

Middle school arts has new teacher

By Erin Borla
Correspondent

Sisters Middle School welcomed new teaching artist Judy Fuentes as a full-time fifth- and sixth-grade visual art teacher this year. Fuentes was hired for a one-year position, paid for by Sisters Folk Festival in partnership with the Sisters School District.

The position was created to bridge the gap between the Sisters Elementary School art program and the seventh- through 12th-grade program taught by Bethany Gunnarson. The elementary program is now in its third year, with teacher Karen Williams. Williams was hired through the Studio to School grant initiative.

The Studio to School grant, also in its third year, was received from the Oregon Community Foundation, Fred Fields Fund by Sisters Folk Festival. That grant supports art and music education kindergarten through 8th grade — the new Sisters Middle School position falls outside

of that funding and is financially supported by Sisters Folk Festival's fundraising efforts like My Own Two Hands.

"We are hoping to support the creation of great foundational art skills in young people in Sisters," said Brad Tisdell, creative director for Sisters Folk Festival.

Fuentes splits her time between Sisters Middle School and Pine Ridge Elementary in Bend. Her classes in Sisters vary between 20-25 students every afternoon.

She integrates art disciplines to help students develop their individual skills and uses different techniques to keep things fun and inspiring.

Students can look forward to learning art principles this year while working with clay; spending time making masks, collaborative group art and art with nature. Students will also look at other artists, art history and cultures.

Recently fifth-grade students studied Chagal's "Over the Town" image and then

created their own version. Each image had the Sisters mountains and the students' homes. They each created their own version of themselves as well to add to the image above their home.

"I try to integrate with what they're studying in other classes as well," she said. "For example the fifth-graders will be studying money; I hope to bring that into art. We will be designing our own coins with cardboard and using yarn as a relief method for rubbings and other techniques."

In a way, everything relates to art.

"There are a lot of ways to bring in their studies," Fuentes said. "Social studies, science, math, geography. This can be especially helpful for students who have a more analytical way of thinking."

Middle school can be a difficult transition for students.

"Art can give students understanding — about themselves, about others and other cultures," said Fuentes. "Instead of just looking at a picture of tiles from the



PHOTO BY ERIN BORLA

Fifth-grade students created their own version of Chagal's "Over the Town" with new teaching artist Judy Fuentes.

Middle East, they begin to see the patterns, the designs; couple that with a fun activity and skill development. It's teaching them confidence."

While Fuentes lives in Bend, she says she is "blown away by the vision" of the art program.

"So often smaller communities may not have the resources or cultural awareness," says Fuentes. "Not Sisters, Sisters is always so vibrant and fiery!"

"I'm so excited to be here — I can't even begin to tell you how excited I am."

The Studio to School grant Sisters Folk Festival received from the Oregon Community Foundation, Fred Fields Fund, supports art and music education kindergarten through 8th grade — this position fell outside of that funding.

Currently this position is supported financially through Sisters Folk Festival. If community members are interested in supporting the arts education programs like this one, earmarked contributions can be made to Sisters Folk Festival.

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