[Elm Park, Worcester, MA, July 26, 2015]

Art, Science, and the Stratosphere

Worcester public schools art educator Stacy Lord accepted to the NASA SOFIA program; to launch into the stratosphere in August, 2015!

`The following interview is from the Massachusetts Art Education Association newsletter

Stacy Lord has been teaching in the Worcester Public School system for thirteen years. Of those thirteen years most have been spent teaching at Worcester East Middle School. She began harnessing her leadership skills early in her career, implementing a Positive Behavior Intervention system in her school that is now studied annually by Harvard University. Her main focus as a young teacher was how to tap into the students and figure out what would engage them. In an urban school district like Worcester it is not always easy to connect with the students in art class. Ms. Lord focused on the students' personal interests, giving them a voice and building their self-confidence through arts-based team-building activities.

Ms. Lord is the co-founder of stART on the Street, the largest free arts festival in central Massachusetts, which will run for its thirteenth year on the third Sunday in September. She has also created numerous collaborative art pieces with her students, one of which is currently featured at Elm Park in Worcester, and is made up of over 31,000 zip ties.

In 2014 Ms. Lord was accepted as a fellow into the Art of Science Learning's Worcester Incubator, which is a program that explores innovation at the intersection of art, science, and learning. The Worcester Incubator, hosted by EcoTarium and Clark University, has focused on developing innovative solutions to the area's urban transportation challenges. The team of fellows consisted of people from many different career fields. Ms. Lord says that having individuals from every walk of life all on the same playing field allowed for richer collaboration and the exchange of ideas. "We were all learning at the same time. Conversations, innovation, and creativity come from collaborating on that level. That's something that I try to get my students to do a lot. An idea starts as a little ball that bounces around, and then one person can add to it or change it and that's where innovation comes from."

The SOFIA Program

Ms. Lord has been collaborating with co-worker Howard Fain for the past thirteen years. Mr. Fain teaches science at the middle school and asked Ms. Lord if she wanted to apply for the program with him. It was not long after that they found out that they had become the first two teachers from Massachusetts to be accepted to this program which is in its third year. Furthermore, Ms. Lord is the only art educator to ever be accepted to the program.

SOFIA stands for Stratospheric Observatory for Infrared Astronomy. It is a flying laboratory that houses a 2.5 meter infrared telescope. It is the largest flying mobile telescope in the world. Ms. Lord says, "The human eye sees only visible light, but with the infrared telescope we are able to see the invisible wavelengths that make up this unseen spectrum. This lets us see the universe in a whole new way. It takes what we don't see and brings the colors to life, like an MRI scan. The program brings educators to the stratosphere to help spread the knowledge about the importance of astronomy."

While interviewing Ms. Lord, I asked what she was most excited about. She states, "Being on the flying observatory and taking everything in. Seeing the equipment, looking through the

telescope and learning how to read it and understand what I'm looking at, and then taking it all back and creating with it. Part of the thrill is developing new ways to present it to our students using the arts as a catalyst. I always turn everything I do into a learning experience for my students."

I asked Ms. Lord about her thoughts on the links between art and science. She commented, "Art doesn't just begin where science ends. It's a beautiful synergy between the two. In science you really have to think outside the box, be creative, take risks. You have to look at what you can't see, and that's where you discover something new. Scientists, like many artists, have journals in which they make notes and sketch about innovation, solutions, and new ideas for things. From those sketches, they create their prototype. These are skill sets that you need for both the arts and sciences. It's a mindset and a way of thinking."

Ms. Lord will launch into the stratosphere in late August for two separate ten hour overnight flights, at about 45,000 feet in the air. Stay tuned for more blog updates, pictures and a post-interview!

Laura Marotta

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Information regarding SOFIA can be found at: www.sofia.usra.edu
Information on the Documentary: Mixing Art and Science can be found at fundrazr.com http://fnd.us/c/911fmc/sh/1530R9
Like us on FaceBook: Mixing Art and Science
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Lord, Stacy. Personal Interview. 26 July 2015.

"The Art of Science and Learning - Worcester Incubator." ArtofScienceLearning.org. Web. 2015.