

Achievement in the Arts Awards

Arts awards spotlight talented teens

A Derry Area High School teacher is named the Arts Educator of the Year.

BY CHRISTINE KINDL
TRIBUNE-REVIEW

Richard McWherter considers himself a working artist "who happens to have an art teacher's job," helping students to approach learning in creative ways.



McWherter

The visual arts instructor at Derry Area High School, McWherter is a professional photographer, a former commercial artist and an entrepreneur.

In addition, the Derry resident is this year's winner of the Arts Educator of the Year award, presented annually by the Greensburg Area Cultural Council, a program of the Westmoreland Cultural Trust.

"I don't teach art; I teach creative thinking," said McWherter, who has been teaching since 1996. "I think it was (Albert) Einstein who said, 'Imagination is more important than knowledge.' I believe that's true."

McWherter will be recognized at a banquet to be held 6 p.m. May 20 at Seton Hill University, in Greensburg.

The event also will honor 56 high school

seniors for their outstanding efforts in visual arts, music and theater. Each of these talented teens, from 19 Westmoreland County high schools, will receive the Judges McCormick and Pezze Award of Artistic Merit.

The banquet, now in its ninth year, aims not only to recognize artistic endeavors but also to highlight the importance of arts education.

Westmoreland County judges Richard

E. McCormick Jr. and Debra Pezze will present the student awards. Event sponsors are county commissioners Tom Balya and Tom Ceraso, First Commonwealth Bank, First National Bank of Pennsylvania, Irwin Bank and Reginella Construction Co.

Creativity is not unique to art classes, McWherter said. "Before (children) can read, or do math ... they have to know that squiggles on paper are ideas," he wrote in his award application. "Art makes all learning possible."

That philosophy impressed the group charged with choosing the award winner, said Iva Saraceni, a retired Seton Hill theater professor who heads the Cultural Trust's Arts and Education Committee.

She also applauded McWherter's career path, which took him out of the fast-paced world of commercial art and into his hometown high school.

"He practices what he teaches, and teaches what he practices," Saraceni said. "He's not only bringing real-world artistic skills and knowledge to the classroom, but he's come to this new career as a vocation."

At Derry Area, McWherter teaches crafts and ceramic classes, jewelry-making and sculpture. He also offers courses in 3-D animation and "fantasy painting," which blends traditional graphic arts with digital imagery.

In the Digital Art Studio Lab, students use emerging technologies to produce classroom presentations and digital portfolios on compact discs or DVDs.

Some of the work promotes the school's art department with posters, brochures, a newsletter and a Web site.

"Since we are an elective at the high school, we treat our students as clients and we compete ... for repeat customers," McWherter said.

He and his wife, Kimberly, a math teacher at Derry Area, have two sons who graduated from the high school.

McWherter's fine-art photographs — what he calls his "gallery work" — are online at www.walkwood.net. Student works are highlighted on the school art department's Web site, listed under McWherter's name at derryasd.schoolwires.com.

visual arts

Sara Rekrut



Arts Festival volunteer; internship with local artist.

Parents: Kim and George Rekrut
Future: Art major
Activities: Costume design for high school play and musical; Art Club; Derry amphitheater design; New Growth

Derry Area

music

Denise Frisko



trumpet section leader; jazz band; wind ensemble; high school musical; county chorus and band; district chorus and honors choir; district jazz band; IUP and Fay-West honors bands.

Parents: Evelyn and Paul Frisko
Future: Music education major, Seton Hill University
Activities: Choir; vocal ensemble; marching band;

Derry Area

theater

Jake Emmerling



SADD; all-class play; high school musical; honors choir; vocal ensemble; all-state chorus.

Parents: Ann and Ernest Emmerling
Future: Musical theater major
Activities: Student Council; choir; leadership team; World Language Honor Society;

Derry Area