

A N N U A L   A R T S   I S S U E

# BREAKING GROUND

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A PUBLICATION OF  
THE TENNESSEE COUNCIL ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES  
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH  
THE TENNESSEE ARTS COMMISSION *and* DEAFCONNECT OF THE MID-SOUTH



**Angel, Ellen Zahorec**



*Ellen Zahorec's work focuses on religious symbolism, utilizing acrylics, markers, colored pencils and crayons. The work shown here is from Zahorec's most recent series entitled, "Vessels". Zahorec earned her Bachelor of Fine Arts at Kent State and Master of Fine Arts at UT Knoxville.*



**Cover: *The Snail and the Mare*, Kathy Tupper**

*Kathy Tupper of Nashville fills her life with art each day, and has developed many styles to illustrate her interests.*



Dear Readers,

The Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities is proud to present the 2012 annual arts issue of *Breaking Ground*, which celebrates art made by and about Tennesseans with disabilities. In this issue, you'll have the opportunity to read about a variety of programs across the state allowing individuals with disabilities of all ages to produce and experiment with many different kinds of art forms.

We're especially excited to partner with two great organizations that are serving as co-sponsors for this issue, **DeafConnect of the Mid-South, Inc.** and the **Tennessee Arts Commission**. These two agencies have demonstrated a strong commitment to increasing access to the arts for Tennesseans with disabilities.

**DeafConnect of the Mid-South, Inc.** bridges the Deaf and hearing communities through communication, advocacy, information and referral. In this issue, you'll read about DeafConnect's recent efforts towards showcasing the artistic talents of the Memphis area Deaf and Hard of Hearing community.

The Council has recently begun developing a partnership with the **Tennessee Arts Commission** that we hope will grow beyond our annual *Breaking Ground* arts issue. Expanding programs that allow individuals with disabilities to participate in various art activities and increasing support for artists with disabilities to maintain employment as professional artists are goals that we hope to pursue together.

Finally, thank you to the many talented artists and writers across Tennessee that submitted their creative work for this special issue of *Breaking Ground*. We hope you enjoy their fantastic contributions!

Sincerely,

Wanda Willis, Executive Director

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## Accessibility and the Tennessee Arts Commission

The Tennessee Arts Commission (TAC) is excited and proud to be in partnership with the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities. As a co-sponsor of this arts issue, the Commission has a unique opportunity to interface with a thriving, inspiring and diverse community. The TAC is actively seeking to collaborate with the broader artistic and economic community. We are passionate about Tennessee's unique artistic landscape and cultural heritage, and I am eager to be a part of moving the arts forward in ways that tell our story, strengthen our economy and enhance communities across Tennessee. It is my hope that this partnership will create new avenues of opportunities for artists in the disability community.

Sincerely,

Anne B. Pope, Executive Director

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# CONNECTING WITH ART



All photos by staff and friends of DeafConnect of the Mid-South.

*DeafConnect of the Mid-South, Inc. bridges the Deaf and hearing communities through communication, advocacy, information and referral. Sign language interpreters provide the communication necessary for Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals to conduct their business independently, and advocacy services to promote equal access by educating the Deaf community and the public about the Americans with Disabilities Act and individual rights.*

By Teresa Wilson, Executive Director, DeafConnect of the Mid-South

The first annual ArtConnect was hosted by DeafConnect of the Mid-South at its home base at 144 N. Bellevue Boulevard in Memphis. ArtConnect was a wonderful introduction to the artistic talents of individuals within the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community.

DeafConnect was transformed into a gallery whose walls were filled with various types of artwork: paintings; pen and ink; geometrics; architectural designs; handmade quilts; stained glass; digitized embroidered self-portraits; handmade pillows; clay pot wind chimes; lamps; jewelry and other crafts. A photo booth from **It's A Snapshot** provided visitors with an opportunity to capture

Handmade quilts by **Carol Dice Temple** showed the delicate handiwork required to sew pieces of fabric together. *Concentric Curves* is an intricate design of circles with a wonderful combination of vibrant colors. *Waterfall* depicted turquoise water falling over chocolate brown earth. The red and green patterning for Christmas in a quilt and wreath reminded us of the holidays yet to come. Temple, a former teacher's assistant in the Hearing Intervention Program at White Station High School, now devotes her time to volunteer work, parenting and hobbies.

**Hector Gomez**, a student at Southwest Tennessee Community College concentrating in graphic design, contributed numerous

Three high school students exhibited their works. **Joshua Branscomb**, a junior at White Station High School, contributed a colored pencil drawing of an anime character. **Lorian Jones**, a senior at the same high school, had two geometric line drawings and two vibrant colored pencil drawings, one incorporating fall leaves. **Shannan Savage**, a high school senior taking a class on fashion and fabrics at Kingsbury Career and Technology Center, created a digitized, embroidered self-portrait.

**Faynita Durham**, a student working toward her associate degree in early childhood education at Southwest Tennessee Community College, displayed her whimsical acrylic paintings of Popeye, Piglet, Spiderman and a blue dog.

Acrylic paintings by **Randall Jackson**, a senior majoring in art at Rochester Institute of Technology in New York and a graduate of the Council's Youth Leadership Forum, were displayed down the front hall. One grouping, featuring earth tones, included a figure drawing, pen in hand, and a riveting bust of a man half in skeletal focus and the other half in full portrait. Two self-portraits revealed Jackson's Hispanic heritage and influence.



Hector Gomez

themselves at the event with a souvenir photo. Guests enjoyed refreshments while viewing the artwork and socializing with others at the well-attended event.

**Sam Griffin**, a successful architect and advocate, provided an architectural grouping for display. The contemporary structural designs were a unique presentation which could either be hung or displayed horizontally.

paintings for the event. His perspective drawings of chairs and the color combinations were very inviting. His drawing of a hand curved into a relaxed fist was strikingly presented in brick red tones against a crinkled rich green background. An acrylic painting of a quaint cottage with two boats moored in waters beyond the front stone wall was especially appealing.



