



## *Talented Art Teacher And Students Create Sensory Wall Mural*

***By Cheryl Conway***

There is this out of this world mural just completed at the Mt. Olive Middle School in Budd Lake that is not only mind boggling to the eye but to the touch with captivating, interactive games for hours of stimulation.

Known as the Sensory Wall, the school art teacher and talented art students had been painting and building the wall for the past four months with the goal of finishing it by the end of the school year.

Mission accomplished!

Located near the nurse's office, the corridor is being "designed to provide our multiple disabled students with a tactile experience with which to practice fine motor skills," explains MOMS Principal Matthew Robinson.

Anyone who strolls down the newly painted corridor will be swept into a new world surrounded by bright and bold colorful buildings, train, dragon, animals, sun, clouds, planets and at least five interactive games.

"A lot of the teachers and staff are really amazed of what we've done so far," says MOMS Art Teacher Melissa Silvestri, creator of the Sensory Wall mural. "The colors are so bright; the images are so fun." Many say "it makes them happy. One said, 'when I walk down the hallway I forget where I was.' It becomes this alternate universe."

### **Meet The Muralist**

In her third year at MOMS as art teacher for students in grades six through eight, as well as gifted and talented art students in grades seven and eight, Silvestri can now put her name on two murals she designed at the school she used to attend as a student.

After graduating Mt. Olive High School in 2011, Silvestri went on to Rowan University graduating with a double bachelor's degree in art and art education in 2015. She spent her first year as an art teacher at Roxbury High School, and then after maternity leave, applied to the open position at MOMS.

"It was awesome," she says about returning to MOMS, but now as a teacher. "At first it was kind of strange because you see the same teachers you had. I love working at the middle school; staff is very supportive," especially of the first mural she created last year.

Last year's mural stretches 80 feet in the art wing and is based on art history featuring art pieces from throughout the world, explains Silvestri of Hackettstown. That mural incorporates written words in a multitude of languages such as Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Filipino, Spanish, Italian, French, Arabic and Hebrew. The words painted on the mural were created by students who speak that language, she explains.

That mural was the impetus for the Sensory Mural. MOMS vice principals Nicholas Cutro, Christopher Reagan and former principal Susan Breton had suggested a

second mural to Silvestri.

“It was their idea to do a sensory mural,” says Silvestri. “I took it and made it our own.”

### **Sensory Wall Comes To Life**

Silvestri started brainstorming ideas back in December 2018 for the second mural. She invited the art students to draw out conceptual thoughts for the hallway.

“They drew out their own designs,” says Silvestri, such as a dragon and Candyland, which were then used in creating the mural. She “took all their ideas and collaged it into one mural.”

In February, the artists prepared the wall, which was then maroon and white cement, by taping all the edges and priming. In February to March, “kids drew out designs and started painting them.”

Designing and planning was mostly done by the gifted and talented art students in grades seven and eight, she says. Some students involved in the Makers Space also made some parts, she says, as well as some students in the STEAM classes that made some prints with gears to engage fine motoring skills.

Some designs jump out at the viewer bringing some sensory action in the visuals.

“One sensory spot is the dragon,” explains Silvestri. The school carpenter applied the hand-drawn dragon onto a piece of plywood bringing a multi-layered affect.

“Some parts are painted on the wall,” explains Silvestri, and others are on plywood “so they are multi-layered.”

The theme for the wall is “The World of Love,” says Silvestri. “It’s huge,” spanning about 70 feet to 80 feet near the wing for Special Education classes.

Materials used include acrylic paint, plywood, reversible sequins, rugs, mirrors, tennis balls, soccer balls cut in half used to look like a planet in outer space, grout, fake fur, an old door and even old chairs.

When Silvestri asked Cutro for old doors and chairs he had suggested the former Budd Lake School building on 206. With permission, Silvestri took the door from the old school and attached it to the wall.

“When you open the door, you open it to nothing,” explains Silvestri, but a slate.

“You can draw in chalk.”

In another part of the mural, an xylophone is attached to the wall “so kids can play music.”

And then there are interactive games.

Velcro sits above the dragon with letters made out of sponges so students can practice their ABC’s and making sentences by attaching the letters to the Velcro. Sequins also line the dragon to represent its scales to provide the sensory of touch.

