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FEATURED

## Anoka County seniors discover artistic talents

Paige Kieffer Jun 20, 2019



The Rumriver Art Center in Anoka is currently exhibiting artwork from local seniors who are in the center's Vitality Arts classes. The center's gallery is located at 2665 Fourth Ave., Anoka, in suite 103A.

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Photo by Paige Kieffer

The Rumriver Art Center's is currently showcasing artwork from local seniors who participated in the Vitality Arts program.

The Vitality Arts program is in its second year of providing art classes to seniors ages 55 and older.

“The Vitality Arts classes are designed for seniors to help them socialize and keep them active and engaged with art,” said Vitality Arts acrylic arts teacher Paul Boecher. “The beauty of it is the seniors come out of these classes with skills they can continue with for the rest of their lives, and they achieve something they’ve always wanted to do.”

Last year the Rumriver Art Center hosted six, eight-week session in acrylic painting, drawing and clay pottery classes. In April and May 2019 the center hosted three more sessions and will do three more this October and November.

Nancy Larson, a watercolor painter from Blaine, wanted to relearn how to draw, which is something she hadn’t done for over 40 years. During the Vitality Arts drawing class, Larson learned about composition, negative space, contouring and value studies.

“I was so happy to have a class available where I could relearn some of these skills and how to use them,” she said. “This class has helped make me a better painter.”

Ham Lake resident Linda Van Arsdale took the acrylic painting class to keep busy in retirement.

“It’s so much fun,” she said. “The instructors were so encouraging and really taught us to be better artists and gave us the tools how to do it. It was fun learning something new and interesting with other people my own age.”

The 2019 Vitality Arts program at Rumriver Art Center is being funded by a \$25,000 grant from Aroha Philanthropies, a Minneapolis nonprofit that works to improve the quality of life of seniors by encouraging the funding, development and proliferation of arts programs for them.

In 2017, Aroha Philanthropies partnered with the Minnesota State Arts Board to bring their Vitality Arts courses to 15 nonprofits across the metro area in an effort to examine how art impacts seniors. The Rumriver Arts Center was one of the 15 organizations chosen.

Boecher said the Vitality Arts classes keep seniors active and engaging with others.

“These classes are life changing to people, and it’s so great to see them shine,” he said. “These classes allow seniors to express themselves, and it gives them a chance to escape from the aches and pains of life.”

“This gets older people out, getting them to be more active, and it gives them a purpose,” added Vitality Arts drawing instructor Debra Kirkeeide.

Randi Olson, of Anoka, also took the drawing class. Olson said she signed up for the class to meet new people after recently moving from California.

“I encourage other seniors to get involved in these art classes,” she said. “It doesn’t matter how much you know about artwork. It’s never too late to learn a new skill.”

Jerry Jorgenrud, of Oak Grove, had previously worked with clay but wanted to learn how to use a throwing wheel, so he signed up for the Vitality Arts class.

“The throwing wheel takes perseverance,” he said. “It’s not something you can do right away, and it takes a lot to get it right.”

Jorgenrud said he signed up to keep busy and meet new people after his wife, Cindi, died last year.

“This class helps get you get out of your shell and meet new people,” he said. “It’s soothing to have somewhere to go.”

Vitality Arts students who have participated in classes this year chose one to two pieces to feature at the new exhibit. The exhibit will be open through Saturday, July 13. The Rumriver Art Center gallery is located at 2665 Fourth Ave., Anoka in suite 103A.

To learn more about the Rumriver Arts Center, visit [rumriverart.com](http://rumriverart.com).

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