

Civic Engagement

Public Service,
Personal Responsibility

Feb./Mar. 2011

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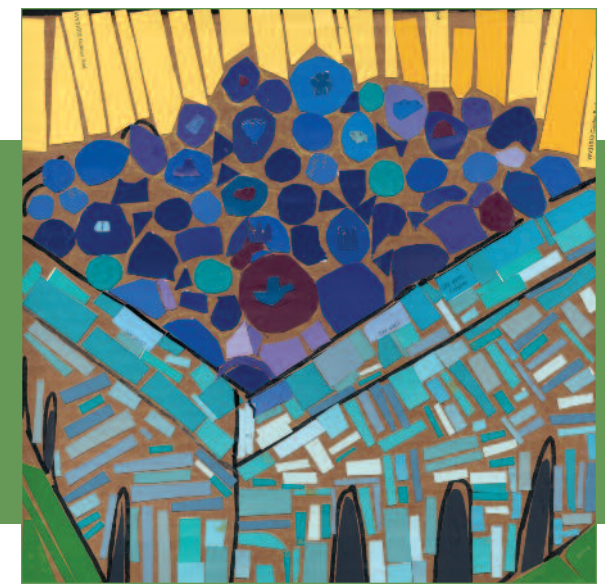


Fresh Artists

Creatively supporting children's art through young artfulness

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Creatively supporting children's art through young artfulness

BY MIRAE KIM

As the crew of *Fresh Artists* unloaded the huge panels of artwork from the car, the icy wind whipping down Powelton Avenue in Philadelphia, PA almost ripped the panels out of their hands. On the second Friday of 2011, *Fresh Artists* brought 15 enormous pieces of children's artwork into the lobby of Red Cross House. Fires, floods, explosions, collapsed houses, and other tragedies had brought people seeking warmth, hot food, and a dry place to sleep to this building. This wonderful place has been providing warm comfort for more than 1,000 disaster victims per year in West Philadelphia. Although the place is clean, bright, warm and blessed with the loving care of Red Cross people, it was BARE. Bare Walls. Thousands of square feet of bare walls.

On January 14, 2011, *Fresh Artists* filled the 33,000 square foot, two-story shelter with gorgeous and joyful artworks made and donated by Philadelphia public school children. It was a permanent gift from *Fresh Artists* through an innovative partnership with some of the regions' most influential corporations and individuals.

Fresh Artists is a nonprofit organization founded by Barbara Chandler Allen and her son, Roger Allen. Ms. Allen was hired in 2005 by then Philadelphia Superintendent of Schools, Paul Vallas, to decorate the District's new 850,000-square-foot Education Center. Her challenge was to fill the enormous building with children's artwork at the request of Vallas. She brought in her son to help with the proj-



"Fresh Artists is a visionary nonprofit initiative. Businesses get stunning art at unknown-artist prices, student artists achieve PUBLISHED ARTISTS status and know they are helping other children, and art teachers receive art supplies like manna from Heaven," said Valerie Van Pham, an Art teacher at Hill-Freedman Middle School. "Fresh Artists is our entrepreneurial art angel!"

ARTWORK – (top row, left to right): <HMS_Mamma>; Self-portrait by Elena Varela; <AnnaS_Mamma>; <McKinsry_Mamma>; (bottom row, left to right): Old City with Ben Franklin Bridge by Juania Velazquez; <Valles_Mamma>.



Molly cuts her artwork.

ect, and Roger suggested using large-scale digital photographs of children's artwork instead of original pieces that would be out of scale in such a huge building. Working together, they found wonderful K-12 children's artwork around the district and had a professional photographer friend take high resolution digital photographs of it. A local large-format printing company, Service Point, donated most of the printing and mounting of the huge artpieces, and the project was a big success. They realized they had stumbled upon a unique and popular form of art as soon as they began to install these large-scale digital images. People wanted to have the large reproductions for their own homes and offices.

Working at the school district headquarters for two years, they learned that Philadelphia was only able to spend 83 cents per child per year on art supplies. With further budget cuts, that district-wide allocation ended in 2008, forcing each principal to fund their supplies. As a result, many art teachers now have little or no funds for art supplies.

Outraged by this lack of funding, the Allens were moved to action. "We realized the potential of

this innovative concept to bring much-needed funding support for art education in urban public schools," said Ms. Allen. They founded *Fresh Artists*, a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization in February, 2008. They put together a collection of art images donated by K-12 kids in the Philadelphia public schools, and started raising money from local corporations, foundations and individual donors. After a year, they made their first distribution of art supplies to Philadelphia schools in need. In their first three years, they have delivered the retail value of more than \$100,000 in art supplies to the most severely under-resourced public schools in Philadelphia.

How *Fresh Artists* works:

1. *Fresh Artists* selects artwork created by children in K-12 public schools. The young artists are invited to donate the use of their selected images to raise funds for innovative art programs and supplies for children in need.
2. Selected student art is photographed, and original artwork is returned to the student.
3. Corporations and individuals make dona-

"It is extremely important to me as a principal, that the arts are an integral component of our educational program," said Mrs. Dawn Moore, the Principal of H.A. Brown Elementary School in Kensington, PA. *"My art teacher, Ms. Blankfield and I recognize the importance for all students to have an outlet for creative expression in order to grow academically and socially. Fresh Artists has fulfilled this for our school and so much more."*

tions to *Fresh Artists* and then are invited to choose large-format, high-quality photographic reproductions as thank-you gifts from the children to display in their offices and facilities (much like public TV stations give its donors a tote bag or a golf umbrella as a thank you gift for their financial support).

4. Money raised is used to purchase and deliver innovative art programs and art supplies directly to art teachers in severely under-resourced public schools. The teachers choose exactly the supplies they most need. *Fresh Artists* purchases the supplies and delivers them to the teachers.

The business model was innovative, entrepreneurial and, most importantly, sustainably sound. Businesses will always need attractive and affordable artwork for their walls. *Fresh Artists* provides art that is not only beautiful, but also inspirational, meaningful and helps to save art making in public schools struggling with severe funding cuts.

The organization is an innovative concept of philanthropy. Rather than the traditional "top down" philanthropy, *Fresh Artists* creates the ability for generous children to make a real difference in their world by engaging them as young philanthropists. Exhibiting the children's artwork connects the corporate donors to the children, where their paths may never have crossed otherwise. Donors may also re-gift the artwork to charities of their choosing, and are invited to participate in multi-year programs of "refreshing" their workplace by replacing artwork and donating their old art panels to other nonprofit's facilities. This is the way the Red Cross House was decorated. Artwork displayed for a year at the World Café Live was recycled out and into Red



Founders of *Fresh Artists*, Barbara and Roger Allen with installation of Sign Studio artwork at Weavers Way Cooperative, Chestnut Hill. These images are replaced seasonally, and were made by 3rd through 5th graders.

Cross House, making room for "fresh" art for World Café Live for the next year. In the fall of 2011, that art will be recycled out into a community partner as well. And so on!

A core goal of *Fresh Artists* is to facilitate the direct civic engagement of children by creating a tangible opportunity for them to give to each other.

For more information on the projects mentioned in this article, please visit www.freshartists.org or contact bcallen@freshartists.org.