Another part features a train with little faces. Students with autism who have trouble communicating can use the faces of the people on the train to express their emotions, says Silvestri.

Other activities and games include a hot air balloon throw bean bag game, magnetic maze and Lego wall.

The mural incorporates “at least five interactive games,” says Silvestri.

With use of the art department’s budget, Silvestri was allotted up to \$2,000 for the Sensory Wall. A fundraiser within the school for Autism Awareness Month in May raised almost an additional \$100.

### **Students’ Creativity Takes Shape**

Art students had been working on the mural during their art class period, during lunch and even during their other classes with permission when all work was completed, says Silvestri. Some of the 70 to 80 students even stayed after school to help with the mural.

While most of the students who contributed to the mural were in the gifted & talented program, other students were also involved, stresses Silvestri.

“If they ask to help, I always say ‘yes,’” she says. “Kids are amazing. They’re really excited. They feel a part of the school by doing the mural. They are so positive, so encouraging in helping each other. It’s a whole positive experience for them.”

The students who will be using the mural the most have been just as excited and will benefit next year when they will be using it in their learning.

Silvestri foresees the students who do have special needs using the mural as part of their lessons, “fine motor skills or to come and relax and decompress.

Sometimes they go in the hallway, this will give them something to use for sensory.”

Michelle Corazza, MOMS special educator, says "The students from my program, as well as students from the middle school, will certainly benefit from the language development, cognitive growth, increased motor skills, problem solving and social interaction which the wall will provide."

Corazza and other teachers are quite impressed with Silvestri's masterpiece. "Ms. Silvestri... she is the brains, brawn, heart and soul behind this entire project," says Corazza. "She and her students have spent countless hours in planning, preparation and activity."

Art, especially creating murals, is Silvestri's passion.

"I love it," says Silvestri. "If I could do murals every year, I would. If they would let me, I would be painting all day" with my students. It's just a fun thing to do. Art is sometimes pushed aside; it's just a happy thing; it's just amazing.

"I just love it so much; I love my job," she continues. "Students are so inspiring; they have so much wisdom and so much creativity; what they've accomplished in such a short time. They feel a part of the school. They feel like they have importance."

Also feeling important are the students who will be using the mural in their development.

"I hope that they feel a part of the school," says Silvestri. "Being and doing all the activities will help them feel like everybody else. The student body is very encouraging with those with special needs.

"Doing the interactive games, it makes the learning fun for them," she continues. "They have an inner child at heart. They are who they are. Being and doing things with the mural will give them positive reinforcement and there's always love and encouragement with other people."

The wall also contains meaningful quotes from all over the world, including Silvestri's favorite spoken by the artist Vincent van Gogh: "There is nothing more truly artistic than to love people."

Concludes Silvestri: "There's nothing more pure and creative. Loving people is a true art form."

## *Photo Gallery*

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## *Varsity Softball Team Hits School Record*

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***By Cheryl Conway***

It was a home hitting season for the Mt. Olive High School Varsity Softball Team, advancing as high as it could and setting the best record in school history. Tallying up all its wins and losses, including the county, state and section games, the team finished its season with 19 wins and seven losses. Accomplishments included: Second runner up in the Morris County Tournament; North 1 Group 4 State champs beating Bergen Tech 7-0; and North Section Group 4 champs beating North Hunterdon 5-2. The varsity team wound up losing 9-4 in the All Group 4 Championship game to Hightstown High School on Saturday, June 1.

The team's success was felt township wide and expressed when emergency vehicles escorted and greeted the girls upon their return after losing in the finals. "They gave us a hero's welcoming even though we lost," says Bill Romano, MOHS softball coach. "Firetrucks, ambulances and police escorted us when we got back on 206."

In his 10th year as coach of the MOHS girls' varsity softball team, Romano was quite pleased by his team's performance this year.

"It was really amazing what we've done," says Romano, going back to back with county finals and group 4 championship, which "has never been done here. It's great that the girls accomplished that."

The 2019 season started on the first Friday in March and involved 20 girls in grades 9-12 playing on the varsity level.

