

BREAKING

G R O U N D

A N N U A L A R T S I S S U E



*Tropical Beauty by
Laura Hudson*

N O V E M B E R 2 0 1 3

A PUBLICATION OF THE TENNESSEE COUNCIL ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE TENNESSEE ARTS COMMISSION



Penni brings humor into her work. She explores acrylics, watercolors and textures, and incorporates found materials into her artwork. Penni also enjoys jewelry making with stones and beads.



Outside Looking In



On the cover:

Laura Hudson of Nashville creates beautiful, lush tropical scenes and fills her pictures with birds, flowers and plants. She uses art as a way to take away dark thoughts, and to have fun. She gives of her time and talent to brighten the day of those around her.



A Letter from the Council Executive Director

In the early '90s, we premiered our first Breaking Ground Arts Issue. My, how times have changed! The writing and art work submissions have certainly grown in sophistication, as well as (and I hope you'll agree!) the sophistication of the looks of our magazine. What hasn't changed is our commitment to presenting the compelling art and writings of Tennesseans with disabilities, their family members and friends in a striking and extraordinary publication.

I must acknowledge the remarkable work of the Council staff under the leadership of chief editor, Ned Andrew Solomon, in producing the Breaking Ground Arts Issue. I applaud their efforts to enhance the creative aspects of the publication, as well as continually striving for improvements.

The Council would also like to recognize Tennessee communities that have expanded arts programming for artists and writers with disabilities. Growing appreciation for these artists locally is evident through the number and quality of submissions that we receive for the arts issue each year.

We applaud our co-sponsor for this issue, the Tennessee Arts Commission. Under the direction of Anne Pope, and the daily work of William Coleman, the Arts Commission is successfully increasing the visibility of artists and writers with disabilities across Tennessee, and through new initiatives, encouraging them to turn hobbies into employment opportunities and professional careers.

Finally, thanks to all of you who contributed to this exceptional issue! It is our pleasure to share your work with others across Tennessee and in other states.

Now, join me in perusing the magazine, and let us know what you think! We look forward to receiving your comments.

Wanda Willis

Accessibility and the Tennessee Arts Commission Message from the Executive Director

The Tennessee Arts Commission is excited and proud to be in partnership again with the Tennessee Council of Developmental Disabilities. As co-sponsor of this Arts issue, the Commission has a unique opportunity to interface with a thriving, inspiring and diverse community. As we move into the second year of this partnership, we want to continue to connect to our broader constituency in more meaningful and creative ways. The Arts issue of this magazine is an amazing opportunity for the disability community to celebrate expressions of creativity. The Commission is always excited to help Tennesseans find ways to use the arts to tell our story, strengthen our economy and enhance our communities. It is our hope that this partnership will create new avenues of opportunities for arts and those with disabilities.

Sincerely,

Anne B. Pope

Extending the Arts Commission's Outreach

by William Coleman, Director of Arts Access

This has been an exciting year for the Commission in the area of arts and disabilities. In 2012-2013, the Commission partnered with VSA TN to help artists with disabilities seek employment in the arts industry. The results of the research are in and we are now seeking funding for implementation and development.

The project is divided into two major pieces. One piece is a training and professional development piece for the artists. The second is an accommodation and networking piece which will be focused on potential employers.

We hope to begin to roll out this training and professional development opportunity in the spring of 2014. In addition to this, the Arts Commission partnered with the Nashville Symphony and VSA to provide professional development training to K-6 classroom teachers. The focus of the training was to provide accommodation instructions and lesson modifications for arts and music instruction. The training was well received by educators and administrators.

The Commission will also begin highlighting best practices in accessibility and the arts throughout the state. We will do this in our quarterly newsletter. The goal of this is to share best practices, offer technical assistance and highlight successes and lessons learned.

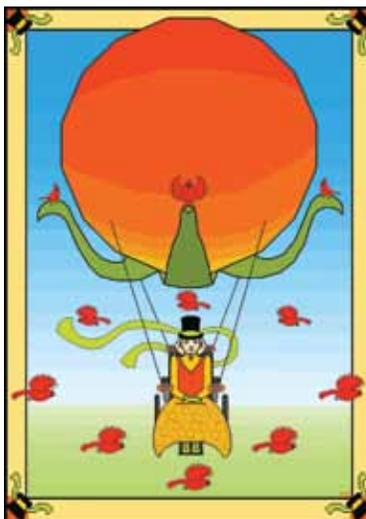
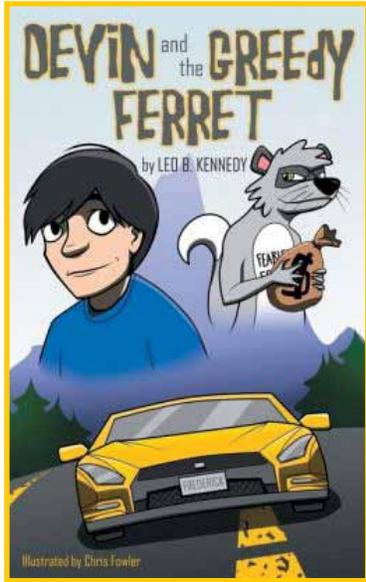


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Tennessee's Oldest Town

Cultivates the Arts

by Kathleen B. Buttolph

Jonesborough, Tennessee's oldest town, has cultivated an extensive arts program that has flourished throughout the community. Jonesborough is unique in that all of its arts education and programming is supported by the town's government. The town has witnessed the great impact of arts on its community, and is now taking even bigger strides to facilitate more creative opportunities for people of all ages and all abilities throughout the region.

