



## Have art, will travel

By Alexander Stevens

Wednesday, October 6, 2004

The home of the Massachusetts Eating Disorder Association is a nondescript building on Pearl Street in Newton - you might miss it, even if you're looking for it. Inside, it's equally humble - the kind of no-frills décor you'd expect at a nonprofit that gets no state money.

But it recently got a face lift - 13 pieces of original art donated by artists via the Art Connection, an innovative program that matches orphan art with nonprofit organizations that could really use a beauty treatment. And not only is the price right - it's free - but the recipients get to keep the art; this isn't a loaner program.

No wonder the Art Connection's model is currently being replicated in cities across the country.

Now, instead of blank walls, clients of MEDA are welcomed by two photographs by John Borchart, artful, elegant, quiet, color shots - one of a window, one of a door. They're a fitting welcome to clients of MEDA who seek new passages in their lives as they confront various food issues.

In one of MEDA's group therapy rooms, several paintings by local artist Judith Lieberman explore the nude human body, creating a thematic connection between the organization and the art on its walls.

"These issues are about how you feel, so how you feel when you walk into the space is tremendously important," says Whitney Post, a volunteer at MEDA. "Only recently has the [physical] quality of this place matched the quality of the souls inside it."

That kind of testimonial is being echoed at nonprofits throughout Greater Boston. Art Connection, which celebrates its 10th anniversary next month with a fund-raiser at Boston Ballet, has donated 2,000 pieces of original art since its inception. Last year, it placed 436 pieces. Art Connection art now hangs in more than 160 nonprofits, including Cambridge Community Services, the Walnut Street Center in Somerville, and the Ruth Cowin House in Brookline.

This win-win program was conceived by Fay Chandler, the octogenarian Cambridge artist who works out of her studio in Allston. After a retrospective of her work at the BCA Cyclorama in 1995, she pondered the fate of the pieces that didn't sell. And, in a beautiful stroke befitting an artist, she decided to invite nonprofit organizations in to review the work and hang it on their deserving walls for free.

"It was a big hit," says Jim McDonald, executive director of the Art Connection. "So she wondered how this could be an on-going model."

Today, Art Connection has a catalog of more than 500 pieces of art, including works by local art notables such as Maud Morgan, Ken Beck, Suzanne Hodes and others. Suitable recipients are nonprofits that have direct contact with clients - that way, the art is appreciated by the public. Many recipients say that process of choosing the art - a digital slide show that begins the selection process - is as much fun as it is challenging.

There's plenty of proof that the program works, including the fact that Art Connection has helped launch three similar programs, currently underway in San Francisco, Washington, D.C., and Maryland.

"All three of those were inspired by us," says McDonald. "And we hope more will be."

But the strongest testimonials come from the recipients who now see art on walls once blank.

"It's been great," says Kathy Stimson, director of community planning at Springwell in Watertown. The art "has really made the place feel less stark, warmer, more welcoming. And we were definitely not in a [financial] position to get art ourselves."

"We wanted to brighten things up a little and bring a little grace into the place," says Carolyn Ingles, of MetroBoston Mental Health Units, located in an old public hospital in Boston. "If you see a beautiful painting on a wall, it can make you forget the floor is a little funky."

And Whitney Post, the volunteer at MEDA, says the benefits run much deeper than just a splash of color on the walls.

She says, "You feel supported simply by the fact that there was an organization out there that was willing to donate to you." *A dinner fund-raiser for the Art Connection will be held Oct. 23 at Boston Ballet. Tickets: \$175. Call 617-338-7668. MEDA has an open house Oct. 7, 5-7 p.m., at 92 Pearl St., in Newton.*

### Photo Gallery



The work of Newton artist Maria Termini (above) adds color to the Wellspring offices in Watertown. (Staff photo by Kate Flock)

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