"It was a season to remember," says Dave Falleni, athletic director at MOHS.

"They were such a resilient team; they never gave up- working hard all the way to the last out. They were a true pleasure to watch and follow all year and I look forward to next year."

Romano, who also works for the Mt. Olive Board of Education Buildings and Grounds Department, credits the skill level of his players and their will to keep playing hard.

"Four or five years ago, we got a group of freshmen that set the goal high so we've been climbing ever since," says Romano. "We're fairly young; juniors this year were sophomores last year. The experience helped us repeat what we did last year and get a step further."

Last year, the MOHS varsity softball team was conference champs, won its state section title North 1 Group 4 but then lost in the semi-finals against North Hunterdon, says Romano.

This year, the team got to play in the finals.

"We got one step further by playing in the championship finals," says Romano, a 1989 alumnus of MOHS.

The girls kept playing and playing with a mind-set void of strike-outs.

"They just had this never quit attitude," says Romano.

While losing in the finals was not the plan, says Romano, the team's spirit was lifted when the players realized how many fans applauded their effort. "Nobody takes losing well," says Romano. "You get to that game; you want to win that last game. With coaching you see kids handle things differently."

Once they saw the ambulance, fire trucks, and emergency vehicles, "Everything lightened up a little bit," says Romano. "They enjoyed the moment coming back to school."

Even Romano had a hard time accepting the defeat.

A lot of my family and friends reminded him: "You had a great year; you made school history. I'm a competitor, I want to win. But, I've never been more proud of a bunch of girls. I'm extremely proud at the way the ladies performed this year."

As a former wrestler at Mt. Olive High School, as well as a coach since he was 21 of wrestling, baseball and softball in Roxbury, Hopatcong and Mt. Olive- Romano appreciates the competition and willingness to guide his team to improve every year.

"To get to the next step," he says the team needs "to continue doing what we're doing. Play softball over the summer," and play other sports to keep the body conditioned is important. "A lot are multi-sport athletes which is big," playing volleyball, soccer, field hockey and basketball.

"They put the bat down and enjoy being a student athlete," says Romano.

"Unfortunately, we lost," he concludes. "The thing that makes this team special is a no quit attitude. Doesn't matter what the score is... comes with the drive, you can't coach that. That's why we were so successful."

## *Career Center Opens At Local Library For Businesses To Meet*

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***By Cheryl Conway***

With more companies running their businesses without an office building, the need for space to hold meetings or presentations may be growing.

Working at home can be great for an entrepreneur and employees, but sometimes the need for sitting around that board table to hammer out ideas or view slides remains. Aware of this issue, The Mt. Olive Public Library now provides a new Career Center free to use by local residents, and for a small fee to those living outside of Mt. Olive.

The MOPL celebrated the completion of its new Career Center with an open house held on June 2, from 12:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m., sponsored by the Library's Board of Trustees. The newly refurbished and redesigned space now offers this convenient location to hold business meetings, training sessions and private conferences. "This place is ready for our residents if they do come here in need," says Mauro Magarelli, director of the MOPL.

With a multitude of resources, computers, rooms for story times and other events, more libraries are providing space for businesses to utilize, explains Magarelli.

This is a "space for career people," says Magarelli, "that's the forgotten group. A lot of libraries are thinking of that now too. A lot of entrepreneurs who do not have space. There is interest in doing this throughout the state."

Magarelli thought of the idea for "a private space in libraries for business" a few years back when he began as library director.

"When I started here three years ago, I noticed I had a computer lab underutilized," says Magarelli, with outdated computers that students were not using. He also noticed a lot of adult learners looking for space.

The new Career Center can be reserved for interviews, skype calls, meetings and board room meetings, says Magarelli.

"That's the purpose," Magarelli says, to be used by "local businesses, career people, law enforcement, teachers, space to do work."

The Career Center is in the far end of the library near the administrative offices and near the magazines, explains Magarelli.

It's "not a huge room," says Magarelli, adding that it can fit 12 to 15 people. It is a "typical office board room."

To prepare the room, Magarelli had the old computers removed and the room remodeled. A student from Kean University studying design offered to complete

the room for course-work credit.