Telling stories

For starters, this East Tennessee haven is home to the International Storytelling Center and the National Storytelling Festival. "Jonesborough is a storytelling town," said Bob Browning, Jonesborough's town administrator. "We have learned that when you know someone's story, you build community and build relationships. When you can break through the labels, you can see the common threads that weave our stories together. Jonesborough tries to focus on story-weaving activities that help build tolerance, understanding and a sense of place for all people."



Photo by Jonesborough Department of Tourism



Photo by Tom Pardue

(l to r) Ruth Davis and Summer Buchanan

The Yarn Exchange is another great example of Jonesborough bringing people together through story. This project performs

stories of, by and for the community. "The Yarn Exchange does not hold typical auditions," said Jules Corriere, Director of Outreach for Jonesborough's Mary B. Martin Program for the Arts. "Everyone who comes to participate receives a role. If they are in the community, they are part of the production."

The productions are also very much intergenerational. Currently, the youngest member is three years old and the eldest is 74. Auditions determine what kind of role the person will have, whether it's one line, a monologue or a leading character. If there's not a part in the show to fit someone's needs, then a part is written specifically for that person. Inclusion is the key philosophy of the Yarn Exchange. "We make room for and encourage participation from all segments of the community," said Corriere. "Our stages are built with ramps to accommodate people who use wheelchairs, as well as folks who have trouble climbing stairs."

Productions regularly feature cast members with Down syndrome and autism, as well as those with other behavioral, intellectual and physical challenges. "Our cast is diverse, but the thing they all have in common is the ability to perform and tell their stories, and their neighbors' stories, in a way that truly reflects the entire community," Corriere said. "When you see the Yarn Exchange on stage, you see the community, in all of its wonderful and diverse beauty."

Continued on page 6

Arts education

In 2004, the Jonesborough Repertory Theatre (JRT) education program started to serve students as early as kindergarten. Through this program, the town quickly learned that students enjoy engaging in the arts, and that theatre improves their self-confidence. It also provides them with opportunities to express themselves that are not always available in their daily lives. The education program works with students of varying abilities, giving all of them a chance to build social awareness, respect and tolerance for all people. Participants are able to develop their voice - inner and outer - through their art exploration, which enables them to become better listeners and observers of the world around them.



Photo by Jonesborough Department of Tourism

The arts education program in Jonesborough started small. It serves the community through traveling performances, inviting schools across the region to see JRT productions and offering year-round acting classes, workshops and camps for students of all ages and abilities. Recently, an old school was renovated to establish the town's new arts venue, The McKinney Center. This will be another home for the arts education programming, now called Jonesborough's Mary B. Martin Program for the Arts.

"Everyone has a place"

Magnus Allen, a 13-year-old diagnosed with Asperger's and ADHD, has attended two musical theatre camps through the Martin Program. "I have had a lot of fun at JRT," said Allen. "I have made a lot of new friends and I really get to act out characters. It does not matter what your ability level is, everyone has a place and you can always learn something. The instructors are encouraging and they make it fun. Seeing all kinds of people work together makes everyone feel like they can do something really great."

Summer Buchanan has always lit up a stage. Born with Down syndrome, Summer started dancing when she was four years old, and continues to perform in recitals, in some of the theater's hit



Photo of Magnus Allen by Carrie Luster Smith Photography

musicals, and even serves as an usher at JRT. "JRT has played an important role in Summer's life since she was small," explained her parents, Curtis and Marilyn Buchanan. "She is now 30 years old. From finding roles for her in plays whenever possible to letting her usher, the JRT family has been supportive of Summer being a real part of the theater."

Creating bonds

Magda and Molly were 13-year-old twins when they first came to JRT in 2004. They are hard of hearing and have late diagnosis (age 18) Asperger's Syndrome. In the beginning, neither girl would make eye contact with others, and they regularly ignored their peers. They would not permit or engage in any form of physical contact. Their articulation made it very difficult to understand them. They would also get frustrated when asked to do something on stage that was not written in their book.

Through a slow process, and with the help and support of their mother, Janette, Magda and Molly were integrated into theater classes and productions at JRT. The whole group worked as a team to make sure that both girls knew when it was their turn onstage and when they were receiving notes during or at the end of a rehearsal. Other cast members had to learn how to communicate with Magda and Molly to get their attention, while the twins had to speak up when they could not hear.



Photo by Janette Gaines

Catherine Miller, Magda and Molly Gaines

These girls are now young women, having turned 21 in 2012. They have played leading roles in over 10 community theater productions. Their mom witnesses every day the power of performing arts and how it benefits her daughters. "The lifelong friendships that every child wants would not have been possible for Molly and Magda without theater," said Janette. "They were never given the extended time it takes to communicate at school."

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Tennessee's Oldest Town

Cultivates the Arts

...Continued from page 6

So, theater provided the in-depth time and communication with fellow cast members to create bonds.”



Summer Buchanan leads a dance class.

Through her daughters' passion for performance, Janette, who is also fluent in American Sign Language, Typewell (translation of classroom lectures into shorthand, then transcribed for the Deaf), and expressive language in general, decided to become a theater educator. At JRT she saw the need for an outreach program in performing arts that would merge the Deaf and hearing communities. She ultimately founded Stage Hands, a theater performance program for Deaf and hearing actors and audiences. The program introduces hearing people to American Sign Language, Deaf culture, and Deaf performance, while offering performance opportunities for Deaf actors and Deaf audiences. Stage Hands currently performs one show each year at JRT.