Faynita Durham

cont. on page 6

CONNECTING WITH ART cont. from page 5

The impact of hearing loss seemed evident in one painting of a doll with large, masculine hands covering the doll's ears. A single tear on the doll's face and a jagged opening in her chest featuring rugged terrain are indicative of the struggles with paternalistic attitudes and controlling hearing individuals and the anguish and challenges created by these circumstances.

**Keith Murphy**, who now lives in Chattanooga, showed his versatility with a variety of offerings. A Tiffany-style stained glass lamp; a stained glass toucan perched in a circular piece of bamboo; a beaded American flag; portraits laminated on wood and cut into jigsaw puzzles and pottery are but a few of the items Murphy displayed.

**William Leavell**, preacher for the Deaf at White Station Church of Christ, uses his drawings to help convey Biblical teachings to his congregation. Pen and ink drawings of

Moses parting the sea, a praying Pharisee and Samson visually tell familiar Bible stories.

**Sheila Chappell**, an American Sign Language instructor and deaf interpreter, displayed a variety of jewelry such as earrings and bracelets which she designed and produced.

**Nita and Phillip Adair** are a collaborating creative team. Their lamps, wind chimes, and chip and dip serving dishes are made of clay pots painted and decorated in a variety of themes such as holidays, colleges and children's designs.

**Corine Edwards** learned her sewing skills from her mother. In celebrating deafness, she uses the "I Love You" hand sign embroidered on fabric to make pillows and pictures which can be personalized with individuals' names.

**Aynalem Tessema-Faulkner's** paintings are influenced by her home country, Ethiopia. Her focus on women and families in daily activities is exquisitely portrayed in her paintings.

also used several designs for silk-screened T-shirts and a hand-embroidered tablecloth with matching napkins.

With the success of our first **ArtConnect**, we look forward with excitement to our future shows, and the opportunity to introduce new Deaf and Hard of Hearing artisans to the Memphis and possibly greater Tennessee community.



Sheila Chappell



Aynalem Tessema-Faulkner



Nita and Phillip Adair



Corine Edwards



William Leavell

### **Waterfall, Derrick Johnson**

I hear the roar of the rushing water.  
The feel of it running down my back, tickling my neck.  
I laugh with the happiness within me.  
To be within reach of its touch.  
I close my eyes as a smile stretches across my lips,  
Feel it touch my skin.  
I feel it roll down my arms as it makes me shiver,  
Making me feel overwhelmed.  
I enjoy the rush,  
The excitement I get whenever I'm underneath the waterfall.

*Derrick Johnson is a graduating senior at Tennessee School for the Blind. He intends to go to the Tennessee Rehabilitation Center in the fall.*

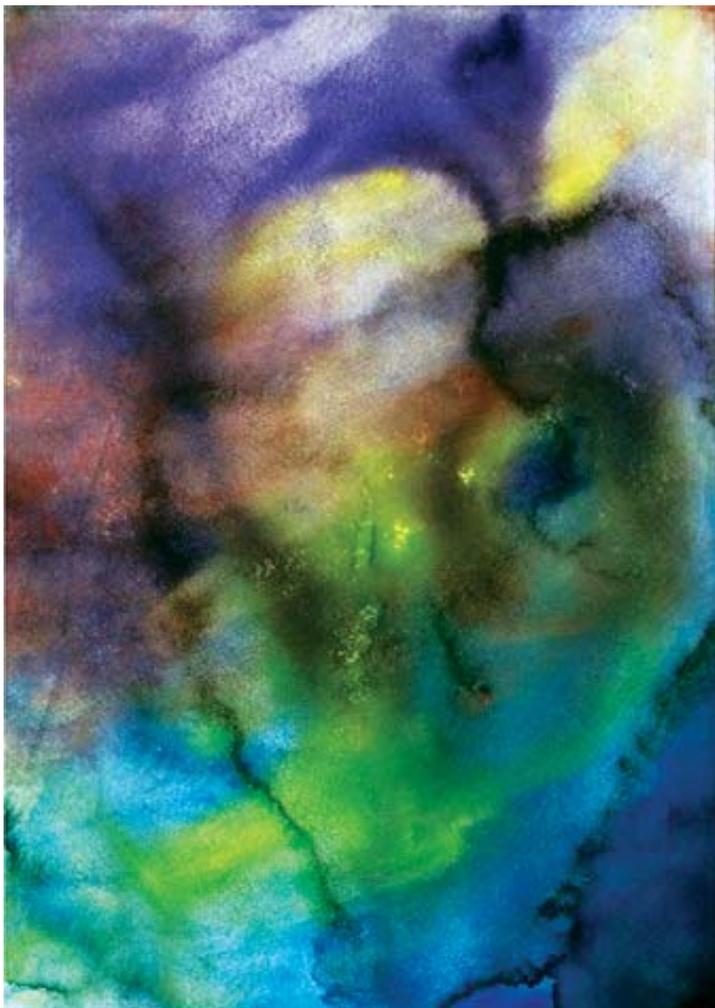
### **Poppies, Barbara Fowler and Barry Fowler**



*Barbara Fowler is one of the founders of Day by Day Foundation, an organization that supports individuals with traumatic brain injuries. She is also an English teacher at Madison Academic High School.*

*Barry Fowler has survived childhood cancer, a traumatic brain injury at age 14 and a grand mal seizure at 18. Today, Fowler works at Outback Steakhouse as a host.*

### **Untitled, Jerry Adams**



*Jerry Adams has exhibited throughout middle Tennessee at various venues, including the Frist Center for the Visual Arts, the Polk Theater Gallery at the Tennessee Performing Arts Center and the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center.*

## **Tennessee Arts Commission Arts Access Program** by William Coleman

Imagine a Tennessee where everyone can participate in and experience the arts.

