

Dr. Ed Hightower named EAC Patron of the Arts recipient for 2014

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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Dr. Ed Hightower, Superintendent of Schools for Edwardsville District 7, has been named the Edwardsville Arts Center Patron of the Arts recipient for 2014.

Elizabeth Link, interim director of the EAC, said that the success achieved at the Edwardsville Arts Center would not have been possible without the vision and support of Dr. Hightower. “Dr. Hightower recognized from the outset the potential benefits of a partnership between the school district and EAC.”

The Edwardsville Arts Center Board approached Dr. Hightower and the District 7 Board of Education in 2010 in search of a permanent home for the Edwardsville Arts Center.

Dr. Hightower and the Board of Education worked collaboratively with the EAC to establish the Edwardsville Arts Center utilizing two classrooms in the east wing of Edwardsville High School. The EAC Board then raised the necessary funds to renovate and open the center in April 2011.

EAC Board President Jacquelyn Dezort said, “Due to Ed’s vision, the EAC has been able to focus on our mission ‘to inspire the lives of youth and the creative spirit of adults through classes, exhibits and cultural events.’ Before the partnership, the EAC was forced to focus primary energies on fundraising. Ed was able to imagine the amazing benefits the partnership could bring to his students. We would not have accomplished half of our current successes without his foresight.”



Art education within the district has greatly benefitted from the partnership, Link said. “High school students and the students in elementary and middle schools all treat the EAC gallery as an ‘in district’ field trip. They have had and continue to have access to world-class art from the archives of SIUE as well as from local and international

artists. Teachers are encouraged to include the displayed art into their curriculum, with classes in social studies, literature, biology, and many others taking advantage of the varied exhibits.”

In 2011, EAC began hosting the Southwestern Conference Regional Art Competition. All schools within the conference are invited to compete, including Belleville, Alton, Granite City, O’Fallon, and Edwardsville.

The EAC began partnering with District 7 Summer Zone, the District’s school-based childcare program in 2014 by offering Masterpiece Mondays. Each student enrolled in Summer Zone is provided art classes for one hour each week at no additional cost. The program was so successful that the class time is being doubled for the 2015 Summer Zone program. Masterpiece Mondays’ artwork is one of the featured shows in the Dennis DeToye Student Gallery.

“The students are so proud to see their work displayed in a professional gallery space,” Link said. “And as they view their art and the art in the main gallery, you can see the joy that art is bringing to their lives.”

With the financial stability that is due in large part to the partnership with the school district, and with revenues from the Edwardsville Art Fair, EAC is now able to offer free art classes for children every Saturday. Free classes to high school students will be offered twice a week, beginning in January. Carolyn Tidball, the EAC Gallery Manager, will teach these classes.

“I am excited to be able to add to the curriculum offered by the district, as I know many students have difficulty fitting the district’s art classes into their class schedules, or they just crave more art instruction,” Link said.

The Dennis DeToye Student Gallery has inspired children throughout the District to continue to hone their talent, as each school within the district has work exhibited annually in the gallery. This “in school art gallery” is unique in public high schools. The only comparable gallery in our region exists at John Burroughs School, a private school in St. Louis.

Dr. Hightower and his family offered the EAC their personal support as well. All were included in the sponsors of the first African American Only art show in 2014 and are members of the EAC. In addition, Dr. Hightower has supported the ongoing development of the Sculpture Garden, which EAC hopes to expand to include the grounds at all schools within the district.

The EAC will honor Dr. Hightower at a reception at the Edwardsville Arts Center at EHS from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. on Jan. 29. The public is invited to attend. E-mail Elizabeth Link at liz.lin@edwardsvilleartscenter.com for more information.

