

Watch for critters

by Shawn Daley

08.15.09 - 05:36 am



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Contributed Photos Apex High School art teacher Ian Sands had plenty of help from art students and volunteers on his Lost Critter Project.

Have you recently seen some bizarre looking creatures in downtown Apex? Something akin to a mouse with horns, a zebra with a donkey's head, or a squirrel that looks like a moose?

Don't worry, those aren't severe hallucinations. You've simply entered the world of Apex High School art teacher Ian Sands.

With the help of some talented students and the support of local businesses, Sands is currently holding "The Lost Critter Project" in town.

The critters are actually 500 foam creations that are placed on curbs, benches, signs and walls throughout the downtown area. Ten businesses are participating in Sands' interactive art project and each has 50 critters looking to be returned to a special "lost-and-found" box.

"We just wanted to do it for the fun of it," said Sands. "I wanted to have some kind of interactive street project. My students like street art but most of that is illegal. This is a good way of doing legal street art."

It also serves as a nice promotion for businesses that have their names inked on the critters. Each critter has a message that reads "Help! I'm lost. Thank goodness you
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found me. Please take me back to the (participating business). I miss my brothers and sisters.”

The first to realize how much free publicity could be generated from the project was the staff at the Apex Halle Cultural Arts Center. When Apex High held an art exhibit at the center a few months ago students placed critters around town with a similar message requesting the item be returned to the Halle.

“We wanted to do something interactive and came up with the idea of a lost-and-found,” said Sands. “We put about 20 items out there and I didn’t even know if one of them would be returned. But they all came back, all 20 of them. So then the people at the Halle started putting them around town and they all came back again. When I saw that I started thinking about doing it (on a larger scale).”

Sands presented the idea to the Downtown Business Association and quickly got 10 businesses to participate.

“They loved the idea,” said Sands. “We decided each business would get 50 critters. But when I started doing it I realized that was a lot of work.”

But with the help of some very eager art students the 500 foam critters were completed.

“We spent two weeks working on it,” said Sands. “The art room looked like a factory assembly line with students painting, others cutting, and other gluing. The kids took it very seriously and really wanted to be a part of it.”

Sands said he is thrilled to be involved in such a collaborative public arts effort with local businesses.

“I think it really promotes the town and shows great support for the arts in Apex,” said Sands. “It also brings some people into the stores.”

Participating businesses include The Blue Tiger, The Red Canvas, All Booked Up, Studio 123, The Apex Chamber of Commerce, Apex Yogic Living, Green Pea Nursery, New Hope Valley Railway, Peak City Film Festival, and Realty World on Salem Street.

8/17/2009

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