

Upper Noe Mural A Picture of Community

By Chris Faust

Upper Noe Recreation Center has a colorful new addition. On a warm summer Saturday in July, over one hundred children and parents crowded the Day Street sidewalk to paint a mural, transforming the park wall into a celebration of joy and community pride. In just a few short hours, under the labor of many tiny hands, the clean but plain beige concrete canvas metamorphosed into a dazzling work of art.

The process began early in the morning. Art teachers, using chalk and masking tape, outlined a paint-by-number design, adding a dot of an appropriate color to each area. Volunteers, using small brushes, neatly applied color inside the lines. And while it seemed that the tiny bristles would be inadequate for the hundred-foot-plus span of the design, the focus, enthusiasm, and skill with which they were handled made color seem to leap upon the wall. Undulating green hills arose, stylized orange poppies popped out, and big blue waves swelled up like breakers upon the shore.

The theme is all San Francisco: flowers, hills, houses, and the sea. California native species, like the poppies, mix with lupine and other wildflowers, while redwoods and Victorian houses dot the hills. The design is the work of Anna Calonje, director of Little Artistas, an art school for children on Church Street near 27th Street. “We wanted a design that honored California’s beautiful landscape but was fun and stylized, could handle friends of all ages participating, and that highlighted native California plants,” said Calonje.

Visitors will notice that the design



The new mural at Upper Noe Rec Center on Day Street is an ode to the city’s landscape: it has frothy ocean waves, bright orange poppies, and Victorian houses nestled in the hills. Anna Calonje of Little Artistas created the design, drawing inspiration from neighborhood residents, young and old.

works well also with the bronze native plant sculptures and the large Native Plant Garden within the rec center grounds.

The project was sparked by the civic notions of resident Sara Fenske Bahat. A parent of children who have attended Little Artistas, Fenske Bahat was impressed with the murals the art school had created at Alvarado Elementary School. It has also painted murals at Cleveland Elemen-



It’s good to be green. Teacher and artist bond through the simple joy of painting.

Photos courtesy Chris Faust

tary, Buena Vista Horace Mann, and Glen Park School.

“I knew it was the kind of thing they were capable of pulling off, and well,” said Fenske Bahat. The rec center came to mind because “it has great traffic and a ton of blank walls! For community impact, that was a logical location.” She floated the project at an Upper Noe Neighbors party last fall before joining the UNN board in March. Collaborative projects between park groups, businesses, non-profits, and neighbors had been the focus of UNN discussion, so the board unanimously and enthusiastically approved sponsorship of the mural last spring.

It all came together well. Working with Calonje, the group developed a concept and prototype. Then Fenske Bahat pitched it to Rec and Park, where it met an enthusiastic thumbs-up.

While the July 22 event was slated from 10 to 4, the size of the turnout and the joyful focus of the artists—the children hardly noticed the free snacks and lemonade on hand—ensured that the work was mostly complete by 1 p.m. With the children dispersed for their naps, Little Artistas teachers continued adding stencils, touching up the paint, and then packing up supplies. A few small children, showing up late, were sadly disap-

pointed to miss the fun. With friendly smiles, paints and stencils came out of boxes again. With gentle guidance, the teachers helped the tots to contribute their artistic talents.

This was truly a family affair. Moms and dads joined in, too. Some used this as an opportunity to teach skills, while others reveled in the simple joy of painting. Brooke Wheeler, who lives across the street overlooking the activity, had never done anything like this before. Since the task was open to one and all, she quickly grabbed a brush and joined in.

As the painting emerged, many children abandoned the swings and slides in the playground to join in the fun. Said Wheeler, “It’s bright and cheery! What’s neat is how the colors are different in each type of daylight. Every time I look at it, it changes.”

Everyone involved in this project agrees that a great big thank-you is due Cheryl Woltjen, Alvin Torres, and all of the staff at Upper Noe Recreation Center for their enthusiastic support and logistical assistance.

Chris Faust is chair of Friends of the Noe Valley Recreation Center.

The Katherine Michiels School After School program offers children afternoons filled with learning, enrichment, and games for students in grades K-5, five days a week, from 2:00pm-6:00pm.

We are located at 1335 Guerrero Street with a School Bus drop-off from Alvarado Elementary School.



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