

Williamsville art teacher gives confidence, receives award

By **PATRICK J. BUECHI**
Staff Reporter

Students of SS. Peter & Paul School in Williamsville learn about the atrocities of Auschwitz in art class. They develop pride in their school in art class. They discover confidence in art class. They learn about art from Mary McIntyre.

Principal Deborah Lester calls McIntyre an “art teacher extraordinaire” with good reason. McIntyre has a way of drawing her students into art and art from her students. In her nine years at the Williamsville school, she has developed an interdisciplinary way of teaching, thus putting art into the science-heavy STREAM curriculum. Projects have created visual representations of lessons taken from social studies and reading classes, as well as works derived from the masters Picasso and Matisse. Her efforts have been recognized by the diocesan Department of Catholic Schools, which will present her with the Sister Lucille Socciarelli/Father John Sturm Making A Difference Award at the annual Gala 22:6 dinner on Feb. 1.

In the school hallways are visual displays of “Hana’s Suitcase,” the iconic item from the Karen Levine book about a young Czech girl killed in a concentration camp during World War II. Students took computer boxes glued on newspaper headlines, strips of cloth with the Star of David, and bed straw. The project wove the lessons from social studies with art. The students didn’t just read about a person, they put themselves in her shoes, first by

making, then carrying a suitcase just as she did.

“I find that the more excitement you can create with an art foundation and showing respect for what they teach, to me it brings so much more to the table. It brings so much more to the kids,” McIntyre said.

Other projects brought language arts skills to the art world as students used onomopoeia to create 3-D displays of “Pow” and “Bam.” The bulletin board now looks like something out of “Batman.”

McIntyre keeps up her own skills by taking part in the Burchfield Penney Art Teachers Program, the BISSNET STEAM Conference, the Milestones of Science Educator Preview presented by the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library, and the Albright-Knox Art Gallery’s Art’scool “Inspired” contest.

Her student artwork has been on display for the second time as a juried art show at the Buffalo & Erie County Botanical Gardens during the Christmas season last year. Her students’ work has also been on display at Williamsville’s Glen Park Art Festival for a number of years, as well as the Williamsville Village Hall and Barnes & Noble Bookstores.

The school itself consists of hallway after hallway of gallery. Even the cafeteria ceiling tiles have been painted by students who expressed their favorite things, turning the ceiling into a quilt patch design. Graduates always look for their tile when they come back to visit. It gives them a sense of attachment to their school.

For McIntyre, a former clothing designer from St. Catharines, Ontario,



DAN CAPPELLAZZO/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Art teacher Mary McIntyre, of SS. Peter & Paul School in Williamsville, stands in front of some of her students’ work.

art gave her the same confidence she received from her sports prowess. She realizes not everyone is athletic or musical, but some might find drawing, painting or design to be their niche. Students learn that by working hard, they can improve in any subject.

“I struggled in math,” she laughed. “So, (art) helped me, because I knew I was good at something.”

When her students see their work hanging around the corner from Picassos at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery or selected by a jury to be hung at the Botanical Gardens, they take some pride in their accomplishments.

Outside of the art world, McIntyre is the school’s Thoughtful Ed coordinator. Thoughtful Ed teaches the philosophy of creative education, assist kids in Common Core, incorporate

different learning styles at different academic levels.

“Anytime anything needs to be done, she is the first one to volunteer to do it. She has taken our art program and just expanded it,” said Lester, shortly after a field trip to the Albright-Knox. “She immerses them in art so much that they love everything they do when they get there. They understand what they’re seeing. Then she gives them time to sketch in the art gallery. They come back and adapt the pictures in the classroom.”

McIntyre has created her own STREAM academy courses. Jean Comer, diocesan STREAM coordinator, uses McIntyre to teach it to other teachers.

“Everything she does, she does big,” said Lester.

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