Finding their “spark”

Performing arts programming naturally offers opportunities to form inclusive atmospheres for people of all abilities. Many students and cast members of varying abilities exhibit improvement in a number of skills. Participants seem to find their “spark”. They get involved in their community by sharing a common passion in the performing arts and the creative process. These new theater artists are finding different ways to communicate, to connect socially, and build on their awareness, understanding, and, because of the inclusive nature of the programming, the acceptance of differences.

Kathleen Brannon Buttolph is the Director of Arts Education for Jonesborough's Mary B. Martin Program for the Arts. She teaches middle school performing arts at Sullivan Gardens K-8 in Kingsport, TN and is the Co-Founder of Power of Performing Arts (POP Arts), an inclusive performing arts program that includes people with and without disabilities.

Sent from Above

By Natasha Cooke

You are such a gift to me,
You've taught me how to truly see,
To look through these eyes like never before,
I couldn't possibly love you any more.
But then I do.
You stack the blocks,
One by one,
The repetitive actions,
Are never done.
You are so intent with what you do,
As if the only one in your world,
is you.
But then you come back,
And look into my eyes,
It's these moments,
That I come to realize,
You are so special,
In each and every way,
And I love you more than words could ever say.
You are my light,
My sun,
and my stars,
one who's obsessed with blocks and cars.
You make me smile.
And fill me with love,
My cherub angel,
Sent from above.

Natasha Cooke is a 26-year-old single mom of a five-year-old son on the autism spectrum. According to Natasha, “Autism has taught me so many things... patience, love...and that though some people are different, they can make your world so much brighter.”

Young Author with Autism Publishes First Book

by
Ned Andrew Solomon

Portions of this article were originally published in the Tennessee Register.

Three mischievous high school friends making bad choices, a cunning ferret with ulterior motives, the kidnapping of a school mascot, and a dangerous car race with lives and personal freedoms in the balance – these are the unique and exciting ingredients of Leo Kennedy's first published book, "Devin and the Greedy Ferret".

A current student at Nashville State Community College, Leo's interest in writing began a couple of years ago. "He just came up to me one day and said he wanted to write a book," said his mom, Nancy, a graduate of the Tennessee Partners in Policymaking Leadership Institute. "He'd never shown any such inclination in the past, and wasn't even much of a reader, so I was a bit nonplussed. Frankly, I didn't have very high expectations about it initially, but I encouraged him to give it a try."

Leo is on the autism spectrum and has faced significant obstacles, academically and socially, his entire life. "Up through his teen years, friendships were pretty much non-existent," said Nancy. "Growing up and maturing has been a slow, two-steps-forward-one-step-back process. Nothing has been easy, either for Leo or for us."

Yet, there have been significant accomplishments too. Leo graduated from high school with a typical diploma. He works 10-hour shifts several nights a week for Harris Teeter. He's taking courses at Nashville State, and goes to Sunday Mass each week independently.

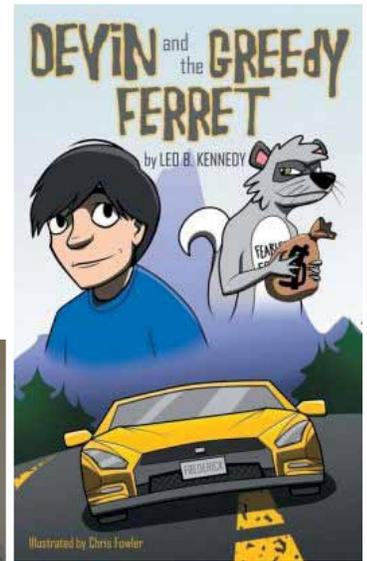
And, as we already know, he has completed and published a book.

That project took some initial prodding by Nancy. Leo was struggling getting started, so Nancy enlisted her daughter, Maddie, who is also a writer. Leo's sister suggested employing the "snowflake method", where you make notes on your main idea and keep branching out. Nancy sat with Leo at the computer, trying to inspire him with questions about characters and plot



Leo Kennedy

Photo by Andy Telli



points, which she typed as he responded.

With those components listed, the next step was to write the story. "I was sitting there at the keyboard ready to type and asking him about his opening sentences, when he just looked at me and said, 'If I'm the author, shouldn't I be the one writing it?'" said Nancy. "From then on it was his own baby. He wrote on his laptop in his room."

From Leo's perspective, it was not an auspicious beginning. "Basically, it started out in 2011 as a crummy

