ACH COMMUNICATES

A SHARED CELEBRATION AT LAST!

The journey began in late 2019. Tyian, our Executive Director, was speaking at Duquesne University about ACH and its work in the arts. She shared the story of the murals that had been completed in the Hill District. One of the attendees was a gentleman named Thomas Reiter. He was inspired by the works that ACH had completed. A few days later, our office received a phone call from Mr. Reiter, who was interested in the possibility of ACH painting a mural of the Mabel Grammer story. If the truth were told, we were not familiar with the story of Mabel Grammer; nonetheless, we decided to research Mabel Grammer to find out why Mr. Reiter was so interested. It wasn’t long before we, too, were enthralled with the history of this woman who changed the lives of so many children.

ACH wanted to do the mural; however, there was just one problem; the mural would depict a religious experience and we knew that we could not use a public space for that purpose. Coincidently, two of our previous murals had been done on the property of St. Joseph’s House of Hospitality but there was no more room on that property. Now, when we needed space for a mural, depicting a Catholic theme, we had no canvas to put it on. After much discussion, Tom Reiter and ACH decided that ACH would prepare a sketch of the Mabel Grammer story and Tom Reiter would look for a home for the mural. The mural depicted an Afro-American Catholic woman who celebrated Our Lady of the Rosary whom she had seen in a dream. Where would such a mural be welcomed and preserved? The rendering was done and Tom Reiter, who is a member of St. Benedict the Moor Parish in the Hill District, began to seek out a location. Our goal was to paint the mural during the summer of 2020 during Creative Camp. And then...it seemed as if the mural would not be painted because Covid 19 intervened and closed down everything. Creative Camp was virtual during 2020! There was no way for the children to come together and paint a mural. The Mabel Grammer mural was a dream deferred!

Late Spring of 2021 brought a new season of hope. ACH prepared to have Creative Camp and the painting of the Mabel Grammer mural would begin. With the work of Tom Reiter, the parishioners and the administrators of St. Benedict, permission had been granted to paint the mural inside the St. Benedict the Moor school. We were excited that the very location which was chosen was also the school where many of our students attended. It was truly a merger of ACH and St. Benedict the Moor School.

Our Third Quarter Edition of ACH Communicates shared the story of Mabel Grammer and photos of the students as they worked diligently painting the mural. The mural was completed in August 2021 by the staff and students of ACH.

As we prepared for a publicized ribbon cutting of the mural, Covid, once again began to surge. As we followed the CDC guidelines, we wondered how we would showcase this wonderful work of art!
THE CELEBRATION (continued)

When school reopened in September 2021, the students and staff were amazed at the beauty of the mural of Mabel Grammer and wanted to know the story. The principal of St. Benedict, Mrs. Audrey Bowser, prepared the school and the students to recognize the great work of Mabel Grammer and to celebrate the work of ACH and its students.

On October 20, 2021, The St. Benedict the Moor School held the Mabel Grammer Mural Dedication and Blessing. The occasion was so special that Bishop Zubik of the Pittsburgh Diocese, along with the parish priests and other special guests were in attendance. The children sang and told the story of Mabel Grammer.

Bishop Zubik compared the work of Mabel Grammer to the ideals of Mother Theresa. Those ideals were stated by her when she said: “I am but a little pencil in God’s hand writing a love letter to the world.” Bishop Zubik encouraged the audience to make a change and a difference by loving one person at a time. Mabel Grammer certainly made a difference to over 500 mixed race children’s lives.

Amani sees ACH as the perfect place for her to prepare for her future. ACH not only provides Amani the freedom to design and develop showcases for various choreographed projects; but ACH has students who are eager to learn and become artists themselves.

Amani is working towards the desires of her heart—that is to be a professional choreographer for celebrities. She wants Pittsburgh to remain her home base while she develops a dance troupe for the youth in the Hill District. As Amani instructs the ACH students, it is evident that they, too, are working to succeed in the world of dance.

Amani credits her mother, April Robinson, for always being super supportive and encouraging. She said that: “although my mother supports me, she will always tell me when I’m wrong.” Amani is a middle child who did not face the “middle-child” drama. Her mother always reassured her that her birth place should never hinder her from achieving anything.

Amani is inspired by none other than Beyonce’. When asked why, she simply stated “Besides being a great entertainer, I can tell she is an extremely hard worker and dedicated to her craft. Her hard work is evidenced by her completed dance projects.”

