

THE BUFFALO NEWS



Lisa Tribunella creates artwork for the new exhibit in Mount St. Mary's Hospital, Lewiston.
Harry Scull Jr./Buffalo News

Opportunities are indeed unlimited for students with artistic skills

New Lewiston exhibit features their work

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LEWISTON — Make your own choices.

Express yourself. Try new art materials.

These are the goals Marcia Ross has in mind while teaching up to 60 students each week as fine arts coordinator for Opportunities Unlimited of Niagara.

Opportunities Unlimited has provided rehabilitation and supportive services to people with developmental disabilities for more than 50 years and operates 20 group homes and three day-program sites in Niagara County.

Ross travels to all three day sites to teach each week. Her students possess a variety of skills sets, but all arrive for class with one purpose — to enjoy art.

“Our artists have painted and used a wide variety of printmaking techniques,” Ross explained. “I tend to offer things that are a little more abstract. I think it’s important for our artists to just freely draw, too,

whether it be with crayons or markers, or whatever. It's just important that they have this time to express themselves."

Some of the students' often stunning results are featured in a new exhibit that opened Thursday in Mount St. Mary's Hospital and Health Center in Lewiston. The original creations line a portion of a connecting hallway linking the main hospital building with the new Primary Care Office and Medical Arts Building.

This is the first time Opportunities Unlimited has displayed its original artwork at the hospital, part of an ongoing effort to help give the artists a public forum, as well as offer the public a glimpse at the artists' unlimited talents.

"We have hundreds of people in our facility every day for a wide array of services," said Judith A. Maness, president and chief executive officer of Mount St. Mary's. "Giving them the opportunity to enjoy works of art from talented individuals is a bonus. Plus, those of us who are here every day get to enjoy them."

It also helps the mission of Opportunities Unlimited, according to Roxane Albond-Buchner, the agency's communications manager.

"We are trying to show our program participants' abilities and dispel the stereotypes and myths," she said. "They are people first, people who have developmental disabilities, but the focus is on all of the new things they are able to learn and enjoy."

A recent visit to the agency's Lockport site — one of the agency's three day-program sites, along with those located in Niagara Falls and Wheatfield — found Ross with four of her students working on mono ink prints.

Hard at work at an art table set up in a corner of the cavernous Heath Street workshop filled with people busy with a number of other tasks, Lisa Tribunella and Jean Marie Guarino carefully pressed their original designs into small gobs of black ink using hand-held rollers. They watched with great excitement as their prints were peeled back and revealed.

"Wow," said Guarino, a big smile indicating that she was obviously pleased with the butterfly print she had created.

"My dad is an artist," she said. "He paints oil paintings. I have my own sketchbook, too."

Seated across the table, Tribunella was eager to discuss her choice of a sun design.

"We're in summer now and you know how hot the sun gets," she said. "I really like doing this. You learn new things. I like drawing and painting on canvas. Marcia [Ross] has quite a few good ideas and we all just love her because she's very good to us."

Tribunella and Guarino are two of the 19 artists whose work is being featured at Mount St. Mary's.

Along with teaching fine arts in a wide array of mediums, Ross said, "My job is also to mat and frame these works and get them into the community to celebrate our artists. I celebrate them everyday.

“A lot of our artists haven’t been able to make many choices on their own — choices are made for them by well-meaning people,” she added. “But my goal is to have them do their own artwork and make their own choices — even if it’s just a choice of colors, for the more physically challenged, or to choose brushes or markers that can be adapted to suit them.

“It’s about expression and the process — not about the product.”

Another goal is to one day make this artwork available for sale, Albond-Buchner said.

The agency will host a tent displaying some of its artists’ work at the Lewiston Fine Arts Festival Aug. 14-15, as well as a talent show and juried art show at Niagara Falls High School in the fall.

Program participants also are enrolled in a number of grant-supported workshops led by professional artists in a variety of venues in the community, including art galleries and nursing homes.

In the future, Ross, who joined the Opportunities Unlimited staff in January and is also currently at work on her master’s in art education, said she’d like to introduce clay “to explore 3-D art.”

“I want to explore as many different mediums as we can,” said Ross, who also is a mosaic artist. “Everyone seems to look forward to this time we spend here.”

Founded in 1955, Opportunities Unlimited of Niagara currently provides rehabilitation and supportive services to roughly 800 people of all ages and their families. The majority are from Niagara County, but the agency serves some residents of nearby communities.



June 3, 2010

Opportunities Unlimited consumers unveil art at Mount St. Mary's

Niagara consumers behind newest display at hospital

---NIAGARA--- Niagara Gazette

NIAGARA FALLS — An artwork collection created by Opportunities Unlimited of Niagara artists was dedicated and blessed Thursday at Mount St. Mary's Hospital and Health Center.

The works were created by people with intellectual and other developmental disabilities during fine arts classes offered at the three day program locations at Opportunities Unlimited of Niagara. The pieces were placed on the walls of the connecting hallway that links the main hospital building with the Primary Care Office and Medical Arts Building.

“This collection of work by the artists at Opportunity Unlimited of Niagara reflects choice-making and exploration of art media,” said Marcia Ross, fine arts coordinator for Opportunities Unlimited. “The movement of ink through wet paper, brush strokes and creating shapes in the creation of mono-prints, all inspire the artists in the process of their art-making.”

The nearly 1,300 associates of Mount St. Mary's and local leaders welcomed the first collection of artwork and the artists during the opening reception Thursday.

“We have hundreds of people in our facility everyday for a wide array of services,” said Mount St. Mary's President and CEP Judith A. Maness. “Giving them the opportunity to enjoy works of art from talented individuals is a bonus. Plus, those of us who are here everyday to enjoy them.”

- James Neiss/staff photographer Lewiston, NY - Laura Welder of Youngstown, a consumer at Opportunities Unlimited of Niagara, right, is all smiles as she receives complements for her artwork by President and CEO of Mount St. Mary's Hospital Judith Maness, during an opening art reception. An artwork collection was created by Opportunities Unlimited of Niagara artists and was dedicated and blessed in the EmStar/Wound Center hallway at the hospital.



- James Neiss/staff photographer Lewiston, NY - Guests and dignitaries attended and art opening at Mount St. Mary's of artwork created by consumers at Opportunities Unlimited.