With a limited budget, Magarelli says, this “gave us a really good starting point.” Remaining funds came from the Friends of MOPL and private donors, he adds. Out of a \$5,000 budget, the room was so far completed for less than \$3,500, he adds.

The “board room setting” features a large board-room style table, eight chairs, projector screen, white board, WIFI and small side desk on the far end for a laptop or computer, he explains.

Magarelli describes the room as a “modern room to conduct business” strictly for “people looking for space to do work,” rather than tutors or private study which “95 percent of the library” can be used for.

His hope is to add resources to make the room more of a resource center with business books and other materials. One idea is to offer the Gale Small Business Builder, a step by step planning tool with tutorials to guide individuals on how to start, manage and optimize a business or nonprofit.

“It’s a work in progress,” says Magarelli, “I don’t have a work crew.” Completion of the room took about a year, he says, with new carpeting installed and wallpaper lining one side of the room. “It’s an evolving room” with maybe more devices to come.

Magarelli stresses that the Career Center is not a place for businesses to make money, but more of a space to utilize as a means to operate a business or “plan out detail.”

He says “it’s a meeting space, workspace. People don’t come in here to make a profit.”

So far the room has been used by about three or four small businesses, the Friends of MOPL, for an instructional course, language course for adults and sign language, he says.

They have used the white board and computer; “they hash it out and they’re done. They seem very grateful for the space.”

It is free to Mt. Olive residents, those working in non-profit businesses, and is also open to non-residents to reserve for a small fee of \$25, he says. The room is locked and must be reserved to utilize. To reserve, call the library administration office at 973-691-8686, ext. 100.

Time restrictions may apply based on demand and availability, says Magarelli. “There are some limitations for fairness,” says Magarelli, as “we don’t want people monopolizing the room.”

## *Local Library News*

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### **Carnival At MO Public Library Gets Kids Reading**

Join the Mt. Olive Public Library for a Stellar Summer Reading Program.

Registration is now open. Blast off with a Carnival on June 21 from 10 a.m.-1p.m.

Many exciting programs will be offered to attend this summer.

Full brochure is online at [<http://www.mopl.org>][www.mopl.org](http://www.mopl.org)

### **Slide Into Summer At Local Library Events**

All grades are welcome to join on June 22 at 10 a.m. for the Summer Reading Blast Off. There will be space carnival games, crafts, and an Out of this World author workshop.

A “**College Funding Seminar**” is set for Thursday, June 20, at 7 p.m. in the Gathering Room.

This free seminar, presented by Alvin G. Newell, vice president of Solutions for College Funding, Inc., explains what every parent should know about getting maximum financial aid funding for their college-bound high school sophomores and juniors.

Registration requested. Call 973-691-8686 Ext. 106 or go to [www.mopl.org](http://www.mopl.org) to register.

## *Around the town*

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### Golf Tournie Supports American Liver Foundation

The Market Place & Tavern is sponsoring its 2nd Annual Golf Tournament Honoring Jeff Kamin on Monday, July 15, from 7:30 a.m. to 6 p.m., at the Flanders Valley Golf Course in Flanders. Proceeds will go directly to the American Liver Foundation.

After more than a year in recovery, Kamin is fighting the fight and his progress is gaining momentum. Sick for a few months before they uncovered the disease, Kamin was very fortunate to have been selected as a recipient, due to the severity of the disease, for this operation. Kamin is progressing to the point that he finally asked Michelle for her hand in marriage. A wedding is planned for November of 2019.

The mission of the American Liver Foundation (ALF) is to facilitate, advocate and promote educational support and research for the prevention, treatment and care of this disease. Donations will help bring awareness to liver disease and provide financial support for educational programs and patient services offered to the millions of Americans battling one of the 100 liver diseases.

Join in the celebration of Kamin's road to recovery at the golf outing. Now is the time. Prizes will include: Team Winner; Longest Drive; Closest to Pin.

Continental Breakfast is set for 7:30 a.m. at Market Tavern. Registration is at 8:30 a.m. at Flanders Valley Golf Course. Tee-Time: 9 a.m. at Flanders Valley Golf

Course. Banquet reception: 3 p.m. – 6 p.m. at Market Tavern.

