

THEY LIVE AMONG US

Applegate potter inspired by nature

BY SEBASTIAN KLINEFELTER

Nancy Yturriaga never planned on a career as a nationally known ceramic artist. It was an accident. As a young child in San Francisco she could have gone in any direction—the place being known worldwide for unique, controversial ideas and radical forms of expression.

Despite the lack of funding for art education in the schools, Nancy says that as a child she gravitated toward expressing herself with color; exploring nature was her greatest inspiration.

At age 18, while attending City College of San Francisco in the late 1960s, Nancy stumbled into the ceramics studio and thought, “Ah, this looks like fun!” But her skill at making pottery didn’t come easily. “Art is a constant struggle; it’s the nature of the beast,” she remarked.

Having found her medium of expression, Nancy purchased a potter’s wheel and began throwing pots in her San Francisco basement. She would pack her unfinished pieces and, baby under one arm and pots under the other, catch a municipal bus to the historic Victorian studio owned by well-known artist and teacher Ruby O’Burke in San Francisco’s colorful and outrageous Castro District. A much-loved mother figure and patron of the arts, O’Burke rented studio space to potters and jewelers, allowing them to work cooperatively in a unique inner-city setting. After her passing, her studio was forever dedicated for working artists to create their art.

Several years later, now in San Geronimo, California, the next step required was to convert Nancy’s garden shed into a producing ceramic studio. This included the acquisition of a small electric kiln, “the old Duncan,” which she still uses today.

Nancy’s style is nicely expressed through her statement: “I don’t plan on



Black dragon teapot in carving stage.



Finished black dragon teapot. Nancy also creates pottery featuring lizards, ravens, frogs, owls, dragonflies and other creatures.

anything; I just let my mind caress the image.” While originally inspired by classical Asian art, Yturriaga’s efforts have

blossomed over the decades into a unique body of work that communes with and depicts the natural world that she so loves.

Nancy has enjoyed great success as an accomplished artist; over the years her work has been exhibited in fine galleries and shows nationwide.

She gained great inspiration from the painter Georgia O’Keefe, whom she describes as “a brave woman exemplifying what can happen if a person is willing to give everything for her art.” After 45 years working with clay, Nancy has clearly given her complete dedication to the artistry that is her passion. Of her consummate skill with clay, she laughed and remarked, “Once you learn the steps, then you just dance!”

Spurning the idea of getting a “real job,” Nancy dedicated herself to her art, bought a horse, and retreated more deeply into the wild. Ten years ago, she arrived in the Applegate Valley to “spend the golden years potting and riding horses.”

Nancy calls her home and studio “The Sweetwater Ranch.” At the ranch there is magic in the air; one almost expects to catch a glimpse of a fairy among the trees. This magic is reflected in the clay art created by the hands of the artist I call “The Sweetwater Potter.”

For more information about Nancy Yturriaga and her pottery, visit www.nancyadams.net.

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Applegate denizen and nationally known ceramic artist Nancy Yturriaga.
Photo by Joan Peterson.

“They live among us” is an ongoing feature highlighting people of interest who live in the Applegate Watershed. The Applegater newspaper is looking for volunteers to take on this column each issue. If interested, call J.D. Rogers, editor, at 541-846-7736.

Long live Ruch Community K-8 School

BY MARGARET DELLA SANTINA AND MICHELLE HENSMAN

Ruch Community K-8 School has long been known for its parent involvement and strong community ties, which play a critical role in the academic and social success of Ruch students. Our rural setting provides a healthy and exciting learning environment; the flip side of our rural location, however, is that our enrollment is significantly lower than other Medford schools.

Applegate Partners Promoting Local Education (APPLE) has been working diligently to keep Ruch School sustainable for generations to come—the school will celebrate its centennial this fall, and we want to be sure it celebrates its Bicentennial in 2113!

In November 2012, the Medford School Board endorsed APPLE’s proposal that Ruch K-8 become a community school with a “place-based” curriculum reflecting its unique rural location in the Applegate Valley.

What is a community school? A community school partners with various organizations to provide services and resources the community may need—in short, it’s an integral part of a thriving community where students are able to learn and achieve.

What is place-based learning? Place-based learning connects national learning standards and classroom activities with real-world learning rooted in the local environment. Students in community schools with place-based learning curricula tend to have a strong appreciation for the natural environment they live in, and learn the importance of community responsibility while mastering academic content and skills.

The Oregon Department of Education website notes:

Community schools are grounded in the concept that learning occurs in many places—in school, after school, in neighborhoods and communities-throughout our lives. Evaluations of community school programs have shown that they help improve student achievement, increase attendance and reduce participation in high-risk behaviors. (www.ode.state.or.us/search/page?id=575)

Ruch families and community partners are committed to ensuring the success of our pioneering little school that is so rich in educational history, natural resources, and community support. Here are a few of the exciting things we are looking forward to in the coming months:

• **The Ruch School Family Resource**

Center (across from the office) offers health/wellness resources, advocacy, referrals, and more! Open Fridays 8 am - noon and by appointment Monday - Thursday.

• **After-school tutoring** and academic support for students in grades K-3, coming in spring 2013.

• **Community Garden.** This exciting project is part of a Master Gardeners’ grant and partnership, as well as a recipient of a YES (Youth, Education, Success) grant, sponsored by local businesses and local TV channel KOB-TV (NBC5). We are actively seeking volunteers for this project, including people with strong backs, machinery, design ideas or materials (soil, crushed granite, cement, plants, pots, fencing, fertilizer, irrigation materials, etc.). Students and community members will cultivate a fruit and vegetable garden, which will promote team building and healthy living. Produce will be used to prepare school meals, and for the Ruch School ACCESS Food Bank. Silver Springs Nursery is donating native plants to create a “100 Years of Agriculture in the Applegate” educational trail that will culminate at our community garden.

• **Summer programs for pre-K children.** Weeklong, themed camps during June, July and August, offered at the Ruch School campus.

• **Exciting weeklong summer camps for K-8 students**, focusing on arts, writing, science, health and wellness, gardening and environmental stewardship, fire-rescue and first aid.

• **Preschool at Ruch.** We are working toward establishing a preschool on the Ruch School campus beginning this fall.

• **Save the date!** Ruch Community Festival, Saturday, March 9, 2013; 11 am – 3 pm. The community is invited to meet our staff, students, volunteers and community partners. Come learn more about the wonderful place-based-learning programs students are currently engaged in, as well as the opportunities ahead. Enjoy food, entertainment and fun activities for children and adults.

Organizations can participate in the Ruch Community Festival free of charge; we simply ask that partners bring pop-up tents, and display and advertisement materials, and share their positive energy with Ruch School and community. If you know of a business or organization that would like to attend as a community partner, please have them contact Michelle Hensman at 1-541-306-0668.

For more information about any of the above programs or events, please call Ruch School at 541-842-3850.

Margaret della Santina and
Michelle Hensman • 541-306-0668

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