

Arts

Upgrades Take Creativity, Teamwork

While many school districts in Wisconsin are slashing arts programs and eliminating capital improvements due to budget cuts, Whitefish Bay has found a way to expand its art program, increase arts offerings for students and renovate the cramped, outdated space that has housed the high school art program for many years.

“Our ability to improve the art program for students is the result of an outstanding team effort involving the art faculty, administration, high school custodial staff, District Buildings and Grounds staff, students and parents,” says Whitefish Bay High school principal Bill Henkle.

Finding Space

The current art space in the high school centers around three rooms, each too small and poorly configured for the growing art program. In the painting “studio,” students currently cannot fit all their easels, so they often have to paint in the hall. The ceramics “studio” includes two kilns in a closet, and the main art room is both a classroom and the thoroughfare into the two other spaces.

Renovation seemed nearly impossible financially until Art Department Chair Melissa Cook and District Buildings and Grounds Director Gary Siegman put their heads together. Henkle served as liaison to all departments and staff who would be affected by the proposed changes.

Getting Creative

High School Head Custodian Al Kryszak volunteered to give up

some office space assigned to his department. The School Board agreed to give up eight feet of the room in which they meet. Siegman designed a renovation plan on a shoestring, and the Buildings and Grounds staff fit the project into their summer work schedule to reduce the need for more expensive sub-contracted labor. The result: A \$50,000 price tag for a project most predicted would cost well into six figures.

Parent support, provided by the Friends of the Visual Arts, will complete the project. “The renovation plan is fairly bare bones at this time,” says Siegman. “Without that extra \$10,000 or so from the Friends of the Visual Arts, this project might not have been possible.”

“Friends of the Visual Arts will pay for finishing touches such as work tables, counters, or storage if it is needed,” says the group’s president, Tracy Luber. “We are so appreciative of the art program and the tremendous value it represents for our high school students.”

Friends of the Visual Arts raises \$2,000 each year from parent memberships in the organization. In addition, the group has raised more than \$10,000 each of the past two years from its Fine Art and Fine Rummage Sale, to be held this year at the high school on Friday, March 18 and Saturday, March 19.

The sale will feature donations from community artists, student artists, parents and friends. Paintings, prints, wearable art, jewelry, photography, ceramics and virtually every art medium will be sold at the event. High school photography students will create note cards

from their work, which last year were so popular that some designs sold out, netting a \$2,000 profit from note cards alone.

Current and former ceramics students once again worked over winter break to throw pots, vases and plates on the pottery wheel, and parent artists have pitched in to paint and glaze their work, since many of them returned to college or jobs right after the break.

Throwing Pots

“We love to come back and throw pots with Ms. Cook,” says 2003 Bay grad Allison Scrivner. “We get to come back and see her, catch up with our friends, and throw pots. And it makes money for the art department. I’m really glad they are fixing up the art space. It needs it.”

The Memorial Gym will overflow with Fine Rummage. “We will feature recycled art, household items, small furniture, antiques, collectibles, and other estate sale type merchandise...anything but clothes or football cleats, we tell people,” says Luber.

Donations of art and rummage are currently being accept-

ed at 414-963-4001. The sale is open to the public and will be held at Whitefish Bay High School, 1200 E. Fairmount Avenue, Whitefish Bay, on Friday, March 18 from 7 to 9:30 p.m. and Saturday, March 19 from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

