

LCCC Center for LifeLong Learning enhances art of retirement



Joann Dakos, a retired teacher, attended a watercolor class at Lorain County Community College through its Center for Lifelong Learning, which offers a variety of classes to those age 50 and older. (Submitted)

By **LEIGH KEETON** | Lorain County Community College
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For Christmas, Joann Dakos' daughters gifted her a watercolor class at Lorain County Community College through its Center for Lifelong Learning, which offers a variety of classes to those age 50 and older.

The retired teacher, who lives in Oberlin, continued those classes for several months and this fall had 10 of her pieces displayed in the Beth K. Stocker Art Gallery, 1005 N. Abbe Road in Elyria.

Dakos' art was part of the REFRESH exhibit that showcased the work of several Center for Lifelong Learning art students and instructors.

One of her watercolor paintings – her favorite of a blue heron – sold at the exhibit's opening night.

"My daughters are thrilled that I've continued taking classes," Dakos says. "And it was incredible to be exhibited as an artist in the gallery."

Another student artist featured in the gallery was Cheryl Burkhardt of Lorain.

Also a retired educator, Burkhardt has been taking classes ranging from art to tai chi at LCCC for years.

Doing so has helped her remain social, which she says contributes to a healthy lifestyle after retirement.

"It's just as important as exercise and eating well," Burkhardt says. "The Center for Lifelong Learning at the college is a really special program that lets us take part in something and enhance our lives."

Dakos agrees, adding that her fellow classmates have become more than that.

"Within the classes I've taken, it almost becomes a family," Dakos says. "We bring in vegetables that are extra at home and share different kinds of desserts. It's just fun."

Burkhardt, who also sold a painting at the gallery opening, says art has always been an interest of hers, although she never made it into a career.

Instead, Burkhardt followed her passion for education – one that is clearly still alive today – to LCCC's campus, where she earned her bachelor's degree in elementary education from Ashland University in the mid-1980s.

Burkhardt attended the earliest iteration of today's University Partnership.

"Ashland University had just opened a branch here and I thought, I'm going to give that a try," she says. "And that is truly what I was meant to be – a teacher."

Both Burkhardt and Dakos say the positive impact art has had on the students they taught for decades, has done the same for them in retirement.

"What excited me most about teaching is the fact that your brain is constantly being active," Burkhardt says.

"And art does that too," Dakos adds. "It just pulls on a different part of the brain and that helps keep it sharp."