



The Nimbus Arts Team
Photo Credit
Briana Marie

THE SHARED LANGUAGE OF ART

BY KERRI BEEKER

One of Nimbus Arts' core beliefs is that art plays a vital role in bringing people together, creating a more connected community that shares and learns together. This value proposition is embedded in their vision and practice daily and has fundamentally shaped this beloved nonprofit's depth and reach in the Napa Valley.

A Main Street fixture for many of us, the large sign above Nimbus Arts' home has animated the entrance to St. Helena's downtown since 2012. More recently, another Nimbus Arts sign appeared over two new studios in the complex as the community-supported art organization secured a larger and more permanent home. From those studios, Nimbus Arts produces more than 650 classes, camps, events and workshops each year, delivering art programs and education to more than 5,000 people.

The pilot program and name-sake "Cloud Camp" for youngsters started in 2005. Working with teaching artists -- sculptors, painters, and printmakers -- the first campers learned the science of clouds from meteorologists and art skills in all media, and then challenged themselves to construct large-scale cloud sculptures larger than their own bodies! "Cloud Camp" evolved into Nimbus Arts as we know it today, serving as a model for a creative interdisciplinary approach to art program design.

Nimbus Arts was conceived by local resident, Dana Johnson. Dana's young daughter spent considerable time at the UCSF Hospital and while there, one of the best thing for both the children and parents was the fact that the playroom offered art activities. She comments: "Each family with a sick child was an island until we got to the art projects in the playroom. The parents would get the kids

started with the project, and then start making one themselves. And there's something magic about being in the same place with other people but focused on creating something -- conversations would just begin so naturally. Once our daughter was doing better, I couldn't stop thinking about that experience, and I decided to start exploring how we could make an organization to foster both creativity and that wonderful sense of community you get from creating together."

"Our Family Foundation was headed by Janet Pagano, and together we started brainstorming about who we could work with to get such an organization started, and both of us thought immediately of Jamie Graff, who had founded Tapioca Tiger after leaving her career as a winemaker. More than just a store, Tapioca Tiger also developed and produced innovative activities and programs for its patrons. Jamie was tapped to develop and run

the fledgling organization and provided a five-year window to test and refine programs and establish a viable structure. "Jamie is amazing -- she has an endless font of creative ideas and the energy and vision to drive them through to completion. In the first years we had no building or center, but Jamie and her artist team brought art classes and camps to many borrowed locations around town, and in the process created a following of eager students, families and community members who asked for more and more art, and also wanted to help Nimbus to grow."

Nimbus Arts blossomed into a public charity nonprofit in 2010 with a threefold mission: providing interdisciplinary classes, camps and workshops, supporting local artists, and offering free community outreach art activities.

Activities like classes, camps and workshops are the most familiar part of the art center, but

with a twist that came from that first Cloud Camp, where history, environmental studies, science, cooking -- even math are often added to the mix! Jamie says: "One thing all the artists love about our programming is that we are all learning something new together. When we plan a camp about snow, we create snow-related art projects but we also learn about and then teach the science of how snowflakes are formed. And when the camp is focused on the Trans-Siberian Railway, we make nesting dolls of course, but we also make maps of the route, and learn about big events and make traditional Russian foods too."

Nimbus supports working artists who live in our community by providing employment that pays a living wage, offering access to gallery and lecture space, welcoming them into its community of artists, and providing com-

missionable sales and employment options at NIMBASH, its annual fundraising auction.

A big part to the mission is showing up all over Napa Valley, Johnson comments: "From the start, we wanted to not only offer studio-based classes and camps, but also to figure out ways to bring art to people who are not going to come to us, and to groups of people that might especially need the restorative and expressive aspects of art, like hospital patients or at-risk kids."

Meet a program called Hundreds of Hands (HOH), which offers free community art workshops across the region and at the Nimbus studio. For each HOH mosaic project, Nimbus partners with another local nonprofit, and people of all ages and backgrounds come together to create beautiful art elements which are combined to form large-scale public installa-

tion, a visual reminder of the connections between all people and a source of pride and identity for the community. Jamie comments: "We are on our fifth Hundreds of Hands project. Each one is unique, and they often take unexpected twists and turns, which happens both with art and working with other organizations. One HOH project that just kept growing is our

third one, when we worked with a Latina teen anti-abuse after school program called Mariposa to make two huge mosaic panels that are now displayed at the Cope Family Center in Napa. It took us almost three years, and we got to know the girls very well. Their transformation -- having gone from no comfort with art to speaking in front of groups and teaching people how to



Board member and teaching artist, David Garden, working with a student

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Artist-instructor, Adam Wignall, guiding young artists at Summer Camp, 2018

make mosaic butterflies -- it was amazing to witness. At the end, the kids saw their names embedded in the mosaic and were able to say -- I was a part of making that. To be part of that kind of transformation, and to be able to use mosaic as a medium to connect people -- it's pretty powerful!"

Nimbus Arts' current Hundreds of Hands initiative is the "Portico Project." Mosaic elements made by community members from across the Napa Valley are being assembled into doorway-like porticos that will be installed in public spaces. The first two mosaic Porticos are being created in partnership with the St. Helena Hospital Foundation and the St. Helena Chamber of Commerce, and will be featured at the upcoming Neighborhood Table event in St. Helena on May 11.