This goal of the Tennessee Arts Commission can become a reality through the cooperation of the artists, arts organizations, arts educators, volunteers and supporters who comprise the Tennessee arts industry.

The goal of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is to ensure that people with disabilities have the same opportunities to participate in everyday activities and programs. Therefore, the Tennessee Arts Commission maintains the following accessibility statement:

“No person on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability, age, religion, or sex shall be excluded from participation in, or be denied benefits of, or otherwise be subject to discrimination of services, programs, and employment provided by the TAC and its contracting agencies.”

Specifically, the Tennessee Arts Commission, through its Arts Access program, seeks to offer direct support to artists with disabilities and to organizations whose mission is to serve people with disabilities through the following categories: touring, technical assistance, arts project support and AA Mini Grant programs. In addition, the TAC is constantly reviewing its programs and services to its constituents to provide meaningful solutions for accessibility and access to the arts.

Visit the Arts Commission's website at [www.tn.gov/arts](http://www.tn.gov/arts) or contact William Coleman, the director of the Arts Access program, at 615.532.9797 or [william.coleman@tn.gov](mailto:william.coleman@tn.gov) for additional information.

# EMERGING ARTISTS PRODUCE FILM USING STOP MOTION ANIMATION AND FOLEY

By Pamela Weston

The workshop announcement assured that sound would be used to help pictures tell stories, and that the creation of the sounds which would do this was called Foley. The animation would occur by compiling many images to simulate motion. Participants would plan a story, develop the needed characters and props, and set up the images for the frames. At the end, each participant would receive a copy of the collaborative work.

Nearly a year after the project was initially conceived, a dozen young people with autism arrived on the campus of Hiwassee College in Madisonville, Tennessee where they spent two half-days working with visual artist Anne Winsauer and Foley artist Bob Stagner in the basement of a building that typically serves those working in the sciences. Some of the young artists were veteran cartoonists, while others were participating in an arts workshop for the first time. All were apparently thrilled to have this opportunity, as the workshop seats filled shortly after it was announced!

With funding provided by the John D. Grubb and Louise G. Sumter Fund for Monroe County, the Autism Society of America East Tennessee Chapter, and Mark Henry, the young artists traveled from Chattanooga, Knoxville and Nashville to participate in this creative experience.

Each artist had received a blank storyboard and information on character development weeks in advance, and they'd had an opportunity to view a sample animation created by the teaching artists. Some came armed and prepared to begin, while others were still figuring out the details of their stories when they began to work. The artists designed backgrounds and characters in various sizes and positions using paper, foil,

moss, and other readily available common objects. Some made segmented characters to enable the easy appearance of movement.

When their components were ready, each artist carried their oversized storyboard to a table and placed it underneath a tripod with a camera affixed facing downward, to enable easy movement of the components on a flat surface. When the set was organized, the artist gave the command "capture" which was a cue for the camera operator to take a photograph. The artist would then reposition their characters and props to do the next frame, and make another request to have the shot captured.

At the end of this process, the artists were able to view a slide show of what would



*Matthew's Still 23 is the creation of Matthew Loveland, Mt. Juliet, TN.*

become their animation and when they were satisfied, they carried their story to the Foley room where they worked with Bob Stagner to create the sounds their film would utilize.

From the sound made by an eraser as it cleans a mark from paper, to that made by a scientist's secret potion as it bubbles in the test tube, the young people approached every creative mission with enthusiasm and a desire

*All photos of the Foley/Animation Workshop were taken by Pam Weston.*



*Collaborative sound creation for Mad Scientist Animation.*

to keep the big, collaborative picture in mind. They were living a dream come true.

In the sound room, they were in charge of identifying sounds and dictating the placement of the sounds in the final film. The sounds came from slapping flip flops together, twisting empty water bottles, shaking boxes of rocks and holding a fan close to the microphone to approximate the sound of howling wind.

Sometimes, the artists served as directors, coordinating efforts while their peers stomped and growled ferociously on cue and in unison to provide a needed sound.

By the afternoon of the second day, all the photos needed to create the film had been captured and all the necessary sound tracks had been recorded. The credits and title page were added after the video and sound files were merged, and it would be several weeks before copies of the final work appeared in the mailboxes of each artist.

There was a real sense that something special had been accomplished, and as strange as it

cont. on page 9

EMERGING ARTISTS cont. from page 8

was to walk away empty-handed and with no hard evidence that this was the case, no one doubted that what had been created would be awesome.

Everyone had pitched in to complete the project by operating cameras and cataloging sounds and cues, so even though each section of the film was the work of an individual artist, the collaboration established a broad sense of pride. Now it was time to wait. Waiting is never easy, but while we did, files were merged, formatted and copied. When the DVDs came in the mail, the excitement peaked again. It had taken eight hours to produce nearly eight minutes of video, but those eight minutes of video have probably seen eight hundred hours of play, already.

One of the young artists said, "It was really fun to learn how to make a movie! I want to do it again sometime. Who knows, it may even go global!"

*The video can be viewed at [www.youtube.com/vsatn](http://www.youtube.com/vsatn).*



# A SHORT STORY ABOUT MY LIFE

by Justin A. Taylor

The past is where my mind keeps me at. Then I don't have to deal with my brain injury. In the past I didn't have to get a job, and I could go outside. If I want to go to the future, then I have to deal with the pain of my injury.

In the past, my friends in school talked to me, and nobody stared at me. In the future, now, nobody talks to me when I tell them I have a brain injury. Then they talk to me like I'm five years old. In the past they would care less. The past is a good thing.