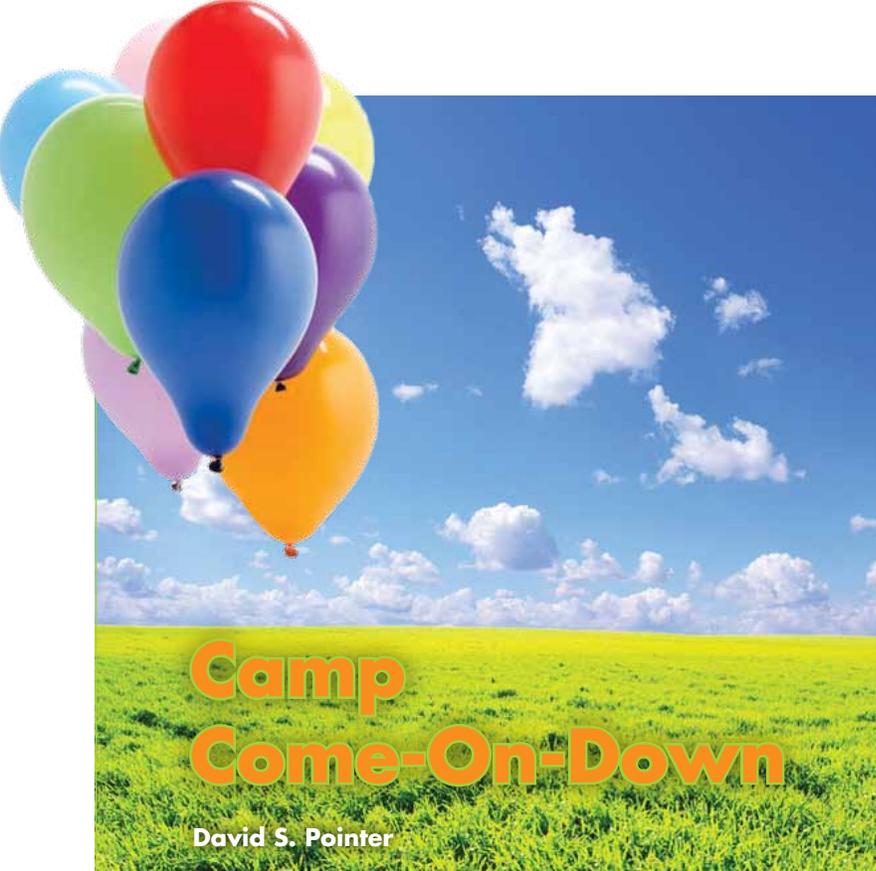
"If I'm the author, shouldn't I be the one writing it?"

story with unoriginal characters that I was planning to upload to Facebook," recalled Leo. "When I was only about 35% of the way through, I realized how lame it was, and started over with new characters, new settings, new vehicles, a new racetrack and even a new prologue."

Although Nancy left Leo to his own creative devices, her curiosity got the best of her, and she asked Leo if she could see a sample of what he'd written so far. "I read it and was amazed!" Nancy said. "And when I read the full draft, I saw it was a real book – exciting plot, interesting characters and well put together."

Still, Nancy knew it would benefit from some professional editing, like any book by even the most established writers. They located a local editor, Rachel Fajardo, herself the mother of a child on the autism spectrum. "Leo is a stickler for grammar and punctuation, so the book needed very little editing on that score," said Nancy. "He was pretty stubborn about any changes, but maybe that's good. It's a quirky story, but it's all Leo."

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Camp Come-On-Down

David S. Pointer

Imagine acceptance-for-all nearly rendering self-advocacy obsolete like rusty hinge parts underneath architectural salvage yard-floors where turkey vultures fly away... where golden eagles-other birds such as herons, vast brown geese, come to re-energize at restorative lakes as exhausted neurologists, altruistic nurses, tired night shift ward clerks and other personnel come finding time to comfort old pulmonary quacks with forgiveness, in nourishment dash with a certified corps of disabled camp counselors having passed a rigorous loft test as loving human beings, unleashed like party balloons in rising unison

One of David S. Pointer's daughters has a visual disability, and David has clinical depression. He has been writing poetry for many years, and has been published numerous times in Breaking Ground magazine.

Young Author...Continued from page 8

Once the final manuscript was in hand, Nancy took charge of the production part with support from Westbow Press, a company that specializes in helping authors self-publish. Next, she found a student from Watkins College of Art – Chris Fowler - to do the illustrations. "Leo helped come up with the ideas for the illustrations, and he approved each one as it was done," said Nancy. "He really wanted the car illustrations to be accurate."

In fact, a Nissan GTR features prominently in the book (and on the slick book cover), and is bright yellow. It was a purposeful detail, to – according to Leo – "not only be safe, but be visible and to draw a lot of attention in traffic."

While we're on the subject of purposeful details, it might help to know why one of the two main characters was a ferret, and not a more common creature. "Because they're much cuter and less cliché than dogs," explained Leo. "They're much more motivated than pigs. They're absolutely fearless compared to elephants. And best of all, they're a whole lot smarter than mice."

Nancy believes the book has been part of a long line of endeavors that have "built on each other" and allowed Leo to gain confidence and life skills. "First was learning to drive, which was so important to him," Nancy said. "Then, step by step, graduating high school, completing job training, getting and keeping a job, taking a developmental writing class at Nashville State, writing a book, getting it published – each time he succeeded at one thing, it seemed to give him the confidence and motivation he needed to try the next thing.

"Leo wants to be a role model for kids on the autism spectrum," continued Nancy. "He wants to show them that with motivation and persistence, they too can build on the small successes and dream big."

The book may be ordered from Westbow Press or Amazon, or purchased at a signing. A portion of the author's proceeds benefit the Autism Society of Middle Tennessee.

"They're absolutely fearless compared to elephants. And best of all, they're a whole lot smarter than mice."

