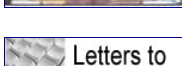


# THE NEW TOWN PRESS

The most widely read newspaper in "The New Town Press" area ~ Over 12,500 copies mailed monthly for residents and businesses in Swedesboro, Woolwich, Logan Township, East Greenwich Township, Mullica Hill, Auburn and Harrisonville areas.



## HOMETOWN LIVING

### Online Art Portfolios From Local Students Delight Family, Encourage Creativity

by Jean Redstone

MULLICA HILL -- You don't think of kindergarteners as having a work portfolio. A portfolio, moreover, that can grow and change as they d become a valuable asset, even a resume citation, in that unchartered territory vaguely known as "years from now."

But Molly Fitzpatrick and Thor Rorapough of Woolwich Township have one. So does Reagan Burke from Sewell. And Sophie Cometz of began her portfolio just last month, with an enterprising entry that was all her own idea. She's all of seven years old. Seven year olds can good ideas. Just ask any parent.

Or better yet, ask a teacher. Specifically, ask Diane Driessen, art teacher for all the grades at the Friend's School in Mullica Hill. Nearly a now boast a personal, online art portfolio that will grow with them through the years, as long as they continue contributing photos of their v Driessen, or "Teacher Diane" as the students call her, is the pre-kindergarten through 8th grade art teacher at Friend's School, where she past three years. When she happened upon information about Artsonia.com, an online "art museum" for students, at a teacher's conventi as a possibly useful venue for her school and its students.

The website was founded in 2000 as a way to both spotlight student work and to make an income from the internet, said Tiffany Rahn, Ec Artsonia.com, in a recent email.

Buddies Jim Meyers and Eric Meidel, "were interested in e-commerce but weren't quite sure about what avenue to pursue," Rahn said. " noticed a co-worker who had his child's artwork posted all around his cubicle. Slowly, the two of them started thinking how there could be share a child's creativity with family and friends.

"As the brainstorming continued, they also wanted to find a way to help support the arts in education, as already it was becoming a cours dropped or challenged when funds were low. So, piece by piece, Artsonia emerged as an online art gallery for student work, providing a families to be more involved with a child's creativity and also a way for art teachers to raise funds to help purchase supplies for their class

She added that the site now has more than 6.5 million artworks on display from students in 130 countries. "Participation in Artsonia is fr "and users may submit as few or as many pieces of art as they like".

Family and friends can then sign up for their favorite artist's fan club. They will receive email notifications when new artwork has been pub nearly 2 million family members and friends of artists are fan club members.

The site makes money through the sale of various items featuring the student art. Mugs with your child's latest work, for example, sell for \$ greeting cards costs from \$8.95 to \$15.95 for 10 cards. Fifteen percent of every sale is sent back to the participating school as either cre firm or cash.

"There is no minimum or maximum requirement -- if a school earns \$10 or \$10,000, it will be paid out upon request," Rahn said. Driesse the approximately \$100 she got back for art supplies for two family art workshops last year.

The online gallery, "is a source of pride for the kids. The older ones like putting their art on their notebooks," Driessen said, "and all the s their best work so it can be put up on the site."



MOLLY FITZPATRICK OF WOOLWICH and Reagan Burke of Sewe



(President) Obama's daughter was seen with one. That's when my daughter noticed them and wanted one."



She noticed Teacher Diane had a small one on her desk and decided to make one. Mother and daughter picked out fabric at the store, "how to do a simple stitch and she was so proud of it," Christina Cometz said. "Teacher Diane does these dolls with her fifth-graders and so much she put it on Artsonia."



Now Sophie and her family can see (a photo of) her Katie doll, "whenever we want. This is so exciting," Christina Cometz said. "It's neat to be online and see a child's work and buy something with that art on it. It's just a good way to encourage the kids. It helps to inspire them to do art and it reaches a broad range of people."



If students and their families love seeing the portfolios of art, teachers say they reap other benefits, as well. Driessen said the online gallery helps parents with the school program.



"I can't put up an art show every week and get parents to come that often," she said. "But they can see their child's work online anytime, and friends."



"I also get ideas from the Artsonia site and the galleries help the students' other teachers keep in touch with the work they're doing with me," teacher told me, 'Oh, I'm always so happy to see what my (pre-K) kids are doing in the art room.'

"It opens a conversation with a child and other teachers."

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This school year students at Logan Township Schools may also open portfolios on Artsonia.com. Art teacher Nancy Gibas, who teaches through fourth grade, also heard of the site at a teacher's convention. She has made preparations to include the program at her schools.

To test its ease of use, Gibas posted art from her own grandson, Jonathan Angelo of Beckett, on the site. He is a student at Center Square. Gibas knew she could get parental permission for posting his work on the site. Artsonia requires parents to OK the submissions.

Gibas used to take all her students' artwork and print a book at the end of the year. That meant students could not take work home to show after the book was put together.

"But now they can have a portfolio and parents can see their work online. Plus it's a portfolio that could be from kindergarten through high school. It follows them and could even be used on resumes," Gibas said.

"It's so good for a student's self-esteem, to have their work in a virtual museum," she added. "Plus it's another way to 'go green.' I'm not having to use construction paper and other paper to make portfolios."

Other schools in the area have also submitted to Artsonia and the site lets a visitor put in a school name or location to see what local content is offering. No child is identified.



MOLLY'S RADIAL DESIGN SPIDER ON [ARTSONIA.COM](http://ARTSONIA.COM).

Driessen and Gibas see the value of this internet innovation as a way to use technology to enhance education and the joy of learning. For them, the benefits are easier to describe.

"I think the school program is fabulous," Christina Cometz said. "It's a great outlet for parents to see their children's art, their progress, to talk about a project."

Friends school in Mullica Hill has a Web site that links to its student work on [www.Artsonia.com](http://www.Artsonia.com). Go to [www.friendsmh.org](http://www.friendsmh.org).

If you're interested in Ugly Dolls, they have a Web site, too: [www.uglydolls.com](http://www.uglydolls.com)

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