I'm starting to handle my disability, but I don't call myself disabled. I can walk, talk. That means I proved the doctors wrong. After my accident the doctors told my mom that I would never walk or talk again. Now I do both and even play the guitar; the blues and country.

I guess that gives me a happy ending, right?

I don't worry about the rest of my life. I don't worry about that much. I hope to look for a woman that would accept a man that doesn't work, except to work around the house like mow the lawn, fold clothes, sweep and mop the floors. If there is a woman that is good enough to accept a man that can't drive, or work.

*Justin A. Taylor had a brain injury in July of 1999. He likes to play the guitar.*

### ***My Best Friend, Aaron Boone***

My best friend is my mother, who loves and cares for me.  
She is always trying to strive for the best for me you see.

She has always been there for me  
through the good times and the bad,  
she has even been there for me  
when I have made her mad.

My mother always had a positive outlook on life,  
and she always went day by day with happiness and strife.

She always made the best of things  
no matter where she went,  
She even had a lot of patience,  
to a certain extent.

My mother was always there for me through the thin and the thick,  
she was even there for me when she was very sick.

And now that she has passed away  
and left us all behind,  
I just have to accept it  
and stay in my daily grind.

And even when her absence has me sad and blue at times,  
I will always have her presence even through something as simple as chimes.

My mother really loved me,  
and this I will always defend,  
and has always influenced me  
until the very end.

*Aaron Boone is a senior at Tennessee School for the Blind, and has been totally blind since birth. After graduation from TSB he plans to explore opportunities through the Tennessee Rehabilitation Center.*

### ***Concrete Banana Leaf, Chad Luttrell, Trisha Jones, Pat Jones***



*Chad Luttrell has survived multiple brain injuries but, in spite of his challenges, has completed a computer course at a local tech school. He loves the great outdoors and creating projects.*

*Trisha Jones is the survivor of two traumatic brain injuries from automobile accidents. Her one dream is to complete her college degree. Toward that end, she is continuing her studies at Union University.*

*Pat Jones is a retired neurology nurse, and the mother of fellow artist Trisha Jones. She is the co-founder of Day by Day Foundation, which strives to help survivors of brain injuries find purpose in their lives.*

### ***The Wood Boat, Jalyn Weston***



*Jalyn Weston is a nine-year-old artist from Sweetwater, Tennessee who began drawing as a toddler. Jalyn's art has won him numerous awards, and he is a member of the Artists Association of Monroe County and the Knoxville Arts & Culture Alliance.*

### ***Sisters, Gina Lynette***



*Gina Lynette is a 2003-04 Partners grad, and a mother of four children. She is a certified Life Coach, consultant, and facilitator of meetings for non-profit and corporate entities.*

# BRAIN'S "I" VIEW - EXPRESSIVE ART CREATED BY INDIVIDUALS WITH BRAIN INJURY

All photos by Lydia Marshall.

By Jil Smith, associate professor of occupational therapy at Milligan College

At age 18, Ron Peterson was already a recognized artist with award-winning paintings hanging in the Capitol building in Tallahassee, Florida. He planned to pursue a life as a professional artist. That plan was derailed by a tragic car accident that left him with a severe traumatic brain injury. The brain injury produced significant enduring physical, visual and language deficits for Peterson, and seemingly put an end to his artistic dreams as he knew them. That was almost 30 years ago.

## Tragedy, Ron Peterson



Peterson now lives at the Crumley House Brain Injury Rehabilitation Center in Limestone, Tennessee. His personal story and his ongoing love for art was the catalyst for the creation of a unique art show in northeast Tennessee.

Incorporating occupational therapy, which focuses on using the meaningful activities of an individual's life, Peterson created a variety of art pieces that "spoke" about his struggles with living with a brain injury. Recognizing that other individuals with brain injury might want

to tell their story in a similar format, I created—with the assistance of several past and current OT students at Milligan College—Brain's "I" View, an exhibit of art created exclusively by individuals with brain injury.

Brain injury affects each individual differently and can impair physical, cognitive, psychosocial, sensory and perceptual function in many ways. Addressing each individual's particular limitations and challenges was an important first step for occupational therapy. The exhibit required that the artist complete at least 80% of the artwork themselves, not including framing. Matching the individual up with the appropriate art medium and then adapting the process as needed was a key component for successful participation.

Occupational therapy is a holistic, person-centered profession and art is a wonderful therapeutic medium for addressing the whole person. Physical concerns can be addressed in the actual art making. Cognitive concerns can be addressed in the plan and design of the art. Psychosocial concerns can be addressed through the creative process as the artist experiences and reveals his or her feelings in a new context. These feelings and experiences were shared on a plaque next to the artwork, allowing the viewers of the art deeper insight into the artist's work.

For example, Clayton Jaymes was asked to draw a picture representing how he felt about his brain injury. Jaymes took this request quite literally, and drew a very child-like drawing of his memories of the accident that caused his injury. When prompted to talk about the picture, he related the following:

*"The black line is the hill that I sledded down at my grandparents' house. I had a sledding accident and I got run over by a Chevy Bronco. I was red with blood from head to toe. An ambulance came and then I went in a helicopter. I saw angels. This is when I got*



Brain's "I" View Exhibit

*my brain injury. I was seven when this happened. Seven stunk."*

Another artist, Tiffany White, was excited to be able to go on television and share her art and her story as she promoted the exhibit. She was one of the later entrants, having only come to the Crumley House a few weeks before the show was to open. While discussing the different types of art she could try, she quickly recited from memory a poem she had written many years prior to her brain injury, hauntingly called, "The Girl I Used to Be".

