Student art earns recognition

Six Webutuck students turned their creativity loose and entered the Hudson Valley Art Awards, part of the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards, this year. Three of them won awards in the contest.

Ashe Johnson, 7th; Thomas Beeman, 8th; Olivia Wickwire, 8th; Haley Winters, 10th; Autumn Beeman, 11th; and Christina Lawrence, 12th, submitted entries.

Visual arts teacher Craig Wickwire helped guide the students as they prepared their entries for the Drawing/Illustration and Digital Art categories. There are 17 art and 11 writing categories overall.

“I want to congratulate them for their diligence and their willingness to show their work by submitting it,” Wickwire said.

The decision to participate in the contest this year stemmed from an increased awareness and the nature of the year. “I thought, because of the situation we were in, that it would have a lot of positive meaning for the kids who were still at home. It would give them something to look forward to and work toward.”

This year, the contest received 2,000 entries from the 16 districts in the region, though some of the entries included multiple entries as individual submissions, said Kimberly Austin of Sullivan County BOCES which oversees the region’s event.

Thomas Beeman said his older sister, Thomas Beeman’s “WaterColorCityLandscape” earned a Silver Key Award in this year’s Hudson Valley Art Awards.”

Morning announcements move to video

From time to time, we all experience that sluggishness in the morning and our students are no different. WES Principal Jennifer Hengen wanted to do something to get everyone energized for the day ahead, so she began creating morning announcement videos which she shares via SeeSaw Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays.

“I try to make it engaging and fun,” Hengen said, adding that it is also a resource for parents as she puts links into each video for parents to find additional information. Technology Director Lauren Marquis provided a way for Hengen to insert sounds into the video to help draw students’ attention. In each video, Hengen announces the day of the week, what letter day it is, a brief weather report, recites the pledge, does a joke of the

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Autumn, gave him the idea to enter the contest as she entered it, too. “WaterColorCityLandscape,” Thomas' piece, was recognized with a Silver Key award. "I created a watercolor painting of New York City. My inspiration was a video that showed how to make buildings using watercolor," he said.

Christina Lawrence's pieces, "Stop" and "Attention" received honorable mention as did Ashe Johnson’s, “Beauty is Pain.”

Awards are given for Gold Key, Silver Key, Honorable Mention, American Visions Nominee, and American Voices Nominee. Typically, awards are presented to students at celebration ceremonies and exhibitions in each region.

“This is phenomenal, it gave me chills hearing that,” Wickwire said when told of the awards. “This wasn’t an assignment. They volunteered for this, so to see three students recognized for their work and dedication to it is outstanding.”

The students selected which pieces of art to submit and were responsible for their own submissions, Wickwire said. Lawrence said “Attention” was a media arts class project toward the end of her junior year. “I spent a lot of time drawing it and I am really proud of how it came out.” She drew “Stop” a few months later. “I was feeling low. Quarantine and online school was very difficult to adjust to. I decided to draw how I felt and “Stop” is what I was left with.”

Lawrence said she plans to pursue a career in art, possibly as an art teacher. Autumn Beeman said her watercolor portrait of a girl with flowers blooming out of her mask was prompted by how important masks had become. “Being in a pandemic, it has become crucial to wear a mask in public in order to protect the health of yourself and others. It has been difficult for everyone and some more than others, so it’s important to recognize your impact and the strength you have being part of the solution,” she said.

“This is a huge confidence builder for these students to move forward and have their ideas and feelings affirmed,” Wickwire said, adding, that the district will “Participate bigger and bolder next year.”

Familiar face returns to transport district children

Editor’s note: This is part of a series on WCSD’s new hires for the 2020-21 school year.

Christine Ford
Bus driver

One of the district’s new faces for the 2020-21 school year isn’t new at all. Christine Ford worked for the district as a bus driver for 15 years before leaving for two years to work for another school district.

“I started missing my home, community and friends. I hated traveling to work and really wanted to come back to Webutuck, to my old bus run with my bus kids and families,” said Ford who has lived in the district since 1993 and had three sons who attended school here. Transportation Director Jerry Heiser said the decision to bring Ford back was easy. “She was a good employee. She was always on time, never missed time and she did a lot in the community.”

Ford is glad to be back. “Webutuck is a small school district where I feel welcomed being back,” she said. “I missed seeing the beautiful views. I appreciate, every day, being back.”

When she is not transporting children, Ford enjoys spending time with her dog, Spike, and cat, Patches at her Wassaic home and talking to her oldest sons by phone or doing things in person when they visit (her youngest son lives with her). She enjoys cooking meals with her boyfriend and watching movies.

If she never became a bus driver, Ford said she would have gone into something to help people, such as working for a hospice organization.

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Family feel helps EBIS overcome challenges

Change brings challenges, and the COVID-19 pandemic has certainly brought what seems like endless change. But, as a family, we’ve seen it through to a better 2021 and some of that success surely comes from the close-knit nature of the Eugene Brooks Intermediate School community - staff and students alike.