The Sparrow's Song

Mandy Barber

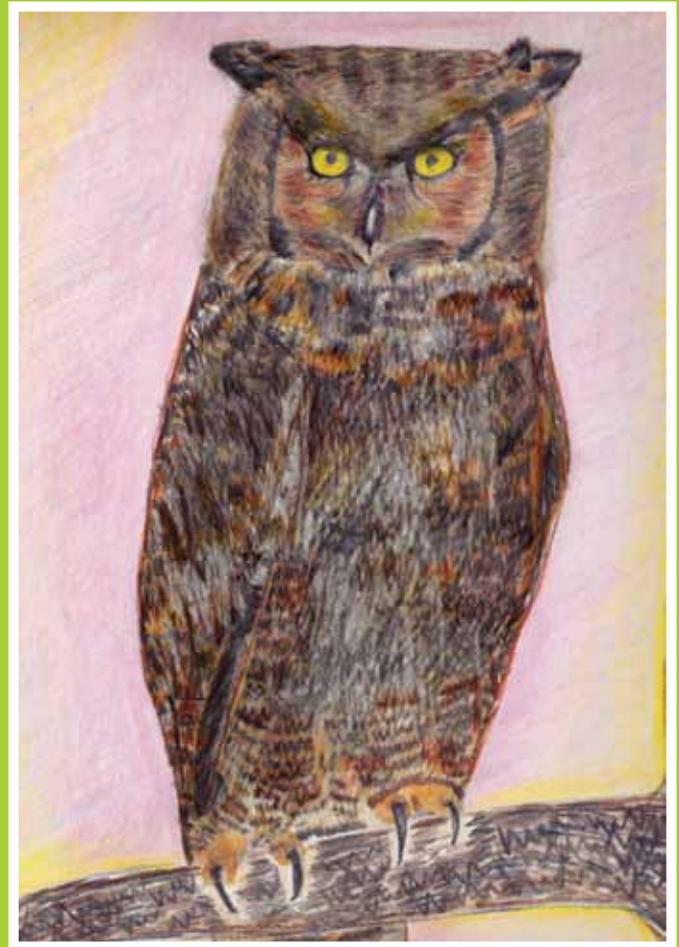
My Sparrow flew away, and I did not get to go;

"It's not your time HE said, and how I love her so,
Her day to leave was already marked, before this time began,
I never said you'd keep her, or that you'd understand.
So in MY arms she slumbers safe until you meet again,
HER love will still be with you even after time won't stand."

We love you Sparrow Barber, and we miss you every day,
We hold the message you left us dear, but knew you couldn't stay.
This world of darkness could not embrace a light that shines so bright.
It blinded those that won't SEE truth, and gave eyes to those with sight.
So at your birth you were heaven bound, to us you never belonged,
So until that day we meet again,
We will sing the Sparrow's song!!!

Mandy Barber lives in Jackson, Tennessee. Her daughter, Sparrow Rayne Barber, passed away last year, and inspired this poem.

Bailey Soviné is a single mother to her 15-year-old son, Lars, who is on the autism spectrum. They live in Johnson City with their big house rabbit, Hedwig. Bailey has enjoyed art since middle school, and has won several awards for her work.



Tree Owl 2



Bettina Wortham is from Dickson where she is a member of ReConnect Dickson. Her pictures often have birds, animals and lots of action and color. She says she enjoys art and how it makes her feel.

Arks Rock

Enhancing Life at Martha's Manor with Art

by Gretchen Kirk

All photos by Shannon Smith

Martha's Manor is a day activity program for women with intellectual disabilities. Located in Memphis, Tennessee, the program began in 1987 to meet the needs of young women with disabilities as they completed traditional school programs. The program at Martha's Manor provides its women numerous opportunities for personal growth.

In collaboration with local agencies, the participants of the Manor visit art galleries, gardens, exercise programs and various city museums, where they attend several ongoing programs. The daily schedule includes educational instruction to meet each participant's needs.

A local art teacher, Rhonda Test, joined the staff in January. Bringing many years of artistic experience to the position, Test instructed the women in a variety of creative experiences. The visual art lessons and curriculum were taught in conjunction with daily activities in order to make each project relevant. For example, they painted Georgia O'Keefe-style flowers after visiting the Memphis Botanical Gardens, and painted clowns after attending the Shriners' Circus. Other projects included self-portraits in a Van Gogh style, embellishing their first name with artistic flare, and creating brightly colored mandalas.

For many years, art projects were done in conjunction with art museums in the city. The new presence of someone within the day program brought out talents that had never been tapped before. The women learned about the correct use of color and the selection of a scene to paint. Each project was developed in a unique way to give the individual artists a new level of confidence and sense of accomplishment.

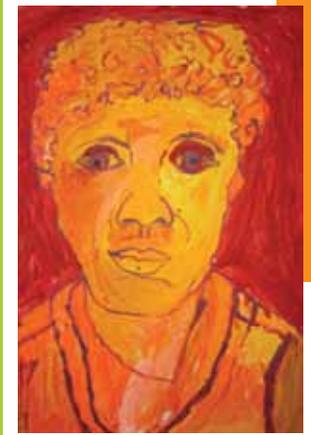
"The ladies of Martha's Manor have taught me to see life on a more profound level," said Test. "While directing them down the path of making art, I have discovered a new way of perceiving the world. The art they made was beautiful and demonstrated creative abandonment, each coming up with their own individual styles and representation of the lessons taught. Each lady was affirmed that she was a true artist!"



Red, White and Blue group project



Amanda Kirk



Self Portrait by Lora Jones



Many Faces
Ellen Moran



Broad Wings by Kathy Zeilain

Sharon Floyd



Blue Flower by Carolyn Bryan



Wanda Patterson

My Haiku

Frank Meeuwis

This is my haiku

About people's I.Q.—It

Matters **NOT** to you!

