

ARTstART students head outdoors to develop creative skills



COURIER photos/Steven Felschundneff
 Cesar Estrada and Aaliyah Loving, center, try to make their classmates laugh during a game called "sculptor" on Monday at Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden in Claremont. The game involved two sculptors, Cesar and Aaliyah, who prodded the other students into poses and then tried to make them break the pose by laughing or moving.

The grounds of Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden served as a living classroom for 68 Oakmont Elementary School upper graders on Monday, who visited the campus as part of the Claremont Museum of Art's expanding ARTstART program.

ARTstART, launched in the fall of 2011, trains college and Claremont High School students in the realm of arts appreciation. These newly-minted mentors then share the wealth, setting up arts education programs for the budding artists of local elementary schools. Sycamore, Oakmont and Vista schools are currently signed on to the project.

With budget cuts carving arts education from school curricula, ARTstART and other nonprofit-driven programs are

providing another way to keep the creative spirit alive.

"It's important not just because of Claremont's cultural heritage," said Rich Deely, director of the ARTstART program. "It provides young people with leadership and teaching skills, the elementary schools with great role models who can make art seem cool and dynamic, and college students with a link to the community and its youth. It helps draw attendance to these cultural venues, like the botanic garden, that open their doors to us. It's an educational experi-

ence for all concerned."

Under Mr. Deely's direction, college and high school students meet each week to formulate activities and projects geared at helping young Claremonters think critically about art. Tuesday's exercises included a nature walk/scavenger hunt where students were asked to draw pictures of trees, flowers and other living items around them. They also led the troops in a round of "Sculptor," a favorite among the day's activities. In this game, two selected sculptors go around to the other players, manipulating their

arms into silly positions. As these statues stand frozen like orangutans with their elbows bowed and hands near their armpits, sculptors circle back around to elicit laughs in hopes of breaking their statues' poses. The last one standing wins.

CHS senior Alia McDaniel relays she has taken away much more than a deeper appreciation of artistic endeavors through games and activities. Before getting involved in the ARTstART program three years ago, she admits stand-

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COURIER photo/Steven Felschundneff
 Sixth grade student Kaleb Greene works on his drawing of a squirrel on Monday during an ARTstART field trip to Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden. A group of Claremont High School students led the field trip, which included attending the Betty Davenport Ford exhibit.

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ing in front of a class to give a presentation would send her into a tailspin. It wasn't evident on Tuesday. The Sycamore grad was a natural public speaker even amid the mass of eager children. Of course it helps she's an art aficionado herself and enjoys sharing her passion for drawing and painting with others.

"I love doing art and really wanted to help [the elementary school kids] learn more about it too," she said. "It's great for the freedom of expression it provides."

After months of prep work, and the opportunity to meet with notable local artists like Betty Davenport Ford, Alia and her fellow mentors helped their elementary school protégés put lesson plans into practice. The young scholars perused the ceramic animals on display at the "Betty Davenport Ford: Capturing the Sprit Animal" exhibit at the botanic gardens, and then used the gardenscape as inspiration to create their own masterpieces. Sixth grader Kaleb Greene used his drawing skills to capture one of the garden's frequent guests, a squirrel. Kaleb, an aspiring graphic novelist, says he enjoys the ARTstART field trips because they give him the opportunity to further explore his love for writing and drawing.

"It gives me a chance to be creative," he said.

The field trip also gave Oakmonters the chance to apply some other school lessons. Through the recently established Oakmont Biomes Project, four distinct native environments (desert, grassland, shrubland and forest) were recreated on the elementary school campus. Each classroom at Oakmont, known as Claremont's



"Outdoor School," has a significant portion of its curriculum built around these biomes. During a clay crafting session, many of the students molded their putty into critters discussed in their lessons about biomes, from crawling snakes to scaly sea creatures.

The rewards of the ARTstART program go beyond driving home classroom coursework, insists Oakmont art instructor Theresa Carvalho. It's providing both the elementary and high school kids with a mutually beneficial partnership, she noted.

"I love seeing these kids who have a passion for art at the high school level talking to our kids and getting them excited about art themselves," she said.

She is pleased to see the Claremont Museum of Art continuing to foster Claremont's creative capabilities.

"Art allows you to be creative and silly and not worry about the pressures of testing well," she said. "You never know what it's going to mean to a child."

— Beth Hartnett

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Claremont Pie Festival & Village Fair

CLAREMONT DEPOT

Theme Booths & Music

11:00-3:00

Pie Eating Contest

12 noon

10:30 Registration begins for Pie Eating Contest at Depot
 First come, first served. LIMITED SPACES AVAILABLE.

Pie Baking Contest