During a planning meeting for their 2016 crab feed, the Friends of the Yolo Crisis Nursery tried out some photo props for the event. Back row, from left, are Martha Bernauer, Lynnette Temple, Nancy Storm, Veronica Stanton, Lynn Evert and Linda Dullum. Front row, from left, are Tammy Amaral, Becky Heard, Karen Adams and Heather Sleuter. Courtesy photo

**Yolo Crisis Nursery: A nursery in need has friends indeed**

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If you’ve ever attended one of the many fundraising events benefiting the Yolo Crisis Nursery, no doubt you were impressed with the crowd size, the efficient organization and the steady stream of good times.

These things don’t just happen on their own. They are the result of a lot of work and a lot of talent.
Behind the scenes, a passionate group of worker bees has been at it for months, planning, organizing and recruiting. Then, on the all-important day-of, they deliver.

These are the Friends of the Yolo Crisis Nursery. Friends, indeed. Every organization could use friends like these. If they were a business, their motto would be: We show up and get things done.

Like the Yolo Crisis Nursery itself, the Friends started out small, a group of three who formed an ad hoc committee simply to raise community awareness of the nursery soon after it opened in 2001.

They got the word out through other nonprofits, speaking engagements and brochure distribution at service clubs, churches, medical facilities, preschools, elementary schools — any place people gathered in Yolo County. They also worked to expand this tiny, but mighty group, which by year’s end grew to 20 members.

Heidy Kellison, the first president of the Friends, recently recalled those early days.

“I think our decision to let the talents of the group dictate our activities was critical to our success in building the group,” she says. “We believed every person had something to contribute and welcomed all hearts and abilities, not just those with a knack for fundraising. This turned out to be a very wise strategy.”

Indeed, it did. Take a passionate person with time to volunteer and a unique skill set to bring to the party, and you’ve got a formula for success.

Artist Linda Dullum, a founding member of the Friends, is a good example. For an early fundraiser, “Help Our Children Grow,” she fashioned flower pots as donation receptacles that were placed in local businesses. Any person making a donation could take a flower pin, also designed by Linda, to wear during the Child Abuse Prevention Month of April.

This really got people talking about the nursery and soon, donations of all kinds sprouted.

In 2013, what would become the nursery’s signature fundraiser, “Krustaceans for Kids,” was launched soon after Sherry Richter became president of the Friends. Sherry’s talent for organizing events featuring food and auctions paid off, as that first crab feed sold out the Davis Senior Center and raised nearly $10,000.

This year’s fifth annual event, under the direction of current Friends Co-Presidents Martha Bernauer and Nancy Storm, sold out the much larger Woodland Community & Senior Center and netted more than $60,000 for the nursery.
When not working on events like these and others, the Friends have acted as facilitators to garner resources to beautify the nursery, like fanciful murals, cozy furniture, a shade structure from Morse Remodeling, and the ongoing support of Rotary Clubs for the grounds and play areas. They also have spearheaded community drives for donations of nursery supplies, clothing, gently used toys and equipment.

For the past 12 years, the Friends have made the Christmas holidays more special for nursery client families with the “Adopt-A-Family” program.

Adds Heidy, “People love to give at the holidays and there was something intrinsically heartfelt about our clients’ wish lists. I’ll never forget (one volunteer’s) tears when the daughter of a family she’d adopted requested Braille books.”

The greatest effort of all by the Friends, however, came together in 2014 when the nursery was threatened with closure. Yes, it was the Friends who rallied the community to raise enough funds to keep the doors open and the lights on while the independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit, Yolo Crisis Nursery Inc., was formed.

And it was Friends who recruited the inaugural board of directors, and it is Friends who hold some seats on that board today.

Heidy summed up her time as a Friend of the Nursery nicely: “For all these years, the nursery survives through the personal gifts and talents of many. That’s how it will continue to thrive in the years ahead. There has never been a more rewarding volunteer experience.”

Consider joining the Friends of the Yolo Crisis Nursery. Bring your time, your talent and your passion to have this rewarding volunteer experience for yourself. To learn more about the Friends of the Yolo Crisis Nursery, find them on Facebook or contact them directly by email at friends@yolocrisisnursery.org.

You, too, can show up and get things done.

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