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Section **A**

Local Elks win grant to help at-risk teens

By Dorothy Bliskey

At-risk teens in Fond du Lac are spending constructive, self-esteem-building time in an art class designed just for them. The Open Art Studio, held weekly for at-risk teens, is the result of the largest grant ever awarded to the Fond du Lac Elks Lodge #57.

Trista Holz, a local artist and Elks member, wrote and submitted the application for the Community Impact Grant last summer in hopes that it would lead to a project that would help troubled teens turn their lives around. Eight weeks after applying she got the word the Fond du Lac Elks had won.

"I had a lot of help from other Elks members and from fellow artist Beata Lieders who now oversees the Open Art Studio on Thursday nights at the Windhover where she works. When I heard we had won the grant, I was so excited," Holz said. "I was heading out on a vacation when I got the call. It made my vacation all the sweeter."

"This is the largest grant our Elks Club has received since we began in Fond du Lac in 1904," said Scott Reath, an Elks member who will take over as president in April and who helped Holz with the grant. "The Elks National Foundation only awards 53 Community Impact grants a year nationwide, and not all of them are fully funded at the maximum \$10,000. But we got the full amount."

The Open Art Studio that resulted from the Community Impact grant is an open-ended art session for teens at risk of juvenile delinquency. The program allows troubled teens to explore their creativity through various art mediums in a safe, healthy, and functional environment. Each Thursday night session runs from 6-8 p.m. and is overseen by local art instructors and Elk Lodge members.

Open Art Studio will occur weekly throughout the year with plans to add a similar class at the



Jack Lemke, kneeling left, age 11, of North Fond du Lac; Tyler Breister, age 15, of Campbellsport, Sam Lemke, age 9, of North Fond du Lac; Beata Lieders, Art Studio supervisor along with Scott Reath, Elks leading knight; Don Behnke, Elks past exhaulted ruler; Trisha Holz, Elks impact grant project manager; and Sarah Lemke, age 14, of North Fond du Lac are around the pottery wheel during open studio on March 1, 2012.

Juvenile Detention Center, which is part of the Fond du Lac County Sheriff's Department.

"We are grateful to the Windhover Center for donating space for this class," Holz said, noting the effort will help to improve the prospects of troubled youth. "Often these teens come from negative or dysfunctional home settings. Providing a respite from this setting helps foster inspiration, creativity, and improved self-esteem. Open Art Studio offers freedom of self-expression in a casual and informal atmosphere. Our hope is that troubled teens will flourish for the better due to the positive efforts made in this art class and the one soon to be offered at the Juvenile Detention Center."

At the Open Art Studio, visiting artists will share knowledge and expertise of their specific art mediums with participating teens. Art forms such as ceramics, pottery, painting, drawing, watercolor, fused glass, jewelry design, photography, printmaking and computer graphics are a few the students will undertake.

Beata Lieders, a local artist who oversees the Open Art Studio at the Windhover, was the originator of the idea for the class. It was through her that Holz connected the class with the idea for the grant. Lieders knows firsthand the value of what the class teaches the teens. Her own teenage son has channeled his energy in more positive ways since taking an interest in art. "For teens in trouble, art is very therapeutic. It

really can save lives," Lieders said. Kids can turn times of boredom into positive creations. Art helps reduce the risk factors that lead to delinquency and other problem behaviors.

Lieutenant Linda Schmitz, Juvenile Superintendent and Assistant Jail Administrator with the Fond du Lac County Sheriff's Department, agrees. As the person overseeing the set-up of a similar art class at the Juvenile Detention Center, Schmitz eagerly looks forward to the positive effects the project will have on troubled teens. "These teenagers are only here an average of 15 days, but they can continue the class at the Windhover when they leave here," Schmitz said. "It's great that the kids know when they get out of our detention center they have a place to go where they are wanted."

"The art class that resulted from the Elks grant helps these kids as well as the community," Schmitz continues. "I look at it as if these are my kids when they are confined in our facility. As with any parent, my goal is to make them better citizens in the community when they walk out of here."

So far, the classes are paying off, according to Elks leader Scott Reath. "We've done at least six weeks' worth of classes so far, and it's off to a great start," Reath says. "The kids are really engaged in the project. Shortly we will be enhancing the program by introducing it at the Juvenile Detention Center. "It's all about guiding them on the right path."



Top left: Tyler Breister, age 15, of Campbellsport, works at the pottery wheel. Top right: Ian Lemke, age 15, of North Fond du Lac, works on a drawing. Bottom: Sibling Jack Lemke, age 11, and Sarah Lemke, age 14, both of North Fond du Lac, work on drawing and painting projects during open studio.

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