



**WEST VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND THE ARTS
DIVISION OF REHABILITATION SERVICES**

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NEWS RELEASE

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2014 Diversifying Perspectives Art Contest winners announced

Charleston, W.Va. (Sept. 16, 2014) – The West Virginia Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) announces the 2014 Diversifying Perspectives Art Contest and Exhibition award winners.

The Grand Exhibitor is Benjamin DiGiorgi from South Charleston for his oil and pastel painting, The Magical Owl.

DiGiorgi, a lifetime resident of South Charleston, is a 2014 graduate of South Charleston High School. DiGiorgi has autism and had to work extra hard throughout school. He became interested in art as a teenager and especially likes to draw owls.

Award of Excellence winners are:

Kelsey Bable from Follansbee for her mixed media collage titled, The Butterflies Are Free. Bable is studying art therapy at West Liberty University. She was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in her senior year at Brooke High School.

John Panek from Shinnston for his colored pencil drawing titled, 1920s Dirt Track Racing. A West Virginia resident since 1995, Panek grew up in Arlington Heights, Illinois. He is a graduate of the American Academy of Art in Chicago. Panek contracted polio during the 1952 epidemic and he now has post-polio syndrome.

Greg Siegwart from Wheeling for his oil painting titled, Occupational Hazard. Siegwart is a self-taught artist who began painting at the age of 10. As an adult, he experienced a traumatic brain injury as a result of an automobile accident. He found oil painting to be his therapeutic refuge and it became his life.

The artwork selected as the Grand Exhibitor has been incorporated into a poster promoting National Disability Employment Awareness Month, a national campaign that raises awareness about disability employment issues and celebrates the many and varied contributions of America's workers with disabilities. Held annually in October, this year's theme is "Expect. Employ. Empower." The poster will be displayed in businesses throughout West Virginia.

The Diversifying Perspectives Art Contest and Exhibition is an opportunity to showcase the creative and diverse abilities of people with disabilities and to promote National Disability Employment Awareness Month in October. The contest was open to West Virginia residents with disabilities who were at least 18 years old.

The exhibition opened with a reception on Tuesday, Sept. 16, at the Culture Center in Charleston and will remain on display through Oct. 31. Forty-seven entries were received.

"This contest and exhibition allow us to feature the artistic abilities of West Virginia artists with disabilities during National Disability Employment Awareness Month and plays an important role in bringing awareness to disability-related employment issues," said DRS Director Donna Ashworth.

Copies of the National Disability Employment Awareness Month poster are free and available from the West Virginia Division of Rehabilitation Services.

DRS proudly presents this contest and exhibition in partnership with the West Virginia Office of the Secretary of Education and the Arts and the West Virginia Division of Culture and History.

DRS and the Division of Culture and History are both agencies within the West Virginia Department of Education and the Arts.

DRS is the state agency responsible for the federal vocational rehabilitation program in West Virginia. Each year, DRS helps thousands of West Virginia residents with disabilities meet their employment goals by providing individualized work-related counseling, training, job placement and other vocational rehabilitation services through its 31 field offices across the state.

Culture and History brings together the past, present and future through programs and services focusing on archives and history, arts, historic preservation and museums.

To request a copy of the poster or for more information on the Diversifying Perspectives Art Contest and Exhibition visit www.wvdrs.org or call 1-800-642-8207.