

Patrol Paints Murals

By DALE POLLOCK

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Walk up to the playground wall on Live Oak Elementary school, close your eyes, take a deep breath, and re-open them. Suddenly, you're in the middle of a Mayan jungle, with monkeys chattering, lions crawling over the landscape with a colorfully plumed ibex staring right at you.

It isn't a mirage in the summer heat. Instead, the explosion of color in Live Oak is simply the latest work of El Tortuga Patrol, a group of young muralists with a message.

Since its inception last year, the 11-member group of artists and their teachers have completed several murals throughout the county, including two "moveable" ones on buses. And the project doesn't cost the schools, where most of the murals have been located, a single penny.

Ralph D'Oliveira and Ray Romo are two artists who made a singular commitment when they first came to work at Watsonville's Academe del Arte.

"As artists and muralists, we could either give the gift of just the mural to the community, or we could give the gifts and techniques we had picked up in our training back to the community," explains Romo.

That they have done with a vengeance. After doing one mural for Watsonville High, and being surprised at the enthusiastic reaction from the school's students, they set up El Tortuga Patrol, with the express purpose of instructing their younger charges in the