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## Teens encouraged to get creative as Festival of Lights Parade interns

By Zoë Friedman Town Crier Editorial Intern

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Chuck Piercy leads a float-building internship program through the Los Altos Festival of Lights Parade Association.

Zoë Friedman/Town Crier Editorial Intern



The float-building internship for the Los Altos Festival of Lights Parade does more

than simply teach teenagers how to use tools and engineer floats. It provides a space for kids to create, fail and make something beautiful.

Chuck Piercy, who for 35 years has worked as a product manager for startups, built his first float for the parade with his son and some friends. What began as a family project quickly evolved into a year-round program in which high schoolers now intern under Piercy and other mentors to design and construct floats for the annual parade.

For Piercy, the program's uniqueness lies in offering interns the chance to "create without the grade."

"Kids don't get that experience these days. When I was a kid, we had woodshop, and you could have a project and make it yourself," Piercy said. "Part of (the program) is the ability to create with people around you who also want to create, and there's no grade, so the magic is that you're just doing it because you're trying to end up with something beautiful."

The Mountain View resident aims to match interns with mentors based on their interests. The mentors specialize in mechanical engineering, electrical engineering, art and painting design. With the mentor's guidance, the interns do more than complete assigned tasks; they innovate and contribute to the design process.

"What I've learned is that the joy is actually along the way, letting people learn how to invent, take a risk and to try stuff. You give freedom," Piercy said.

The freedom to explore and create is one of intern Nikita Narang's favorite aspects of the program.

"The ferris wheel float was one of my favorites, because, (Piercy) really let me do whatever I wanted on the outside," the junior at Mountain View High School said.

The internship also allows the students to explore potential career paths and develop career aspirations. Mountain View High senior Ava Seto, who has been an intern since February 2022, said the experience has shaped her career goals.



“It’s helped me explore more what electrical engineering is and getting to talk to the mentors about what they do in their jobs, too, and helps me learn more about my future careers,” she said.

Narang echoed this sentiment.

“It’s definitely helped me realize that I want to do engineering,” she said.

“Before, my biggest thing about engineering was that I didn’t want it to be super boring and something that didn’t involve a creative side, because I do really enjoy art, and I think that with these floats I understood that I can actually use engineering and my creativity to create something super cool.”

Beyond technical skills, the internship program also imparts valuable life lessons, according to the mentor and mentees.

“I’ve learned a lot about certain concepts like voltage and current for electrical engineering, but also the engineering process,” Seto said. “What happens when you know your plan doesn’t go as you thought it was gonna be? You have to go back to the drawing board.”

The internship program is open to all high school students and is year-round, with the parade scheduled Thanksgiving weekend. The time commitment is three to four hours per week.

To apply and for more information, email Piercy at [cpiercey@icloud.com](mailto:cpiercey@icloud.com).



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