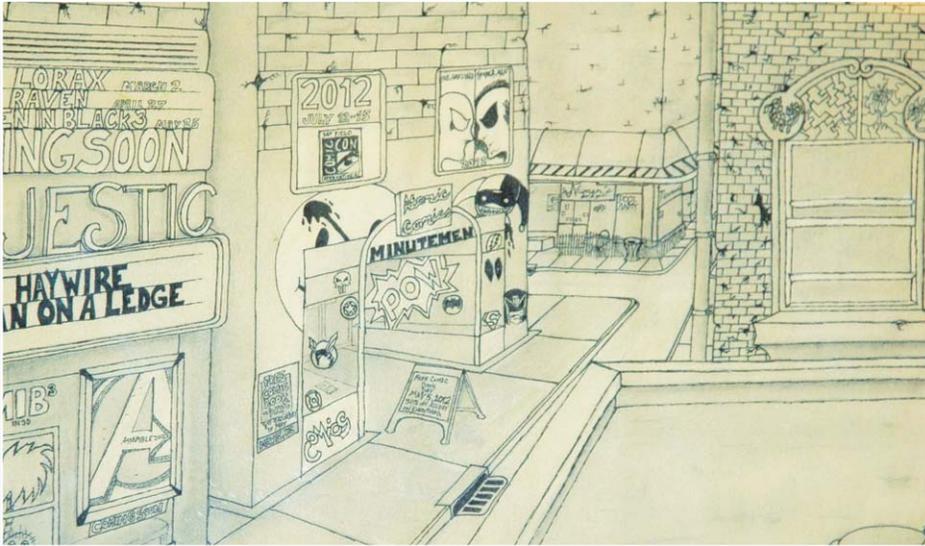
The basic concepts of mixed media art were shared with her, and a suggestion was made that the poem from her past might be integrated into art for the present. Eager to give this a try, White created a poignant piece that utilized the poem and other images and elements that expressed how brain injury had changed her life significantly.

cont. on page 12

BRAIN'S "I" VIEW cont. from page 11

*"I wrote this poem before I had my brain injury. I never realized how ironic it would be now. I had hoped to grow up to be a*

**The Dream, Bob Thatcher**



*professional woman, but instead I am a lucky survivor of brain injury. Although sometimes a brain injury seems like a fate worse than death because we are stuck in between what life could be and what it actually is. I can see the life that I thought I would have, but the brain injury keeps me from getting there.*

*The torn gold piece represents the injury and the upside-down cherries represent how people with brain injury sometimes view the world. The colorful square is how we need to have structure and order to cope with each day. The head with the shining star represents the mix of bright ideas, silly thoughts and funny things that sometimes come out of our mouths. The other shining star on the picture of the parent and child represents my connection with my daughter who I was blessed to have five months before my accident. I try to see the life I thought I would have through her and I get to watch my child become the woman I thought I would be."*

Bob Thatcher was an animator prior to a stroke caused by an arteriovenous malformation (AVM) at a young age. After that he stopped drawing, believing the stroke had taken that talent from him. After encouragement and support from Crumley House staff, Thatcher

began to draw and was pleasantly surprised to see his skills return. He created a detailed perspective sketch called, "The Dream", which he also connected to other things he feared he would no longer be able to do.

*"In 2010, something popped in my brain. It was called an AVM, but all I know is that it messed me up. I was an artist and musician before this happened. I planned to be an animator. This drawing represents the things that I was told I wouldn't be able to do such as stand on top of tall buildings due to the potential of vertigo or go to 3D movies as they might cause seizures. I am an animator. I love 3D movies. I tried to resume drawing a month after surgery, but it didn't seem to work so I gave up. Luckily I decided to try again and now I know I can do it and I will be an animator. Life is only what you make it."*

**Brighter, Jerry Holloman**



Ron Peterson, the artist that inspired this show, was able to create several items for the exhibit and was pleased with the reception for his work. However, one of the most poignant pieces was a painting of flowers he created with paint pens rather than brushes. The hope was that he would have more success with the pens than he did with a paint brush, due to his upper extremity ataxia, which plagued his control over his own movements. While others thought the painting turned out beautifully, Peterson had a different perspective which he felt was important to share with those that would see this piece. He chose to call the painting, "Tragedy".

*"As an individual that was a professional artist before my accident, I do not believe that this picture is up to my artistic standards. Just looking at it, I am dismayed by the lack of quality that it displays compared to what it would have received prior to my accident. I know that there are other people that really like this painting, but they have not seen what I used to be able to do before my injury."*

Jerry Holloman, an individual that has experienced two brain injuries, made a colorful tile creation that he chose to call "Brighter". His explanation is a good summary of what Brain's "I" View was hoping to inspire for all involved.

*"I accidentally added more purple to this tile than I wanted to add. Spilling the purple color is a bit like living with a brain injury; getting a little something that you didn't expect, and then you have to work with it. Sometimes I feel all mixed up, and I have trouble thinking about the things I want to think about, but with faith and hope and a positive attitude, the future looks brighter."*

Brain's "I" View was on display for four weeks at the Jonesborough Visitor's Center in Jonesborough, Tennessee this past March and April. The positive, enthusiastic response from the community was exciting and affirming for the artist participants, as well as the art show coordinators.

A slide show of the entire exhibit can be found at <http://museservices.blogspot.com/p/brains-i-view-art-show.html>.

