

CHAT ROOM



Tracey Gies

Community service projects go to next level

I graduated from Farmington High School last year, and I am now attending Central Michigan University. From my experience, Farmington seems fairly informed about community service projects organized and completed by high school students. However, after these high school students graduate, as I did, little is ever heard about them. Consequently, it may be assumed that the service projects that occur in Farmington only influence those within the city limits. This is not true.

Although I can't claim that I significantly impacted the Farmington community while I lived there, I can say that my volunteer experience in Farmington helped to inspire me to do more. Through a program called Alternative Spring Break, I was recently given the opportunity to take my volunteer experiences to an international level. It proved to be a life-changing adventure.

Many volunteer options

At CMU, Alternative Spring Break is a program run by United Way and our Volunteer Center. This year, about 80 students participated in 10 sites around the country. We had the option to deal with issues such as poverty, hunger or AIDS. I chose to volunteer for the Heifer Project International (HPI) at its Overlook Farm located in Rutland, Mass.

When I first got on the bus for the long ride to Rutland, I really had no idea what I was getting into. I had an idea that I would be vaccinating animals, milking goats, or tapping maple trees.

I had no idea that I would be contributing to the fight against world hunger. Before the trip began, I was among the vast majority of people who have no idea - no idea what HPI is about.

In addition to chores and daily projects, we attended an educational session each day at the Overlook Farm. We learned about issues such as world hunger, organic farming, and HPI.

Fighting world hunger

I was amazed at the magnitude of HPI and the number of lives it has improved and saved over the past 50 years.

With more than 300 projects in 38 countries, HPI has provided more than a million hungry families with gifts of livestock and the training necessary to care for these gifts. The livestock is then able to provide the families with protein that is essential for survival.

When the family is given the livestock, however, there is one condition that must be met: the first female offspring of the animal must be given to another family in need. In this way, the gift can be shared over and over again.

Making a difference

As is often the case with life and mind altering experiences, it is disheartening to return home only to find that people have no idea about your experience, no idea about HPI or how they too can help.

This is why I am writing. I want Farmington to know that Farmington graduates are making a difference at an international level.

I also want Farmington to know that they can help. Volunteers are always welcome and quite frankly, I could not think of a more rewarding way to spend time.

Of course, donations can also be sent to the HPI headquarters at Heifer Project International, P.O. Box 808, Little Rock, Ark. 72203.

There is hope for world hunger and projects such as HPI are making a difference, in the lives of volunteers as well as the lives of the hungry. Call HPI at 1-800-422-0474 or fax the organization at (601) 378-8906.

Farmington native Tracey Gies is a freshman student at Central Michigan University in Mount Pleasant.

Chat Room is always looking for new perspectives to feature in this space. If you live or work in Farmington and have an idea for a column, please contact Mary Rodrigue at 477-5450.

Capturing feelings on canvas

1998 Artist in Residence Danguole Jurgutis wants viewers to draw their own conclusions from her work.



Farmington's 1998 Artist in Residence, Danguole Jurgutis, wants viewers to use their imagination when they see her work.

Faces and landscapes might be felt or implied, but they are not easily discernible on her canvases.

"I like to make myself wonder and make the viewer wonder," said Jurgutis, a Lithuanian emigrant who has called Farmington Hills home for nearly 30 years.

She points to a work from the series she calls *Odyssey*.

"There is movement, search for nature, forms here and out in space." It is that ethereal quality that is common to her work, from the collage and other mixed media pieces she displays in her sprawling ranch home to the acrylic painted canvases and watercolors.

Jurgutis (pronounced: your good is) has had a prolific arts career for two decades now. Listening to her practical father's advice, she sought a more stable career choice initially. She earned a degree from Wayne State University and worked as a pharmacist before surrendering to her creative side.

Her works have been featured in group exhibits from Toronto to Texas, the Lincoln Center in New York to the Detroit Institute of Arts. She is a member of the Farmington Arts Club and the Birmingham Bloomfield Art Association. She has had one-woman shows at the Clurlionis Art Gallery in Chicago, the Atrium Gallery in Northville and the Cary Gallery in Rochester.

Her work is in private collections in the U.S., Canada, Lithuania, England and Japan.

Her style is to create series of works with names like *Image*, *Reflections*, and *Odyssey*.

"I'm trying to evoke feelings," she said.