Frank Meeuwis is a 16-year survivor of a Traumatic Brain Injury. A Masters in Social Work graduate of UT Knoxville, Frank is on staff at The Arc Tennessee, leading the People Talking to People project for the Tennessee Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.



Achilles Sports

Amy Saffell

Amy Saffell

is a 31-year-old with Spina Bifida. Although she had not raced before finding out about the Achilles sports and recreation program for athletes with disabilities, she has now completed more than a dozen races, including two half marathons.

It'll Be

by Kirk Davis

It'll be, yes it'll be.

Together we **WILL** make history.

Sharing our ability.

Bring hope for all to see.

There **IS** an ability!

Providing hope and opportunity.

Let's all see your great ability!

Never fear, hold faith and see.

The gifts there be.

Accept and see.

There is beauty in our life.

Love yourself and see

The inner strength come before thee!

Grow with your ability.

Kirk Davis is a TBI survivor, and a passionate advocate for the rights of persons with disabilities. He is also a graduate of the Partners in Policymaking Leadership Institute. "Sharing our abilities" is one of his favorite phrases, and certainly describes his personal philosophy.

Untitled poem

by Katherine Turner

T is tall
Handsome
Smart
Wants to be
NORMAL
Stashes the shirt his mom makes him wear
Changes it for the favorite rock band of the moment
He has friends
But is talking less this year
Seems so shut down
NO WONDER
The bells-like they couldn't have possibly found a
worse grating noise anywhere on the planet if they tried-bell
The crowded halls
Resource classes
Won't turn in math homework
Has to ride a SPED bus-trouble on the regular bus
T likes plumbing
Pipes
Commodos
He knows all about them
Can fix them
Loves to read the manuals
and tell you all about them
if
you
REALLY want to know
He's gonna be good
He will look you in the eye
In his time
On his terms
Figure it out people

Katherine Turner lives in Maynardville, Tennessee. She is a mom to seven children, and a grandmother to four. She has a BA in special education, and an MA in Science Education and Biology.

Jalyn Weston is an 11-year-old from Sweetwater, TN, who began drawing as a toddler. At age four he was diagnosed with autism, and his innate interest in drawing was used to develop his language and social skills. Jalyn has an extensive list of awards and exhibitions, and is a member of several local and statewide artist associations.

THE CONTRADICTION EXPOSITION

Brian McHan

It was the beginning of my life. It was the end of my life.
I was never more alive. I was never more dead.
I was only 23.
God is dead. God is talking to me.
I can't think well. I can't stop thinking.
Lord have mercy on me.
I was free as a bird. My mind was in jail.
I'm as weak as an old man.
and what is to be will be.
Will it ever end. Will my life ever begin.
I've experienced Heaven. I've experienced Hell.
It no longer matters to me.
A pill to sleep. A pill to stop thinking.
A pill for blood pressure. A pill to release fluid.
Will I ever be free.
There is no cure.
Something will be found soon.
If I keep taking the pills there will be some relief.
If I go off they'll come back as bad as ever.
A cure I may someday see.
Why can't I live with myself?
Why can't I live with someone else?
Why can't I liven my mind up?
Why can't I calm down?
Will I ever find the key?
and what is to be will be.

Brian McHan is from Jackson, Tennessee, and is a 2002 Partners graduate. According to Brian, "This poem is about my experience with schizophrenia, which will probably go on the rest of my life."



Chum Some

Forging a Connection through Dance and Movement

The Movement Connection dance company is a group of dancers from different backgrounds and different parts of Nashville, but they have two things in common: they each have a profound love of dance and movement, and they have Down syndrome. Movement Connection was inspired by another dance group in Memphis named Company d. Under the artistic direction of Darlene Winters, Company d has been performing together for over 10 years.

Movement Connection started when VSA Tennessee received a grant from CVS Caremark last summer to fund a six-week dance intensive for individuals with Down syndrome. Danielle Clement, who had graduated from Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) with a minor in dance, came on as director of the class. Nine dancers participated, and were taught technique in ballet, modern dance and jazz, while also expressing themselves with creative movement. The six-week course finished with a performance in the MTSU Dance Theatre studio.

Because of the interest this class inspired in others, VSA Tennessee decided to continue with the company, moving it to a new location at the Vanderbilt Dayani Center in Nashville. Five of the original nine dancers elected to continue, and the program was embraced by VSA Tennessee. Danielle Clement continued in her role as artistic director, and now the dancers have been taking classes and performing consistently since October 2012.



I to r: Scott Lewis, Adam Boyd, Rebecca Woodard and Meghan Maynard



I to r: Meghan Maynard, Lynlee Judkins, Ryan Marshall, Destiny Weldon, Adam Boyd, Rebecca Ledford and Grace Dodd

The dancers are continuing to grow and develop basic dance skills that help with their gross motor skills, coordination and self-esteem. The dancers have gone from not being able to stand on one foot for two seconds to standing on one foot for 20 seconds. The growth in the class is amazing to watch, as well as the dancers' respect for one another. The dance company is like a family, and the dancers, as well as their parents, socialize beyond the studio walls.

The Movement Connection would love to welcome more dancers and families into the group.

Rehearsals are every Tuesday night from 6:15-7:15 p.m. at the Vanderbilt Dayani Center. If you have any questions, please contact Artistic Director Danielle Clement at 615.613.5579 or by email at danielleclmnt@gmail.com.



