

Graffiti being encouraged in South Lake Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

Drab utility boxes mixed with graffiti are becoming commissioned works of art throughout South Lake Tahoe.

“When people see this, they see what we can do with graffiti and spray paint,” Dakotah Jensen told the South Lake Tahoe City Council.



Green utility boxes, left, are being turned into art, right, throughout South Lake Tahoe.

Photo/LTN

Instead of being paid for his talents, Jensen and others in the 4-year-old Sphere of Influence program are being given the tools (paint) and the canvas (utility boxes) to express themselves.

That’s how Jensen and Bernardo Ayon, two South Tahoe High students, described what they are doing. Ayon said it shows urban art can be a positive thing.

When the city in 2008 started experiencing a surge in graffiti on public and private buildings, including dumpsters, it stepped a local businessman with the idea to have local students create approved artwork throughout town.

Sphere of Influence was born. Matt Kauffmann oversees the program that has had about 40 students go through it.

He would like to have a wall to showcase this type of art.

For the dumpsters, South Tahoe Refuse sanitizes them before the young painters do their wizardry.

All designs are first OK'd by the city. They must have a mountain-sports theme like flowers or mountain bikes.

Kauffman said more than 100 sites have been painted, with plenty more needing something other than the standard green they come with.

The public is noticing – including Phyllis Shafer, chairwoman of Lake Tahoe Community College's art department.

She wrote a letter to the city saying, "Not only have I been impressed with the artwork that has been presented in the applications for these projects, but also the ability and willingness of the artists to work within certain stipulations and still produce highly creative works of art."