Neighborhood Art House

February 2006

New Executive Director

After 10 years as Executive Director of the Inner-City Neighborhood Art House, Sister Mary Lou Kownacki has stepped down and Sister Anne Wambach, who has served as Program Director for 10 years, has been appointed to fill that position.

Sister Mary Lou praised Sister Anne as a “phenomenal administrator” who knows the Art House inside and out, and has wonderful relationships with volunteers, benefactors, supporters, Erie organizations, and the Women’s Core Committee that directs the Art House. “She’ll give it new direction and energy,” said Sister Mary Lou who founded the Art House.

“Music, dance, literature and the visual arts have flourished at the Art House during this first decade because of Sister Mary Lou’s vision and dedicated service,” said Sister Anne.

“The staff and I look forward to building on this strong foundation,” she continued. With the addition this year of two Benedictine Sisters to the Neighborhood Art House staff, our music program is developing and expanding. Through the efforts of Erie artist Chuck Dill we are creating a vibrant evening program for teens. And with the help of the architect, David Breneman plans are unfolding for expansion and renovations for much needed studio and gallery space, a performance area, and office space for development personnel.

“We are grateful to Sister Mary Lou for her inspiration and dream and I am excited about sharing the arts with inner-city youth and their families in the next decade.”

Sister Mary Lou, who is also Director of Benetvision, the publication outreach of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, said she will take some time off before returning to the Art House as Writer-in-Residence.

Through A Glass, Creatively

Tom Vicary was fully engaged in what he calls his third career. “You can make any design you want,” he told Art House students. “Just let your imagination run wild.”

The young people did just as Vicary advised, arranging the colorful bits of glass triangles, squares and rectangles into intricate designs, the first step in the art of fused glass.

Vicary was teaching the class to Art House students for the second consecutive year as part of his contribution to the Silent Auction offered during Taste of the Arts 2005. Mary Lincoln, a member of the Core Committee, submitted the winning bid for Vicary’s fused glass creations. Tom Vicary also honored an additional high bid for this item submitted by Cole Stearns.

When the students completed their work, Vicary fused their designs into 10-inch square decorative trays in a kiln at his home.

“I’ve always been interested in glass as an art form,” said Vicary, an electrical engineer from Pittsburgh who took up fused glass art after he worked as an engineer and, later, as the owner of an Erie business. Vicary said he and his wife, Cheryl Vicary, a member of the Core Committee, have always admired the work of the Benedictine Sisters in the inner city. “They do wonderful work at the Neighborhood Art House and (Emmaus) Soup Kitchen” said Vicary, “and we are happy and proud to be part of it.”

Holiday Gift Books

An annual book-buying for the Neighborhood Art House at Barnes & Noble inspired one of the store’s staff to make her own special contribution. The Barnes & Noble head cashier, Jenn Comman, contributed 20 of the 90 children’s books purchased by customers for the Art House during the annual Holiday Book Drive.

“Such a kiss from the hands of children,” said Caspar.

In November and December, Barnes & Noble patrons were able to choose books from a display inside the Peach Street store or to simply buy a book which was chosen by booksellers.

Three Women Join Leadership Board

Three women accepted positions on the Women’s Core Committee of the Inner-City Neighborhood Art House beginning in 2006. Joining the leadership group are: Rebecca Hilbert, Mary Lincoln, and Lynn Twillie-Darby. They join the following leaders: Patricia Rybak, Barbara Pollock, Denise Illig Robison, Barbara Mosco, Barbara Pollock, Denise Illig Robison, Patricia Rybak, Margaret Stolley, Ann Toohey, Cheryl Vicary, and Craige Pepper. For information about the Neighborhood Art House, call (814) 455-6508.
Children from the Inner-City Neighborhood Art House brought a bit of the weather indoors to the Blasco Library as part of a special art project.

Entitled "Art Outside the Box: A Weathering Project," the project ran over 15 weeks, beginning in early September; when seven- and eight-year-olds gathered a variety of materials, including beads, bits of tree branches, paper clips, bits of yarn, buttons and ornaments.

The materials were then weathered outdoors in trees, in bushes, in old birdhouses or buried, until November, when the students, using a gel medium, incorporated them into paintings.

Their creations – 30 canvases in all – were on display at the Blasco Library through December. They also will be on display at a local gallery in spring and at Taste of the Arts 2006.

The project was made possible through a grant from the Pennsylvania Partners in the Arts.

Passle Helminski, a Neighborhood Art House volunteer and an internationally known fiber artist who received the 2005 Distinguished Alumnus Award in Art from Edinboro University of Pennsylvania, led the project.

“Our students told us that this project made them feel like real artists for the first time,” Helminski said.