

ART

Phoenix food artist brings table work to schools

By Brent Ruffner
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

An artist, a baker and a food art maker.

Ahwatukee resident Sandra Marshall is all that and then some.

Marshall, 51, turns avocados into horror figures and squash and corn into characters doing yoga poses. She has been an artist her entire life, but her food art came into practice after her daughter, Lena, “declared” she would not eat meat anymore. “I had to get creative,” Marshall said.

Then, treating dinner ingredients as art pieces allowed Marshall to find out about new produce.

“I would come home and learn about new ingredients,” Marshall said. “We eat everything that we make. It’s kind of a strange hobby.”

Earlier this year, author Stephen King retweeted her depiction of Bernie Sanders at the January presidential inauguration — bundled up in the cold, mittens and all.

Now, her children’s book, “The Razzle Berry Wackadoodle Garden” — a plant-based book meant to teach kids to get over any kind of

» See Food on page 9

Food

» From page 1

hangups over eating fruits and vegetables — is getting published.

The book is a 44-page hardcover story about a garden filled with “bright blue-berry skies, surrounded by flowers of purple cauliflower and pink grapefruit.”

The description of the book tells of a smiling watermelon pig and a peacock made from cabbage and squash who “parades down” a garden trail.

“I’m so happy I did it,” Marshall said. “I have schools now that want to incorporate this book into their curriculum.”

But Marshall doesn’t just create food art and write books.

The artist teaches more traditional art, too.

Susana Gonzales, assistant principal at Avondale Middle School, helped pick Marshall to teach Zoom classes as part of a 21st Century Community Learning Grant, which provides “academic, artistic and cultural enrichment opportunities” for children and their families.

The artist sends school officials acrylic painting kits in the mail that includes everything needed to create a painting, including a canvas, paint and brushes.

The grant, which lasts five years, also allows school officials to host activities such as a cooking night and photography classes.

Gonzales said school officials plan to have the artist teach eight to 10 Zoom classes for the next school year.

“We were looking for the skillset of an instructor (who



Sandra Marshall is a food artist who has become a children’s author and teacher, with a goal of having kids eating healthy. [Sandra Marshall]

could work with kids),” Gonzales said.

The artist captures the

curiosity of the children she teaches. At first, Gonzales said the kids were leery

about painting. But that feeling eventually wore off.

“They are curious,” Gonzales said. “Kids are recruiting their friends. ...They are eager.”

The move toward teaching children is reciprocal for Marshall. She said she’s talked with schools “around the country” about being involved in teaching children about the importance of fruits and vegetables. She’s currently exploring the idea of getting a company such as Del Monte Foods sponsoring her in some way.

“That’s my goal this year,” Marshall said. “It opens kid’s eyes to looking at fruits and vegetables in a whole different way. “...It could take your breathe away.”

At home, Marshall admits not everyone in her household is excited about her food art

all the time. That’s especially true when her husband, Greg develops an appetite.

“Sometimes when he’s hungry, food art is not his favorite thing in the world,” Marshall said.

But Marshall’s friend, Ahwatukee resident Linda Gayles, is quick to hand the artist compliments on her work. She is a retired teacher who taught in south Phoenix.

With children, she said Marshall breaks down what different fruits and vegetables are.

“Some students didn’t know,” Gayles said.

For the educator, she said the artist makes her job a bit easier and helps build a sense of community.

“It builds relationships with kids,” Gonzales said. “It’s really important for where we work.”