

Deb Sementelli-Hoernes: Most of the individuals I teach at the art museum now are adults. I teach life drawing and basic watercolor and intermediate drawing class. It's fun to be able to play and help others get comfortable with the art medias and have fun with it more than anything else. Jim came to me years ago. He worked at Erie Insurance. He is retired now. He started out with very tiny, tight drawings, but you could tell he really, really wanted to learn. And his drawings now are amazing. He's loosened up. He's tried a lot of different media, has experimented, and he's filled his mind's eye, as we do when we draw over and over and over again. You really put things in there that you can draw on later, and the practice makes permanent. You know what arms look like after a period of time, and you can kind of fudge through things and experiment. And the more practice, the more comfort you have with drawing or painting.

Sarah Buyer: I hear you have an interesting method of finding live models for your classes. How do you do that?

Deb: I'm always looking for live models. Any time I'm at the mall, I'm at the beach, if I see somebody that has an interesting face or an interesting body structure, I will very politically correct, or as much as possible, approach them and introduce myself and tell them what I do and ask if they would be interested in modeling. We prefer to have live, nude models, but we've had a great time working with belly dancers. And I've had a number of women who were pregnant model for us. One probably six or seven years ago gave birth the night after she modeled. And she didn't model nude. She had a bra top on and kind of yoga pants and didn't move around a whole lot. And we could actually see the baby moving. And it was just such a fascinating thing to share with a group of individuals. And I have a body builder that works with me quite regularly. We work with ballet dancers. We work with young basketball players, young dancers, anybody that's just interesting.

Sarah: What are some other projects that you've taken on at the museum over the years?

Deb: I've brought kids in for tours. I've worked on most of the booths in JazzFest volunteering. I love to work the bucket brigade and collect money for the museum, you know. I'm very passionate about the museum, and I think it kind of rubs off, and most people end up dumping money into the bucket for us.

Sarah: At the Blues and Jazz?

Erie: At the Blues and Jazz, yeah. It's kind of one of those passions of mine, you know, to keep it going and to make sure that we have it here. The opening, the grand opening, was just magic. It was overwhelming. I think it was one of the biggest parties Erie has seen since the opening of the Warner Theater. It was a mob. It just seems like half of Erie was packed inside the museum from one end to the other, and it just was a wonderful celebration to see what Erie was capable of. And just seeing so many people from all over, so many artists and business people all coming together and celebrating such a wonderful opportunity, just, it was very rewarding. I think art kind of unifies everyone. It doesn't really matter what age. I think it's something that we all enjoy, and it provides things for us to think about. And the more we see it, the more doors it opens up inside.

Sarah: How have you seen the museum change over the years?

Deb: It's been an amazing transformation. I remember walking from the stairs to my classroom when I first started teaching life drawing, and I had to walk through a dark and rather dingy storage area with no lighting into the lit classroom. So, it was kind of creepy. I watched that room transform itself into a gallery that a large number of shows were in. And now that room is another classroom with more facilities for more instruction here at the art museum. You know, little by little, we got to see the transformation, little by little, and the walls going up and the stairs coming in, and the floor downstairs, which is absolutely amazing. You know, it looks like marble, and all it is is polished concrete. But it's magic. It's just been, just a magic place to be. And to see the transformation and to be part of that is just really great mind Candy, I think.