

Lathrop students' art part of Valley Air calendar

By Rose Albano-Risso

Manteca Bulletin, Thursday, Dec. 13, 2012

LATHROP – Phoebe Southimath of Lathrop Elementary School, and Nikolle Sanchis of Joseph Widmer School are calendar girls.

Phoebe, a seventh grader, is the calendar girl for January 2013. Sixth-grader Nikolle is the October girl.

The calendar where they are being featured, along with 13 other students in the San Joaquin Valley, is the 2013 Healthy Air Living Kids' Calendar published by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

District spokesman Anthony Presto said 20,000 copies of the free calendar have been printed and are distributed to schools, community groups, healthcare facilities, churches, civic organizations and non-profit groups throughout the eight-county Valley Air District.

The educational calendar features the original works of art by the children in the eight counties, with the selected 15 chosen from hundreds of entries. The annual contest is open to all K-12 students in the Valley, Presto said.

"We receive a lot of fantastic arts from talented artists all over the Valley every year," he said.

"We're mainly looking for messages on how to live a healthy-air life and how to clean the air and educating the public," he added.

Phoebe's illustration shows a young boy and girl, with each announcing a message. The girl's message is bilingual – "Hacer del mundo un lugar mejor," with the English translation, "Make the world a better place." The boy's message is, "Keep the Air Clean." Above them is the message in capital letters: "You can Make a Difference."

Nikolle's colorful October calendar drawing shows two girls sitting in a colorful car. Nikolle's message for the October month is: "Be Cool and Carpool!"

Presto said the grand prize winner in the calendar contest gets to be on the cover. This year, the young artist whose work graces the 2013 calendar is Modesto fourth-grader Julia Shannon. The youngest among the featured artists is first grader Arieana Gutierrez of Tulare. The other winning artists are from Bakersfield, Clovis, Fresno, Madera, Woodlake, Atwater, Stockton, Modesto, and Lemoore.

Presto said copies of the calendar can be reserved, while supplies last, at public.education@valleyair.org, or they can be picked up in any District office in Fresno (tel. 559-230-6000), Modesto (tel. 209-557-6400) or Bakersfield (661-392-5500).

Stockton, Modesto Among "America's Dirtiest Cities"

by Chris Nelson, Multimedia Journalist

Fox 40 News, Wednesday, Dec. 12, 2012

STOCKTON - As the year comes to a close, Forbes has offered up another of its "worst of" city lists, and as usual, California cities have made a few appearances.

This time, it's a ranking of "America's Dirtiest Cities." Of the six California cities that made it into the top 10, two are in our area: Modesto comes in sixth, and Stockton comes in ninth.

Much of the article focused on pollution in California's central valley, blaming such things as its bowl-shape that traps pollutants, agricultural industries damaging the groundwater, and a history of farmers burning fields.

“An article like this just shouldn’t be used as a credible source of information about the valley’s air quality,” said Anthony Presto, Outreach Communications Representative for the San Joaquin Valley Air District. “They’re really nothing more than clever antics to sell newspapers.”

Presto insists that the information used for the list was outdated, and the branding of “Dirtiest City” is an unfair exaggeration.

“Whether it be Fresno, Stockton, Modesto... Air quality in the San Joaquin Valley is cleaner than it has ever been. We actually should be on the list for #1 most improved,” Presto said.

Some wood burns hotter, cleaner than others

By Teresa Douglass

Visalia Times-Delta, Thursday, Dec. 13, 2012

There are 100 different kinds of wood in the Valley, said wood cutter Gene Curtis.

To choose the best one for your wood-burning fireplace, consider if you are more interested in how much heat it produces, how long it lasts, how much it costs, how much residue it produces, what it smells like and what it sounds like when it burns.

“Everything will work in a fireplace, but the best wood is oak. It burns the cleanest with the least amount of residue,” he said. “Walnut is the same way.”

Some wood gives off a distinct aroma as it burns.

“Burning cedar is like being in heaven. It’s like sticking your head in a cedar closet,” he said. “The most fragrant is citrus. It smells like oranges in bloom. ”

Pine makes a desirable popping sound because it’s full of oil. For that reason, it can cause creosote to build up in the chimney. Cedar burns cleaner than pine, Curtis said. But both soft woods burn quickly.

When Curtis builds a fire in his free-standing wood-burning stove, which he uses to heat his house, he begins with rolled-up newspaper and places cedar and pine kindling around it because they catch fire fast. After the fire is going, he throws on a big piece of hard wood, either oak or eucalyptus. “Your oak and eucalyptus burn longer, but cost the most money,” he said.

Eucalyptus has more oil than oak and burns hotter, said Jack Benigno, tree trimmer. Not all oak trees are created equal when it comes to firewood. Valley oak is a swamp oak, he said, and is not good for fireplaces. But live oak has a lot of oil in it and will burn hot.

The downside to high oil content in wood is that it can make creosote build-up on the walls of the chimney or flue lining, which can result in a chimney fire, said Robert Cortez of RC Chimney Cleaning. He recommends having your chimney cleaned annually if you use more than a cord of seasoned wood during the winter.

Seasoned wood — wood cut from a tree that has dried out for six months to a year — has less oil and less particles to attach to the the chimney, he said. Wood that is not seasoned has more oil and more by-products that will result in a dirtier chimney.

One of the most common fire calls in Visalia during the winter months is from people who forget to open the flues to their chimneys, said Battalion Chief Doyle Sewell. Smoke fills the house and the fire department has to set up big fans to blow the smoke out and clear the air.

Because of high levels of air pollution in the area, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District monitors when it is OK to burn wood in residential fireplaces. The district has a Check Before You Burn program, which runs from Nov. 1 through the last day of February.

Last season, November 2011 through February 2012, there were 12 no-burn days in Tulare County. So far this winter, there have been four no-burn days, said Jaime Holt, chief communication officer for the district.

If you have a fire in your fireplace on a no-burn day, you can receive what amounts to a ticket. First-time violators have to pay \$50 or they can choose to attend a residential wood-burning school, much like traffic school for motor vehicle infractions.

A second violation costs \$100 and it goes up from there, she said. Last season, seven citations were issued to Tulare County residents

Check Before You Burn

Go to www.Valleyair.org or call 1-800-SMOG INFO to find out if it is a burn day by county. You can sign up for a daily email at the website.