ACH looks forward to celebrating Amani as she meets the goals she has set for herself. In the meantime, we invite our seniors to call ACH at 412-815-0271 and ask about dance classes for you and your friends.
ACH Clear Pathways welcomes its newest teaching artist to the staff. Just in time for Creative Camp, Amani Hill joined ACH in June 2021 as a full time teaching artist in dance. Amani brings with her an eclectic style of dance, including ballet, jazz, modern, hip-hop and contemporary.

Amani says she started dancing when she was about 2 years old. Whenever she heard music, she just could not sit still. Her love of dance never waned, in fact, she auditioned and was selected to attend Westinghouse Performing Arts Academy Charter School. At Westinghouse, half of her class day was spent in perfecting her craft of dance. It was here where she learned the art of choreography.

Dance for Amani was not just limited to school days and times, but she became the co-captain and choreographer of the local dance troupe known as “The Royal Outlawz”. Although the dance troupe mainly performed Hip-Hop dance, the troupe provided Amani with an opportunity to work with young children and to showcase her talents in the community.

Dance is a language that is communicated through movement. Amani says that learning the anatomy of the body and how it works is important to dance. You must learn breathing techniques and how to breathe in your moves. When asked what was contemporary dance, her response is that “it is a combination of actual movements of various dance techniques.” Tribal dances are actually a type of modern dance.

Amani loves to teach dance to children. She says it is a little easier to build a foundation because the bodies of children are more supple; however, age does not restrict dance classes. Everyone can benefit from dancing.

ACH will soon offer dance classes to the seniors in our community. Dancing is for anyone who likes to have fun! The benefits to seniors include improved mobility, improved emotional responses and mental outlook. Dancing builds confidence in your ability to learn new things and to realize new accomplishments. Interpretive dance helps to express feelings, emotions, and moods. Dance has so many purposes in this world. It can be a language that unifies people without verbal conversation. Language barriers can be removed by dance as we observe the visual expression of feelings. Take a moment and observe the rhythm of the dance as people walk or run down the street.

The Bishop and the Priests bless the mural. Because of their concern for social distancing, the audience viewed the blessing via video streaming.

The students share the story of Mabel in each panel of the mural.
2021 has been a year filled with challenges, dreams deferred, and dreams realized. It has been a year of growth and new beginnings. Through all of it, you have been supportive! That support is the reason why we can’t give up—no matter what! We thought the pandemic was over and things would go back to normal; but, we were introduced to the “new normal”. A normal where the children are still wearing masks; a normal where, although the table can be set for 10 comfortably, we are setting the tables for 8 or even 6 so that we can maintain social distancing. We are grateful that we have enough class rooms so that the children can participate in their chosen art form and still maintain social distancing.

The 2021-2022 Out of School program brought new challenges to ACH. The children had previously been transported from their schools to the ACH program after school; however, like so many other schools and programs, there was no transportation available. The buses were available, but there was no one to drive the buses. How could we have an Out of School program if we could not find transportation for the children? Our Director and the Board agreed that it was time that we had our own transportation and our own drivers. Deciding to purchase a 15 passenger van was the easy part; however, due to the shortages in manufacturing and transportation, there were no vans available to purchase for at least several months.

When you’re given lemons, you make lemonade! ACH leased a van from a transportation company and hired its own drivers. We would make a way to get our children safely from school to the ACH program center. The generosity of our donors made it possible to make the payments to lease the vehicles. We wondered how long we could continue to do this financially. AND THEN….once again the support of a donor came through. A 15 passenger van was donated to ACH by UPMC! What an awesome needed gift. We completed all the necessary paperwork and now all we’re waiting for is to get ACH signage on the bus!

We are grateful for the committed support of you, our donors. We recognize that we are in a partnership with each of you. We can only say “Thank You!”

We know that most of you have followed us on the journey of the purchase and expansion of the Kaufmann Center. Perhaps you’re wondering what’s going on in our new space. Our children are so happy that they have the room to spread out as they create their art pieces. There is room for the pieces to be exhibited and not hidden away.

**Thank you to our supporting foundations & our donors!**

**All ready for our performing artists!**

Visit us on the 2nd floor and see the Music Suite and we’ll help you get in tune.

What’s so special about media art?

Media art is a form of time related art which is created by recording sound and/or visual images. Media art is a work of art that changes and moves. ACH is preparing our students to excel in the world of computer graphics, video production and video animation. There are so many opportunities in the field of media art that many people are not aware of. Did you realize that cartoons are a form of mixed media art? What about those games that children play on their iPhone or computers? The games originated as mixed media art.

Our media art center has been named “The Terry and Janet Serafini Digital Media Center” We are grateful to the Serafini family for its support of ACH and acquiring the naming rights of the center.