

A MILLION GREETINGS FROM NEW ORLEANS

Photo Opportunity

Ms. Tama Distler at (504) 484-8082, or Stephán Wanger at (504) 400-4603.

Louisiana Elementary School Students take on Massive Mardi Gras Bead Mosaic Project

All 408 students of Rudolph Matas Elementary School raised over 2,200 pounds of Mardi Gras beads that are being recycled and used to create 12 huge 4' by 4' art works depicting the beloved delicacies of Louisiana to become a part of an international exhibit.

Metairie, La - Rudolph Matas Elementary School's Arts Facilitator Ms. Tama Distler, together with New Orleans mosaic artist Mr. Stephán Wanger, are teaching Matas students the art of bead mosaic work to meet the school's curricular goals for the arts, and to extend lessons in Mathematics, Environmental Conservation, Louisiana Culture and Pop Art. In order to do so, last October the school initiated an enormous bead drive enabling the students to amass over 2,200 pounds of Mardi Gras beads. By the end of the school year (late May 2011), the results will be visible in the form of 12 finished art works depicting food items such as Beignets, Red Beans and Rice, a King Cake and many others.

"A generous grant from the Target Foundation triggered me to contact Mr. Wanger," said Ms. Distler, "and after a few meetings we realized that there would be enormous potential for our students to teach others about Louisiana's culinary treasures while learning about the art of creating mosaics using Mardi Gras beads. The project grew so much larger because we realized that through these works, we would be able to inspire future students to continue to seek out recycled materials for the creation of art."

Mr. Wanger mainly uses recycled materials and channels his creative energy into assembling dazzling mosaics using Mardi Gras beads. Working in a photo-realistic style, he re-creates scenes, images, and icons of Louisiana to help bring awareness to the world of the innate beauty of the state's unique culture and varied communities. His exhibit is called "A Million Greetings From New Orleans."

Matas Elementary School has an Arts Integration curriculum to enhance the learning experience for those students who want more, and to provide differentiated paths of learning for those students who need more. The schools' principal Ms. Pat Helmstetter points out, "many students have come to Matas never having experienced art before. These large pieces have made a tremendous impression upon our students, faculty, staff, and community. I am delighted that they will continue to inspire Matas student for years to come."

The 12 works that are being created depict: Red Beans and Rice, Raw Oysters, Crawfish Boil, a Po-Boy, a Hubig's Pie, Tabasco, Beignets and Café Au Lait, Barq's Root Beer, Zapp's Potato Chips, a King Cake, a Muffuletta, and Tony' Chachere's. The finished works will go on display in a public space with a grand opening event some time in May or June of 2011.

For more information please contact Ms. Tama Distler at (504) 484-8082, or Stephán Wanger at (504) 400-4603.



About Rudolph Matas Elementary School

Rudolph Matas Elementary School is a Pre-K - 5th grade school in Metairie, Louisiana, just outside of the city of New Orleans. Our population is $\frac{1}{3}$ students with special needs and $\frac{2}{3}$ regular education and gifted students totaling approximately over 400 students for the 2010 - 2011 school year.

Our school has piloted an Arts Integration Curriculum in 2008 and continues to achieve excellence and high test scores through this program. The school also has specialized classes in visual art, ballroom dance and music.

Arts teachers also use the key concepts of what is being taught in the classrooms and base their lessons on that material in order to provide true arts-integrated learning.

Matas also has an inclusion curriculum for our students with special needs. Classroom teachers and arts teachers work very hard to include all of our students in integrated lessons and learning experiences for our students to enjoy together. Assisted by para-educators, our students with handicapping disabilities participate in almost all of our daily programs and routines.

We have worked diligently with special needs education, organizations to seek out and acquire appropriate tools, equipment and learning materials so that our students can all work together to learn, experience and grow.



About Tama Distler, Arts Facilitator, Rudolph Matas Elementary School, Jefferson Parish Public School System

Tama Distler is the Arts Facilitator at Matas Elementary Public School in Jefferson Parish in Metairie. Matas has adopted a full Arts Integration program three years ago with the hiring of a Ms. Distler to oversee the program, a full time visual art teacher and a full time music teacher. This program, which the school adapted from a model presented by the Southeast Center for Education in the Arts, works in two ways.

