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Helping Others With His Art

Michael Clarkson, Carpentry Junior, Says 'It makes me happy to help others with my painting.'

Williamson students are known for giving back to their community, using their trade skills to paint churches and build handicap ramps among other things.

Recently, a junior carpentry student used his skills to help others in a unique way — a painting he made was purchased by an international company and the profit was used to buy art supplies for children in the Philadelphia School District.

Michael Clarkson, a carpentry junior, was pleasantly surprised when he was contacted by Barbara Allen, the founder and executive director of Fresh Artists, telling him that a painting he made in eighth grade had just been sold.

Allen approached Clarkson to see if he could leave school to have his photograph taken with his painting at the Newtown Square headquarters of the German business software development firm SAP; a New York photographer was taking the photograph as part of an article being prepared entitled "A Day in the Life of Fresh Artists."

Fresh Artists is an organization that promotes young artists by selling their art and then using the profits to buy art supplies for Philadelphia public school children. In the last two years the organization, whose motto is "empowering young lives through art," has raised over \$200,000.

Clarkson, who made the abstract painting with oil pastels, said, "It makes me happy that I can help other people with a painting I made." He added that they did not tell him how much the painting sold for.

When he made the painting for an

eighth grade art class, his teacher recognized his talent and entered the painting in a contest. It was selected as a winner and hung in the Philadelphia Museum of Art for one year. Then his teacher, who in the meantime had been promoted to a Philadelphia School District administrative position, took the painting with her and hung it outside her office.

When Allen saw the painting on a visit to the building, she too saw what a wonderful painting it was and got permission to use it for Fresh Artists.

Clarkson, who realized he had artistic talent when he was in third grade, said he didn't really care much for the painting at the time he painted it, but after many people told him how good it was he slowly came to like it. He said he's usually critical of his own work.

Despite his artistic talent, Clarkson says he plans to have art as a hobby not a vocation because his real interest is carpentry.

He does have some ideas on how to combine carpentry with art, though. "You can do art in many forms, not just painting. You can build things in certain ways that makes them artistic."

One way Clarkson sees that he can combine his two skills is by building props for plays. "I'm not sure what I am going to do after Williamson, but one thing I am considering is being part of a stage crew, people tell me I'd be good at it."

Clarkson says ever since he was a little boy he wanted to be a carpenter. "I have always liked working with my hands and was always taking things apart and putting them back together

again just to see how they worked."

He got his first taste of carpentry while going through school doing side jobs with his uncle, such as putting in an addition to a house. This experience made him realize even more that he wanted to be a carpenter.

After graduating from high school, he wanted to attend a trade school, but lacked the money so he got a dead-end job at a convenience store and wondered what his future would hold.

Then one day his former art teacher called him to tell him about the interest Fresh Art had in his painting. She asked him to come to the school to have his photograph taken with his painting and while there a school administrator started talking to him about his life goals.

When he said his interests were art and carpentry, but he lacked the money

to go to school, the administrator recommended he apply to Williamson and helped him with the application process.

Clarkson said, "I was extremely happy to get accepted at Williamson. I'm now studying hard and trying to do my best. I finally have a purpose. I have always believed things don't just happen, they happen for a reason.

"I am learning more about carpentry and how to use different tools. Later on I can apply what I've learned in my own way. I like trying things in my own way, to take what I have learned and put them into my own form."

Whatever he does in the future, for now, Clarkson says, "People here are looking out for me; they want me to graduate and do well. I'm very appreciative of being at Williamson."



Michael Clarkson 1W2 (right) stands by his abstract painting hanging in the halls of the international software development firm SAP in Newtown Square, Pa. With him are (from left to right): Juania Velasquez, a high school junior, and Fresh Artists co-founders Roger Allen and Barbara Chandler Allen.