All photos by
Lori Kissinger

I to r: Scott Lewis, Meghan Maynard, Grace Dodd and Ryan Marshall



Drawing on Strengths:

by Terri Giller, M.Ed, ATR

An Art Therapist's Role

When I discovered that a career like Art Therapy existed, I knew with certainty that it was what I was meant to do. My earliest experiences were working with adults diagnosed with "severe to profound developmental disabilities". These individuals often had little or no verbal skills, severe physical limitations, and cognitive issues. This proved to be a challenging experience. However, it has shaped my approach and continues to mold my role as an Art Therapist.

"Z" was a high energy, strong-willed individual. He was in a wheelchair but able to move around by propelling himself, quite literally, by bouncing off the walls around him. Our first few meetings consisted of handing "Z" art materials which he promptly dropped, occasionally glancing at the materials only after they hit the floor.

"E" was non-verbal, but his soft blue eyes spoke a thousand words. He was reclined back in his wheelchair, and his fine motor skills had deteriorated to the point where he had little strength to grasp and hold onto art materials independently. He did, however, have the ability to grasp my arm. This happened consistently as I presented sensory-based art materials such as clay and fabric.



"S" possessed the sweetest spirit, coupled with a strong desire for independence. What she lacked in verbal skills, she made up for with grins and eyebrow movements. She read my facial expressions too, her eyes intensely studying my face. Her arms had significant contractures, requiring splints on both hands. Because of this, her hands were permanently positioned close to her chest, limiting her range of motion. Her medium of choice was paint, and in



our sessions we always sought that balance of freedom and the control she desired.

Early on, it was apparent that I had to change and, in a sense, re-learn how I approached art making, communicated, and interacted with individuals. My primary role as an Art Therapist is to focus on each person, their strengths and what they can do rather than focus on their perceived challenges. Although the process varies, everyone has the ability to create art.

I understood fairly quickly that sitting at a table and creating art on a piece of paper was not the process "Z" would adopt. I pushed the table against the wall and laid a large piece of canvas on the studio floor. Before "Z" came to the Art Therapy Studio, I filled small cups with paint, soaked fabric in paint, and gathered sensory objects such as clay, balls and yarn. Our sessions were full of movement; my role consisted of following "Z" around the canvas, offering paint cups, yarn, clay or fabric soaked in paint. He made his decisions quickly and dropped them to the canvas, watching as he visibly made an impact on his environment. "Z" didn't spend much time admiring his work, quickly moving along while his wheelchair created lines across the canvas.

"E" took some time to settle in the Art Therapy Studio. Our sessions began with listening to soothing music, holding his hand and talking to him about the weather, or how nice it was to see his sister during her visit earlier that morning.

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Fred and Will



"E" had a neutral response to the art materials, tolerating hand over hand assistance to manipulate items. I suggested drawing to music and set up a drawing board. I pressed our palms together, a marker held in place between them as I guided him in making some marks. "E" grabbed my wrist and began to move my arm back and forth, taking control and creating marks on the paper. He was intentional with his mark making, watching every new line that was created. That day, I became the "tool" in his art process.

"S" always chose to paint. We worked together to adapt the brushes - my intention was to provide her with the tools to work as independently as possible. I

tried attaching the brushes to her splints and even lengthened the handles of the brushes to ensure that she could reach the canvas in front of her. "S" had a way of letting me know what worked for her and what didn't work. I sat in my chair at home, imitating her contractures in order to gain insight on how to help her achieve independence while she painted. I can still see the concentration and joy on her face as she stared into the mirror in front of her, the canvas now laid on her chest. "S" completed several paintings this way, as this positioning allowed her to grasp the paint brush and independently make marks with ease.

The creative process gives the opportunity for all individuals to explore their surroundings, make choices and contribute to their environment. My role, as an Art Therapist, is to provide a space for artists of all abilities to explore processes and materials. My role is to draw upon the strengths of each person, allowing them to express themselves and communicate ideas; promoting a sense of self and a satisfying quality of life.

Sharon Stolberg is a special education teacher, Partners graduate and an outdoor enthusiast. Although she has Juvenile Rheumatoid Arthritis, she "gets her thrills" from camping, hiking, rock climbing, kayaking and cycling.



Fred and Will climbing

Looking through "An Artist's Window"

Julie Long began working for Waves as its therapeutic recreation coordinator and art teacher in 2006. She was immediately overwhelmed by the amount of raw talent that existed in so many of the Waves participants. Since the art training that most had received was minimal to none, the individual style of each person was very evident. Not concerned with trying to copy or imitate someone else, the artists were interested in creating what seemed natural to them, and what felt stylistically right to them. From choice of color, to the type of medium they chose, their point of view was organic and unique.

Julie felt compelled to create a show in which Waves artists could be showcased. As she began to research other art events, it was evident that she needed to include individuals living in the community at large who also had a talent and passion for creating art. This is not a show that highlights disabilities; it's a show that highlights artists who happen to have disabilities.



Ruth Adams

On Friday, March 15, 2013, Waves hosted its 7th Annual Art Show, "An Artist's Window", for adults with developmental disabilities. Waves hosts this show each March and invites adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities living in the Middle Tennessee area

to participate. An Artist's Window is also an art sale. Each artist submits one piece of work. All forms of art are accepted and the range of work includes acrylic and oil on canvas; sketches; watercolor; pottery; sculpture; photography; mixed media; 3D; glasswork and jewelry. Each artist is given the choice to sell their piece of art, as well as set the price they think their creation is worth. There is also a contest for Best of Show, 2nd, and 3rd place, judged by local artists.

