

Students become artists in training

By DOUG OLESON - doleson@shawmedia.com

There were turkeys of all kinds. There was a baby turkey, a happy turkey, a mad turkey, a sick turkey and even a turkey who had bad teeth because he didn't brush them.

The turkeys were all works of art created by the Young Rembrandts program at James R. Wood Elementary School in Somonauk last week.

According to Cathy Derrig, who teaches the program, the Young Rembrandts are a group of 14 kindergarten through fifth-grade students who meet for an hour every Tuesday afternoon after school in four- to-five week sessions. There are about four such sessions every school year with each one focusing on something different.

"No lesson will be repeated for two years," she said, explaining that it will keep the extracurricular program fresh for the students, many of whom will take all the sessions. "The next session will start in late January."

Although she has only been teaching the program for a few months, Durrig said she was teaching art classes in Elmhurst when she heard about the Young Rembrandts 15 years ago.

"I was teaching the same thing, that anything can be drawn using basic shapes," she said. "Anything I do here can be incorporated into the school day."

Derrig, who lives in Sandwich and instructs similar classes in Plano and Yorkville, said the program – named for the great 17th century Dutch painter – is headquartered in Elgin.

According to the Young Rembrandts website, the program was founded in 1988 by a woman named Bette Fetter in her own home. Fetter had a fine arts education and a background in child development and wanted to create an original, step-by-step method to teach children drawing, which is the fundamental skill of all visual arts. Today, the program partners with preschools, elementary schools and community centers to either augment or supply their art education programs.

Under guidance from Derrig, a licensed certified art teacher, local students complete a drawing every week which they then mount and either place on the wall outside the school cafeteria or take home. They start by drawing their figures with different shapes by pencil and then proceed to color them in with colored pencils, markers, crayons or chalk.

"The only rule is that everyone is their own artist," Derrig said. "No one tells them if it's good or bad or how to do it."

Since it was the week before Thanksgiving, Derrig had the students focus on "cartoon turkeys."

There are between 14 and 17 students in each program.

"I think it's great," Robin Woodward, a parent helper of the Somonauk class, said of the program. "It's a good way to express themselves through art."

Woodward said she's been involved with the program for the past four years. She said she never had much of an interest in art herself until her daughter, Makayla, showed an interest in it.

"I signed up because I really love art," Makayla said, adding that she has two older brothers who also took the program. "These pictures look really cool to make."



Art teacher Cathy Derrig works with a student during a session of the Young Rembrandts recently in Somonauk. (DOUG OLESON | doleson@shawmedia.com)

Fellow fourth grader Evelyn Ebersohl had a similar view.

"I love to draw and the pictures are really fun to make," she said.

"It's a lot of fun," Sydney Johnson, a second grader, added. "It's fun to draw and it's fun to color."

So do the young artists have a special place at home for all the drawings they make?

"We have a wall that we hang all the pictures on," Evelyn said.

When asked if he knew who Rembrandt was before he signed up, second grader Payton Wyant blurted out an immediate "no," then paused for a moment.

"I think I did," he said, before hesitating again. "I don't know."