A grant from the California Arts Council and other individual and foundation gifts were directed to bring art instruction to young people in Napa County's juvenile justice system. In collaboration with the Napa County Office of Education, Nimbus launched a fine and industrial art education program for students in Court and Community Schools in Napa and Calistoga. The skills students learn through their Nimbus artist-instructors serve as a foundation for continued training and set a path toward future employment. Be-

ginning in 2016 with 50 students for a once-a-week session, the program now serves more than 150 at-risk youth three times each week, including programs brought to incarcerated youth. The program director, Caroline Wilson, comments: "It's no exaggeration to say that taking our students to Nimbus is the best thing we do. Many are averse to learning in any traditional way, but they engage and come alive when they're at Nimbus. Our students tell us being at Nimbus makes them feel capable, empowered, and creative, and that art activates a richer sense of purpose and meaning. We knew we needed a more extensive art program, but we didn't realize how therapeutic art could be for our students. Nimbus Art has been transformative."

The early programs launched with a "dirty dozen" -- thirteen energetic and talented local artists who were at the core of the Nimbus think tank and development team. They produced a constantly evolving slate of classes and camps in painting, drawing, ceramics, metalworking, construction, glass arts, and more. Artist-instructors now number nearly 40 with classes spanning a wide variety of media. "I recognize that creative work is important to the soul - and sharing the passion is the most fun we have at Nimbus Arts," stated Anne Pentland, Staff Artist + Assistant Program Manager.

Annually, since 2009, the Nimbus family of artists and creators unites to develop and produce the Napa Valley's multi-faceted and wildly unique "Arty-Party" and auction - NIMBASH. Each year NIMBASH is guided by a different theme and the team creates art activities, design, auction items, and décor to express its theme. This event showcases the immense creative force and artistic talent within the Nimbus team. Now in

vance the organization. Increasingly, Nimbus Arts receives program and project-specific grants. Capacity building and community art program support from Napa County and the City of St. Helena have been vital to the continued growth. Kerri Beeker, the Director of Development at Nimbus stated, "It's so gratifying to live in a community that values art and artists, and that continues to support our operation and community



ED, Jamie Graff, welcomes art patrons and supporters to NIMBASH 2018

its 10th year, on Saturday, May 18 NIMBASH 2019 will celebrate HOME. For the first time, the event will take place at Nimbus Arts' expanded, improved, and long-term home-site. Always sold out, more than 350 art patrons and Nimbus supporters are expected for the upcoming NIMBASH.

Among the the best parts of NIMBASH are the work parties that happen beforehand, when the studio doors open and they ask the community to come and help with whatever needs doing -- creating the invitations, repairing bidding paddles, painting backdrops, or making decorations. "There are some people who only come to the work parties," comments Johnson, "And we are so grateful for their help!"

NIMBASH is the single largest fundraiser for Nimbus Arts. In addition, support through donations of all sizes from throughout the community sustain and ad-

art programs through gifts large and small."

From the beginning Nimbus Arts' has had a dedicated and enthusiastic Board of Directors, including local artist Matt Rogers, Martha Doornink, David Garden, and Dana Johnson; Claire Stull and Sue Furdek have more recently joined to bring new energy and talents. The Board's stability and strategic guidance are essential elements of the success of Nimbus Arts. An early board decision formed the Nimbus Arts Leadership Circle, a group of donors who make high value, multi-year commitments. The certainty of this funding enables the organization greater flexibility in programming and strengthens its sustainability.

The commitment of the board and Leadership Circle is reflected in the energy and enthusiasm of the Nimbus team, led by Jamie Graff, Nimbus Arts'

founding Executive Director and the 2015 Napa County Arts Hero. Jamie's creativity, enthusiasm and strong connections to the artist community have continued to fuel Nimbus Arts' innovative programming and steady growth. When asked about the future for Nimbus, Jamie stated, "I want to see Nimbus continue to be an organization that nurtures creativity within the community, like an incubator." We love what art can do for people -- that it can take them out of whatever they were doing and help them see things a little differently, help them feel differently about themselves." She continued, "We feel so lucky and grateful to have our team of terrific and talented artists and staff, and our wise

Board, Leadership Circle and generous community supporting our vision."

Now, with expanded studios and growing public interest and involvement, Jamie and her team are juggling a calendar crowded with creative classes and workshops while always looking for even more ways to make art's healing and creative powers available to our community.

Nimbus Arts invites everyone to come visit their expanded and improved home, and join in at one of its upcoming free community art events. To get involved, contribute to Nimbus Arts, buy tickets to NIMBASH, or to get more information, please visit their website, www.nimbusarts.org, or call them at 707.963.5278



Nimbus artists and community members assemble a section of the HOH mosaic

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TOURISM

BY KATHLEEN COELINGH, ST. HELENA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Tourism. St. Helena has been a popular tourist destination since pioneer days, being famous for its natural beauty, wine industry, pleasant climate and medicinal springs. The St. Helena Star newspaper recognized the importance of tourism for the health of local businesses, and advocated for paving the dirt streets, widening the sidewalks, and expanding the rail system to increase access to St. Helena from San Francisco.

A 1901 Star editorial convinced St. Helena to close all stores at 6pm so merchants and customers would spend evening hours playing sports, reading, and socializing, instead of loitering in bars. The decision was soon reversed after hotel owners realized that visitors left town in the afternoon, whereas before they would have stayed the night and patronized the hotels, restaurants and bars.

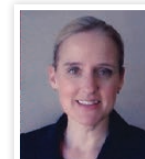
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