This year's event was held at Rolling Hills Community Church in Franklin, from 5-8 p.m., and featured live music and dinner provided by the Sassy Casserole. Larger than previous venues, Rolling Hills provided enough seating space to serve dinner as well as spread out the art work for the more than 250 attendees. The event showcased the works of 86 Tennessee artists. Awards were

given for Best of Show to Mickey Swearengin from Franklin County; 2nd Place to Roger Sullivan of Fairview; and 3rd Place to Charles Wood of Hermitage.



(l to r) Beth Hughes and Julie Long

Today, Waves continues to hold weekly art classes, ranging from arts and crafts to all different mediums of paint and types of art. Over 40 artists participate each Tuesday in a themed art class, arts education class and music therapy class. The Waves artists love having the opportunity to participate in classes on a regular basis, as well as being able to create different forms of art. "Creating art makes me feel calm, and helps me to relax," said Vera Johnson, an artist and Waves participant. "I love keeping busy and feeling good about what I am making."

Since 1973, Waves, Inc. has provided a broad range of services for adults with developmental disabilities in Williamson County.



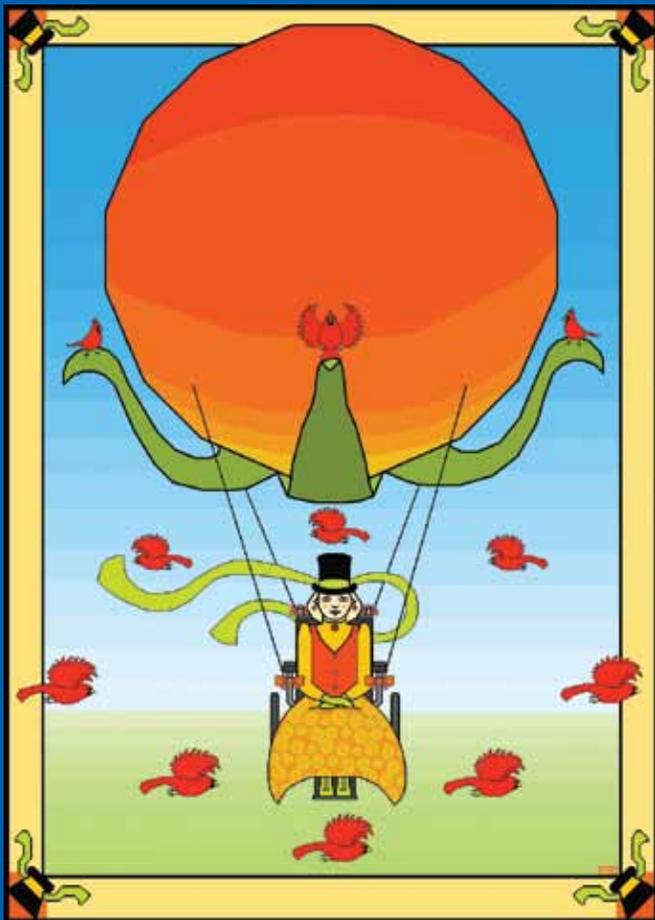
Thomas Gammons

All photos by Jeannine Rose



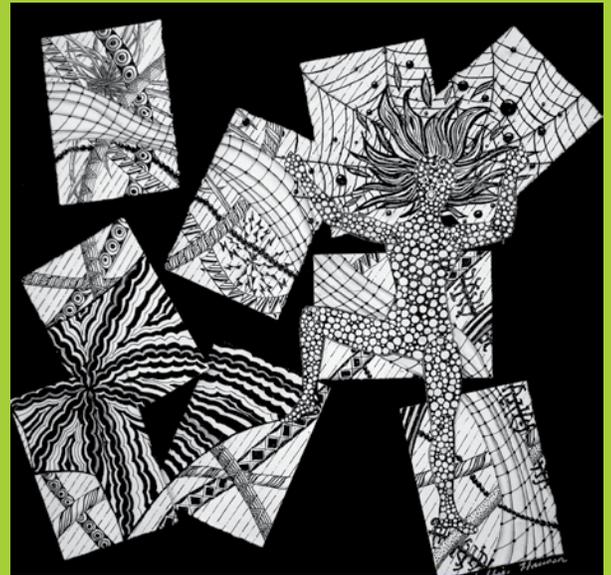
Aveion Townsend is 16 years old, and lives in Nashville. Her ambition is to become a hairstylist and open up a chain of beauty shops.





It's So Nice to See You Out

Nashville artist and writer, **Erin Brady Worsham**, is a denizen of East Nashville, home of the very popular Tomato Art Fest. This piece was included in the most recent Tomato Art exhibit in August at the Art & Invention Gallery.



Frantic

Deborah Hanson created this piece with Zentangle patterns. She credits Zentangle with helping her return to art as part of her mental health recovery. She is from Flintville, Tennessee and is a member of ReConnect Tullahoma.

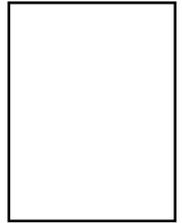


Washington Square, New York, New York

Born in New York City, **Cynthia Trainer** is a graduate of the High School of Music and Art, used in the movie "Fame". Her work has been exhibited in New York, New Hampshire and Tennessee.

Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities

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Red is the color...

Kathy Tupper uses a variety of styles, chosen to best express the subject and mood of each creation. Her exhibited and published works include watercolor, pen and ink, pencil and acrylic illustrations; cartoons, poetry and sculpture.