

Lots of Winners at the Driftless Area Art Festival

12 October 2015—It was another record-breaking year for the Driftless Area Art Festival, held September 19-20 in Soldiers Grove. Perfect weather during the eleventh annual event, and 83 visual artists, many of them returning favorites, drew more visitors than in 2014, representing 15 states and 279 zip codes.

When those visitors voted for their favorites among the visual arts exhibitors, the People's Choice Award went to Jamie Heiden, a repeat favorite, whose innovative photography captures imaginations and prompts rave comments from people around the world. The VIVA Art Gallery in Viroqua sponsors the People's Choice Award, which includes a blue ribbon and a prize of \$100, and Heiden as this year's award winner will be a featured artist there during May 2016.

Another popular exhibitor, cabinet maker and creative wood artist, Joe Schwarte of rural Gays Mills, won the Committee's Choice Award. Sponsored by State Street Gallery in La Crosse, it recognizes the overall quality of the artist's work and Festival exhibit, and carries with it a blue ribbon and a cash prize of \$150. A committee of judges agreed with Schwarte's description of his work as "functional, sculptural, beautiful." The Committee's Choice judges also selected two Merit Award winners. Oil and watercolor painter Hannah Heyer of Dakota, MN, and oil color painter Lisbeth Quebe of Soldiers Grove, WI, each received ribbons and cash prizes of \$75.

Visitors also saw proof that art is alive and well in many school districts in the Driftless region. Almost 400 young artists displayed their work in the KidsArt tent. Art works from 12 elementary schools attracted hundreds of visitors, including kids, parents, grandparents, friends and relatives. Three pieces, one from each of three grade categories, won blue ribbons and their young creators will receive \$30 checks as well as framed copies of their art. The original pieces will be sold during a live auction in Spring 2016, with the proceeds going to the art programs in their schools.

Kendra Vesperman, third grader at Winskill Elementary School in Lancaster, created a tempera painting, "Clowning Around." The daughter of Joe and Denise Vesperman, her teacher is Patty Francis.

Nathan Woodhouse, son of Kim and Terry Woodhouse, is a fifth grader at St. Charles School, Genoa. He won a blue ribbon for his melted crayon painting, "Melting Raindrops." His teacher is Meg Buchner.

And Celeste Thalhammer, eighth grader at the Pleasant Ridge Waldorf School, Viroqua, WI, won for her photograph, "The Swan." She is the daughter of Felix Thalhammer & Katherine Young, Blue River, and her teacher is Natalie McIntire.

Besides the three blue ribbons and several as well as several Achievement award ribbons, some pieces displayed the "You are my Favorite Artist" tags, awarded by kids who

attended the Festival and who were invited to select any artist at the Festival for Favorite Artist designation.

All schools that had student entries were eligible for a \$500 cash prize drawing, with the money designated for the school's art program. The 2014 winner, drawn during the May 2015 Driftless Art Festival gala, was Doudna Elementary School in Richland Center. Art teacher Julia Steiner said, "I am so pleased Doudna is the recipient of this drawing. It shows the children and our community how important art is in our school curriculum, and it helps us purchase quality art supplies, when budgets are limited." The drawing for the 2015 winner will be held during the May 2016 gala.

Teen artists from the Driftless region entered their works independently in the Teen Art Gallery, and a panel of artist judges awarded ribbons and other prizes. The first prize, a blue ribbon and \$75, went to Jaali Parrish of Viroqua, for her soft sculpture "Junie the Bugbear." Emma Craig's pencil drawing "True Self" won the Caledonia, MN, artist a second-place ribbon and a check for \$45. Brooke Elliott of Lancaster won a third-place ribbon and a check for \$25 for her multi-media piece "Moonlight Delight." Honorable Mentions went to Ariel T from New Frontier Academy for the painting "Echo of a Heart;" and Allison Zink of Viroqua for her painting "Untitled."

Almost 100 volunteers from the area and well beyond contributed well over 200 hours to the weekend, according to volunteer coordinators Theresa Yaeger and Diane Craig. "Some of our volunteers have been here every year since the Festival began," Yaeger said, "and they come in all ages and sizes. The Driftless community has been supportive from the very beginning."

Festival Partners included Community Development Alternatives, Inc.; Peoples State Bank of Prairie du Chien and Soldiers Grove; Village of Soldiers Grove and the Soldiers Grove Economic Development Corporation; Wisconsin Public Radio; and Crawford County/Crawford County Tourism Council.

Photos:

Cabinetmaker Joe Schwarte of Gays Mills won the Committee's Choice Award at the recent Driftless Area Art Festival, recognizing the excellence of his work and the quality and appeal of his booth, including the hand-laid wood floor.

Kendra Vesperman of Lancaster won a blue ribbon for her tempera painting "Clowning Around," at the recent Driftless Area Art Festival. Along with two other winning pieces, it will be sold at live auction in Spring 2016, with proceeds going to the art program in her school, Winskill Elementary.