

Art Matters

# Art, imagination, and co-creating our future



By Janet Sellers

With spring snow, the temps are relatively comfortable, and many go outdoors for play. We've all seen snowmen, snowcats—we even had a snow unicorn complete with icicle horn on my street—as well as the broomball and other winter pick-up games that just need a few people and a fun attitude. This is important random play, and actually has a big impact on our lives, society, and our well-being.

A variety of social worker studies show that free play is proactive and supports imagination and natural abilities, whereas toys and gizmos cause reactive play and suppress inquiry and creative action. Rob Hopkins, the founder of the international Transition Towns movement, wrote in his book, *From What Is to What If: Unleashing the Power of Imagination to Create the Future We Want* that some of the schools in his study even went so far as to remove all toys for three months every year, and what unfolded was astonishing.

Hopkins said that on the first day the children were shy and hesitant, but by the third and fourth days the children were making forts out of the

chairs, drawing on the chalkboards, and more. This is also reminiscent of the rhythmic words and numbers hand-clapping games of yesteryear, creative agility games such as Rockin' Robin, pat-a-cake, a sailor went to sea, and so on. These are fun games, no toys needed, facilitating eye-hand coordination and activating sensory and motor neurons on both sides of the brain.

Our brain's hippocampus, playing a major role in learning and memory, is directly involved with our reactions to stress activating the hormone cortisol. Elevated cortisol induces hippocampal atrophy. *Frontiers in Aging Neuroscience* reports that "clinical studies found that elevated cortisol was associated with poorer overall cognitive functioning, as well as with poorer episodic memory, executive functioning, language, spatial memory, processing speed, and social cognition..."

Hopkins reported that stress, trauma, anxiety, loneliness, and depression all have an adverse impact on the human imagination, causing it to contract and shrink. He visited Rosalie Summerton of Art Angel of Dundee, Scotland (btw, Scotland has a popu-

lation about the size of Colorado), an organization that works with people he said are "on the hard end of anxiety crisis." He asked, "When you were talking before, you used the word attention, and I wonder—it feels like we're in the middle of an attention crisis, that everyone's attention is shot to bits, and they can't focus on anything. I wonder if you've seen an increase in that?"

Summerton responded, "You know, we're all attached to our phones. We're always looking at the phone. Even when you go see a movie, it's really fast and furious and quick. There's no pause or time to speculate. It's always just everything is full-on, and we feel as if we're not being entertained unless it is..."

Hopkins' findings showed that the outdoor play of "what is" became "what if" when neighborhood members went outside to play, without toys or gizmos but making imaginative play with whatever was at hand—sticks, chalk, or just movement like jumping, hopscotch, run races like tag, etc.

Art and play help create significant changes in the way people perceive and shape their reality. Drawing in chalk

makes temporary creations but stimulates the creative part of the brain in a unique way. We can always erase it and start over or keep the picture around for a while. Our imagination development is in the doing of the chalk drawing, not necessarily in the long-term keeping of it.

Studies—and life—show us that if kids get to jump around, fall down, run, climb trees, and play outside in the neighborhood (even playing and drawing with chalk on the sidewalks or in the street), they are more resilient life-long to all kinds of "falls" and ups and downs of life. They are more creative in problem-solving throughout life. In many places, the streets are closed off regularly to create play space for kids, adults, the whole 'hood, bringing up safety and lowering crime and discord. It creates community when people are outside and playing together.

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## Snapshots of Our Community

### Hatfield book signing, Mar. 5



**Above and below:** Lisa Hatfield of Woodmoor signed copies of her first novel, *To Starve an Ember*, at Barnes and Noble in Colorado Springs on March 5. Hatfield is wearing a woodsmen helmet that is used during chainsaw and chipping work to reduce risk to homes or clean up damage after one. "*To Starve an Ember* is a novel about wildfires and family disasters and how to protect yourself from both," Hatfield said. It is the first of what Hatfield hopes will be a trilogy of novels. She's working on the second book now. *Photos by Michael Weinfeld.*



### PRHS students win MVEA trips



**Above:** Two Palmer Ridge High School juniors are among four students who have won the chance to take part in youth leadership trips this June and July. Diya Suri (left) came in second place and John Moritz (right), fourth. Students who took part in the contest answered three short essay questions about electric co-ops, leadership qualities they value, and what being part of an electric co-op means to them. As the second-place winner, Suri gets an all-expense-paid weeklong trip to Washington, D.C., for an Electric Cooperative Youth Tour in June. As the fourth-place winner, Moritz wins a trip to Clark, Colo., for a Colorado Electric Educational Institute Cooperative Youth Leadership Camp in July. *Photos provided by MVEA.*

### Park groundbreaking, Mar. 9



**Above:** Trinity Lutheran Church in Monument held a groundbreaking ceremony for the first phase of Trinity Community Park (TCP) on March 9. Holding the shovels are TCP team leader Tamara Schwartz and Pastor Mike Vinson. When the church's old playground was torn down, kids ended up hanging out in the parking lot. In response, church members, helped by a foundation matching grant, raised more than \$50,000 to build a new playground and walking paths. The first phase will include a playground with a swing set, tire swing, Americans with Disabilities Act swing, toddler swing, spring toy, and large climbing structure. There will also be a wheelchair-friendly walking path. The project will be built by volunteers who hope to complete it by early summer. *Photo by Samantha Johnson.*