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Is Mistletoe Romantic? Not on a Tree!

By Cathy Dausman



A grove of trees in Moraga sport mistletoe in their branches.

 \mathbf{Z} issing couples seek it out at water from the tree, either stunting its Christmas, but pity the poor Lamorinda tree playing host to mistletoe. Nat King Cole may have waxed poetic about enjoying turkey and some mistletoe, and Justin Bieber sings about being under the mistletoe, but mistletoe, like the local wild turkey, is actually a pest—a parasite.

Okay, it's technically only hemiparasitic, which means that it actually can exist on its own, although like an unwanted holiday guest it probably prefers to mooch off the nearest hosttree.

Tumbleweed-sized mistletoe clumps are common in local tree groves, and are easily visible when deciduous trees shed their leaves. The Anglo-Saxon roots, "mistel" and

growth or eventually killing it. A U.C. Davis pest management website describes several kinds of common broadleaf mistletoe in California. One affects trees including alder, flowering pear, ash, birch, walnut and cottonwood; another variety infests only oaks. A third variety is endemic to Sonoma County. There are even mistletoe varieties which infest fir trees and conifers in the Sierra Nevada Mountains and foothills.

Just how did the kissing ritual associated with mistletoe begin? In ancient times, mistletoe signified life, fertility and forgiveness. The Greeks believed it protected them from evil spirits, and armies or angry spouses in Scandinavia could declare a truce un-"tan," literally meaning dung and derneath what they considered a plant twig, explain just how unromantically of peace. In 18th century England, a the shiny green parasite transfers from young woman found beneath a bird food to droppings to tree branch. mistletoe ball could not refuse to be Once established, mistletoe saps kissed; if she rebuffed a suitor, she'd

Photos Cathy Dausman

remain unmarried throughout the New Year.

Mistletoe has also been used since ancient times to treat illness. Even today its mystical powers persist. The National Cancer Institute says mistletoe is used to treat cancer, most commonly in Europe. So whether it makes you feel good or just makes you feel romantic, we bet you'll never look at mistletoe the same next year!



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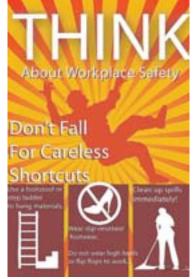
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Safety by Design



Submitted by H. Wheeler



First-place Digital Design poster by Acalanes High School student William Audley. Image provided

eachers go to great lengths to educate our kids and to help them make good choices. But who reminds teachers to make safe choices for themselves each day at work? Apparently, students do.

For the past four years, the Contra Costa County Schools Insurance Group (CCCIG) has turned to students throughout over 20 school districts they insure to portray anew their message of classroom safety. A \$100 cash prize motivates students from Antioch Elementary schools to the Contra Costa Community Colleges to design a winning poster. CCCIG hopes fresh designs each year will capture the eye of teachers in staff rooms, reminding them to stay safe at work. In the Fourth Annual "Slip Trip Fall Prevention Student Poster Contest" the winning design in the high school category came from the Acalanes School District.

William Audley, a sophomore at Acalanes High School, submitted two posters and waited nervously. He was excited about this contest because there was prize money on the table and he felt good about his designs. William's confidence could be counted on. A design by William last year was chosen by Acalanes school faculty to cover the academic school planner for 2012-2013.

Interested in computers and art when he started Acalanes, Audley chose Digital Design 1 as an elective his freshman year. His interest and passion grew swiftly. "I really like using graphic design tools and I really like the class. It's fun!" says Audley of Digital Design. His enjoyment of the class is shored up daily by Digital Design teacher Susan Lane who instructs students in Adobe Illustrator and Photoshop. Beyond software, Lane works to improve her students' understanding of the field of graphic design. And with each new element taught, she lets the artists go to work.

"She lets us work independently," says Audley. "It's great!" Challenging her students with projects such as the CCCIG contest, Lane seizes opportunities to teach a real life skill: designing under pressure. Audley is catching on. His safety poster will be posted in offices of over 20 school districts.

Second place in the high school category also went to an Acalanes High School Student. Kyle McQuain, a freshman and a student in Lane's Digital Design 1 class helped make it "A sweep!" according to Lane, who will also receive \$100 from CCCIG to help with classroom supplies.

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