**A prayer, Karen Webber Gilat**

Showergod, I worship through my tears  
steam rises as I press my right palm into sky blue tile  
try to steady myself on soap dish  
soon my left forms a fist  
It is prayer  
lament not praise  
Next I drop to a kneel  
knees numb  
and now into a heap  
finally I am on all fours in this water dance  
My spirit has caught a Greyhound for Austin  
I study my hands as I balance crosslegged  
ancient half moon scar (from my crazy car accident)  
visible now between the knuckles of my index and middle finger  
smaller, newer scrapes surface  
bitten cuticle skin reveals deep red  
I rise up throw an elbow to lean on the lip of the tub  
My God, you are here in this steady stream  
As the skin around my ankles softens

*Karen Webber Gilat has lived in East TN for the past four years. She is an actress/performance artist-poet and cantor (in the Jewish faith) and dabbles in collage.*

**Untitled, Jodi Sztapka**



*Jodi Sztapka is a 2010-11 Partners grad and the mom of a five-year-old with Asperger's Syndrome. This piece is her depiction of what sensory overload is like to a person on the autism spectrum.*

**Golden Memories, Renée Ray**



*Renée Ray's love for painting began at age seven. For Ray, painting has become an outlet for relaxation and rejuvenation.*

**Untitled, Katie Phelps**

I am Mary Shelley's creature  
My voice unrecognizable  
My humor unfamiliar  
My mind, rewired yet haywire to those who are similar.  
It is not the appearance that hinders  
But age that has me trapped  
Mental eloquence  
Is my penance  
I am too young to be taken with seriousness  
Yet too old to fit in with the rest.  
My paradise is not lost  
But the tunnel is long  
And at the end, lying in wait.  
May be a companion who won't fixate  
On the differences we have from the mediocre man.

*Katie Phelps is a freshman in college who, due to a brain tumor taking up 3/4 of her right temporal lobe, has no short term memory or analytical thinking skills. For Phelps, writing is a coping mechanism.*

# ASTRO: NOT JUST A SERVICE DOG

By Pam Townsend

When I first brought Astro home I knew my life would change because I now had a trained service dog. Little did I know Astro was more than a service dog. It turned out he was a service dog, guard dog, babysitter, politician, patriot, celebrity, mascot and most of all, a good companion. One might ask, how can one dog be all this? Well this is the short version of a long story.

Shortly after I brought Astro home from service dog training I received a call from a reporter wanting to do a story on me and my service dog. The article ended up being a full, four-page color article in the Sunday newspaper. Astro the celebrity was recognized everywhere we went.

I went to work very early in the morning. During the fall and winter months it meant going from my car to the building in the dark. I felt very uncomfortable with this short walk; the thought of an unwanted visitor was always in my mind. Finally, one day it happened, as Astro and I got out of the van and started our walk. Unknown to me, a man was quickly approaching. Suddenly the hairs on Astro's back stood up and he started a deep-down growl. Everything happened so fast I had no time to think. I turned around and the man was right behind me. Astro the guard dog quickly went into action and started barking and growling as though he would tear the man apart. Without a word the man quickly ran off.

I was never afraid again. I knew Astro the guard dog would protect me.

Astro also turned out to be very patriotic, at least that's the way it appeared. After 9-11 each morning at work, the people in my division would gather down the hall to say the pledge of allegiance to the flag and sing a patriotic song. Astro was always so excited to go but I had to stay behind to answer the phones. I would unleash him and he would go

down with the group and come back.

One day I finally had a chance to attend. Astro sat at attention as everyone recited the pledge and then someone did a song. As I started back I noticed Astro was going in the other direction. That's when I found out it wasn't his patriotism at all. Several people were giving him dog treats when he visited their offices!

I would have speaking engagements often, and Astro was always happy to go along. Sometimes it would be at schools speaking to young children, and Astro would shake their hands after my speech. We would attend fund-raising events that lasted several hours, but Astro always acted pleased to accompany me. One day we had to go to the Legislature to hear others speak. The Legislature was in session, which meant we had the opportunity to meet a lot of influential people. Astro shook hands with senators, councilmen and other state representatives, acting like a regular politician.

Astro was known and loved by everyone at my job. He was loved so much they named him the "Cordell Hull Dog" after the building we worked in. As we strolled down the halls everyone we passed would smile and say, "hey Astro!" Most times they didn't know my name, so I would just get a smile or nod. I was approached frequently by people in the cafeteria asking if Astro could have part of their lunch. I always declined; he doesn't eat when he's working. But I never stopped the handshakes and hugs while we waited at the elevator. If you looked up the Cordell Hull mascot you would see a picture of Astro smiling.

I never knew which Astro liked the most - puppies or babies. He was always rolling around on the floor with both. When my son brought his twins home, Astro would stand watch as they slept. When I brought a new



*Pam Townsend and Astro.*

*Pam Townsend is a 1995-96 Partners grad and a consumer advocate for the state Department of Mental Health. She is also an Associate Minister at Bethesda Original Church of God.*

puppy home, Astro let her sleep in the bed with him. He always made sure the babies and the puppy were safe. He was like a live-in babysitter!

Astro lived a long, fulfilled life. At age 11, he became ill and would not eat. The vet said that wasn't good, and at his age there wasn't much they could do. That evening family and friends gathered around Astro to let him know he was loved. Astro went quietly to sleep. With tear-filled eyes everyone said goodbye.

Astro was more than a service dog; he was everybody's friend.



All photos by  
Lori Kissinger.



# SUPERHEROES UNITE!

by Pamela Weston

Last spring, the VSA national office collaborated with Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) to increase the number of superheroes in existence, and young people with autism were handed the charge of creating these new superheroes. The youth submitted details about the superpowers the new superheroes should possess, described the costumes that would be needed to accommodate these superpowers, and provided details about the colors their superheroes would wear and what those colors would represent.

In March and again in early April, participants met with fashion design faculty at MTSU, where they learned about the history of superhero costumes and the evolution of superheroes in popular culture.

