

Cedarhurst focuses on education in the arts

Cedarhurst offers programming for both children and adults

BY JOSH JONES
SENTINEL NEWS STAFF

MOUNT VERNON — Understanding the core concepts of art and building upon that, art can open up a new world for many.

Cedarhurst Center for the Arts has always striven to provide some educational aspect in nearly every program that they host. Rusty Freeman, Director of Visual Arts at Cedarhurst, explained what role education plays in a public museum.

“Education is the focus of any public museum, be they history, science, or the visual arts. Art museums are more like libraries. We offer carefully selected historical artifacts from the past that the public can study from a number of perspectives. More than a library, art museums are public trusts, which means they have a responsibility to hold in their collections the best works of art from our collective past and to elucidate and present those works as History with a capital H,” Freeman said. “Our role is even more important in the age of social media, because the discourse of social media evolved from the printed word and the painted image. As a historian once said, the past is prologue. Knowing where America came from, we might imagine where it is headed in the future. The art collections offer this kind of education and more.”

Director of Education Jennifer Sarver explained the in-school art instruction program that Cedarhurst offers.

“Our goal is mission driven, in that it provides opportunities in the arts. Many

schools in our region do not have a formal program in the arts. It is my hope that our outreach helps fill that gap. Cedarhurst offers a variety of hands-on art experiences for students throughout the Southern Illinois region,” Sarver said. “From Navajo clay projects to painting like Claude Monet, 3,998 students participated in these programs during the 2018-2019 school year.”

Schools that participated in last year’s programming included Ashley, Bethel, Carbondale New School, Centralia Junior High, Clay City, Du Quoin Elementary, Farrington, Grand Prairie, Hall PreK, Lincoln Attendance Center, Longfellow Marion, Mount Erie, New Horizon, North Clay, Oakdale, Pleasant View Baptist, Rome Grade, Selmaville, Sesser-Valier, South Central, St. Bruno, St. Mary, Thompsonville, Trinity Lutheran, Vandalia, Waltonville, West Frankfort, Willow Grove and Woodlawn.

Cedarhurst’s Performing Art Series also reached many students.

“From seeing a play adaptation of the book, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, to learning about science and technology, with a drone science program, our School Performing Arts series offers students an exciting array of educational performances that connect with our area school’s curriculum,” Sarver said. “Last year we had over 3,500 students visit Cedarhurst to experience our school performing arts series.”

Director of the Shrode Art Center Carrie Gibbs said that the center hosts art



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PERFORMING ARTS SERIES – American Eagle Productions previously performed a stage version of *The Diary of Anne Frank* for students and educators from various local schools. Last year over 3,500 students visited Cedarhurst to experience the school performing arts series.

classes for children.

“Throughout the school year I teach our second to fifth grade after school art class: ArtTime. We learn how to work with clay, painting, drawing, mixed media and printmaking,” Gibbs said. “On Wednesday mornings I teach our 1 1/2 to 3-year-old ABC & Art class. We sing songs, create an art project, read a story and explore new ideas through art, music, language and the changing seasons around us.”

Gibbs also helps run various adult classes including Clay and Cocktails, glass fusing, Henna, Tie-Dye, throwing on the potter’s wheel and hand-building clay techniques.

“I find it interesting that introductory level adult art classes and children’s art classes focus on learning the same elements and principles. Everyone has to start from the same basic starting point. My teaching style

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LEARNING THROUGH ART – The Bonan Permanent Collection at Cedarhurst Center for the Arts is one of the many key educational opportunities at the museum. Currently *An Enduring Legacy: Masterpieces from the Mitchell Museum at Cedarhurst* is being showcased in the gallery.

Cedarhurst:

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changes on the way I deliver my message based on the age group I am working with, but my actual demonstration of an art technique or process is fairly similar,” Gibbs said. “I love teaching our youngest class, to the toddler age group. They come in so excited and I love the joy on their faces of discovering art and learning new songs, it seems almost magical.”

Gibbs has been an art teacher since 2006. She said that through her experience, her teaching style has grown and she is proud of the sound curriculum that she has been able to help develop at Cedarhurst.

“At the end of the day, after I have been teaching a class, or workshop, I feel that I have done something meaningful,” Gibbs said. “Working with people directly and helping them discover their own creativity is very rewarding and I’m grateful to have a career in art education.”

Cedarhurst’s presence in schools and holding classes is only the tip of the iceberg, when it comes to educational opportunities.