Back to nature

Nature is a recurring inspiration. "I was a Girl Scout leader. We camped out a lot. I was impressed by the bright white nights."

Orbs that could be interpreted as full moons are apparent on many canvases.

"I like the circle. It's a symbol of eternity. It's very interesting to include spheres in a square canvas. I like to include symbols in my art. My works are not explicit. I strive to be mysterious. You bring your own experience to each piece."

Jurgutis has two grown children; son Paul is a biochemist in Chicago, daughter Asta is a Hewlett-Packard worker by day and a rock singer by night with Hope Orchestra and lives in Farmington. Another son, Darius, passed away in 1975 following a short bout with cancer at age 15.

"After his death, I went to London, England to study art," Jurgutis said. "I came back to Michigan in 1977 and created a series called *Inner Images*."

Some of that work was published in a volume called *Lithuanian Artists in North America*. In it, she explained



Odyssey Series: Above, Danguole Jurgutis in her dining room, which showcases some of her works.

"these were somber landscapes of the soul where sorrow and spiritual pain were vividly expressed in dark colors and angry looking nervous lines. A bright spot appeared in these paintings the shape of the moon, shining brightly, signaling hope."

Hope springing eternal is a recurring theme.

Seeing the world

Travel is another source of inspiration. Jurgutis and her husband, George, have traveled all over Europe, the Middle East and Asia.

"I think my creativity and approach are kind of mystical. That was inspired by trips to the Far East: China, Thailand, Singapore, and Bali." She also enjoys the northern Michigan seashore. Some of her paintings were started on the sandy beaches of Lake Michigan, but always completed in her home studio since so much of what she puts on the canvas is a reflection of her internal feelings.

Of her latest honor, being named Farmington Artist in Residence for 1998, she said: "I was just delighted. I am honored." Her husband was the first to get the call from the arts committee and welcomed her home with a bottle of champagne to celebrate the award.

"I work every day," she said. "I think it's important, sometimes I paint for eight hours, sometimes just a few hours after supper." Recently, a beautiful large bird she spotted near the creek that runs through her backyard inspired her to the canvas.

Over the years, influences have included English painter Joseph Turner: "I like Turner for space and atmos-

Please see **ARTIST, B2**



Odyssey: Raw emotions expressed on canvas.

Art teacher, dance instructor

Two women honored for distinguished service to arts

Two women with vast experience in their respective fields received 1998 Distinguished Service to the Arts awards from the Farmington Community Arts Council.

Dancer and teacher Virginia Dickerman



Ellen Wallis

and high school art instructor Ellen Wallis were honored.

In a nominating letter on her behalf, Farmington High assistant principal Mary Brown wrote of Ellen Wallis: "I observe a woman totally committed to her students and their development as artists. Her conversations with students, her excitement in showing me their work, her words of encouragement to new teachers in her department, her patience with me as she helped me improve my understanding of art, all were the hallmark of a truly fine teacher and artist."

Dedicated teacher
One of her students, Ray Matson, wrote: "I can't count the number of times Mrs. Wallis has inconvenienced herself helping me to achieve personal success. Just over a month ago, she stayed after school until 8 p.m. so that I could finish and matt my work for the scholastic arts competition. Without her, I would not be attending the Center for Creative Studies on scholarship in the fall."

Wallis is listed in the fifth edition of *Who's Who Among America's Teachers*,

1998. She was nominated by a former student.

Wallis helped develop Farmington Public Schools first kindergarten through 12th grade art curriculum and surveyed many art texts to find the right one to recommend for purchase by the district.

While assigned to East Middle School, she gathered art work created by bilingual students from all Farmington Schools and put together a large multi-cultural art exhibit for the annual bilingual dinner.

She keeps framed student art work continually rotating through several Farmington businesses. She can always be found at the annual Festival of the Arts held every April hanging and organizing student work.

Wallis earned a bachelor of fine arts degree from Western Michigan University in 1960 and a master of arts degree from Eastern Michigan in 1972. She received middle school endorsement in 1980 and continues her education through ongoing inservice workshops and classes.

She began her career as an art teacher in Lawton in 1960 and came to

the Farmington Schools as a substitute teacher in 1963. By 1967, she was teaching art in the community education program. In 1975, she became an

Please see **SERVICE TO ARTS, B3**



Virginia Lee Dickerman