

## Art Transforms a School and Leads the Way to New Friendships

April 25, 2008 - *Kitchener, ON, Canada* - Three large-scale art projects at St. John's Catholic School have transformed the school and initiated new student relationships. *ArtsAccess* Community Artist Facilitator, Mosa Neshamá McNeilly, has been working with the school, preparing for their 2<sup>nd</sup> annual *Arts Showcase* on April 30<sup>th</sup> from 6 - 8 p.m. The community event includes arts of all disciplines: drama, music, and the visual arts. Mosa McNeilly will present two large indoor murals that were completed by the Grade 6 and 7 classes and discuss a current outdoor pillar project.

### Large-Scale Murals Initiate New Ways of Collaborating



*Victoria Park*, Grade 6 class of 2007 St. John's Catholic School, Kitchener, acrylic. Photo: M. McNeilly, *ArtsAccess*.

*Victoria Park*, conceived and painted by the Grade 6 class, is an impressive 10.7 metres wide (35 feet) by 2.5 metres high (8 feet) acrylic mural. The painted work has a dramatic presence spanning the length of the school's Student Centre. According to McNeilly, *Victoria Park* was a rite of passage for the younger Grade 6 students, who were allowed to work in an area of the school typically reserved for Grade 7 and 8 students. Over the course of the project, the Grade 6 class began to feel more comfortable in the space, aiding in their transition to this wing of the school the following year.

*School Activities Through the Seasons* was designed and painted by the Grade 7 class. The class took photographs of structures in their community through the seasons. Using these photographs and their initial charcoal sketches, they planned an expansive narrative mural which is 14 metres wide (46 feet) by 2.5 metres high (8 feet). The mural runs the length of the school's 2<sup>nd</sup> floor hallway. McNeilly noticed that as students collaborated on the painting, new friendships formed. Some of the students told her that they never spent time with certain classmates under other circumstances, and the art provided an opportunity to get to know their classmates in a new way.



*School Activities Through the Seasons*, Grade 7 class of 2007, St. John's Catholic School, Kitchener, acrylic. Photo: M. McNeilly, *ArtsAccess*.

## Legacy Project Beautifies School

McNeilly is currently facilitating a project whose long-term goal is the beautification of fifteen 10-foot pillars under the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor canopy behind the school. The project has long-term significance for the school. This year, the Grade 7 class will paint five of the fifteen pillars. Each subsequent year, the Grade 8 class plans to paint one pillar while mentoring the Grade 7 class on the project. The process will continue with a new graduation pillar being painted each year, and with the Grade 8 class collaborating with the next Grade 7 class on the process. Since ten pillars remain, the project's legacy has the potential of carrying on for ten more years with each new graduating class. The project is a powerful example illustrating *ArtsAccess*' core principles of art mentorship, collaborative arts practice, and community legacy projects.

For the five pillars to be painted by the Grade 7 class this June, each pillar will represent a theme that is linked to concern for the environment, tying into the students' geography curriculum and the Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery's exhibitions. The themes chosen by the students include poverty, pollution, appreciation for nature, human rights and animal rights.

According to Pam Garbutt, Principal of St. John's Catholic School, "Mosa is like a honorary staff member who has enriched our school through legacy projects. The students have experienced art as an evolving, transformative process through projects that relate to their curriculum and encourage problem-solving and collaboration. The projects have visually transformed the school's interior and exterior, and changed the way students interact with one another. They have learned new outlets for expressing themselves - which has been especially beneficial for our English as a Second Language students. We are delighted by the results and so happy with our *ArtsAccess* partnership."

### St. John's Arts Showcase - April 30



*Small scale models of pillars, Grade 7 class, St. John's Catholic School, Kitchener, acrylic, 2008. Photo: M. McNeilly, ArtsAccess.*

On April 30th, McNeilly and student representatives will present models of the pillars to be completed in June and collaborative poems relating to their pillars' themes. The June exhibition will incorporate an unveiling of the pillars and a spoken word performance outdoors.

"Once I sat down with Mosa and understood how the artistic process was meeting curriculum expectations, I felt more comfortable about giving so much time to the project," said Carlos Roque, the students' Grade 7 teacher. "When you look at the mural, you can see the value."

"Working at St. John's School has been a rewarding experience for everyone involved. We have built a long-term relationship couched in a sense of belonging within the larger school community," explains McNeilly. "The teachers feel more comfortable integrating arts into the curriculum, art has become an



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integral part of the school's culture, and the students have grown comfortable with artistic expression and discovered their gifts. This partnership exemplifies the powerful role of the arts in uplifting and enabling students of all backgrounds to take ownership of their school, and make a beautiful legacy of their presence there."

### **Event Details**

St. John's Catholic School's Arts Showcase

April 30, 2008, 6 - 8 p.m.

22 Strange Street, Kitchener, ON

Call St. John's Catholic School to arrange ticket(s) for pick up at the door: 519-745-7793.

Free admission; donations to the school's arts programs would be appreciated.

### **About ArtsAccess**

Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery's (KW|AG) participation in *ArtsAccess*, a three-year provincial partnership between KW|AG, the Art Gallery of Ontario, Thunder Bay Art Gallery, and Woodland Cultural Centre, provides an alternative approach to programming that draws from community arts practice, with values congruent to the Gallery's goal of transforming the "institutional box" into a catalyst for community development. Over 6300 people have already participated in initiatives through *ArtsAccess*, the majority of whom represent new audiences for KW|AG. Current community partners include: Anishnabeg Outreach, The Children's Museum, Downtown Community Centre, Forest Heights Collegiate Institute, Kitchener Public Library, Kitchener Youth Action Council, the Multi-cultural Centre, Open Sesame, St. John's Catholic School, St. Mary's Secondary School, University of Waterloo, and the Working Centre.

### **About the Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery**

Through thoughtful and engaging programs, the Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery (KW|AG) connects people and ideas through art. The Gallery's exhibits and programs are built on the mission that art is the catalyst for shared experience, dialogue and imagination. The Gallery emphasizes contemporary art, often premiering works by Canadian and international artists. Exhibitions frequently draw upon selections from the 4 000 work permanent collection to provide a forum for dialogue. KW|AG plays a vital educational role in the community, offering a full spectrum of artistic experience for adults, children and families alike. Established in 1956 and operating within Centre In The Square, KW|AG is the oldest and largest public gallery in Waterloo region: roots in the community, eyes on the world. For more information, contact [mail@kwag.on.ca](mailto:mail@kwag.on.ca) or visit [www.kwag.on.ca](http://www.kwag.on.ca).

### **Media Contact**

Tracy Smith

Communications Coordinator

Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery

101 Queen Street North

Kitchener, Ontario

N2H 6P7

[tsmith@kwag.on.ca](mailto:tsmith@kwag.on.ca)

519.579.5860 X222

**Connecting people and ideas through art.**