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## Lafayette artist rises from ashes to create new works inspired by local landscapes

By Kara Navolio



Suzy Elsworth-Heithcock and one of her paintings.

Photo provided

When your home catches fire and you lose everything, including your life's work of paintings, it might be hard to imagine recovering from such a devastating loss.

But recover is exactly what Lafayette artist Suzy Elsworth-Heithcock did. It has taken eight years, however, to complete enough work for a solo exhibition. Elsworth-Heithcock's first solo show is on display through Aug. 14 in the Walnut Creek City Hall lobby.

The blaze occurred in the summer of 2009 after workers left flammable rags under the house that ignited from the hot weather. "Losing four of our five cats was the worst part," reflected Elsworth-Heithcock. "We were lucky that no people were hurt or that the fire didn't spread to other homes. We were not home, so it wasn't possible for us to rescue anything. We lost 10,000 books, our photographs. We had to replace every

glass, toothbrush, pair of socks." The only examples of any of her previous artwork are a handful of giclée prints of some of her earlier paintings.

The home took two years to rebuild and restock. "The silver lining is that I got to redesign my house, but everything you see is new," she noted. "There is nothing here from our travels or with family history."

The insurance paid nothing, however, for her lost art. Since she had not yet sold any pieces there could be no value attached to them. "That was pretty devastating to be told that your work had no value," Elsworth-Heithcock recounted.

Painting became part of her emotional healing process. As the house was being re-built, she began to explore the open space around her home and in the Briones Regional Park. Her new painting style was influenced by the beauty around her and her recent experiences. She began to work in a large-

er format with a looser style. She often took photos and then transformed the scenes into beautiful paintings that have a sense of surreal realism and celebrate life and the joy of nature.

Many of the eight paintings in the exhibit are landscapes from the local area. "I am conscious of the fact that everything moves, even rocks and mountains, and even if we as humans can't perceive the movement in the time span we are here. I want people to know that nothing is static," explained Elsworth-Heithcock. This movement shows in her landscapes with her flowing brush strokes.

Elsworth-Heithcock has shown her work in several local galleries this year, but this is her first solo exhibition. The work can be viewed Monday through Friday, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. at 1666 N. Mani St. in Walnut Creek, or on her website: [elsworthartworks.com](http://elsworthartworks.com).

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## New CERT training trailer carries the load

By Cathy Dausman

Duncan Seibert was like a kid in a candy store, only this store had wheels and a trailer hitch.

Seibert, program manager for Lamorinda Community Emergency Response Team was showing off Lamorinda CERT's newest acquisition — a six-foot-wide by eight-foot-tall 14-foot long storage unit on wheels designed to tow all the gear associated with nine weeks of hands-on emergency preparedness



Duncan Seibert in front of the new trailer.

Photo Cathy Dausman

training.

Previously that gear was housed in a storage container and transferred weekly to CERT instructor's vans or trucks, and carted to various classroom locations. Inevitably, Seibert explained with a shrug "we'd forget something." No more.

Designed in April, custom built in Oregon and purchased by the Lamorinda CERT Foundation for \$4,100, it was then donated to the Moraga-Orinda Fire District (which owns and insures all CERT assets) and delivered in July.

"It came with the (interior plywood) walls," Seibert said. Exterior trailer graphics are of Lamorinda CERT and MOFD. Seibert installed electrical wiring and shelving inside and mounted a 16-watt solar panel to the roof. There was just one final hitch in the road to local ownership — the fire department would not accept the trailer until CERT found a parking spot.

Saint Mary's College offered space. SMC Chief of Public Safety Adan Tejada explained that "hosting the CERT trailer is just another part of an ongoing tradition of co-operation between Saint Mary's College and the Lamorinda emer-

gency preparedness network. We have conducted numerous joint exercises and participated in joint training. Having accessible resources placed strategically in the region only enhances all of our emergency operations," Tejada said.

"I can't thank Saint Mary's College enough for this (parking space)," Seibert said, although he expects to reduce his indebtedness by teaching a class in fire safety to SMC staff. This is the third trailer for Lamorinda CERT.

CERT's Volunteer Reception Center trailer is stored at MOFD Station 41 on Moraga Way. A recently purchased trailer holding shelter supplies donated by Red Cross is also at Station 41, but construction work planned for that site precludes parking a third trailer there, Seibert said. The new training trailer replaces a small original CERT trailer, which was donated by the Moraga Police Department.

The new training trailer will be used to tow gear to the fall CERT basic training classes starting Sept. 14 in Orinda. To take the class go online to <https://lamorindacert.org/training/classes/>.

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