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Children auction 'fearless' art

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Hadlie Bennett, 8, watches as her father, Heath Bennett, bids on her artwork during the 4th annual Art Auction last night in McCracken Hall. The silent auction featured artwork created by the students of The Plains Elementary School. Half of the proceeds go to the artists and half go to the students' art program.

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Parents, grandparents, teachers and Ohio University faculty members crowded into McCracken Hall yesterday to support local elementary school students and their art.

Second-grader Hadlie Bennett's painting - a multi-colored ocean made of lines and swirls beneath a giant purple moon - was one of more than 30 pieces of artwork sold during the "Art Extravaganza and Silent Auction" today. Officials from local schools and OU's Patton College of Education and Human Services organized the fourth annual silent auction to showcase the young students' art. About 100 people attended the event.

"My most favorite colors are light purple, black and white. White and purple together make a really pretty color, so that's why I decided to paint this," Bennett said of her painting, "Moonlight."

College of Education Dean Renée Middleton asked the auction's attendees, many of whom live in The Plains, if they had been affected by the tornado and high winds that swept through Athens County in September.

"I'm hopeful we've had many opportunities to celebrate since that challenging time," Middleton said. "This will be another opportunity to celebrate the accomplishments of our young students."

The college has a benefactor who will buy paintings that didn't receive a bid, but so far, that person's services haven't been needed, Middleton said.

The artwork was displayed in McCracken Hall since its unveiling in May. Next year, the students' pieces will also hang in the Kennedy Arts Museum, Middleton said.

Many of this year's pieces of artwork inspired bidding wars between parents who placed bids via telephone and those present at the auction.

The bids started at \$15, and minutes after the bidding started, several of the pieces had gone as high as \$75.

Half of the money from each piece sold goes to the student who created it. The other is put in a pool, which is used to pay for a "wish list" of art supplies compiled by the students' teacher, said Tamy Solomon, the College of Education's director of alumni relations and events.

Solomon, who helped to organize the event, declined to say how much money the auction raised.

The artwork's theme was the power to dream and achieve, said Tami Benyei, a K-6 art teacher at The Plains Elementary School.

"The artwork here tonight is a reflection of (the students) being fearless," Benyei said last night. "Most of them will tell you they've never done this before."

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