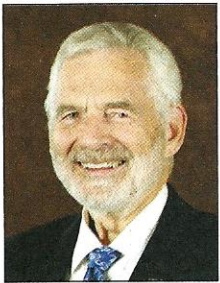


## The very important art of Inclusion/Acceptance

When you come to City Hall, it's usually to ask how you can help the city, or how the city can help you.

So, it may be a bit of a surprise to discover that City Hall is also an art gallery, and a great place to meet the artists.

But that's exactly what it is, thanks to a Sammamish Arts Commission decision many years ago to turn the lobby and balcony at City Hall into a special place of art.



*Don Gerend  
Mayor*

Here's how it works. Every three months or so, a new exhibit is installed featuring the works of one or more artists.

It might be photography of polar bears and mustangs (a beautiful exhibit shown last year by Gail Twelves), or a wide range of printmaking by a dozen or so regional artists and printmaking instructors.

And then there was the work of Bainbridge Island artist Amanda Devine, spanning 40-years and encompassing installations, conceptual art and unconventional mixed media.

Another striking exhibition was Don Fels' "Vanishing Points", providing a history lesson gleaned from World War II.

Each new exhibit begins with a reception and a chance to meet the artist or artists.

The current exhibit, which opened last month, was organized by the Sammamish Arts Commission in partnership with The Renaissance School of Art and Reasoning and ten profes-

sional artists from this area.

The topic – an important one these days – is "Inclusion/Acceptance".

To explore the subject through art, 24 students joined the professional artists and richly adorned City Hall's "Commons Gallery" with a variety of art pieces.

In addition to interspersing their art with that of the professionals, the students also contributed poetry, which they read during the Feb. 9 reception, an evening event in the City Council chambers featuring parents, teachers, artists and students.

Speaking at the event, Arts Commissioner Barbara Jirsa, the exhibit curator, stated, "This exhibition is an opportunity for the community to engage visually and through poetry on what it means to be inclusive and accepting.

"If inclusion is a state of being valued, respected and supported, what does that look like and how can we embrace it?

"Certainly a timely topic. This is a wonderful example of art providing the vehicle for conversation and community engagements."

The Renaissance School of Art and Reasoning is a Lake Washington School District "Choice School" serving sixth- through eighth-grade students.

Using a curriculum that meets state and district standards, students develop in an environment of artistry, rigor and warmth, learning to think and act using multiple approaches and perspectives.

All students are known and nurtured as important individuals who have an active concern for their com-

munity and society.

The school was founded in 2006 by teachers and parents who envisioned an engaging and challenging academic environment that would meet the needs of middle school students.

Head Teacher Linda Amaya said the premise for the "Inclusion/Acceptance" project flowed from a reading this past semester of Ray Bradbury's "All Summer in a Day."

The story of a young girl misunderstood by classmates gave them a springboard to launch their creativity and reflect on what inclusion meant for them.

The students were given free rein over their choices of media, and were required to write artist statements explaining where their inspiration and thoughts came from, a process that allowed them to reflect on the emotions and circumstances that can be such an important part of a middle schooler's life.

The idea of collaboration between the Arts Commission and the school is credited to Gee Randhawa, a volunteer at the school.

And I can tell you, the idea has produced a terrific exhibit we should all enjoy, and learn from.

Just come to City Hall between 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, and take a look at the creativity, and the sense of inclusion/acceptance, these talented artist's, both young and old, possess in abundance!

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Donald J. Gerend".