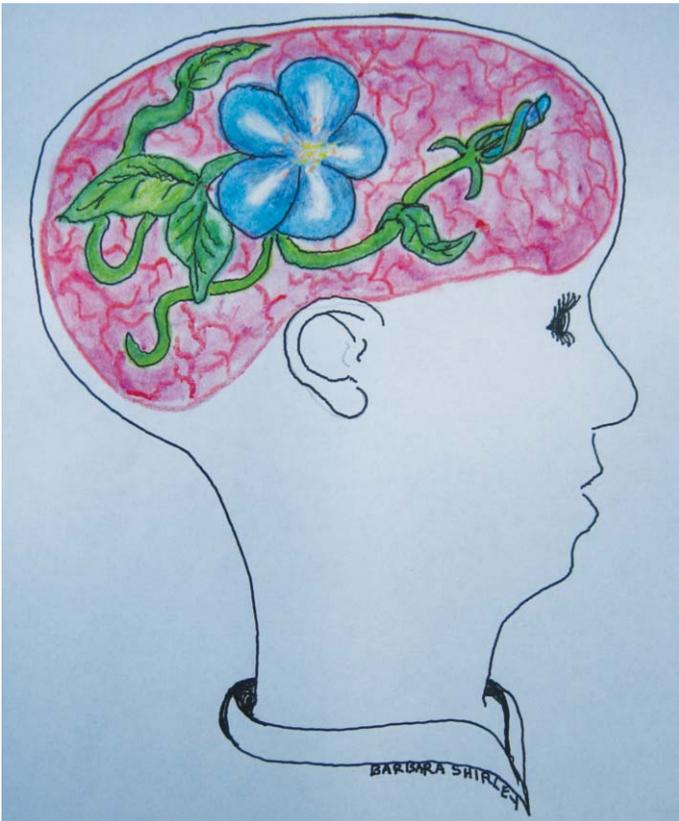
Guided by their own conceptualizations of the perfect superhero, the artists made detailed hand sketches, reproduced them using state-of-the-art design software, rendered patterns for the costume components and generated design transfers. Although most had not used a sewing machine before, the emerging superheroes used high-tech sewing equipment to finish their costumes, and then held a style show, modeling costumes for family, friends and fellow designers.

The superheroes project not only provided an opportunity for young people to experience working with design professionals on a college campus, it resulted in a host of new and exciting superheroes. The world is now a safer place, thanks to:

- Heroic Hawk (Bradley Early)
- Superhero Jalyn (Jalyn West)
- Ultraman Matt (Matthew Loveland)
- Dave (Robert Bousquet)
- Super Cool (Derrick Freeman)
- Mysterio (Jacob Martin)
- Sketch (Clay Smith)



**Brain Knowledge, Barbara Shirley**



**Barbara Shirley** of Nashville tries out various ways to express her artistic inspirations. She said, “when I share an idea and see it at work in another’s mind, it makes me feel good inside.”

**Body Betrayed, Jennifer Lindberg**

Unbound ability shackled  
Slave to my silence  
No other my freedom impedes  
Flesh of my flesh traitor revealed  
Mind besieges body  
    or is fault only mirrored?  
Perhaps they collude in an assault on the soul.  
Body betrayed

Key to freedom held inside on a whisper  
Slave to my silence  
Demands of the guards  
    with concussive unspoken threats  
Exclusion into solitary release  
Shunned without movement  
Alone by denial unless imprisonment is sought  
Dark and damp are the confines

Slave to my silence.

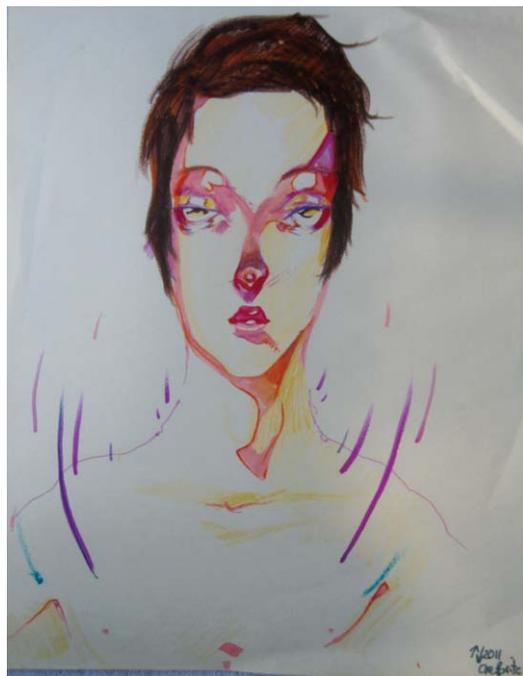
**Jennifer Lindberg** is the Brain Injury Transition Liaison with the Tennessee Disability Coalition. Her younger son is 18 and has Tourette syndrome. She said, “He and others that I have watched cope with this misunderstood Tourette syndrome disorder were the inspiration for the poem.”

**Untitled, Mia Belleza-Binns**



**Mia Belleza-Binns** is six years old and is on the autism spectrum. According to her mom, Luz Belleza-Binns, Mia expresses all her feelings and thoughts through her drawings, and “sees a happy world”.

**Face, Eric Brito**



**Eric Brito** is from Nashville where he is a member of Park Center. He particularly enjoys drawing people and faces.

**Disney**  
**Brian Werner**

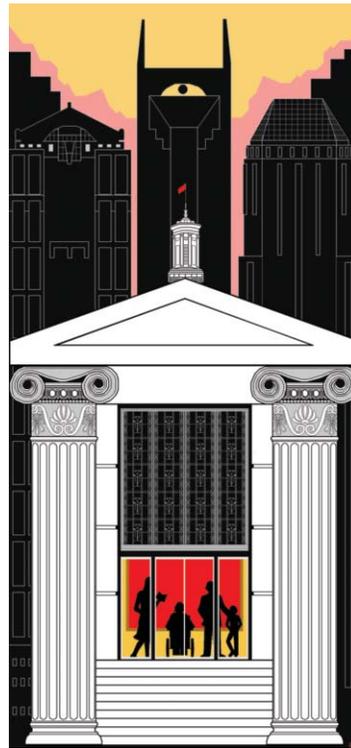
Take me back to those Disney days  
Where Mickey Mouse is the latest craze  
Where Alice still lives in Wonderland  
Where Wendy flies with Peter Pan

