

Serving Up Creative SOUP

By Susan Talpey
Living Editor

A delicious and imaginative concoction, *Creative Soup* is a website cooked up by shoreline artists and bubbling over with original ideas and musings.

Branford graphic designer Jen Payne set up the *Creative Soup* collaboration two years ago to encourage inspired souls, including herself, to take thoughtful time out.

"I always loved writing, but like many busy people, as I grew older my business took precedence and I had little time to pursue that passion," she says. "Two years ago I had a life changing moment and realized it was most important that I take time out for my artwork and my writing."

At a dinner gathering of shoreline writers, photographers, and artists, Payne came up with the idea for a website dedicated to the pursuit of creativity. At that melding of artistic minds, the menu was homemade soup—and an idea was born.

Creative Soup presents a new installation each quarter, often based around a theme. Past ideas have including Inspiration, Magic, Creativity, It's A Secret, Sacred Spaces/Special Places, and Talk To Me.

At the end of September, *Creative Soup*'s latest installation, the *2nd Annual Great Creative Soup Alphabet Project*, will be posted. Centered around the idea of "What I Did on My Summer Vacation," it's a collection of 26 creative pieces, from A to Z, and marks the site's second anniversary.

Broader is Better

Rather than focus on one artistic form, *Creative Soup* is a tasty mixture of artwork and illustrations, poetry and prose, essays and photography, book recommendations and amusing musings.

"I believe that we are all creative in some way. Some people are writers, others artists; some people are gardeners, others are cooks," Payne says. "In our busy world today, most



(Above) Branford graphic designer Jen Payne set up the *Creative Soup* website to be a thought-inspiring artistic outlet for the shoreline's creative minds.

Photo by Susan Talpey

(Right) Logo by Carol Nicklaus

people don't have the time to get in touch with their creative side and yet it's more important than ever to do just that. *Creative Soup* is a platform to inspire people to find time to explore and express their creativity, to engage viewers and inspire thought."

In the last two years, *Creative Soup* has grown its list of contributors, or "kindred spirits," to more than two dozen with more than 150 interested minds signed up as regular readers.

"We've cultivated an active group of enthusiastic and engaged open minds from all different artistic backgrounds who find *Creative Soup* their own creative outlet," Payne says.

"We live in such a remarkable area. You'd think that you'd have to go to a city to find this incredible depth of creative talent but the shoreline is home to the most vibrant and diverse artistic community imaginable."

The Secret Ingredient

Pamela LaRegina, calligraphy artist and Payne's next-door neighbor in Branford, was the first artist to throw her work into the *Creative Soup*. Under its broad artistic umbrella, LaRegina says she relished the opportunity to contribute a variety of work, from cartoons to "humorous and inventive" writing.



Creative Soup is a nice way to share work of different genres. And we don't get paid—we do it for the love of art."

With the far-reaching audience that cyberspace offers, *Creative Soup* is its own creative community, Payne says, and contributors enjoy not only logging on to each other's thoughts, but also meeting face-to-face.

"We've had two get-togethers and intend to have more in the future. *Creative Soup* allows us to connect with like-minded people, to support and encourage our work and the work of others, and when we actually come together the conversation just flows," she says.

In the interest of inspiring the artist in everyone, *Creative Soup* recently added a blog on which all are welcome to share their creative ideas. This year, Payne also ran the site's first open writing project.

"It was called 'Assignment 08' and everyone who signed up was sent a cardboard suitcase. They had to fit into the suitcase what they would take to a desert island and submit a digital photo of what they packed," she says. "We want to do more of these open projects—it's a great way to get people involved who don't think they're creative but everyone has an answer to a question like that."

Payne hopes *Creative Soup* will gain a larger, wider readership and continue to inspire creative souls, on the shoreline and beyond.

"It's exactly what I wanted it to be—a place to connect and share creative work. It's also exciting to see the project grow in new ways. We want to keep meeting in person and we're considering having a physical show or a print publication of *Creative Soup* work," she says."

"*Creative Soup* is a great example of what can happen when you allow yourself time to open your mind and explore your ideas."

"When you think creatively you're using a better part of your brain, and when you're working toward a specific end it's to create something of beauty," she says. "Whether it's through art, or gardening, or cooking, it's very natural to create beauty. It's wholesome and whole-minded. And in our culture, in our schools, that's not always nourished, but it's very important."

Guilford writer Doug Mathewson is, along with his poet wife Gemma, a regular contributor to *Creative Soup*. He says the website offers him a different artistic outlet to his published short fiction.

"The majority of us artists and writers work in isolation and are kept busy by our own work," he says. "While it's always great to get selected for a gallery show or a publication,

The *2nd Annual Great Creative Soup Alphabet Project* will be posted at the end of September. Visit *Creative Soup* at www.creativesoup.org.