

Campers take lessons from local artist

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CARLSBAD — Summer camp wouldn't be complete without arts and crafts projects and Carlsbad's Boys & Girls Club is no different. There, campers gather twice a week to let their creative juices flow as they work on a number of assignments.

For the first time, though, children will be bringing home much more than the standard construction paper projects usually offered up at camp. They'll be learning fine art techniques from professional artist Cheryl Ehlers through her successful program, Stardust Arts.

"It's my way of giving back to something that was so important to me when I was a kid," Ehlers said. "I'm doing what I love and the kids are having a blast."

Through her grant-funded program, Ehlers is teaching painting and drawing techniques to a number of campers throughout the summer. She encourages them to think outside of the box instead of limiting themselves to what they've previously been taught. "They're learning different concepts," she said. "I tell them that they can do anything if they just believe."

One of Ehlers' main goals with the campers is to submit several pieces to the Boys & Girls Club of America's National Fine Arts Exhibit Program. She noted that it would be the first time that anything from the Carlsbad branch has been submitted.

As a group, the campers have mapped out and started painting the Carlsbad Village to submit to the exhibition. Ehlers will also select several acrylic and watercolor pieces for consideration in the national competition.

"It's not about winning though, it's about giving them positive avenues to explore and find what they're good at," said Ron Sipiara, the director of operations at the club.

Ehlers brought her Stardust Arts program to the Boys and Girls Club after a successful run in Oceanside during the last school year. She launched the program with a grant from the Kenneth A. Picerne Foundation to provide art instruction to elementary schools.

"It was a dream come true for me because none of the schools have an art program taught by a working artist," she said. "I got to teach 1,540 students at 11 schools over the course of one year."

Although Ehlers' program has been a success, its future is uncertain. The current grant funding ends in September and she's diligently searching to find another way to keep the program available to North County's students.

"Some of the schools are trying to find ways to bring me back and I hope they can," Ehlers said. "I do it to see the smiles on these kids faces."

To learn more about the Stardust Arts program, visit www.thestardustarts.com.