It is the role of the Art Facilitator to work with classroom teachers to add arts components in visual art, theater, dance and music to the lesson plans that they currently teach. In addition, Arts classroom curricula is designed around the standards and GLEs being taught in the classrooms while also addressing the benchmarks and standards for the arts. These two components work hand-in-hand to enrich and enhance learning for Matas students, broadening the experience for those who want more, and providing different avenues of learning for those who need more.

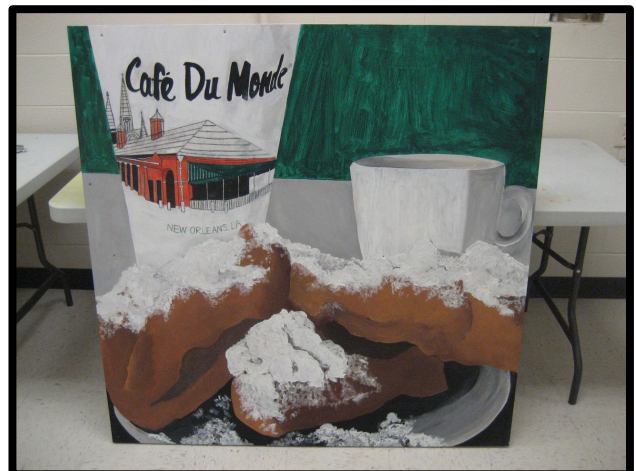
In the past year few years as the program has developed and grown, the school has benefited from this extremely successful avenue for alternative and enhanced learning.

It is also Ms. Distler's goal as the Art Facilitator to transform the large campus at Matas into an art-filled paradise. Since Katrina, Matas' facilities have undergone many reconfigurations to assist and house others schools who had lost their own.

Now that Matas has regained their space, the focus is to re-unify the school grounds and re-establish the school as an Arts Integration School.

In the past three years, Ms. Distler has been filling the indoor corridors and outdoor covered walkways and sprawling green spaces with artwork, providing concerts and music happenings for students to appreciate and enjoy, and providing students with experiences in dance and theater to enrich the learning environment at Matas and expand the curricula.

Ms. Distler has actively sought and engaged local artists, arts supporters, and organizations to help achieve this goal and to ignite the arts experience for Matas students.



About Stephán Wanger, Artist

Stephán Wanger is a self-taught artist who channels his creative energy into assembling dazzling mosaics using recycled Mardi Gras beads. Working in a photo-realistic style, Mr. Wanger re-creates scenes, images, and icons of Louisiana to help bring awareness to the world of the innate beauty and wonder of the state's unique culture and varied communities.

Through his experiences traveling the world, Mr. Wanger has gained insight and influence from the Spanish Art Nouveau designs of Antoni Gaudi, the Moorish and Persian architectural details in Istanbul, Turkey, and the the sculpture and environmental art of Chicago artist and friend John David Mooney. These designs and images have translated to his work in pattern, design and fine detail. Though Mr. Wanger is not formally trained as an artist, he engages in a craft that speaks to fine art, borrowing the ideals of Post-Impressionistic Pointillism and emulating the style and scale of Roy Lichtenstein's Pop-Art works. By approaching each piece with superior craftsmanship, Mr. Wanger has elevated what might be considered kitsch because of the whimsical materials he uses, and brings a level of "high art" to his craft.

In preparation for the formal construction of each piece, beads are meticulously sorted by size down to the exact millimeter and perfect shade, creating a detailed and varied palette much like a painter would for painting. The resulting play of light and color recalls several Post-Impressionistic artists' works while adding a new dimension of glitter and shine through the use of metallic, plastic and luminescent beads. The illusion of three-dimensional space is often created through the use of perspective but also the variety of sizes of the beads he uses to create actual dimension add an element of bas-relief. The finished works are stunning to regard both from distance and upon close inspection of his fine craftsmanship.

Part of Mr. Wanger's goal is in using recycled materials for his pieces. Not only does he collect discarded beads throughout Mardi Gras in an effort to clean post-parade debris, but also, he regularly visits salvage yards to gather additional materials for his work. Through his art, Mr. Wanger hopes to inspire the citizens of Louisiana to recycle and to create, and the the rest of the world to appreciate and gain fondness for the unique culture and natural beauty that Louisiana has to offer. The exhibit is called "A Million Greetings from New Orleans."

Mr. Wanger's mosaics works can be seen at Galeria Alegria at 1914 Magazine Street, New Orleans, LA 70130, or online at www.galeriaalegria.com.

