

Spanning the years

By Megan Anderson

A public school art teacher finds satisfaction among paint, glue, paper and the active minds of children.

Walking through the front doors of Frank Ohl Middle School, the years between childhood and adulthood seem to disappear. The school smells the same as it did over a decade ago; a unique blend of books, paper, people, and food. The hallways even look the same, although a bit smaller than remembered. Straight ahead, a long hallway leads to the art classroom, and loud voices echo out of the gymnasium, where an assembly is taking place.



Up ahead, a teacher is peering down the hall. He, like the sights and smells of the school, seems to have not changed over the years.

“Hello!” Don Kollar, art teacher at Frank Ohl, calls out as he leads the way into his classroom. Like the school itself, the art classroom retains its own unique scent; a blend of paint and paper, pencils and ink, paste and glue. Student artwork crowds the walls, and art supplies sit on tables throughout the room.

As Kollar sits down at his desk, it's hard not to notice that his neatly pressed khaki pants, button-down shirt and dark blue blazer are amazingly spotless at the end of a day of art projects.

“I wear an apron when I teach,” Kollar explains with a grin.

He leans back in his chair and immediately begins describing his job of 26 years; teaching art to fifth-, sixth-, and eighth-graders at Frank Ohl.

Each day begins at 8:15 a.m. when the first bell rings. Kollar teaches six classes per day, five of them art classes, and one study hall. Kollar smiles as he says that the study hall is his toughest class.

“They don't want to study!” he says with a laugh. Luckily for him, his other classes tend to go a little more smoothly. Kollar says that fifth- and sixth-graders are the most receptive to art.

“Eighth-graders are in transition,” he says. “Some of them are adults, some of them are kids.”

Kollar swivels around in his chair and pulls up to the computer next to his desk. He brings up the Frank Ohl Middle School webpage and clicks on a link that leads to a website featuring a dancing cartoon pencil.

“This is my website for my students,” he says as he navigates through the site. The various pages of his website contain assignments for his students, as well as links to the Art Club, of which Kollar is the co-advisor. There are also links to Frank Ohl's Wrestling Team, which Kollar is the coach of, along with numerous links to art museum websites and other art-related sites.

Kollar explains that the art budget is limiting, so he isn't able to do all of the projects he'd like. But he says that he is glad to put up some of his own money to help purchase supplies for projects like paintings, drawings, crafts and even puppets. “The kids appreciate it,” he says of his willingness to buy his own supplies. “The school does not charge the kids for their art classes.”

As Kollar talks about his students, the enthusiasm he has for his job is clear in his voice.

“It's so important to understand the kids you're dealing with,” he says earnestly. He rummages through a stack of papers on his desk and comes up with a book, *Understanding Today's Youth Culture* by Walt Mueller. Holding it up, he exclaims how informational and helpful it is.

“It talks about sex, peer pressure, drugs, alcohol, depression; all these things and how they relate to teens,” he explains.

After 30 years of teaching – 26 at Frank Ohl, and four at Watson and Davis Elementary Schools – Kollar feels he has a pretty good handle on today's youth.

“You know, the number one thing is peer pressure,” he says. “Everyone wants to fit in.” He explains that he sees kids dealing with peer pressure every day, and he understands how hard it is.

Kollar's enthusiasm makes it clear that he loves what he does, and he confirms that he has always enjoyed teaching.

“Teaching was my job right out of college,” he says. A graduate of Youngstown State University, Kollar studied commercial art and art education.

“People always seem to think that art majors are just doing it because they're not smart enough to do anything else,” he says. “It's not that I can't do math! Science was my best subject!” Kollar just genuinely loves art, and loves teaching art to others, and feels that what he does at Frank Ohl is important.

Kollar also feels that it's very important to continually educate himself in his chosen field. He frequently takes courses in art and education, "just for the fun of it."

He and his wife also like to travel, especially to New York, for concerts and the theater. Kollar also enjoys visiting art galleries and museums, and says that it keeps him well-rounded.

Kollar said that traveling so much is what keeps him in Youngstown, an area he doesn't plan to leave.

"The key is to know there's more out there," he explains. "There's so much out there, and traveling keeps it fresh. I have family in the area, and I have a certain comfort level here. But traveling gives you a different perspective."

Traveling extensively on a teacher's salary may seem difficult, but Kollar shrugs it off.

"You can always make more money," he says. But he'd rather stay right where he is, doing what he loves.

"I really enjoy the kids," he says. "It's so enjoyable; every day is different."