Making community grants

By Mike Trigg
EPA Today Contributor

Many local nonprofits benefit tremendously from community-based grant making organizations. Environmental Volunteers, a nonprofit on East Bayshore Road, has been educating children and adults about our local environment since 1972. The nonprofit teaches over 10,000 K-8 students each year.

This year, Environmental Volunteers is continuing its mission with a collaborative program with the Marine Science Institute to offer combined bay ecology and marine ecology programs in area classrooms. Funded in part by a $5,000 grant from the Palo Alto Community Fund (PACF), this initiative will deliver hands-on investigation and cooperative learning to students in East Palo Alto starting in February.

Children pet a leopard shark during an Environmental Volunteers' excursion.

"This grant lets us reach out and engage with students directly in their classroom setting," explained Allan Berkowitz, Executive Director of Environmental Volunteers. "Not only do students gain an understanding and appreciation of their local ecosystem, but because we use volunteers to lead our programs, they serve as role models demonstrating the importance of philanthropy and civic engagement."

Environmental Volunteers isn't alone. Several nonprofit organizations in the East Palo Alto area also received news last May that they were recipients of grants from PACF. The organizations, which include Art in Action, BUILD, Canopy, Collective Roots Garden Project, Each One Reach One, the International Institute, Nuestra Casa, and Youth Community Service, were part of over $165,000 in grants that PACF provided this year to fund local programs.

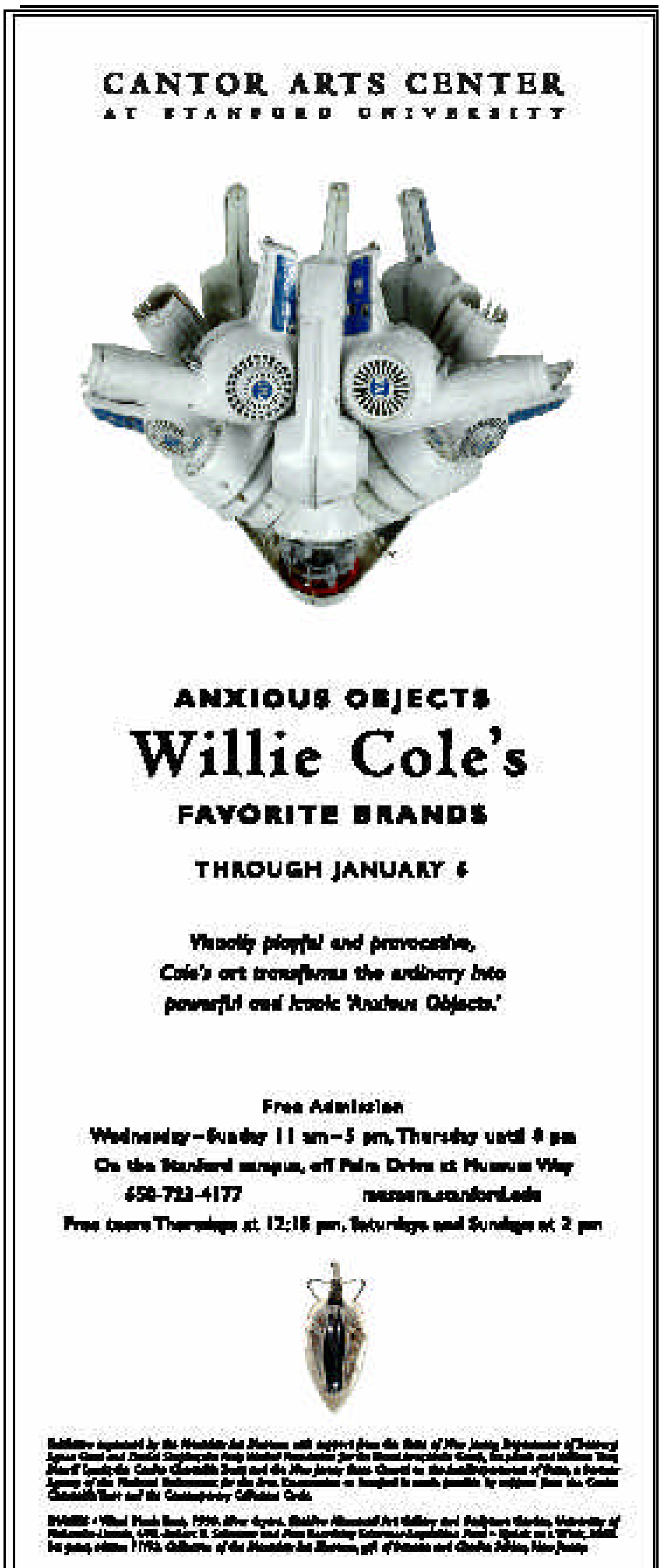
"We were very pleased to be able to support so many wonderful nonprofit programs in East Palo Alto this year," commented Kathy Schniedwind, co-president of PACF. "This year's grants helped fund a wide variety of diverse programs that are critical across the greater Palo Alto area, including a visual arts project, youth leadership training, family counseling, business training, and a tree-planting campaign."

The Palo Alto Community Fund was established in 1979 with the mission of helping to grow, sustain, and use its endowment to improve the quality of life in our community. With a philanthropic endowment of over $4 million, PACF provides annual grants to local nonprofit organizations serving Palo Alto, East Palo Alto, Menlo Park and contiguous communities.

PACF funds organizations and projects as diverse as our community - encompassing arts and culture, community development, education, environment, health, and social services. Since 1979, PACF has awarded more than $1.2 million to over 130 local nonprofit organizations.

"Every year we make a concerted effort to identify the most interesting and worthwhile projects being led by nonprofit organizations in our community," said Cammie Vail, Executive Director of PACF. "One of our main goals is to increase the size of our endowment, so we can increase our annual funding levels for local philanthropic programs."

PACF's emphasis on the local community sets it apart from other charitable foundations. Last year, PACF evaluated over 70 grant applications and selected 23 organizations that represent a diversity of local causes. As the endowment has grown, the proceeds have enabled PACF to increase its annual grant making, creating a perpetual impact on the local community.

More information about PACF, including online donations and applications for nonprofits interested in applying for grants, can be found on PACF's web site, www.paloaltocommfund.org or by calling 650-687-5026.

Mike Trigg is on the Advisory Board of the Palo Alto Community Fund