



Napa's parking lots sprout 'values'

LISA STOCKON | Posted: Friday, May 20, 2011 7:57 pm

In parking lots across Napa, 16 core human values — concepts such as respect, compassion and courage — are making their way onto the pavement.

Hoping to spark “thought-provoking conversations,” local artist Peter Hassen, working with volunteers, is stenciling words depicting basic human values on more than 500 parking spaces in 60 lots as part of “The Values Project.”

“The project is inviting people to curiosity. Inviting people to wonder,” said Hassen, who hopes the words also bring people closer together.

On the Values Project website, Hassen shares his fear that people are becoming separated from “common cultural touchstones.” He cites social networking websites and news media as two of the ways in which today’s culture isolates people from diversity, allowing them to hear only what they want to.

Values are “the glue” that holds a community together, Hassen said.

Using interviews, focus groups and classic literature, he identified values he believes are common to every race, gender, nationality and creed.

The list is: gratitude, respect, tolerance, learning, charity, kindness, compassion, productivity, knowledge, courage, responsibility, patience, honor, commitment, integrity and community.

He debuted his project this month with a splash of stenciled values at more than 500 parking spaces. “I want it to open like a flower, open all at once. It's more impactful when people see it all at once,” Hassen said.

The values at nearly 200 spaces are in Spanish.

What started in city and county parking lots has now expanded to schools, churches and hospitals, with the prospect of yet more parking lots.

“Including all of these will create a perceived unity of the social fabric of the community,” he writes on his website.

Photos and a complete list of participating parking lots is listed on the website. Sites include Napa Mill, Browns Valley Elementary School and the county Office of Education.

In an effort to engage students in the project, Hassen is visiting schools and starting discussions around the value words. By the completion of the project, 510 students in 18 local schools will have participated in the values workshops.

Hassen opens the dialogue by asking students to choose one value and tell what the value means to them. Have they seen it in action in their own lives?

Additionally, Hassen has benefited from some student “volunteers” who were working off community service hours.

At the launch celebration last week, Hassen expressed his gratitude to the community leaders who backed the project. Kristina Young from Arts Council Napa Valley spearheads the advisory board, which includes Rep. Mike Thompson, county Supervisors Bill Dodd and Brad Wagenknecht, architect Jay Golik and county schools superintendent Barbara Nemko with additional support by artist Gordon Huether.

Although Hassen is donating his time and the installations are completed by a volunteer crew, there are costs for permits, paint, gas and stencils. Arts Council Napa Valley is the financial sponsor of the program, which is partially funded by the

Gasser Foundation and individual donations.

Tax deductible donations can be made to Arts Council Napa Valley, c/o The Values Project. For more information, visit thevaluesproject.org.

Hassen is still seeking volunteers and parking lot sites. He and his crew are working every night, and some days, to spread values throughout Napa.