

Recycling 'art' into historical artifacts

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Wood Middle School student projects on display at library

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"Three, two, one — we declare the Wood Museum of History for 2010 officially open!" Booming applause resonated from the cafe to the stacks on both floors at Alameda Free Library last week. Wood Middle School's sixth- and seventh-graders, their parents, teachers and a handful of Alameda Unified School District and Alameda County Office of Education Board members cheered in unison to help kickoff the ninth annual exhibit of student-made artifacts reflecting the cultures and civilizations studied this year.

"Artifacts range in time from a cave drawing (Early Man) to the Italian Renaissance. There are more than 250 pieces in this year's show including Trojan horses, Mayan temples, Egyptian monuments, art and tomb sculptures, Buddhist temples, Zen gardens (and) medieval castles," said Nancy Ely, who's taught sixth-grade core classes including ancient world history the last eight years at Wood. "There is one long wall of Asian-themed kites,



JENNIFER K. RUMPLE/FOR BAY AREA NEWS GROUP

Wood Middle School sixth-grader Abigail Keep, 11, explains her ancient artifact created with recycled materials to science teacher Jeannette Frechou as part of the ninth annual Wood Museum of History on display at Alameda Free Library through May 8. Keep entered her creation on ancient Egyptian boats made of papyrus reeds in the Alameda County Office of Education's 'History Day' competition. She was the only contestant from Alameda.

which students are looking forward to flying at the beach once the exhibit comes down (May 9)."

Students created each artifact with Alameda County's Service-Learning Waste Reduction Project

in mind. Wood Middle School has participated in the program the last two years, encouraging teachers and students to reuse and recycle

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materials within their curriculum. Each artifact displays a label of materials used and how it fits into the historical time period studied. Sixth-grader Abigail 'Abbie' Keep, 11, created a hand-painted, tri-fold board explaining ancient Egyptian boats made from papyrus reeds.

"It's not as special if you do something everybody else is going to choose, so I picked something unique I knew I could really go far with it," said Keep, the first ever and only student this year from Alameda to enter the national History Day competition at the county level. Her exhibit did not make it to the

state level.

"We're supposed to try and use recycled objects for our projects. I took some clay I saved from a class earlier this year and used it to make cargo pots on my boat, used some of my mom's material to make a rice sack and braided string to make rope."

Keep gathered rushes from her back yard, bound them together and soaked them in water to make them pliable to form a replica of an ancient papyrus reed boat. She also pulled more of her mom's extra fabric like a "velvety, shimmery piece that kind of looks like sand" and blue cloth with a wavy pattern resembling water to make it look like her boat was floating along the Nile River.

"I have chills from every-

thing she's done on this because the focus since last year has been to really try and do more recycled materials to reduce what ends up in landfills. She takes my breath away with what she's done here," said Jeannette Frechou, five-year science teacher at Wood and the school's coordinator for county waste reduction project. "Her project absolutely exemplifies our recycle program. Where a lot of kids might have gone to Beverly's fabric for this, she went to her back yard for the reeds, her mother for extra materials and saved clay from a class instead of throwing it out."

Ely said she encouraged all her students to enter the History Day competition, but Keep was the only one who committed. Keep researched

many hours outside of school, met with a local ancient history professor and corresponded with a British archaeologist in Kuwait to get a better understanding of reed boats.

"Through this project, Abbie was introduced to scholarly research on the collegiate level. At the judging of her entry, she was quizzed at length by three adult historians and had to defend her conclusions about the importance of the innovation of reed boat making in ancient river civilizations," added Ely. "I have prominently featured Abbie's History Day entry in this year's Wood Museum of History because I think she is an inspiration to other students to participate next year in this countywide event." 350