

THE ADVOCATE

NEWSPAPER ARCHIVES

Summer program teaches art

[Eft Edition]

Advocate - Baton Rouge, La.

Author: DONALD LEE

Date: Jul 10, 2004

Section: News

Tara High School junior Ashley Stuart loves to draw. In fact, she aspires to be so proficient that her work one day will make it to the big screen.

"I came here because I know how to draw a little, but I want to perfect my drawing," the 16-year-old said of the reason she's participating in the Summer Arts Program 2004. "I used to draw cartoon characters. I came here to learn how to draw people, and I want to learn how to draw for animated movies." Stuart is one of more than 40 youths - ages 12 to 20 - in the Melrose East community who are taking part in the summer program sponsored by Melrose East Community Association and Shout-Out USA.

Melrose East Community Association, or MECA, comprises residents, community leaders and business leaders who are working toward improving the quality of life for residents in the area. Shout-Out USA is an extension of Crown Productions, a video production company owned by Jim Colbert, producer of "Shout Out," a teen talk show returning to the air in the fall.

Organizers said the Summer Arts Program, which started July 5 and runs through Aug. 5, helps teach teenagers in the Melrose East community new skills, offers them opportunities to expand their horizons and reinforces positive self-esteem.

"We held a community meeting with the residents and business leaders," said Dana Littles, the 33-year-old secretary for Melrose East Community Association. "At that meeting on June 3, we discussed what could be done to have the youths involved in some type of positive activity.

"Jim Colbert, who had already tried to get his art program off the ground, mentioned starting the art program to the group," Littles said. "And everyone there was in favor of that. And that's where we began."

Littles said property developer Howard Gyler has been vocal about doing something to "change the (crime-related) stigma of what was called Mall City, and he wanted to change that and restore that back to the original community of Melrose East."

There is a need for more activities for youths in the low- to moderate-income area, Littles said. Organizers are doing what they can to meet that need, she said.

"We're offering very valuable solutions and alternatives for our kids - alternatives meaning (their) not being involved in criminal behavior and activities, and instead channeling that energy into something positive and productive," Littles said.

"We wanted to establish a program to raise awareness and self-esteem through art," Colbert said. "All the streets in Melrose East are named after famous artists, like Van Gogh, Monet and Renoir. We're giving them (the kids) history on the various artists whose names have graced the streets of Melrose East."

Sandra Williams-Diggs and Chad Million are two professional artists who are volunteering their time to teach in the program. And the young people are excited about it.

Quintasha Coleman, 12, who attends Broadmoor Middle School, is one of the youths benefiting from the program.

"My cousin and I came to see what Shout Out was about, and they told us they have Friday nights called Mike Nights," said the singer/ dancer. "We performed, and the lady there was telling us about different things that they were doing.

"It's fun," Coleman said of the art program. "Everybody gets a chance to do things that they want to do, like draw, cheerleading, football, basketball. And you get to meet new people, and we get to meet real artists." Bridgette Turner, 16, a junior at Tara High School, said she joined the program because she wanted to learn a new skill.

"I didn't know how to draw, and I wanted to learn," said Turner, whose brother, Sam Turner, 33, is a volunteer in the program. "I'd like to draw cartoon characters and portraits of people."

Chad Million's nephew, Jeffery Million, 12, said he's grateful for the opportunity that the program offers. "I like to draw characters at home," the Melrose Elementary School student said. Along with drawing, the program also is teaching principles for succeeding in life, Jeffery Million said.

The students meet from 10 a.m. until 1 p.m. Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays at Crown Productions Studios, 547 N. Carrollton.

An art show and graduation are scheduled at noon Aug. 7 at the studios.

For more information about Summer Arts Program 2004, contact Jim Colbert at (225) 926-3493.

Donald Lee' e-mail address is djlee@theadvocate.com

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction