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Art on the Move

Art on the Move, is just as its title suggests. Bucks County Intermediate Unit No. 22 in Pennsylvania owns and loans a valuable art collection to bring art and art curriculum to students, regardless of where they live or go to school.

By John Fitzgerald

Many people play the lottery. Not many win. But what if a previous lottery winner gave you some reasonable advice that will help you or your heirs win the lottery years from now? Would you listen?

Mark Hoffman, the executive director of Bucks County Intermediate Unit No. 22 in Doylestown, Pennsylvania, is sitting on the art equivalent of a lottery victory.

In 1949, County Superintendent of Schools Charles H. Boehm joined with artist Walter Emerson Baum to work with the world-renowned New Hope Art Colony – conveniently located in Bucks County – to establish The Traveling Art Gallery, a lending library of original art. The gallery allowed art to be available to all Bucks County students, not only a privileged few, and for the students to understand their art heritage. The two men dedicated the new gallery on Sept. 9, 1949 with 70 paintings donated by colony artists.

An Investment in Art and Education

Fast-forward to 1989 and the Bucks IU decided to re-evaluate the items in the gallery. To do so, an Arts Education Trust Board was created to oversee the collection and the first order of business was to conduct an appraisal of the collection, which had grown to more than 170 pieces. The appraisal found that, counting for inflation and the increased fame of the painters, the collection was now worth \$4.5 million.

Sensing an opportunity, the Arts Education Trust Board partnered with the newly founded James A. Michener Art Museum in Doylestown to care for the paintings when they were not out on loan. With the advent of the Bucks IU and Michener Art Museum partnership, a grant was procured to re-establish the mission of the original Traveling Art Gallery. In 2001, the Art on the Move program, the modern version of the Traveling Art Gallery, created several six-piece collections using art from the original collection. Each collection was accompanied by a six to eight-week K-12 interdisciplinary curriculum written by Bucks County teachers. Sixteen years later, Art on the Move has 11 collections, each available to any public, private, parochial or charter school in the county.

When participating in Art on the Move, schools integrate the curriculum into their districts' K-12 arts curriculum for that semester. A teacher at a school will sponsor one of the collections and, along with the paintings, will get an updated interdisciplinary K-12 curriculum. This curriculum has been specifically developed for the collection and instructs teachers on how to use the paintings in disciplines such as science, math, social studies, art, theater, language arts, history and technology.

“We offer an inservice for faculty and continued outreach on how to integrate the art into every discipline,” said Edwina Frasca-Stuart, the director of teaching, learning and staff development for the IU. The Art on the Move educator visits

the school and introduces lessons to the students and teachers. The curriculum brings a higher understanding of art while supporting educational growth and development.

“Teachers say students become more engaged in their studies when they work with the art and we know that research confirms that the achievement gap gets smaller and students perform better on SAT tests, drop out less and achieve more when they engage with art,” Frasca-Stuart said.

Growing in size and value

In 2016, Art on the Move received a \$15,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to develop a new collection of six paintings and its accompanying curricula that is directly linked to STEAM disciplines. That project should be finished by the beginning of next school year.

When a school participates in the Art on the Move program, they celebrate the culmination of their projects at a community night in which students’ artwork, art-inspired writing, and other projects related to their Art on the Move collection, are exhibited for parents, friends, and community members to enjoy.

Not all of the artwork is in the Art on the Move program. Some of the art is on display throughout the Bucks IU offices. “Our offices have a very different feel than most office complexes,” Frasca-Stuart said. “We receive numerous comments on the specialness of being surrounded by the works of Bucks County master artists.”

In addition, the Bucks IU features a gallery each year of 18 to 20 pieces of the best artwork from students throughout the county, framed to museum specifications. Each March a reception is held to honor the student artists. Parents, friends, teachers, administrators, and board members gather to view each student artist receive a special certificate and to hear the students say a few words about their art.

The Bucks IU has two additional galleries. There is an ongoing exhibit of artwork from the students who participate in Bucks IU special education art classes and a rotating art gallery for contemporary Bucks County artists.

This lesson from the past can serve as a model for a future art education

All of this is nice if you have a multi-million-dollar art collection at your fingertips. But what if you don’t? Hoffman has a suggestion: “Administrators can’t go back to the 1940s and do what our predecessors had the foresight to do. However, they can still start a partnership with contemporary artists living in their area and start accumulating art.” Capitalizing on the artistic community located within a school’s geographic area and working with educators to create an interdisciplinary curriculum is easily replicated.

Starting an Arts on the Move program is cost effective, supports student learning, and fosters student engagement while honoring the heritage of each area. Hoffman concluded, “I would encourage educational service agency leaders to partner with their local communities in pursuit of high quality programming that celebrates the arts and education.” For more information, go to artonthemove.net or call Bucks County Intermediate Unit No. 22 at 215-348-2940. Bucks County has more than 96,000 students in more than 270 schools.