

# A gem among many

Between organizing fundraisers and rehabilitating the homeless, Carol Garsten can usually be found in her Palo Alto shop where she shares with kids and adults her passion for fossils and minerals

By Diana Samuels • Daily News Staff Writer



Kirstina Sangsachart / Daily News

Carol Garsten, owner of the Nature Gallery, poses for a portrait with an ammonite fossil in Palo Alto on Friday. Garsten uses dinosaur fossils, minerals and stones to educate local students.

**E**very surface in Carol Garsten's Nature Gallery is covered with things to look at — huge, sparkling amethyst geodes, tiny fossils of trilobites in gray stone, jewelry made with smooth, rounded tiger's eye.

"I have to make a living doing this, but it is way more than making a living for me, this business," said Garsten, a curly-haired, exuberant 49-year-old Palo Alto resident. "It's my passion. It makes me happy. And it makes me happy that it makes other people happy."

Garsten says the minerals and fossils she collects and sells "kind of help us put perspective on life, because they're these ancient things." And their impact carries beyond the walls of her small shop at the Town & Country Village shopping center in Palo Alto.

She does classroom presentations, turning local students into "rock hounds." She also uses the shop to support local charities through fundraising events.

When not at work, she advocates for the homeless, serving as board chairwoman for Peninsula HealthCare Connection at Palo Alto's Opportunity Center, and running the Downtown Streets Team's mentoring program.

Carolyn Digovich, a local marketing professional who has worked with Garsten on projects and nominated her as an unsung hero, described her as "a local businesswoman who finds a creative way of giving back to her community and helping people."

For example, Digovich said, earlier this month Garsten gathered a small group of Town & Country Village businesses to do a fundraiser for Breast Cancer Awareness Month. The businesses donated a portion of their proceeds to Breast Cancer Connections, a local resource center for people with breast cancer.

"It's not just a check written to something," Digovich said. "It's her personal involvement that's made a difference in so many people's lives."

Garsten graduated from film school at the University of South-

ern California and began her career in the film industry. But her plans changed after her mother Norma Tager, who was ill with cancer and interested in the healing effects of crystals, decided to open up a crystal shop in San Luis Obispo in 1987.

Garsten joined her shortly after and never left. In 1994, they moved to Palo Alto. Tager died in 1996.

Today, the tiny store's green walls are lined with cabinets full of crystals and jewelry, and Garsten's nature photography hangs on display. It's the kind of place where parents tell their children, "Don't touch anything!" But Garsten has a cabinet just for kids, full of gems, fossils and treasures they can hold.

"A lot of what I do in this gallery is teaching, not only to kids but adults, too," Garsten said. "A lot of people say this place is like a museum, except you can touch it."

Garsten is a Rotary Club member, and through that organization became involved with groups that serve the homeless, including the Downtown Streets Team and Peninsula HealthCare Connection.

"I think a lot of people in the community are really scared of the idea of even talking to someone who's homeless," Garsten said. "A lot of these people are just people who have had really bad luck and made bad choices, and it could happen to anyone."

She currently runs the Streets Team's mentoring program and has worked with Downtown Streets Team participant Evan Davis for a year and a half. She has helped him get pro-bono dental work, apply for a membership at the YMCA and secure housing at the Opportunity Center.

"She helped me organize my goals, how to achieve them, kept me on track," Davis said.

He stops by her shop to chat and wash her windows every week.

"The time I spend connecting with people one-on-one is just so valuable," Garsten said. "It makes a life worth living, to be able to help someone less fortunate."

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

A few months ago, we asked you to let us know who among you are unsung heroes — the people whose deeds quietly touch others' lives in positive ways yet seldom get the recognition they deserve. Thanks to your responses, we will be featuring these special people once a month in this section.



### CITY OF MENLO PARK NOTICE OF NOMINEES FOR PUBLIC OFFICE

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the following persons have been nominated for the offices mentioned below to be filled at the General Municipal Election to be held on Tuesday, November 2, 2010 (in ballot order):

**Heyward Robinson (City Council Member)**  
**Richard A. Cline (Mayor/Business Owner)**  
**Peter Ohtaki (Director, Menlo Park Fire Protection District)**  
**Kirsten Keith (Attorney/Planning Commissioner)**  
**Chuck Bernstein (Educator/Business Owner)**  
**Russell Peterson (Community Volunteer)**

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that a General Municipal Election, consolidated with the Gubernatorial General Election, will be held in the City of Menlo Park on Tuesday, November 2, 2010 for the following officers:

**THREE CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS — Full Term/Four Years**

The polls will be open between the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m.

#### MEASURES TO BE VOTED ON

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that a General Municipal Election will be held in the City of Menlo Park on Tuesday, the second day of November 2010 for the following Measures:

**NOVEMBER 2, 2010 BALLOT MEASURE L—CITY OF MENLO PARK: (Yes or No vote)**  
 Shall the ordinance entitled "Measure to limit retirement benefits for new City of Menlo Park employees (Except sworn Police Officers) and to restrict City Council from increasing benefits in the future without voter approval", be adopted?

**NOVEMBER 2, 2010 BALLOT MEASURE T—CITY OF MENLO PARK: (Yes or No vote)**  
 Shall the voters affirm the decision of the Menlo Park City Council to approve the Menlo Gateway project and amend the City's General Plan to permit construction of offices, research and development space, a hotel, health club and restaurant on property located east of Highway 101 near Marsh Road?

DATED: October 25, 2010

/s/ Margaret S. Roberts, MMC  
 City Clerk  
 City of Menlo Park

PUBLISHED: October 26, 2010



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