



Students hold their awards on May 24.

JIM MACLEAN/RIVERTOWNS ENTERPRISE

Friends champion vigor for the visual arts

By Kris DiLorenzo

Ardasley High School's visual arts program is getting a boost from a newly formed organization called Ardasley Friends of the Visual Arts (AFVA).

The "friends" are parents, community members, and arts educators who have come together to provide extra support for the school's visual arts program, making available more resources, activities, and recognition for art students. The organization, officially formed earlier this month, aims to provide scholarships, enrich programming through special events and projects, and reward student work with certificates and awards, for a start.

AFVA is the brainchild of art teacher Stephanie Rosen, who has been teaching at the school since 1999. "It's always been a vision of mine that there be a parental support for the visual arts," she told the Enterprise. "These parents made it happen."

Rosen was referring to AFVA president Sue Lau; vice president Mark Montague and his wife, Michele; Favey

and Stephanie Chu; Francesca Manzi; Jen Montgomery; Lee Dannay and Wayne Hutchinson; Sarah Hill; Laura Rubino; and Smita Patel. One of the Montagues' three sons, Zachary, 17, will attend the University of the Arts in Philadelphia this fall, and has declared to major in industrial design. Samantha Hutchinson, a senior, is heading for Skidmore College to study art, and Caitlyn Chu, a 2015 AHS graduate, is at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, studying art.

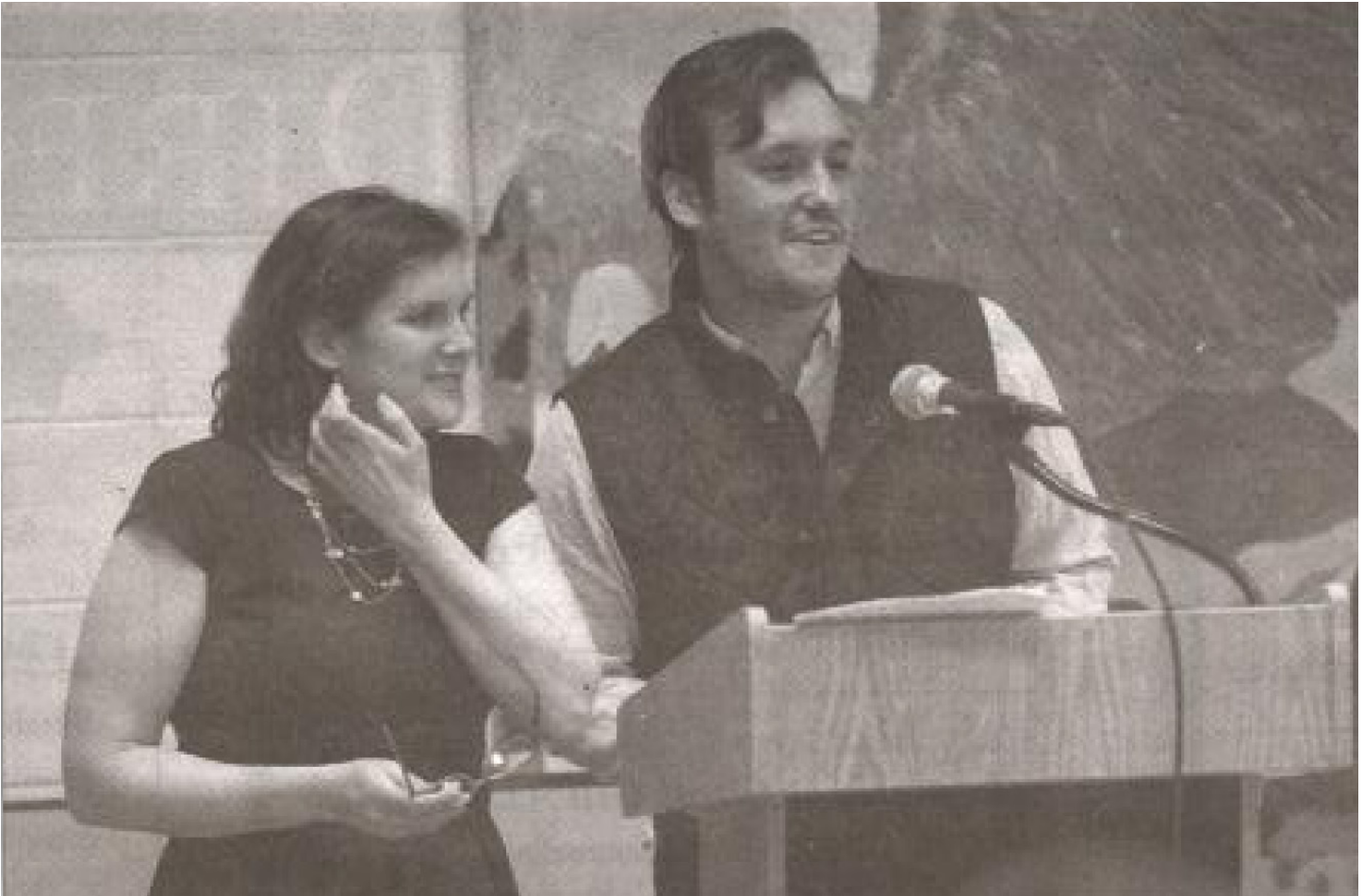
Rosen, 45, has wanted to do this for years, according to Lau. "She's always felt that other kids get awards and attention, and that visual arts students don't get much more than an annual art show, and two awards on Senior Awards Night," Lau explained. "She wanted to highlight all the visual artists from first year through seniors."