Where Donald quacks and Goofy is funny  
And Winnie the Pooh snacks on some honey  
Where Cinderella goes to the ball  
And Sleeping Beauty dances in the castle halls

Where the three pigs run from the wolf again  
And Snow White lives with the seven little men  
I love them all because you see  
There's still a kid that's inside of me

I still like to run and skip and climb  
And believe in Once Upon A Time  
I believe that dreams really do come true  
And now my Disney poem is through

*Brian Werner is 35 years old, and has William's Syndrome. He moved to Crossville in 2002 from Canton, Michigan and has attended Hilltoppers ever since. In addition to his current job at Food City, Werner has volunteered at the Art Circle Library and at Joshua Pet Treats.*



**Urban Conversation,**  
**Erin Brady Worsham**

*Erin Brady Worsham is a renowned Nashville artist and 2001-02 Partners graduate. Worsham has had three successful, one-woman shows in Nashville. Sponsored by the Society for the Arts in Healthcare and Vanderbilt University, her first show toured the country and Canada.*

**Peaceful, Stephanie Hartman**



*Stephanie Hartman is from Dickson where she is a member of ReConnect Dickson. Hartman works quickly and likes to explore using a variety of colors. Her artwork reflects her own "belief in goodness".*

**Pottery Creations, Sofia Maneschi**



*Sofia Maneschi was inspired to do pottery after meeting Danielle McDaniels, "The Clay Lady". Although Maneschi's manual dexterity is compromised by multiple sclerosis, a friend, Meredith Holper, helps her build the bisque ware. She said, "my work with ceramics brings me great joy, and I am happy to know that while MS may affect my body negatively, it cannot touch my creative spirit!"*

**Texas, Laura Hudson**



*Laura Hudson* of Nashville enjoys making her drawings come to life with “details that bring the viewer into the scene”. Hudson was chosen as the 2012 Tennessee Disability MegaConference Art Contest winner for her piece, “Tree Frog”.

**John Payne, Jessica Suzore**

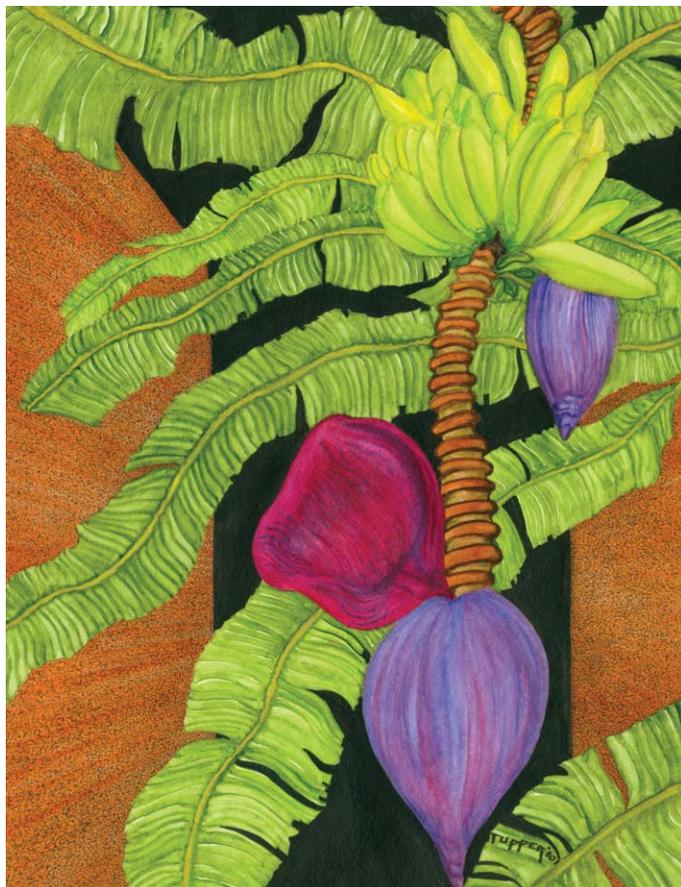


**Stella Bunny, Jessica Suzore**



*Jessica Suzore* is the mother of four and considers herself “an amateur photographer, at best”. She said, “I have favorites of the pictures I’ve snapped through the years and inventorying the works in my mind, pictures of children are the most beautiful. Stella is on my list of favorites.”

**Blooming Bananas, Kathy Tupper**



**Totem for Trinity and Host, Ellen Zahorec**



**Cat, Ellen Zahorec**

Cat!  
Why do you do that?  
You sit in a bag  
All nice and neat.  
I do not hear the patter  
Of little cat feet.  
I hear the crinkle of the paper  
And the tinkle of your bell.  
But you have more to tell.  
Being one of God's creatures  
Is your best feature.  
All the love that you give  
Must be your reason to live.  
You have been with me for years  
Purring through turmoil and tears.  
Even when I say, "Scat cat!"  
You nip at me as if to say,  
"Let me be - a cat!"  
In the door. Out the door.  
On the sofa. On the floor.  
You are in the way  
Demanding all the day  
Cat!  
I am yours.

**Mountain Peak, Ron Bass**

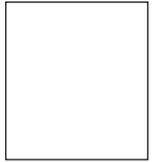


*Ron Bass is from Murfreesboro where he is a member of the Our Place peer support center. Bass comes from an artistic family and he continually works to improve his art.*

**Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities**

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***Snowy Owl, Dean Harris***



*Geraldine Dean Harris was born and raised in rural Jackson County. She has exhibited in group installations six times at the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center, twice at the Appalachian Center for Craft and the Folk Fest in Atlanta, and in several Cookeville galleries.*