“Cedarhurst offers a variety of opportunities to engage children and adults with art. I encourage everyone to explore our website and follow us on Facebook to get an idea of the breadth of our programming. Cedarhurst’s Family Fun Day is a great example of a program where children and adults can work together to create a work of art to take home,” Sarver said. “The relaxed



atmosphere of this event really allows participants to enjoy themselves and be in the moment while they are creating art. Beyond programming, our galleries and grounds are a great place for families to explore and learn about art.”

Freeman explained his role in the educational process at Cedarhurst.

“My role at Cedarhurst is three-fold: to care for the permanent collection of art which has historical paintings by Mary Cassatt, Thomas Eakins and George Bellows,” Freeman said. “The word curator derives from ‘to care for.’ Two related responsibilities include creating temporary, three-month long exhibitions based on the art of contemporary visual artists who have something important to say about living in today’s world. And I care for the sculpture park. These three responsibilities can only come to life if the curator can adequately put into words what these visual works of art are trying to say. That is the educational component of curating.”

Gallery talks are another key component at Cedarhurst.

“Sometimes I have the artist give a gallery talk, sometimes I give a gallery talk, most times, I write a short essay on the works relationships to history,” Freeman said. “Jennifer, Carrie and I will sometimes try to coordinate and relate to each other’s educational programs.”

Accessibility is a key focus for Freeman when it comes to gallery talks or any program.

“The most fundamental component of our educational philosophy is having the visual language of artists be something that the audiences we serve can relate to, put into their own words, and have some kind of relevance to their lives. My approach to gallery talks, or any other educational program, is to consider first what our audiences need to know,” Freeman said. “The point of art museum educational programs is to give the audience the content and let them decide for themselves.”

While many of their programs happen on a consistent basis, Cedarhurst also offers annual opportunities for families to take the leap into learning about art.

“Our annual WSIU family event is a great partnership that introduces many families to Cedarhurst and the quality educational programming offered on PBS. We have had dinosaurs, Curious George and Elmo visit Cedarhurst. It is always a fun filled afternoon,” Sarver said.

The Beck Family Center, which has already been a driving force for younger children to get into art, was remodeled at the end of 2018 and Sarver explained how the appeal of the gallery can apply to anyone.

“The Beck Family Center and gallery provides exhibitions that are accessible to children, yet still enjoyed by all ages. The art and interactive components are vehicles to promote discussion about art and its place in the world,” Sarver said. “It is a wonderful space to be engaged in the arts, I think you can be 100 or one and still learn something about



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AFTER SCHOOL ART – Cedarhurst After School Art Instructor Kristina Klein, RIGHT, demonstrates some drawing techniques for students during an After School Art Time class at the Cedarhurst Center for the Arts. Cedarhurst offers a variety of programs for both children and adults to learn about art.

art and creativity from this space.”

Gibbs is the curator of the Regenhardt Gallery at Shrode Art Center. She explained her involvement with the gallery and the opportunities it presents.

“This provides me with an opportunity to work closely with artists in our region and showcase their work in a beautiful exhibition space. When we host an Art Chat our goal is to help visitors appreciate the artwork more,” Gibbs said. “We discuss how the artwork is made, the processes involved, the many hours of devotion the artist has to their craft, as well as the artist’s concepts and ideas and what they’re hoping to express through their work.”

Two standout programs for adults and learning about the arts are Art, Coffee & Conversation (AC&C) and the Cedarhurst Book Club.

“AC&C is simply a chance for people to connect with each other and talk about art. We have a wonderful group of participants with various backgrounds. You don’t have to be an artist or know anything about art to be a part of the conversation. Everyone is welcome,” Sarver said. “Our book club is unique to the region, as its focus is on books that have some relation to art.



One of our members is a retired math professor and he has stated that he likes the book club because they are books he might not personally choose for himself but enjoys. I think the variety of books selected for the group offers members a chance to expand their boundaries of what they normally read. The books are good but the people are better. I love the friends that I have made because of this program. We always have a lively and great conversation.”

Freeman explained what stands out to him when it comes to hosting these programs.

“What stands out most is that our audiences are gen-

uinely interested in the arts. They are curious, ask questions, and share their own knowledge and experience,” Freeman said. “My conversations with our audiences have quite often enlightened my own perspective.”

Gibbs explained that the importance of art is the connections it can create.

“I believe making art connects us all; In our families, our communities, around the world, and throughout history,” Gibbs said. “I believe that in the modern world making art really matters today more than ever. Tapping into our creativity shows us new possibilities.”

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