Rosen's vision includes more field trips, bringing in artists in residence, using different materials, and purchasing equipment that the school budget doesn't cover. However, she is quick to point out, "Their job is not to

change what we already have, but to make what we have more accessible and even better, to extend it further." The school's current offerings are studio art, creative crafts, digital art and design, drawing, painting, ceramics and sculpture, collage, and digital photography.

Lau has ideas that would carry out what Rosen imagines: "I would love to take kids on a field trip, have a private tour of the Met, and get a printmaker. We want to recognize that the visual arts are just as important as math and sports. I believe there should be a balance of creativity with academics. Those would complement each other."

AFVA has organized its activities into three areas: the legal and administrative side, fundraising, and encouraging and fostering youth artists. It is in the process of being recognized by the state as a charitable organization, and will then seek non-profit status. It already held its first fundraising event -- a bake sale on May 17 that raised more than \$450 -- and began gearing up for Dessert;Award Night, a celebration of student achievement on May 24.



Teacher Stephanie Rosen and sculptor Malcolm MacDougall III

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On May 24, three college-bound students who plan to major in visual arts received monetary awards. Others were acknowledged for going above and beyond what their peers did, including taking a project home to work on, participating in extra-help sessions, taking risks with their artwork, or improving during the school year.

The evening's keynote speaker was sculptor Malcolm MacDougall III, who has had his work installed in Union Square in Manhattan and shown in a variety of art galleries. MacDougall, 26, a graduate of Ardsley High School and Purchase College's School of Art & Design, works out of a riverside studio in Dobbs Ferry.

Rosen and her students understand that the value of the visual arts can be a form of therapy, "a way to get connected to oneself."

She would like people to be reminded that "every windowpane, every chair, every record album was created by someone. We as a society take that for granted, that someone's creative thinking made that possible. We've lost sight of how things take thinking, problem-solving, playing, figuring things out. Artists still know how to do that."

The Montagues share that perspective. "I think it's becoming a trend in school districts to ask parents to form a booster club and to support programs that school budgets can't take care of," Mark Montague said. A partner in the Manhattan-based legal firm of Cowan Liebowitz & Latman, he is optimistic about the future of AFVA. "We want to keep up that level of excitement for volunteering. Luckily, we all have the energy to put into this."

One student who is keenly

aware of the potential benefits of the group's efforts is 160-year-old Christina Hernandez, a junior. She has been studying studio art, graphic design, and drawing, and created the AFVA logo, which can be seen on the AFVA website created by junior Christopher Pence. "A lot of what is given to other classes, like science and technology classes, I would like to see offered to art classes as well," she said. "I would like to see more trips. I would like art students to be commemorated for their work."

Like her art teacher, Hernandez sees that art has a broad effect. "It allows me to express things that I wouldn't necessarily be able to express if I were just speaking or writing. I think it can be very impactful in the real world, and carry messages to the society we're living in."