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Art That's More than Just Pretty



Finding art in Northside life: Roger Cummings and Anne Little Long (top) at a Juxtaposition Arts' drawing class with (from left) Ameen, Larry, and Aamina.

Northside artists are giving kids tools to create art and craft their lives.

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By Jaime Kleiman

In addition to Juxtaposition and PCYC, other organizations are using arts programming to help change North Minneapolis. The Northside Arts Collective collaborates with community centers to produce public sculpture. The Peace Foundation hosts numerous events and community forums dedicated to cleaning up the area and creating dialogue. Its annual Peace Games includes street parties, a 5K run, and an arts crawl, Flow. Then there's the Camden Music School, the Lundstrum Center for the Performing Arts, the Workhouse Theatre Company, Homewood Studios, Asian Media Access, and Universal Dance Destiny Studio.

Artistic director/performer Edna Stevens Talton, who runs Universal Dance and lives in New Hope, says the Northside reminds her of her childhood in Queens and Brooklyn. "Everyone in the neighborhood knows each other," she says. "The Northside has a huge African American population, which is unlike the other areas in the Twin Cities. When I moved here, I thought the majority of Minnesota was Caucasian until I found the Northside. Its distinct down-to-earth qualities can make a newcomer feel at home." She loves that she can buy the "hottest kicks" in the entire state on the Northside. Yet, as a business owner, Stevens is dismayed by the filth of North Minneapolis and the city's negligence. "Appearance is crucial in any business," she says. "I'm not sure who's responsible for this."

In Mayor R. T. Rybak's 2006 State of the City Address at the Capri Theater, he said that there was no other part of the city that needed more attention. "Now is the time and this is the place to make North Minneapolis the jewel we need it to be," he said. "This entire city—from top to bottom—needs to be committed to success in North Minneapolis."

For Ayers, Hartwell, and their friends, Rybak's words hold little, if any, weight. "Within the first three days of moving to the Northside, we heard an ambulance because someone got stabbed in their backyard," says Hartwell. "If every neighborhood had an afterschool program like PCYC's and if the police would come on time, there'd be a lot less violence. That's why I came to PCYC. To not get into trouble."

Jaime Kleiman is theater columnist for Mpls.St.Paul Magazine.