



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

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NEWS RELEASE

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2015 Diversifying Perspectives Art Contest winners announced

Charleston, W.Va. (Sept. 3, 2015) – The West Virginia Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) announces the 2015 Diversifying Perspectives Art Contest and Exhibition award winners.

The Grand Exhibitor is Greg Siegwart from Wheeling for his colored pencil drawing titled, 1865.

Born in Wheeling, Siegwart's love of painting began when he picked up a brush at the age of 10. This self-taught artist turned this hobby into a therapeutic refuge after experiencing a traumatic brain injury after an automobile accident in 2000.

Award of Excellence winners are:

Forrest Ash from Mineral Wells for his mixed media mosaic picture titled, Luck.

Ash works part time in the art department at SW Resources in Parkersburg. Being paid for working with art has been his lifelong dream. Ash believes he squandered his artistic talent away for nearly 20 years struggling with mental illness and addictions to drug and alcohol.

John Panek from Shinnston for his colored pencil drawing titled, Rodeo Bull Fighter.

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.

Carli Ratliff from Oak Hill for her mixed media painting titled, Moonlight Stalker.

Ratliff is a 2010 graduate of Concord University, where her studies focused on art and music. Currently, she is painting wildlife and pet portraits and working on continuing her education. Ratliff has epilepsy and her ultimate goal is to teach art.

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 "My disability is one part of who I am." The poster will be displayed in businesses throughout West Virginia.

Enabling and empowering individuals with disabilities to work and to live independently

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.

Thirty-six entries were received.

The exhibition opened with a reception on Thursday, Sept. 3, at the Culture Center in Charleston and will remain on display in the Culture Center's Balcony Gallery through Nov. 7.

"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 30 field offices across the state.

The Division of 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.