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The Studio Art Center of Yankton is offering its annual “Santa’s Workshop” programs for children ages 2 1/2-7. The programs expose kids to arts and crafts, and nurture their creative abilities. LEFT: Lita Stucky (back, in red) is again offering the program. “Christmas has gotten so commercial, so I enjoy teaching kids the joy of making things for other people instead of them just saying, ‘What do I get or what do I want for Christmas?’ It puts them in a place where Christmas used to be, when people mainly gave handmade things to others,” she said. ABOVE: One of the items crafted by the young “elves” during the Santa’s Workshop programs. (Courtesy photos)

‘Santa’s Workshop’ A Busy Place

Yankton Area Studio To Offer Its Annual Holiday Craft Programs For Kids

BY ANDREW ATWAL
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Lita Stucky grew up poor. Because of this, she and her family often had to make each other their own Christmas gifts out of common, or inexpensive, household items.

This became the basis for her Santa Claus Workshop program at the Studio Art Center in Yankton.

“I love Christmas — it is my favorite holiday of the year. Growing up, we did an awful lot of our own Christmas decorations and presents,” Stucky said. “I was always artistic as a young kid and Christmas was always a big thing for me. Our family made everything for Christmas — there were seven kids, so we didn’t have the money to spend for Christmas so we had to find creative ways to make things for the holidays.”

Stucky grew up five miles from North Pole, Alaska, which is where the Santa Claus house is located today.

In 1999, she began teaching art to children through the Studio Art Center in Yankton. By December 2001, she decided that she would begin offering a piece of “Santa’s Workshop” of her own by allowing students to make presents for friends and family as part of the program.

This season marks the 12th year of the Santa Claus Workshop.

“When I came to Yankton and opened up my studio, there was nothing like this going for kids,” Stucky said. “Because of this, I thought since there is nothing for kids at Christmas time like this, I would start up the Santa’s Workshop program.”

Children ages 2 1/2 to 7 can make a visit to Santa’s workshop with a parent or responsible adult to create ornaments and Christmas cards for their family. Kids are scheduled in small groups for a 45-minute time slot where they come in and create gifts for friends or family members.

Kids that are ages 5 and up can come in for the longer four-hour program, which is held on Saturdays from noon to 4 p.m. This longer program gives parents the opportunity to do holiday shopping while their children are doing arts and crafts and creating various gifts for loved ones.

The program will be offered Nov. 24, Dec. 1, Dec. 8, Dec. 15 and Dec. 22. The students who qualify for the longer program do not need a parent or older adult to accompany them.

Drop-ins are not accepted. Everyone interested in the program must call the Studio Art Center at

665-4686 to sign up for a date.

“For the shorter program, kids that come in can typically make about three items in the time they have,” Stucky said. “The older kids that come to the longer program can usually make 10 items, but that varies depending on the child.”

She added that students that are a little more skilled are allowed to make paintings during their time in the program. A student that decides to paint can usually get approximately two canvasses done in four hours, but if he or she decides to make a small painting, they can also make some Christmas presents when they are finished.

Kids that participate in the program have the option of getting a Christmas house and choosing different objects to be placed around the house to create a holiday theme.

“I’ve been working on the project kits for the program and getting everything together for Santa’s workshop since about Halloween time,” Stucky said. “Snowmen are very popular with kids in the program, and a lot of times kids see what their peers are doing and it inspires them to come up with their own or similar ideas on what to make.”

At the end of either the short or extended workshop programs, children get a bag of gifts to take with them and even get to choose a stuffed animal that was donated to Stucky for the children that participate in the program.

The four-hour program has a charge, while the short program is free.

“There is an additional charge ... if students choose to use a wood product in their gifts,” Stucky said. “If parents have never been to the Studio Art Center, I suggest they come down and visit. If they see a wood product they think their kids will like to use, they can send their child with some extra money to use one of the products.”

She added that there were about 70 children that came to Santa’s Workshop last year.

“Ever since I started the program, I’ve just been building it up year after year,” Stucky said.

She said parents should not limit their kids if they think they are not capable of doing arts and crafts. Parents should not only try to get kids involved with the various art programs, but also participate with them.

“Students that start young and stay with it turn out to be really amazing artists,” she said. “So many of my students are doing beautiful paintings now. A lot of kids never lose the desire to create.”

One of the reasons why Stucky started Studio Art

Center and the Santa’s Workshop program was to fill the void created by having her grandchildren live more than 1,700 miles away in Oregon.

“They live such a long way away so I never get to see them at Christmas. I just miss them so much, so that’s the biggest reason why I started the art center,” Stucky said. “My husband said, ‘Why don’t you teach kids art?’ The art center has done exactly what I’ve been missing. It fills in that space that I need to be surrounded by kids, and I get to do things I would do with my grandkids if they lived closer. Studio Art Center and the workshop has taken care of the need I have to work with kids.”

One of the biggest goals Stucky has for the program is to show children how Christmas once was, and how it was for her growing up.

“Christmas has gotten so commercial, so I enjoy teaching kids the joy of making things for other people instead of them just saying, ‘What do I get or what do I want for Christmas?’ It puts them in a place where Christmas used to be, when people mainly gave handmade things to others,” she said. “To be with kids and to participate in the joy of Christmas time and teaching them what a wonder and joy it is to create things for others means the world to me.”

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