RSVP at 973-997-3506 or [brucerwallace@yahoo.com](mailto:brucerwallace@yahoo.com).

Sponsorships include: Breakfast: \$200; Luncheon: \$200; Golf Cart: \$250; Closest to Pin: \$250. Golfer Pricing: Individual: \$150; Foursome: \$600; Dinner Only: \$100. For those who can't attend, optional donation appreciated.

Each player package includes green fees, cart, gift, buffet luncheon, on-course refreshments, contests and dinner reception.

Please send payment of cash or check payable to Kamin Open, and Mail to Bruce Wallace, 76 Clover Hill Drive, Flanders, N.J. 07836

### *Water Report Is In*

Please be advised that the Township of Mt. Olive "Annual Drinking Water Quality Report" is available on-line by logging into the following link:

[http://www.mtolivetwp.org/water\\_quality.html](http://www.mtolivetwp.org/water_quality.html)

Hard copies are also available in the Tax Office at Town Hall or by calling 973-584-7086.



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*NEWS AT COUNTY COLLEGE OF MORRIS*

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## CCM Displays Artists' Work In Summer Exhibition

The County College of Morris (CCM) in Randolph plans to host a Summer Art Exhibition, featuring the work of students in the Summer Portfolio and Presentation course taken at the college.

A reception is set for to be held in the Learning Resource Center Thursday, June 20, from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. The reception is free and open to the public.

The portfolio course completes the work of Fine Art and Design students' creative studies at CCM. The class teaches students valuable skills such as how to create effective presentations, market their work to prospective clients and museums, and present portfolios to four-year institutions following graduation.

A Portfolio and Presentation course is offered each semester at CCM, concluding with an art exhibition highlighting selected work.

Students exhibiting in the Summer Art Exhibition this year include Susan Harrsch, of West Milford; John Lyssikatos, of Morristown; Lia Scherr, of Rockaway; Sarah Sci, of Mendham; Kevin Testa, of Chester; and Allison Zavaleta, of Stirling. For additional information, contact Marco Cutrone at [mcutrone@ccm.edu](mailto:mcutrone@ccm.edu).

## Shelter For Battered Women And Kids Seek Solutions

With more than 60,000 children going to bed hungry or living in shelters, the plea for help continues for New Jersey people in crises. Women and children who have been thru domestic violence and abuse, often with little job training (even college grads are working as waitresses or cab drivers) are expected to rebuild their lives in 60-90 days. Before going off to vacation this summer, think about what can be done and either support a local shelter or offer some solutions. Keep in mind that the children are the future.

Thru a great miracle Strengthen Our Sister's (SOS) mortgage note was assumed by Columbia Bank.

"For this we are eternally grateful and although we are assured, we won't lose our seven houses, we don't have money for utilities and gas," says Sandra Ramos, founder of SOS. "While we worked diligently to keep paying the mortgage when it was in foreclosure, we got behind on operation costs. DFC is trying to help and we're working with them; however, we need your support. The dedicated people that comprise the SOS unpaid staff (10) are working day and night. We accept people most of whom are not eligible for Social Service payments because they have already utilized their 60 days' worth of per diems and other shelters turn them away.

"This is horrendous and unfair and we urge you to support and reach out to others that want to help change this situation," says Ramos. "This is a state-wide problem - four N.J. shelters are closing because sometimes people refuse to leave at the end of their time limit as they have nowhere to go. The shelter operators are forced to go to landlords tenant court, which can take up to three months for an eviction; during this time the shelter does not receive reimbursements for those participants.

"We do need money, but let's also work together and start a grass roots action to change N.J.'s stipulation limiting a shelter stay for only 60-90 days (60 if you're battered and 90 if homeless)," says Ramos. "It's unfair to think a person coming out of an abusive situation can go into fortifying and preparing a person to take charge of their life and start on the road to become an independent, strong person after being beaten down. They not only have themselves to renew, but

the children often need counseling, tutoring, etc. Sixty days is simply too short a time.

“Our miracles take a little longer, but the results are priceless.”

For more details or brain-storming ideas, call Sandra Ramos, at 973-831-0898 or email [susanscb@comcast.net](mailto:susanscb@comcast.net).

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