PIECE BY PIECE

DRAGON COMES TO LIFE

Watsonville artist Kathleen Crocetti sculptures a dragon out of foam as a community-driven effort to commemorate the city’s historic Chinese neighborhoods with the newly dubbed “Chinatown Bridge” continues to progress. Working in conjunction with the river-focused Coastal Watershed Council and community members, local artists have designed a gateway arch to be placed at the River Street foot of a pedestrian footbridge linking to San Lorenzo Park. The nontraditional arch will be lined with Chinese characters sharing messages of welcome and poetry, with an orange skyward-looking dragon atop it all, producing an about 23-foot-high structure. The arch will honor the city’s Chinatown neighborhood which stood until the middle of the last century on the site where DNA’s Comedy Lab and the Galleria now stand. The project is in part a vision realized with the help of local businessman and philanthropist George Ow Jr., who lived his earliest years, from 1943 to 1948, in the last of Santa Cruz’s four former Chinatown neighborhoods before it was destroyed by flooding in 1955. Community mosaic and mural artist Crocetti and concrete artist Tom Ralston have been commissioned to design and produce the gate and dragon. Crocetti will coat the foam structure with concrete and then apply colorful mosaics. Ow and Ralston also were behind creation of a commemorative monument honoring deceased Chinese residents which stands at Evergreen Cemetery. The work on the project is planned to be completed later this year.