

Lompoc Valley

MAGAZINE



Women in Wine

WOMEN OF THE MURAL SOCIETY

BY VICKI ANDERSEN AND CAROL OLIVEIRA



An outdoor art gallery ... what a marvelous idea! Art of immense size suspended or painted on building walls or freestanding in empty lots — what could be better? Art for everyone to enjoy without personal expense, no holes in the walls, no worries over placement, and you don't even have to dust it. Abstract, impressionistic or photo realism, whichever you choose. If one wall doesn't suit your taste, just turn a corner or go around the block to find something different. Such is the Lompoc Mural Project.

In the 1980s, Lompoc's Old Town, like that of many other communities, was being devastated by new developments and shopping centers on the city's perimeter. Lompoc City Council members and local residents were very concerned. They viewed "Old Town" as the heart and soul of the community and discussed ways to revitalize it.

In 1988, Mayor Gene Stevens and his wife Judy visited Chemainus, British Columbia. They were impressed that a small town of about 3,500 people, which had been dying because its major industry had shut down, was using art as an economic rebuilding tool, developing tourism with the help of murals. That year, the 18 murals in the little town had been credited with attracting more than 150,000 tourists.

Gene and Judy brought the idea back to Lompoc, where they shared

it with Marilyn Oliver, a British Columbia native. She too had entertained the same thoughts. In August 1988, about 80 people attended a town meeting to discuss using the same concept to help Lompoc's declining Old Town. The response from the group was so enthusiastic that a board of directors, operating under the city's umbrella, was formed.

Marilyn Oliver, elected by the board of directors in 1988, became the first chairwoman of the Lompoc Mural Society. She continued in that role until 1996, when local artist Vicki Andersen succeeded her. Vicki still serves as chairwoman with Mayor Dick DeWees as co-chairman. Gene Stevens has served as the project administrator since the beginning and is still the "heart" of the Mural Society www.lompocmurals.com.

Dedicated volunteers deal with everything from fundraising to weed pulling and installing and maintaining the murals. Membership in the Lompoc Mural Society is open to everyone and all talents are welcome. With the addition of the Round Up program, a system of rounding up individual city utility bills, everyone in the community can help sponsor the mural project.

Santa Monica artist Art Mortimer created Lompoc's first mural, "History of the Flower Industry," in 1989. Painting directly on a wall in the heart of the old downtown, Art talked to locals as he worked and people began to take notice.



K.A. Griffith



Over the next 18 years the project grew to more than 40 murals, mostly in the Old Town. Many private groups, individuals and businesses have been inspired to privately commission murals, bringing Lompoc's inventory of murals to almost 100.

Artists have included well-known locals Leonardo Nuñez, Shirley Wallace, Vicki Andersen and Nancy Phelps. Internationally recognized artists such as Richard Wyatt, Roberto Delgado and Art Mortimer have also left their signatures on the walls of Lompoc.

One Old Town attraction, Art Alley, is an outdoor gallery located in an east to west alley between South H Street and South I Street. Art Alley displays works by professional and amateur artists. The alley project is currently on hold pending the demolition of one of the vacant buildings facing South H Street. Once the building is demolished and a new multi-story commercial and apartment complex is built, the art in the alley will be enhanced with new works, including murals and possibly sculpture and kinetic art.

In 1992, the first California "Mural In a Day" took place in Lompoc. Under the direction of Oregonian Robert Thomas, 12 local artists banded together to complete a 12' x 48' mural featuring the Chumash Indians. Starting at 8 a.m. and finishing with a dedication ceremony at 5 p.m., all involved agreed it was the experience of a lifetime and couldn't wait to do it again.

This year on Saturday, September 30, the 15th Mural In a Day will be a featured part of the Old Town Arts Fest. The subject of this year's mural is the Monarch Butterfly and its annual migration to the Central Coast. The

Arts Fest will also host art displays by the Lompoc Valley Art Association, historical displays by the Lompoc Museum, a barbecue and an ice cream social.

The Mural Society also co-sponsors, with the Lompoc Valley Chamber of Commerce, the annual "Brushes & Blues" event. This year's event, to be held on Sunday, August 6 at Ken Adam Park, features an art show and sale, blues and jazz music and wine tasting.

Lompoc's mural project has been a catalyst for major rejuvenation projects in the Old Town. In 2005, more than 319 tour buses transporting an estimated 7,975 passengers visited Lompoc, with 25 buses requesting step-on guides to conduct tours of the city's murals. Most tour companies booked their passengers at local hotels. The tour bus element of the local tourism industry spent an estimated \$797,000 at local hotels and restaurants.

In 2003, the California Mural Symposium voted Lompoc "California's Most Successful Mural City." Lompoc has also teamed with Lindsay and Twentynine Palms, two other mural cities, to create CALPAMS, the California Public Art and Mural Society. The goal of CALPAMS is to connect the state's mural cities on what will be known as the "California Mural Highway," part of a plan to promote California as one of the world's most desirable art attractions. As this goal becomes a reality, Lompoc's reputation as a major art center will enhance the valley's economy and build community pride.

Artist Vicki Andersen is chair of the Lompoc Mural Society. Carol Oliveira is a local artist.

THE ART OF JOHN PUGH

The Lompoc Mural Society's focus for the future centers on new works for Art Alley. The society is in talks with internationally known artist John Pugh to install one of his incredible *trompe l'oeil* murals as the highlight of Art Alley. Check out his work at www.artofjohnpugh.com.

"By weaving the powerful story-telling abilities of the narrative mural into the engaging impact of the life-size *trompe l'oeil* illusion, artist John Pugh has created a stimulating and enlightening venue for both public and private art. His murals have been instrumental in revitalizing the *trompe l'oeil* genre as a vital mode of artistic expression that is both aesthetically and intellectually challenging. He has created a truly monumental body of work and an artistic style worthy of its own descriptive expression: Narrative Illusionism." *Kevin Bruce, author of the upcoming book "The Monumental Murals of John Pugh."*

FACING PAGE (top): Carol Oliveira (left) and Vicki Andersen at Cypress Gallery.

FACING PAGE (bottom): Mural "Lompoc's Mission Vieja," 1996, by Vicki Andersen, 200 S. H St.

ABOVE: "History of the Flower Industry," 1989, by Art Mortimer, 102 W. Ocean Ave.