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FEATURED

Vitality Arts program fosters creativity, community

Olivia Alveshere Staff Writer May 10, 2018



From left, Lori Schultz, of Spring Lake Park, and Judy Osbon, of Blaine, work on mixed media collage pieces in one of three V Arts classes offered at Rumriver Art Center in Anoka this spring. Photos by Olivia Alveshere

The Rumriver Art Center is now more than halfway through the first round of its Vitality Arts classes, offered to adults 55 and older.

The average age of participants is 77; the oldest student is 92, according to Larry Weinberg, director of the Rumriver Art Center.

The program was made possible by a grant from Aroha Philanthropies. The organization's new Seeding Vitality Arts MN program aims to improve the lives of older adults across the state through creativity.

The creative process stimulates the brain, keeping people healthy, and by grouping budding artists in classes, they have new opportunities for social stimulation as well.

"The socialization is almost as impressive as the art work that is coming out of these classes," Weinberg said. "The participants' creativity is awe inspiring, but what is so special is all the new friendships."

Three eight-week courses in mixed media collage, hand-built pottery and acrylic painting filled quickly with spots for a dozen artists in each.

Classes begin at 9:30 a.m. and run until noon one day each week, but students have started arriving earlier and earlier, according to Weinberg.

"I'm just excited to come," said Renee Jaroscak, a 70-year-old Coon Rapids resident. On the flip side, she's also excited to go home and continue experimenting with new techniques she picked up in class.

A longtime writer, Jaroscak has always wanted to pick up a paintbrush.

"I've been wanting to do art forever," she said. "Now I have the time to do it."

Deborah Ann Kirkeeide, assistant instructor for the mixed media collage class, thinks offering classes to people 55 and older at such a low cost has been a great opportunity.

Art classes like the Vitality Arts offerings usually cost hundreds of dollars, Kirkeeide said. Because of the grant from Aroha Philanthropies brought the cost of the eight-week series down to \$75.

"These are mature women, and I think a lot of them are like me," she said. "A lot of them are tapping into those creative urges. ... This is our time, and we have to use it."

Classes are taught by professional artists MaryLeah Marshall, Angie Renee and Paul Boecher.

Marshall was touched when her students created a card for one of their classmates who missed a week for minor surgery.

The camaraderie has been incredible, and she has seen her students sharing with one another – “materials as well as ideas,” she said.

Kathy Ranta, 66, of Coon Rapids, has enjoyed that aspect of the class, too.

“It’s so nice to be able to share ideas and techniques,” she said. She came into the class not knowing a soul, and now they are bouncing ideas off of one another like old friends.

Ranta has brought in a variety of materials found at flea markets to share with her classmates.

“I’ve done gathering, and now I can start making,” she said.

The three classes’ creativity will be on display at Rumriver Art Center, 2665 Fourth Ave., Anoka, in June with a gallery show reception planned for Saturday, June 9, from 4-7 p.m. The community is invited.

Additional Vitality Arts classes are slated to begin this summer. A six-week sampler class begins June 12 and runs Tuesday evenings from 6-8 p.m. Cost is \$125. For a complete list of class offerings, visit rumriverart.com.

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