

Community

For more community news visit gilbertsunnews.com

GilbertSunNews.com | @GilbertSunNews | /GilbertSunNews

Gilbert art league helps to develop kids' talent

BY SRIANTHI PERERA

Tribune Contributor

The community center at House of Refuge in Mesa was a hive of activity recently as children from 4 to 13 socialized after the school day.

Some drew cartoon characters on the large white board. Meanwhile, volunteers from Gilbert Visual Art League bustled about preparing for an art class.

The lead teacher was Heather Livingston, who, together with Donna Finter and Deepika Haldankar, taught paint-pour art to about 20 children.

Seated around a long table, each child was given a small canvas. They donned aprons in preparation but their animated chattering did not abate.

The followed Livingston pouring three acrylic paint colors into a small plastic cup. She passed the cup around so that the children saw the purple, pink and blue paints layered inside.

She placed a canvas atop the cup and turned it over. While the paint was still contained by the cup, she dabbed white paint on the canvas and spread it around.

Then, she lifted the cup and let the paint pour into all corners, creating a design. Lastly, she created a bubbly effect by spraying a bit of silicone on the canvas.

Soon, the children began to create their own abstract paintings.

"Just notice how the kids are suddenly quiet now," Livingston said. "Their self-esteem improves when they see what they can create."

"It's meditative and relaxing," Finter added.

Taylor Haught, 8, said she was attending art day for the fourth or fifth time, explaining, "I meet new friends."

Soon, the scene was a messy and colorful mix of dripping canvases, soaked paper towels and paint splatters on the



Riegann Bryant is happy to create an abstract art using shades of blue and white paint during an art class led by Gilbert Visual Art League volunteers at House of Refuge in Mesa. (Courtesy of Deepika Haldankar)

plastic tablecloth.

"I find it's kind of a therapy if you can express yourself on canvas through abstract. By the colors you choose, it helps to be creative," Livingston said. "If you have problems and you want to get in

a different world in your mind, it's very therapeutic."

Aria, a 10-year-old who participates in the class frequently, said the class "is like a daycare for kids. But we don't get to sleep. We only play here."

The House of Refuge offers rental housing to families who are experiencing homelessness. Families receive help from professional staff to heal from trauma, secure suitable employment and obtain permanent housing.

Gilbert Visual Art League, also a non-profit, aims to help people develop or improve their art capabilities. It has been volunteering to teach art classes to children and adults at various venues, including HD SOUTH in Gilbert.

The league has donated 236 pieces of member art for House of Refuge's offices and 88 community homes. A year ago, league volunteers began weekly teaching sessions at the House of Refuge community center, with a lead teacher and two assistants.

Lessons included complementary colors, overlapping to show proportion, crayon resist, creating patterns, fabric art, printing, wearable art, paint pours, collage, stenciling and mixed media. The children use markers, crayons, acrylic, tempera, and watercolor paints, some of which were donated by the volunteers.

"We are so grateful that GVAL has committed their time, talent and treasure to love on the children at House of Refuge through their weekly art activities in our community center," said Kayla Kolar, president of the nonprofit. "This has given the kids a new tool to use for self-expression and to just do something fun that they don't often get to do."

"The benefits of these art classes to the well-being of our children are immeasurable," she added.

Jocelyn Pena, co-director of the community center, said attendance soars on Wednesdays. "They really do enjoy the volunteers who come and help," she said.

Pena has noted changes in the children.

REFUGE FROM PAGE 19

"They are becoming better at socializing with the other kids, doing more homework and reading," she said. "So, it's always nice seeing that."

Participating in an art program means having fun, growing in art abilities, expressing thoughts and feelings visually, and increasing self-esteem through positive experiences.

"Many of the children at House of Refuge have experienced more difficulties than other children, so art therapy can be especially helpful," Finter said. "Art is a wonderful form of therapy for working through life's challenges."

At first, Finter said she thought leading children's art at House of Refuge was a way to return what others did for her as a child.

"I thought I was doing a service for the kids. However, I gain so much from my interactions with these deserving, sweet kids," she said. "Many of the volunteers say that their time with the children is the highlight of their week. I agree."

Details: houseofrefuge.org and gval.org.



Owen Sipe (at left) watches while Ethan Sipe chooses acrylic paint for his abstract paint pour at House of Refuge in Mesa. (Courtesy of Deepika Hal-dankar)

Paint the Town Red

11th Annual
A Night at the Museum

Gilbert Historical Society
March 4, 2023

Paint the Town Red

This magical evening will include a lively cocktail hour, silent auction, dinner, live auction and of course dancing!

Join us as we fundraise and paint the town red!
Saturday, March 4, 2023 at 5:30 p.m.
being held at HD SOUTH - 10 S. Gilbert Rd.

For tickets and sponsorship information call 480.926.1577

Diamond Sponsor

Platinum Sponsor

Gold Sponsor

Specialty Sponsor

In-Kind Sponsor

\$10 OFF
\$40.00 Purchase
Gilbert location only. Must present coupon.

\$5 OFF
\$25.00 Purchase
Gilbert location only. Must present coupon.

SONSON'S PASTY CO.
Authentic • Handmade

Taste the history

1430 W Warner Rd Ste 134
Gilbert, AZ 85233
sonsonspastyco.com
602-300-0344
Open 9am - 6pm Monday thru Saturday