

---

# Camden students create library mural

By DANA FORDE  
Courier-Post Staff

## CAMDEN

Last winter, Earl Stamm drove all over the city in search of the perfect location for students to design a work of art. Then, during a visit to the Camden Public Library, he noticed an empty wall that needed some color.

"Art is a very important tool for education," said Stamm, who is managing director of NetworkArts, a nonprofit education organization based in Philadelphia. "We try to do something that will improve Camden and something that will beautify and educate Camden."

Tuesday afternoon, Stamm pointed to a wall inside the library, where 15 Camden students have started to design a vibrantly colored mosaic. The all-male group of students is using clay and colored tile and glass to illustrate a historical timeline of communication: from cave times to iPhones.

Students involved in the summer mosaic project are participants in programs sponsored by the city's Center for Family Services. The project is part of NetworkArts' mission to expand science and art opportunities for underserved children, Stamm said.

"It's the process of learning. You make decisions on what needs changes and what doesn't work," added educator artist Ricki Lent, who is helping to guide the project. "Even though it's a short period of time I think that the experience really will last. It'll be something they'll really remember."

Officials would not release the last names of the students working on the mosaic project since their identities are considered confidential by the Center for Family Services.

Earlier in the week, a 16-year-old named Tony worked diligently, cutting pieces of glass that he will eventually add to the mosaic.

"I've been working with clay sculptures. I did one with that Egyptian man and I did a musical note down there. It's black, white and red," said Tony, adding that he had never worked with clay or ceramics before.

Prior to starting the library project two weeks ago, students transformed their own drawings into clay sculptures. They are now in the process of using cement to apply their sculptures to the wall and cutting glass and tile to complement their designs.

Tuesday, Derrick, 17, applied colored tiles to the wall, which bordered the drawing of a book. He then observed a King Tut sculpture he created.

"I drew it on paper first. It took me like a day and then we have to make the sculptures in clay," Derrick explained.

A 17-year-old student named Marvin proudly pointed out his contributions to the mosaic, which included designs of hands and a stack of books.

"I'm surprised at the way it's coming out because I didn't even think I was artistic," Marvin said.

"These are some kids who've never drawn before. I think they were very surprised at the progress they've made," said Lent, who was alerted to the NetworkArts program after retiring from a 30-year post as an art teacher in the Philadelphia school district. This is her third year with the organization.

NetworkArts has led the design of about 30 mosaic projects in Camden over the past 10 years, courtesy of grant funding from the Campbell Soup Company, Stamm said. Past project locations include the city's Walter Rand Transportation Center,

Campbell's Field and the Camden Children's Garden. The organization also has organized art projects with inner-city children in Philadelphia for the past 14 years, Stamm said.

"We've worked with tens of thousands of kids. We use art as a tool for learning. This way they can pass their knowledge onto future generations," said Stamm, adding that officials chose this summer's communication theme to coincide with the library's environment of literature, writing and technology.

"We find that a lot of kids that are failing in school are really artistic," Stamm said. "We're very proud of the kids. Some of them start off cynical but they're very proud of their work at the end."

Reach Dana Forde at (856) 486-2917 or [dforde@courierpostonline.com](mailto:dforde@courierpostonline.com).

Published: August 15, 2007 3:10AM