

Students volunteer at art center

Teens help prepare for art events

BY HENRY KELLY
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The Old Jail Art Center has used junior and senior high students as volunteer docents for several years, crediting the group with helping in the museum's events and outreach programs.

The junior docents usually meet once a week to help prepare for various events by making sample crafts, cleaning, and setting up stations, as well as helping set up for Art to Go, a program that gives students around the Big Country the chance to experience art through hands-on participation.

"I love knowing that with Art to Go, we are helping kids learn more about art," senior Savannah Perez said. She has been a junior docent for six years and now serves as an intern.

Throughout the year, the OJAC hosts festivals celebrating various holidays like the Lunar New Year and Dia de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) with junior docents manning stations with activities aimed at children.

"The festivals can be hard to enjoy because you have to be working and watching the kids at the same time," Perez said. "I still enjoy the festival, especially helping kids with their crafts."

The junior docents also guide the young participants through activities varying from reading stories to playing limbo, all the while wearing hats, masks and even face



Eighth grader Addison Asher prepares supplies for the Art to Go program that the Old Jail Art Center provides to area schools. The local art museum uses student docents to assist with the program, along with several other projects throughout the school year. The junior docents also curate a student art show in March. PHOTO BY KYLEA GARDNER

tattoos.

"I like getting to see all the kids enjoy the festival," Kelton Parker said. "It reminds me of when I used to go to them myself."

Although junior docents work throughout the school year, they also take a trip during the summer as a type of reward for their in-

volvement. The trips have ranged from going to the Grace Museum in Abilene to the Nasher Sculpture Museum in Dallas. The trips usually include something new and fun, like eating face-sized burritos or Greek food from a food truck.

"I really enjoy the trips because I get to see cool art and eat good food,"

Parker said.

Although the junior docents sometimes perform more serious duties, it isn't all work and no play.

"I really like getting to joke around and have a good time," Parker said. "I like making memories with the other junior docents."

As volunteers who

start in junior high and transition into high school, athletics can get in the way of the meetings, making it harder to participate. With extracurricular school activities crowding the schedule, continuing to be involved in junior docents can be a struggle.

"We could not serve the thousands of kids we do each month without their help," said OJAC Education Director Erin Whitmore. "They are not only helping prepare for art projects that we teach, but also helping set up and working at events."

Not only is being a junior docent helpful to the museum, but it can also lead to a paying job at the OJAC as an intern. This year's interns are seniors Matthew Rupp and Savannah Perez.

The program also helps high school students log much needed volunteer hours to use on college and scholarship applications.

Being a junior docent looks good on a college application because it shows that a participant is responsible enough to work and willing to give up time to volunteer, Perez said.

The program has even had siblings following the same path.

"My brother, Blake, was a docent, and he always enjoyed it, so when I finally got to sign up, I knew I would like it too," Perez said.

One of the other positive aspects of being a junior docent is that students are guided by a professional staff. The program is led by Mary Burke, the Education Coordinator and Erin Whitmore, the Education Director. The pair

spends much of their time planning and facilitating educational events for students, with the help of the junior docents.

During youth art month in March, the junior docents curate a show of student art, judging and awarding student submissions from grades 5-12 at schools all over the Region 14 area, allowing students to create art that is based on artists' works, but allowing them to create their own interpretation.

The junior docents are also very helpful to the OJAC by telling teenagers about scheduled events and encouraging them to participate in the activities that are planned.

"We feel like we wouldn't have as good of a presence among the teens without the junior docents," Whitmore said. "They help in education and to spread the word around school."

For one day in the year, the junior docents each choose a piece from the OJAC's collection to use to design activities geared for the entire family. They share information about the artist and the selected piece of work, then guide the visitors in creating their own piece of art.

"They are researching and facilitating a public program each spring that encourages families to visit the museum, learn about artists and create their own artwork together," Whitmore said.

Any student wanting to become a junior docent can fill out a form on the OJAC's website or contact the museum's Education Coordinator Mary Burke at 762-2269.