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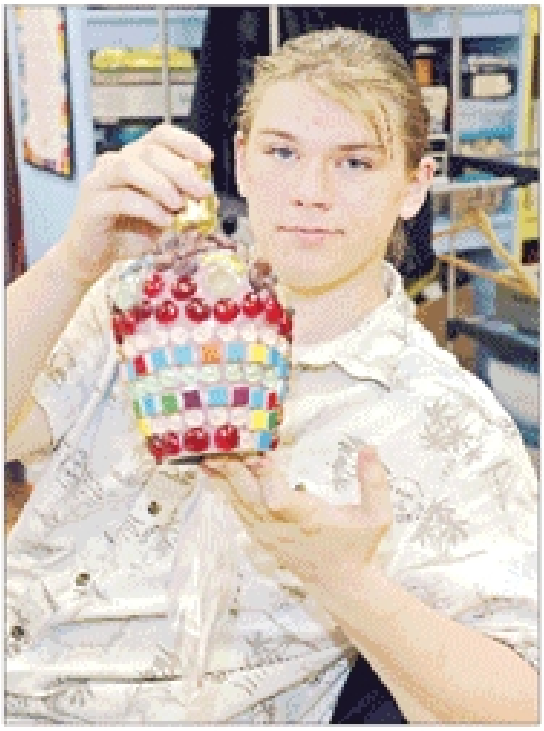
Cedarburg studio allows OHS artists to interact with community

A pilot program involving the Northern Ozaukee School District and a Cedarburg art studio is helping tap the artistic talents of four special-education students.

Beth Csaszar, a special-education teacher at Ozaukee High School, said she got the idea for the program after learning about the work being done with special-needs students at the Art Oasis in Cedarburg.



“I initially read about the Art Oasis, a non-profit studio started by Mary Marjenka-Pipp who has a daughter with a disability,” Csaszar said.

“This art studio and shop support the idea of raising people’s awareness of disabilities, raising hope and money to continue her passion for providing services for all students and adults, with and without disabilities.”

Csaszar said the motto of the studio is, “Promoting disability awareness and acceptance.”

Intrigued by the inclusive nature of the studio, she contacted Marjenka-Pipp with the idea of setting up a place where special-education students could work on their art in a community-based environment.

The studio owner embraced the plan, as did the school administration, which even offered funding.

“The students’ goal is to foster functional living skills through art and community,” Csaszar said.

Since November, the class has made weekly trips to the studio for 75-minute sessions.

Their most recent project was to upcycle lamps purchased at the Goodwill Store in Grafton, essentially “recreating” them into something better.

“They are creating mosaics on the lamps and are also decorating the lamp shades, creating an entirely new and updated lamp,” Csaszar said.

“You cannot believe how proud they are of their progress. One project will be donated to the Northern Ozaukee Scholarship Foundation dinner for its silent auction.”

Beyond the satisfaction of making something of innate beauty, Csaszar said, the students are gaining valuable life lessons from their work at the studio.

“Some of the pre-vocational and social skills we focus on every week include appropriate greetings, use of eye contact, appropriate social exchanges, following step-by-step directions, working within a time frame to accomplish progress, meeting deadlines and dealing with project challenges and possible frustration,” she said.

“All of these life skills can be applied to vocational placements as these students transition into adulthood.”

Csaszar said the studio has provided an ideal setting for the students to work in the public eye, rather than in the isolation of the school classroom.

“On occasion, shoppers have come in during the sessions and students will demonstrate some of the skills they have learned,” Csaszar said.

“This has been very exciting, because it is the first opportunity I have had to have students interact with individuals outside the school environment.”

Image Information: STUDENTS FROM OZAUKEE High School have been tapping into their artistic muse during weekly workshop sessions at the Art Oasis in Cedarburg. Studio owner Mary Marjenska-Pipp teaches the special-education students how to use reclaimed items to create new artforms. Lower left, Jacob Dohrwardt showed a recycled lamp he created. At right, Marjenka-Pipp worked with Angela Thurston, gluing pieces to a lamp. Photos by Sam Arendt