

ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

Zarnow: Sharing the experience of art

By [TERYL ZARNOW](#)

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Luis Sanudo attacked the art project like a home-cooked meal: With relish and without hesitation. First a pink base coat, then a green line for the stem of a rose and, finally, petals.

Rumor had it the sixth-grader planned to give his creation to his girlfriend. Luis would neither confirm nor deny.

Carlie Ung, in seventh grade at Valadez Middle School Academy in Placentia, painted hers gold overlaid with green and pink lines applied by the edge of her brush. Hers was definitely going to Grandma.

Ostensibly they were painting Easter eggs, but the foam spheres could just as easily be ostrich or dinosaur eggs. Creativity isn't hung up on details.

"I love art," Carlie says. "It's a way I can show my creativity."

These middle-school students came to Rodgers Senior Center in Huntington Beach for an intergenerational project. Everyone companionably painted their eggs and their fingers.

It was a simple event that seemed effortless on the surface, but demanded a lot of paddling under water. It was made possible by the senior center, an after-school program for low-income students, an art teacher – and a foundation that allows that teacher to make a difference.

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Seventh-grader Chelsey Veliz has painted her egg turquoise and silver with flowers and stars. She admires the artwork by Judy Osuna, who shared her table.

"Yours is so pretty!" Chelsey tells her.

"It is?" Osuna responds. "I mean; it is!"

Osuna was tentative about painting her purple egg; the students were not.

"They just came in and got started ... They don't overthink it."

Jack Knight, a Lake Forest illustrator and painter with more than 30 years' experience, has noticed the same thing.

"Kids like art more. The adults get all caught up in how their picture is going to look. Kids are more focused on doing it ... They eventually do better work because they aren't focused on the end result."

Knight got a taste of community service when he taught a painting class to homeless children at an art store. It underscored how essential art can be as a medium for expression.

"I realized these kids couldn't afford to take art lessons ... They don't have that opportunity."

And that's when, beneath the surface, everything flowed together.

Creative types like artists and (ahem) writers are at the mercy of our muse and the marketplace. Knight says he has had seen good years and not-so-good years.

It's harder to help others when your income is unpredictable.

Then a friend told Knight about the Artist Outreach Project offered by the Kenneth A. Picerne Foundation in Orange County. He applied and received a grant to support his desire to teach art to underserved children.

"This gave me a foundation to base the program on," Knight explains. "Then I was able to approach people about offering a program."

When Knight teamed up with GOALS – Growth Opportunities through Athletics, Learning & Service – everything fell into place. GOALS, a nonprofit based in Anaheim, offers free after-school programming including academics, athletics and enrichment.

In public schools, art class is a frequent casualty of the budget wars.

GOALS program coordinator Mike Wendel says that art is offered at Valadez, but not all students are eligible to take it.

"Some kids might show their creativity by tagging in the streets. This is an opportunity for them to really experience art."

Since January, Knight has been the art teacher for the GOALS after-school programs at Oak View School in Huntington Beach and Valadez in Placentia.

Valadez students began by painting a mountain and then a tree.

They are painting pretty pictures, but Knight is also teaching them about shapes, value, perspective and light.

On Fridays he teaches 30 or more students in the Art Club at Valadez and on Tuesdays he teaches nearly 80 Oak View students – who all chose art over sports.

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Knight, 57, is fully engaged in making a difference to others.

His experience, coupled with motivation, is exactly what the Kenneth A. Picerne Foundation is seeking.

Since 2007, the foundation has awarded more than \$1 million to nearly 100 artists – all age 55 and older.

They come from the visual, performing, and literary arts; each wants to share creative expression with individuals who might otherwise not have the opportunity. Think journal writing with homeless veterans or music with mental health patients.

What's intriguing is the age requirement.

The Artist Outreach Project isn't for struggling young artists. It's for those whose careers are already established. You know, the generation pondering: "Is that all there is?"

Victor Nelson, executive director of the Foundation, calls it the "encore career." He says later in life is when people begin thinking about how to make a contribution in their lives.

"Artists are an untapped resource. They are creatively motivated ... but might not have the resources to give back.

"We asked some artists what would they do if they had the resources. They all knew right away."

The Picerne Foundation gives them a jumpstart.

The grants, up to \$12,000 each, support artists who spend six to eight hours a week working with underserved groups through the nonprofit of their choice.

The foundation focuses on "healthy human development," but it's hard to tell if a creative outlet helps turn a life around.

Knight, however, can attest that the experience had a profound impact on him.

Grants only last one year, but Nelson says 63 percent of recipients continue their projects after one year. Knight plans to continue and even expand his work with GOALS.

"I would have figured out a way to do this even before they decided to fund me."

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