

Chicago Tribune

Thursday September 15, 2005

FAMILY

Finger-painting and beyond
Art center draws on kids' creativity

By Glenn Jeffers

Tribune staff reporter

Published September 15, 2005

Mary Tepper lifts the ink-stained paper away from the table and places the calligraphy-inspired scrolls, one by one, on trays to dry. It's just about lunchtime, but some of the 17 children in Tepper's class at the Hyde Park Arts Center walk up to her, wanting to work on their pop-up cards before they eat.

Within minutes, colored pencils and glue sticks lie on the previously clean paper covering. Nina Maliszewski, 9, cuts into the cover of a "Betty & Veronica" comic book, hoping to add the wholesome Betty to her project.

Postponing lunch is a small price to pay to prolong the imagination of children, to nurture a young mind through art.

"Their enthusiasm is wonderful," says Tepper, 36, a local artist who also teaches at the art center. "They've been really anxious about finishing [the pop-ups]."

One can expect those same kind of childhood epiphanies to continue when the arts center, located at 5307 S. Hyde Park Blvd., starts its fall schedule for youths and teenagers on Sept. 26.

Six classes, three workshops and a pair of days-off-school programs will test the ingenuity of more than 100 Hyde Park and South Side youngsters. Toddlers as young as 2 can discover shapes and lines and colors and teenage photographers can get acquainted with words like "film" and "darkroom."

The 90-minute classes--in ceramics, photography, painting and drawing--last 10 weeks. Along with those classes, the arts center provides art education to a number of South Side schools that are struggling to afford these programs on their own.

"Many schools look at the arts as optional and the traditional way people would be exposed to the arts is being diminished," says Blake Bradford, the center's director of education.

The center provides arts programming to schools in Hyde Park and other South Side neighborhoods, including Columbia Explorers Academy, Canter Middle School, Farren Elementary School and Murray Language Academy. Artists come in once a week and work with teachers to build a curriculum that not only provides a creative outlet for students, but possibly plants the seed of a lifelong love.

The outreach programs run throughout the fall, offering students a range of courses including ceramics, photography, painting and drawing.

"If other people aren't willing to do it, if that's the way it'll be, then I'll do it," says Jesse Walsh, 30, one of the outreach teachers. "The kids are amazing. They truly understand what it means. It's hard to get them to stop being creative and get them to focus."

The center plans to expand its community efforts with the opening of its new location at 52nd Street and South Cornell Avenue next April. The space will feature a 1,600-square-foot arts resource center, with space for programs, a library, exhibitions and meetings.

"It's going to be more of a connector to the Chicago arts community and the community in general . . . families, parents, organizations," says Raymond Yang, the resource center's program manager. "Hopefully, it will spur collaboration with different organizations and encourage creativity in different audiences."

Fall art classes

Where: Hyde Park Arts Center, 5307 S. Hyde Park Blvd., 773-324-5520, www.hydeparkart.org.

When: Classes run Sept. 26 through Dec. 3. Workshops run Oct. 16 and 30 and Nov. 6.

What: Fall classes for children and teens at the celebrated South Side arts center. Includes classes on ceramics, painting, drawing and photography.