“This year is unlike anything we've ever imagined. Though we are missing out on so much — in person interactions, in person learning, hands-on activities, Holiday Breakfast, field trips, socializing at school — we also have some silver linings,” science teacher Christine Gillette said.

Staff have made it a point to let students know they are here for them, whether students attend class in person or remotely.

“Reaching out via Google classroom private comments, or Zoom private Chats, etc. they need to know this is tough for everyone- not just them,” she said.

Teaching assistant Raquel Singleton agrees that staying in touch is key. One of the in-person events that had to be stopped was recognizing students’ birthdays.

“With remote instruction, I make sure I send a card to them for their birthday,” she said, adding that she makes weekly calls to her group of students to see if they are doing OK, if they have the supplies they need and, if not, she’ll send them.

ELA teacher Jenna Garofalo said that remote instruction, “gave me the ability to almost have kids in my home and create a home away from home for them. I showed them my guinea pig, I was working from my boyfriend’s house so I introduced them to his dog. … it’s more personal.”

Principal Matt Pascale said the staff works well together and, that while students always come first, “this group works and operates like a family unit.”

When a member of the family is in need, everyone jumps in to help.

“We had a family displaced by a fire not too long ago, the faculty and staff immediately worked to help provide assistance. When I experienced a medical issue with my wife, the group at EBIS came through with such kindness and generosity,” Pascale said. “While I believe our small size contributes to this closeness, it is the kind-hearted individuals who come to EBIS each day that truly create this atmosphere.”

He also pointed to the Positivity Project and the district’s efforts to bring a health clinic to the school as examples of the care the district has for its students and families.

Gillette and Singleton praised administrators for their roles in establishing this feeling.

“The best thing the administrators can do now is to be supportive of staff during this challenging time and we certainly have that,” Gillette said.

Singleton said Pascale is very good with communications.

“He sends a weekly email to keep us informed about what is happening, any changes and he keeps the communication channels open so we don’t feel like we’re on an island by ourselves,” Singleton said.

Departments also hold their own virtual chats and meetings.

“Team and department chats keep each other positive throughout the remote experience. This has been a constant source of support and laughter for us,” Gillette said, pointing to her team’s participation in Spirit Week as an example.

Of course, being close-knit has its drawbacks when you can’t be together. So, the thing Singleton looks forward to most, as do the rest of the staff, is, “seeing the hallways filled with students and their smiling faces and just being around them and celebrating a sense of normalcy.”

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day and discusses the monthly character trait, which for January is perseverance.

“I used myself as an example this month. I talked about how I can’t stand to see myself on the screen, but I do the announcement each day anyway because it is the right thing to do,” she said.
Weekly assembly maintains connections

Every Wednesday, WES Principal Jennifer Hengen holds an all school assembly via Zoom to connect with students, do a little teaching and have some fun.

Hengen may start with a short introductory activity, such as different ways people can say, “Hi,” virtually then moves on to the character trait of the month, the Pledge of Allegiance (recited by a student volunteer), birthdays and a reading lesson. Leading up to the STEAM Fair, she’s also hoping to feature students who share project ideas or STEAM projects to inspire other students to create one of their own and enter.

The assembly is a social emotional learning component.

“Students feel somewhat disconnected with one week in school, then the next one not. This is something we can keep in place whether we are remote or in-person,” Hengen said.

Staff has been flexible with their Wednesdays because they recognize the importance of it, she said.

Hengen said she was reading the stories herself while sharing the pages on screen, but for Jan. 6 found a video on YouTube of someone reading the book, “Brave Irene,” so she shared that link. Then, she presented a cause and effect slide, giving students the cause and asking them for the effect. For example, what is the effect of Irene’s mother being ill or Irene falling into a hole.

Hengen said participation has been good, with about 120 students and staff members making an appearance.

The Wednesday assembly takes the place of the SeeSaw announcement, though a brief announcement is sent out that includes the link to the assembly.

Calendar

Jan. 25, Board of Education meeting, 7 p.m.

Feb. 1, Board of Education meeting, 7 p.m.

Feb. 22, Board of Education meeting, 7 p.m.

March 1, Board of Education meeting, 7 p.m.

March 15, Board of Education meeting, 7 p.m.

March 29-April 2, Spring Recess

April 5, Board of Education meeting, 7 p.m.

April 19-23, 26, NYS ELA exams (subject to change)

April 27, Board of Education meeting/BOCES vote, 7 p.m

Students stay remote until Jan. 25

All Webutuck schools were closed to students and staff Tuesday, Jan. 19 as maintenance workers performed a deep clean in all buildings.

The decision to close school buildings and order students to remain remote until at least Jan. 25 stemmed from a large and growing amount of positive COVID-19 cases among WCSD students and staff.

As of Jan. 15, the district had 20 lab reported positive cases based on residential addresses and 11 students/teachers/staff testing positive.

We will continue to monitor cases in the district as well as the Dutchess County rate. If the situation changes, we will alert you through robocalls, text messages and via our website.

Please stay safe and continue to observe proper safety precautions with regards to wearing masks, washing hands and staying at safe social distances.