

Croatian Group Meets With Local Class At The Macoupin Arts Collective

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STAUNTON - The Macoupin Arts Collective (the MAC) hosted an international meeting between two art classes for senior citizens via Zoom on Nov. 9th at the studio in Staunton. Seniors from area towns including Carlinville, Staunton, Edwardsville, and New Douglas met with another art class of seniors in Zagreb, the capital of Croatia to create art together.

All of the Croatian participants live and work in Zabreb but only two of them are originally from there, the Croatian instructor Vonja explained. One is from the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the town of Zenica, one is from Cakovec in northern Croatia and one is from the east in Osijek.

Jan Gann, the American leader at the MAC spent three years in Croatia several years ago and became good friends with Vonja during that time. Both wanted to try to have the two classes meet via Zoom to meet and work together.

The Expressive Arts Program was born with the idea that the pandemic was isolating our older population who would enjoy the opportunity for a social occasion to visit with new friends while learning ways to create and enjoy art. With the work of long-time volunteer and supporter Ms. Jan Gann to dream up this program, the MAC began to offer sessions for seniors last year. The classes are designed to offer companionship, conversation, and support through art.

The format of Expressive Arts depends on participant voices. Our classes are open-ended and student-led in content. The first class each session allows students to map the skills they hope to learn and share the skills they may know or be willing to lead the class in learning. This input allows time to focus on the artistic interests of the group, or redirect to collaborative ideas as they arise.

The instructors seek frequent feedback on the pace and direction of the class. If the class enjoys the watercolor painting, then the class will agree that next week may be a continuation. If not, another form of artistic expression is explored.

The staff at the MAC are finding that this program is helping the students to gain independence, companionship, and a greater sense of well-being through this program. Art is a way to work through problems of everyday life and these classes meet every week.

Bernie Gietl. of Carlinville and a board member of the MAC, attended this special event and participated in the group in an interesting painting activity. Fifteen words were suggested after introductions were completed, and each student chose any five of the words and wrote them on their paper using their opposing hand. Next, everyone picked a color of paint that they felt represented each word on their list and they painted one of each color on the word that the color represented—five colors, five words.

Then, continuing with the opposing hand, everyone was asked to paint whatever and however, they chose on top of the words and colors. The third step was to paint again over the words and colors and create a picture of anything they chose that all of the words represented. When everyone had completed their paintings, each participant in

both groups had the opportunity to show and explain their painting. The levels of ability varied but with everyone using their opposing hand to create their art, the creativity flowed freely. Bernie said it was so interesting to see the greatly varied paintings and hear the ideas behind them.

On Thursday the 15 people enjoyed this exceptional experience with new Croatian friends and hope to share another session in the future.

Expressive Arts are offered every Thursday from 10:30-12:30 and \$10 is asked for every student OR a student can volunteer for two hours for the MAC and class is free.

More information about the MAC is available at macart.org or visit the studio located on Main Street in Staunton where 10-30 local artists have decorative, useful, and delightful items for sale during the Macidays Holiday Sale. Part of each sale helps to support the MAC and the programs offered to students from all over Macoupin and Madison counties. Classes are for children and adults. The proceeds from events like this sale support the hundreds of free art activities for those with challenges or barriers to art opportunities in our area.