



Sustainable grant helps nonprofit add sculpture to community

Thanks to a grant from the Woodland City Council, a new sculpture adds a touch of whimsy to Mutual Housing at Spring Lake.

Being made of “found objects,” it is another example of the sustainable goals of the nonprofit developer, Mutual Housing California, and of the city council.

One of three art pieces that residents and public can enjoy, “Marsh Madness” stands in the common area of the community on Farmers Central Road.

The metal egret and friends by Sacramento-native Steve Cook were chosen by Mutual Housing’s project manager Vanessa Guerra.

A farm worker’s daughter who grew in the area, Guerra liked the idea of a sculpture with creatures like a turtle, frog, dragonflies and cattails.

“I was inspired by the sub-division’s name and the different kinds of birds and wildlife you would typically see near a lake,” said Guerra.

“It reminded me of the marshes throughout Yolo County.”

Like Cook’s other art—some of which can be seen at New Harmony Mutual Housing Community in Davis—the sculptures are made from cast-aside tools and parts.

The egret is made from a motorcycle tank, an exhaust pipe off a car, hand shovels, a pair of nail trimmers that a farrier would use and rebar.

The other critters in the eight-and-a-half-foot sculpture are created from metal spatulas, garden cultivators, motorcycle chains, springs, railroad spikes, plumbing pipes, metal strips and a hammer.

Cook found his calling while bailing hay in the local area.

Where others saw useless junk from weathered objects abandoned in fields, he saw potential art.

Cook wasn’t thinking of saving the environment at the time, but that has become an important aspect of his work—at least to some of his fans.

“Cook successfully re-uses objects that would have gone to a landfill otherwise,” said Rachel Iskow, Mutual Housing’s chief executive officer.

His first show—in 2009 at Woodland’s Blue Wing gallery—ran for two months and sold 16 of the 20 pieces the first night.

“I didn’t think I’d get that kind of response,” said the 54-year old Cook.

While he’d made sculptures for friends and family before, the show made him take his art more seriously.

Today, he has sculptures in homes, gardens and museums from California to New York—and less stereotypical places like Alaska, Idaho, Montana and Florida.

“Children—and adults—like Steve Cook’s art because it’s understandable and fun,” said Rachel Iskow, Mutual Housing’s chief executive officer. “Trying to figure out what the parts are is fascinating.

“It’s important for children to grow up with art in their daily lives, not only in galleries or universities,” said Iskow. “Having art in our Mutual Housing communities is one way to do that.”

The grant that the City Council, under the leadership of former mayor Tom Stallard, gave the nonprofit partially funded the creation and installation of the sculpture.

The Mayors Climate Protection Award was given to the city by the U.S. Conference of Mayors for Woodland’s climate action plan goal of increasing the tree canopy by 50 percent above the 2010 coverage and supporting zero-net energy homes.

The Woodland Tree Foundation received money from the grant to help plant the 8,500 shade trees needed to reach the city’s goal.

With the city’s financial support, Mutual Housing at Spring Lake became the first zero-net energy multifamily rental housing in the nation.

The U.S. Department of Energy’s recognized the achievement by certifying the development as its first Zero Energy Ready Home rental community.

Finished in 2015, the community has 61 apartments and townhomes for agricultural workers.

“We really appreciate councilmember Stallard’s effort to secure this grant when he served as mayor,” said Iskow.

“For the city council to pass a portion to Mutual Housing for a beautiful art piece that reflects our sustainability goals is perfect.”

The new sculpture joins a mural and painting inside the property’s community building.

The colorful mural was designed and painted by the University of California, Davis, students in professor—Maceo Montoya’s Chicano/a Studies class.

The mural covers a wall and portrays resident lives, hopes and dreams.

A large painting of a tomato—one Yolo County’s major crops—by Sacramento artist Marsha Schindler greets people in the entry.

Montoya also is the director of the local community arts center, Taller Arte del Nuevo Amanecer.

Founded in 1988, Mutual Housing California develops, operates and advocates for sustainable rental housing for the diversity of the region’s households.

A member of NeighborWorks America—a congressionally chartered nonprofit organization that supports community development nationwide—Mutual Housing has more than 3,000 residents, nearly half of whom are children.

Through its focus on community, the nonprofit also provides training and mentoring as well as educational programs, leadership-building activities and services for residents and neighbors.