

Magic Of The Arts At Tilles

BY ELISE MAY

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On Monday, Dec. 7, an inspirational program, The Magic of the Arts in Special Education, was presented at the Tilles Center for the Performing Arts at LIU Post. This free event was cosponsored by The Arts in Special Education Consortium (ASEC) and the Tilles Center for the Performing Arts' Department of Arts Education at LIU Post. Through this special event, the NYC-based ASEC sought to reach out to Long Island stakeholders and bring them into a conversation about the importance of the arts for students with disabilities and providing quality arts education to them.

The evening began with a screening of selected excerpts from *Spectrum of Hope*, a moving documentary that centers on special education students engaged in a multi-arts program at P94M, a public school in NYC. This was followed by a panel discussion focused on building and sustaining quality arts programs, wholly school-based and collaborations with outside arts organizations, for special learners. The panel consisted of Ronnie Shuster, principal of P94M, The Spectrum School; Tessa Derfner, coordinator for arts instruction & programming for P94M The Spectrum School; Lisa Dennett, founder/director of I.D.E.A.S. (Interactive Drama for Education and Awareness in Schools) and cofounder of ASEC; and Dr. Elise Sobol, an author and educator whose published music research focuses on developmental/academic gain for students with significant disabilities. Each panelist shared a pivotal experience that led her to working with the arts and students with disabilities.

State Regent Roger Tilles, always a vocal supporter of the arts, attended and offered support when it came to the subject of arts inclusion. Dr. David Gaines, president of NYSSMA (New York State School Music Association), was also present. Many attendees stayed after the event to continue

Elise May,
Lisa Dennett,
Dr. Elise
Sobol, Ronnie
Shuster,
Tessa Derfner



the conversation. Dr. Shaireen Rasheed, professor at LIU Post, said, "I took my doctoral students to see The Magic of the Arts in Special Education. I was not expecting to be moved at the level I was. Neither were my students. The movie *Spectrum of Hope* is a beautiful, creative and fluid commentary of the evolution of student personalities in their interaction with the arts. Through the power and magic of dance, theater and song, special needs students...found their 'ability' and the freedom to be and achieve great strides in overcoming their various disabilities."

The Arts in Special Education Consortium (ASEC) provides means by which professionals and key stakeholders involved in arts education for students on the special education spectrum can share perspectives, determine needs, develop ways to meet them, deepen practice and understanding.

The Tilles Center for the Performing Arts at LIU Post offers an extensive arts education program

which serves more than 11,000 students in the region. It offers programs that encourage self-expression in the belief that the arts provide insight into the nature of human experience and are essential to every learner. Arts Education at Tilles Center includes professional performances by world-class artists, in-school artist workshops for educators and intensive school partnerships, all designed for students and teachers from elementary through college levels.

The Tilles Center is dedicated to serving high-needs communities on Long Island and strives to make the arts accessible to all. The Arts Education Program is supported by The Gilbert and Rose Tilles Endowment for Arts Education and the New York State Council for the Arts. The Magic of the Arts in Special Education was made possible by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Gov. Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature.