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Sue Hilderbrand applies a second coat of orange paint Saturday to Sally Sunshine. The puppet represents solar energy, one of many areas that could benefit from the funding used for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.



Susan Tchudi helps drape the Jolly Green Ecological Giant on Saturday in preparation for a rally in City Plaza on March 15. The puppet stands for local organic farming, which could benefit from funding now spent on war.

Puppets paint war options

By: Taylor Flores

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More than 30 people, 15 glue guns and hundreds of cardboard boxes later, 10- to 15-foot puppets will dance in the streets of Chico.

In preparation for the fifth anniversary of the war in Iraq on March 15, the Chico Peace and Justice Center is sponsoring all-day workshops every Saturday to teach people how to make giant puppets with the theme, "Alternative Uses for a Trillion War Dollars." The puppets will be featured in City Plaza, rising taller than some rooftops.

"I'm hoping this is going to wake people up," said junior Ashley Oakley, president of Campus Involvement and

Awareness. "I hope when they find out what it is it will make them motivated."

Saturday was the first workshop, and participants began making puppets that represent spending alternatives, including funding for better health care.

"Protesting what we don't want got us nowhere," said Sue Hilderbrand, director of the Chico Peace and Justice Center. "Now let's show what we do want, and what better way than with giant puppets?"

Chico State and Butte College students are making a giant check to show how the money could be used for free education instead of war. They are also making a backdrop of New Orleans to show support for rebuilding the historic city.

"With all this money we could have had 15 New Orleans," said Jennifer Ward, president of Butte College's Campus Involvement and Awareness. "The possibilities are endless."

For the past four years the Chico Peace and Justice Center, which works to manifest alternatives to violence, has sponsored protest events for the anniversary. But this year members wanted to try something new, Hilderbrand said.

Giant puppet displays are common in organizing political activity in bigger cities and with Chico's artistic community it works, too, she said.

Members were thinking of alternatives and Steve Tchudi offered his son who was a puppet maker, she said.

"It was a done deal after that," Hilderbrand said.

Cheetah von Tchudi, the puppet master, has spent five years making puppets as a member of an avant-garde puppet-theater company, he said. After moving home he wanted to get involved in puppet art again but never expected this.

"I hope there are a lot of people out there very passionate for the neglected projects in the world," Cheetah von Tchudi said. "It will be a great display."

One puppet is the Jolly Green Ecological Giant, standing 12 feet tall and weighing 15 pounds. Taking about three weeks to create, he stands in support of local organic farming.

"His weight isn't the issue," Tchudi said. "I'll be going downwind with him, or else it could be bad."

There are at least 10 puppet projects, including a giant wolf for protection of endangered species, a Statue of Liberty illustrating the neglected people of the world and Sally Sunshine, a 3-D sun advocating solar energy.

The center supplies all materials and has spent about \$200 on initial costs, Hilderbrand said.

Participants are encouraged to bring recyclable materials and knick-knacks to the Drive-By Gallery.

Workshops are every Saturday 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. until the March 15 anniversary, when the puppets will be displayed from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. in City Plaza.

"If you don't know where you're going any road will take you there," Hilderbrand said. "This last year we've been saying what we don't want so screw it, let's build what we do want."

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