

# Orange Arts Center builds community

by Ryan Dentscheff | Posted: Thursday, March 22, 2018 12:15 am

PEPPER PIKE — When Shauna Hajek moved to Pepper Pike last summer from Minneapolis, Minnesota, she was looking for activities she could get involved with in the community and was interested in expanding her artistic skills.

She began searching online and discovered the Orange Art Center. She has now completed two “semesters” of beginner drawing and watercolor classes, made numerous friends and grown as an artist.

“When I started I had no confidence and didn’t really know how to do anything,” she said. “It’s just really built up our confidence, and you grow so much throughout the time taking the course. And you want to just keep going.”

The Orange Art Center has been offering classes at 31500 Chagrin Blvd. in Pepper Pike since 1980 and recently completed significant changes to the facility with \$50,000 worth of improvements. In conjunction with the renovations, the center also bolstered its course offerings, adding more beginner art classes and integrating for classes for students.

Executive Director Debra Lee Meese and program assistant Emmalyn Tringali, the art center’s two full-time employees, said the goal in offering the dozens of classes is to attract all levels of artists and extend all of the benefits of art to the community.

“Most of our classes are very fine art based,” Ms. Tringali said. “So we’re really looking to engage students on a higher level of art education, to bring in people who have had prior experience or are at the very beginner level to build their foundations.”

The classes at the Orange Art Center – which is a nonprofit organization part of Orange Community Education and Recreation within the Orange City School District – are split into four semesters, one for each season. Over the entire year, more than 120 classes and workshops are offered.

Registration for the 16 adult and 10 young artist spring courses, as well as several workshops, is currently ongoing with the classes beginning in April. The various young artist offerings range in age from kindergarten to 12th grade.

The course offerings include classes in painting, drawing, pottery and ceramics, watercolor and jewelry making, to name a few.



## Orange Art Center

The Orange Art Center exhibits artwork in its gallery and throughout the building year-round. The featured artwork changes with each of the four seasons, as there are three all-student shows and one faculty show. Currently being displayed until April 6 are the works of students who took the center’s painting and drawing courses.

“There’s been a resurgence now that we have our brand, and with the building update is completed, programming is on its way,” Ms. Meese said. “We’re also starting to do more expanding into the community.”

She added that with the addition of more beginner classes, the goal is to get anyone interested to feel comfortable doing art.

“We want people to be able to enter and not feel intimidated and have the joy of art,” she said.

Annie Peters of Middlefield recently joined the team of about 15 instructors and is teaching beginner classes in drawing, painting and watercolor. A retired high school art teacher, Ms. Peters said the first thing she wants her beginning students to gain, before some of the intricate techniques and skills, is confidence.

“Because I think, especially in the beginning, making art takes a huge amount of courage. And I think that stands in the way of a lot of beginners. They’re very nervous about it.”

She said while progressing through the course, which is usually once a week for about 10 weeks, the students are also able to learn a lot of “tricks and skills that will help them make their work look more professional. And that also helps them build their confidence because they realize they can do it.”

Mrs. Hajek is one example of a student entering a class with no experience being able to build the confidence to create art. Now, as she continues progressing through the various courses and learning more skills and techniques, she is enjoying expanding her creativity in creating her own pieces.

She said she also enjoys being able to get her son, Lou, involved in the art center. Being a part of the Orange school district, the art center has programs for students that begin after school and also have summer art camps. Lou is in the fifth grade at Brady Middle School and has taken a cartooning class at the art center.

Ms. Hajek said she loves how the center has helped her and her family transition and integrate into the community since moving from Minnesota.

“I’m brand new, so that’s been a great thing for me,” she said. “Our first drawing class had just three students and we all re-enrolled. Now they have the new students and some of them are re-enrolling.

“So we’re building friendships. Being a new person to the community, it really helped me set down roots right away.”

In addition to offering more beginner classes as a way to get more community members involved in the arts, Ms. Meese and Ms. Tringali are also making the center’s presence known in other areas of the community. For example, they worked to get the center included in the Collective Arts Network Journal, an art publication distributed throughout Northeast Ohio. The center will also be represented at Fair on the Square at Playhouse Square in Cleveland April 9 as well as at Blossom Time in Chagrin Falls in May.

“Our thinking is that we’re a destination,” Ms. Meese said. “We want to be able to provide this as a resource, a benefit and a destination. And I think that it’s really important to have this as a service we offer.”

Another beneficial aspect of the center, she said, is the opportunity to experience the arts on all levels. Not only are the students learning a specific craft through the classes, they are also experiencing what it takes to

prepare and be a part of an art exhibit. At the end of three seasons each year, the art center displays an exhibit of student works. The fourth season features the faculty art show.

Currently on display through April 6 is the painting and drawing student show.

“Having that art show rounds out the whole experience,” Ms. Meese said.

“You get the full experience of an artist,” she said. “There’s a process of being able to exhibit your work and then it’s no longer just yours. It’s out there in the public and people can critique it, they can like it or not. It’s part of that process. Preparing for an exhibit is also part of the experience.”

And the community is also able to visit the center and view the artwork, which is another example of the center serving as a community resource.

“I think it is a huge asset to a community,” Mrs. Peters said. “The community is a wonderful community that supports the arts and knows that the arts are valuable and reaches out to all members in this area that can come here and get some respite from the world.

“And for the people who take the classes, it helps them develop as creative beings and it’s also great for the camaraderie and the friends that people make within the classes. I think it’s terrific.”