Dan Evers Biography Continued

In 1971, Dan resolved that he wanted to be a wood and glass craftsman, and Hearing that Chico, with its beautiful university, was becoming a magnet for young artists, he packed up his things and headed north… sight unseen. Starting in a garage on Longfellow Ave, he began creating doors and furnishings for local businesses. In 1974, Dan moved his shop to a larger space directly behind Orient and Flume Art Glass, that he rented from his good friends David and Shari Hopper. It soon became apparent that the wood dust was not compatible with the glass making, so Dan purchased the large Northern Star Mills warehouses along the railroad track in Durham. (Now Westgate Hardwoods)

By 1999, Dan had built the business into a national brand, with the Feather River Door sold in Home Depot and other dealers throughout the US. In addition to the door factory in Durham, he had built a glass factory in Baja California, and display factories at the Chico Airport and in Louisville Kentucky.

In 2000, Dan sold his share of the company that he had founded nearly thirty years earlier so that he could return to the troubled Barrio Logan Neighborhood and begin working with the local kids.

Soon after setting up shop in the center of the Barrio, Dan was visited by members of Optimist International and Kaiser Permanente who needed help in creating a positive healing environment for young cancer victims in the giant Mt. Zion Hospital. Dan proposed that they needed an optimistic, colorful and abundant theme that the kids could respond to, and this was the beginning of the Rainforest Art Project. Dan then formed a partnership with the San Diego Zoo so that pediatric cancer victims could make Saturday visits to the zoo to learn about and draw the animals. The beautification of the Pediatric Wing of the hospital went on to win the coveted Orchid Award for creative excellence, and the program with the San Diego Zoo has now served thousands of patients and members of their families. These art activities are now accepted by Kaiser as a vital asset to their healing protocol, helping victims and families to break the cycle of fear and despair through creative exercise.

Having seen many failed Government funded programs, Dan believed that lasting change within deteriorating inner-city neighborhoods is possible if families begin take pride and ownership through the creation of public art.

Dan Presented his ideas to Fernando Hernandez, the Principal of Perkins Elementary School. With nearly forty percent homeless, they needed help more than any school in San Diego's sprawling district. Amazed that these high-risk inner-city schools had no art programs, Dan recruited volunteers and began engaging students in the creation of art projects for their school and community.

As the Rainforest Art Project expanded throughout Southern California, classroom teachers began asking for help in bringing art to their students on a regular basis. In partnership with the Imperial County Office of Education, the Rainforest Team began interviewing teachers, asking what they would need to make art happen in their classrooms. The overwhelming response was that the program needed quality grade-level workbooks and video support, with all supplies included, and that it needed to enhance their ongoing curricular studies, such as history and science.

Through this personal dialog with teachers and principals, the Rainforest Art Project began serving districts throughout Southern California with the comprehensive support that they were asking for.

Hearing of this success, Tim Taylor, then Superintendent of the Butte County Office of Education along with several principals visited the San Diego Headquarters and asked the Rainforest Team to begin programs in their region. About six months later, following the devastating Camp Fire, Dan was contacted by Mr. Taylor again, with an urgent request that the Rainforest help with their recovery. Within weeks, the Rainforest Team had established an office, and built a shop at the old OSH building where Paradise Junior High was temporarily housed.

Now in its beautiful facility at 20th and Locust Streets in Chico, donated by local developer Wayne Cook, and with over twenty supporting businesses as Community Partners, the Rainforest Art Programs are reaching students in five Northern California counties. The Rainforest Team is committed to inspiring students through project-based learning and have now published books and videos for every grade level, from kindergarten thru high school.

Rainforest students have helped to design and build sculpture parks in the cities of Brawley and Imperial, along with mosaics and logo design for the Sidewinder Skate Park in El Centro California.

Paradise High School students have created a marvelous bobcat mosaic for their fountain area, along with designing the stained glass for their library entrance. Through Paradise Rotary Club, new mosaic logo medallions are being created for the fronts of all of the schools. The Rainforest Shop Program at Paradise Ridge Elementary School has raised thousands of dollars for the rebuilding of the Honey Run Covered Bridge, and students are being involved in the design of the surrounding nature and history park. These same students also showed their gratitude to Durham Elementary School for allowing them to relocate there after the fire by making a beautiful mosaic bench.

For Dan it is extraordinary to be back in Northern California and finding so many friends, service clubs and businesses eager to help bring therapeutic art to the students and neighborhoods that need it the most.