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Passing on the joy in art

Medina artist Redlefsen brings fine arts to students, facilitates county mural

by Heather Berry

04/08/2007 - For more than 30 years, Medina's Anitra Redlefsen has followed her passion for the arts, a passion which has led her on an unconventional and unexpected journey. A former white-collar executive with the phone company, Redlefsen has transformed herself into a pomegranate-loving "teaching artist," selected to participate in specialized training by The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.



With a penchant for pomegranates, Medina artist Anitra Redlefsen teaches art to students in northeastern Ohio. Photo by Krista Burns ([click for larger version](#))

For the past four years, Redlefsen has committed herself to learning curriculum standards in Ohio schools in an effort to create specialized workshops for both teachers and students. With funding in part through The Kennedy Center, she is one of 25 Ohio artists chosen for a program designed to teach artists how to teach art.

"The aim is to train us to deliver and develop fully integrated lesson plans in a very professional, high standard way," Redlefsen said. "This involves developing art programs for the classroom, but also professional development workshops for teachers."

With infectious enthusiasm, Redlefsen explained how a recently unveiled mural at the Medina County Achievement Center titled, "Rhythms," illustrates the training's goals, blending artist and art instructor.

Along with husband Dain, the Redlefsen's orchestrated the creation of this 6'x15" mural celebrating the 15th anniversary of the Medina County Board of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (the Medina County Achievement Center). More than 200 hundred clients, staff, and students collaborated on the mural's 36 panels.

As the project's facilitators, the Redlefsen's came up with the mural's color palette and theme. The couple developed sample panels, trained the staff, provided all the necessary materials, and mixed the colors.

"The color palettes are all the same," Anitra explained. "They used the same objects in the print making, creating unity in the repetition of color and images."

The project was designed to give participants some freedom in the arrangement of the panels without destroying the continuity of the mural.

"However the panels were arranged," Redlefsen continued, "the mural would still have unity. It turned out exactly as we imagined. It's beautiful. I couldn't have asked for a better project."

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With an undergraduate degree in communications and a graduate degree in human resource development and training, some may consider her corporate experience as time wasted. Redlefsen, however, sees every step as necessary preparation for her life as an artist, instructor, and art education consultant.

Since taking early retirement from the phone company, after 23 years of service, Redlefsen has shared her passion for art by creating or facilitating projects for the Akron Art Museum, the Akron Children's Hospital, Berea City Schools, the Playhouse Square Foundation, and Young Audiences of Northeast Ohio.

She has been nominated for the Ohio Governor's Award for Arts in Education and an Akron Area Arts Alliance's "Arts Educator Award." Redlefsen has also provided art education to various outreach programs in Cleveland and Akron for at-risk children. And, she has completed several murals, including one measuring 14-feet-long for Summit Artspace.

In addition, the artist has a love of painting and photographing pomegranates with some of her work being featured in various publications including the California Rare Fruit Growers Magazine.

"I'm not gifted in drawing and painting," Redlefsen admitted. "There are certain things I do well. I'm wonderful at color and I'm wonderful at design. But, I'm very good at teaching."

She gives the organization, Young Audiences of Northeastern Ohio, credit for opening doors for her in art education. Young Audiences books local artists in all mediums for school programs as a way of introducing fine arts to children.

In addition, Redlefsen creates art programs for adult groups. For example, the Akron Art Museum sponsors a young professionals group where the Redlefsens have presented their "Jackson Pollock Night," complete with splatter painting for grown ups. Redlefsen's talent for teaching and performing has been a constant throughout her career, either in corporate America or the world of fine arts.

"I never regretted it, ever," Redlefsen said of her phone company career. "It was the training aspect of the human resources degree I was interested in. I liked the teaching. That's why my work today is just a combination of my earlier training with the added art component."

Redlefsen offers private art lessons for children and adults along with educational art workshops and programs for community groups and school systems. For more information, Redlefsen can be contacted at 330-723-6500 or on her website: www.artisjoy.com.



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