

News-Record  
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SMARTEN UP  
@ The South Orange-Maplewood Adult School

### **Art at the Adult School**

By Judy Levy

I've been told that, ever since I was old enough to hold a crayon, I loved to draw. As far back as I can remember, art has been a part of my life and I've always found joy in painting and the pursuit of other creative arts. As an adult, however, although my interest in art continued unabated, work and family most often prevented me from putting crayon to paper.

And so it was, until a friend, who is an artist, told me she was attending an art class at the South Orange-Maplewood Adult School (SOMAS) that not only helped her improve her skills, but also inspired her. While I had my doubts as to what an Adult School class could offer me, a year later, still having produced no art work, I registered for the class.

It's been more than twenty-five years since I signed up, and I still attend that class, learning something new at virtually every session.

My teacher, Barbara Minch, has taught art at the Adult School for more than 30 years. Originally hired to teach one drawing class, she now teaches a collage class and a Master Class and has a following of dozens of students. Many, including me, started in her classes as realistic artists, using pencil and a variety of paint mediums. But, in the Master Class, Barbara's creativity and innovative thinking motivated many of us to explore new mediums and surfaces, in addition to sculpture, collage, photography and technology.

"The Master Class is a critiquing and exhibiting group of professional artists who came together from my other classes to form a support system for each other," said Minch.

The newer collage class has changed Minch's thinking about teaching. "I used to say, 'I can teach good art skills, but I can't teach

talent.' I've changed my thinking on this, though. Talent is about having original ideas and acting on them. Since I started teaching the collage class, using a layered system that taps into the subconscious, I was able to get in touch with that intuitive part of the brain where creativity starts.

"When I work in class with other artists I'm struck by how different each person interprets the same materials. Creativity is contagious."

A highly accomplished, professional artist in her own right, Minch believes that teaching is a big part of her creative process. "I have to push my own work so I can keep challenging my students. I have gone from using my collages as ideas for paintings, to working, as a collagist, with three-dimensional elements, to sculpting life-size figures, with my own recipe of paper clay.

"When asked what drives my passion for art, I have to say, it's a deep internal need that never turns off. I don't know who I am without it. Parents have asked whether or not their children can make a living as artists. I tell them it is a hard, often unpredictable, way to live, since so much of the work is experimental and solitary. When the work doesn't go well, it has a way of influencing everything. And still, I couldn't imagine doing anything else. The highs in art are well worth the lows. There's a sense of expectation each time I go into my studio, and it has me coming back everyday."

Minch thoroughly enjoys her SOMAS classes. "The people I have met in South Orange and Maplewood have inspired me and made me want to be better. The way it works is the more I give the more I get back."

In sum, Minch's students have learned to think outside the proverbial box. Significantly, our work has been accepted at galleries and shows in New York and New Jersey.

Two of Barbara's current students, Sarah Canfield and Evelyn Graves, have perfected their skills to the point that they have been asked to teach their own art classes at the Adult School. Canfield is teaching two classes, Soft Pastels and How to Draw. She believes drawing is a skill anyone can develop. Graves is teaching a watercolor class for all skill levels, a great class.

SOMAS has always given its teachers the opportunity to create classes that inspire students of all ages to learn and grow. Whether a

student has an interest in learning more about computers, culinary arts or cameras, or subjects as varied as planting a garden, performing or enjoying personal growth, there is always a class to be found by simply leafing through the catalog or browsing [somadulthoodchool.org](http://somadulthoodchool.org)

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***Judy Levy has lived in Maplewood for 39 years and has been a trustee of the South Orange-Maplewood Adult School for more than 25 years. She is an artist and was Communications Coordinator of the South Orange-Maplewood School District before retiring in 2012.***