

Art teacher offers sessions on how to survive in business

By Geri Crawford
special writer

As school districts across the nation face budget cuts, staff reductions and declining enrollments, the very existence of art departments is in jeopardy. Art educator, Janice Plank, former Franklin resident and Groves High School graduate, looks to the Getty Center for Education in the Arts as a means for putting and keeping "art" in the mainstream of education.

"The Getty Trust is planning to spend \$50 to \$50 million, annually, on art education in public and private schools. This is the first time money of this magnitude has been available to art programs," said Plank, art department chairwoman and curriculum consultant for the Whitehall City Schools, near Columbus, Ohio.

The Getty Center, part of the J. Paul Getty Trust, in collaboration with the Rand Corp., recently completed a year-long study on the status of art education in schools throughout the country.

FROM AN ORIGINAL field of 600 school districts, seven, including Whitehall, were selected for further evaluation and documentation, based on the use of history, criticism and production in their art programs.

According to press releases, the Getty, deeply concerned about the quality of arts education in the school, believes

that "understanding and appreciation of the arts is essential to a balanced education."

The Whitehall art curriculum, which Plank presented at the National Art Educators Association convention at the Renaissance Center in March, is based on a philosophy which Plank described.

"Our curriculum consists of one-third art history, one-third criticism and one-third product. The whole concept is new," she said, citing the need to convince administrators, school board officials and parents that art is more than the production of take-home craft items or drawings, if art programs are going to survive the revenue crunch.

Whitehall children do have "hands-on experiences," but they are the end results of study, not the major focus of an art class.

From kindergarten through high school, students are exposed to art history, art criticism and the role art plays in society. Their projects develop from museum trips and artists' visits, as well as class instruction.

Plank added that much of the learn-

ing transfers to other areas as students apply their knowledge of art to economics, history, literature and other subjects. The curriculum is adapted to the emotionally and physically handicapped student.

"Our elementary students have 80 minutes of art instruction per week and each of the seven schools in the district — elementary and secondary — has a full-time art educator," said Plank.

Plank, a master's degree candidate at Ohio State University, spearheaded the development and writing of the present Whitehall curriculum five years ago. She also designed a curriculum for the artistically gifted. Whitehall is the only school district in Ohio with such a program.

Realistically, Plank said, "With art education, in general, being cut back so badly, the arts, no matter how fantastic, will not survive. We need to find a way to get teachers involved in art history and criticism and to get children interested in works of art and to verbalize about them."

Teachers and students are involved and enthusiastic in Whitehall, a blue-collar, lower-middle-class community where parents can seldom afford private art lessons or art gallery excursions.

"SUCCESS BREEDS enthusiasm," explained Plank, "we have highly

motivated people who started with nothing and wrote a curriculum which saved the art department and their jobs when a levy defeat was imminent."

This curriculum, she said, brought national recognition to the staff, school district and community.

She is confident that other school districts can put "art in the mainstream of education," too. By taking advantage of the research results which will be published by Getty next year, educators and school personnel will have a blueprint for programs based on the "models" now under study.

The Getty Center anticipates using the data to develop institutes for teachers and principals and seminars for superintendents and school board members, thus broadening the understanding of art history and criticism as the basis of an art curriculum.

In Whitehall, the recognition and enthusiasm has gone beyond the art department and into the front office.

Two elementary school principals have been honored by the National Art Education Association and the National Association of Elementary School Principals with awards for supporting the arts within the district.

One of the winners, Howard Miller, principal of Beechwood School where Plank teaches, told her that he learns something new every time he goes into her classroom.

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