

Kodner Gallery helps kids at Ranken Jordan learn lessons in art



KATE MILLER PHOTO
Artist Joan Parker, left, works with Ranken Jordan outpatient Melanie Goad on a mural in the center's treatment room.

BY KATE MILLER
STAFF WRITER

Children at Ranken Jordan are receiving extra help with their art projects through a program sponsored by Kodner Gallery of Fine Arts.

Ranken Jordan is a pediatric specialty hospital in Maryland Heights. The hospital treats children with various illnesses and injuries.

Kodner Gallery owners Jon and David Kodner set up a workable design space in the art room at Ranken Jordan and are providing art supplies for children with physical disabilities. Furthermore, they are inviting working artists to come to the hospital to teach children about art through explanation and hands-on teaching.

So far, contemporary artist Chris Martin and landscape artist-illustrator Joan Parker have participated. Artists

Paul Degan, Billyo O'Donnell and Jason Dowd are scheduled for visits.

"Art brings not only beauty to the world but therapeutic value as well," said David Kodner, president of Kodner Gallery, located in Ladue.

Kodner, who has become a regular fixture at Ranken Jordan, said some of the youngsters he meets there are unable to communicate in traditional ways.

"A lot of these kids have lost the capacity to express themselves," he said. "The ability to create art allows them to do that and brings them self-confidence."

Lauri Tanner, president and CEO of Ranken Jordan, said the center always has had an art program but saw a need to expand it.

"How children (with special needs) can perform their art is very different," she said. "We needed the experts to come in and tell us what to do and how to do it."

The staff at Ranken Jordan and the Kodner Gallery combined their expertise to create an art program so that more children, even those unable to use their hands, could get involved.

"So many of our kids could sit around and think of things they can't do," Tanner said. "This is another medium that is about teaching kids what they can do."

Martin was at the hospital in June. While he was there, he created a piece of artwork with the children. On Saturday, Nov. 19, the piece will be auctioned, with the proceeds going to the hospital.

Other works by Martin are being shown at Kodner Gallery until Wednesday, Nov. 30. A portion of the sales from those pieces also will be donated to Ranken Jordan.

On Nov. 9, Parker was at the hospital. She designed a mural that is being transferred by

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paint and brush — with the help of Ranken Jordan patients — to the walls in the hospital's treatment room. The mural is an underwater scene with a castle, bubbles, mermaids and colorful fish.

The mural is bringing color and life to a room that was once sterile.

"Children need a distraction, and art can be a distraction," said Tanner, who said that's the case whether they are creating art or looking at art. "You let kids' imaginations go somewhere else, so they're not scared."

Josh Bucks, 13, of Illinois injured his leg in an accident. Before his return home, he painted two fish figures on the mural.

They will be there for other children to look at when he's gone.

"It's cool that I get to be a part of it," Josh said.

Kodner said, "Our intention is to create the leading regional art therapy program to benefit youth who require special care and would gain further or speedier physical and emotional recovery from the therapeutic benefit of art."

