

Regional

"Art-A-Thon" celebrates importance of arts

Each year the College of Arts and Sciences at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville organizes a day-long event called "Art-A-Thon," with participation by several departments of the College. This year I interviewed some of the faculty, students and staff involved in this series of events. One was a poetry reading exercise organized by the department of English language and literature where-in students presented their own work. Allie Velahos, current vice president of the department's English Language and Literature Association, described their activities.

"For 'Art-A-Thon' we did a collection of different types of spoken word, poetry, readings, creative fiction and non-fiction," she explained. "We kind of go across the board. So we tried to set this up today to showcase our members and what we write and what we do." One of the students reading her own poetry was Rosily James.

"I write poetry, so I will be speaking a couple of my poems today, one of which got accepted for publication," James said, adding that her work focuses on telling stories. "That is what is most important to me." She thinks that words in poetry are powerful.

"They give a message that is not the most everyday, but you can talk about the everyday in a very special and unique way," she said. "It really brings to life things that are not necessarily brought to life very often. It makes you think in ways that fiction, or creative non-fiction doesn't. It makes you work much harder."

Another event was a ceramics sale and exhibit organized by the department of art and design. One of its visitors was Katherine Poole-Jones, an assistant professor of art, who spoke about the importance of promoting the arts in the community.

"I think that if you look around you can see the level of achievement our students have gotten to," she said. "These are some incredible pieces and I think it's important to share not only with the SIUE community, but also with visitors coming from Edwardsville and even St. Louis. I think they know the level of quality of the



Photo by Michael Nathe

The SIUE steel band.

students and the types of products they are creating within the department."

Another visitor to the exhibit was the chair of the department, Barbara Nwacha, who said that she has seen an evolution in styles and techniques being used by the student artists.

"We see things shift from year to year depending on what the graduate students are doing and what their focus might be," she said. "In the past we have seen graduate students do ceramic work that has

typography or graphics in it. We have a little of that coming back now this year. Sometimes we have people who are working more on ceramics to be displayed on the wall with less concern about function."

Another of the events that took place during this art extravaganza was a representation of a theater piece titled "Life is A Dream" by the Spanish writer Pedro Calderón de la Barca. I spoke with the chair of the department of theater and dance, James Wulfson, who designed

the stage for this piece, and asked why the faculty decided on this particular performance.

"I think in many ways de la Barca is very similar to Shakespeare for the Spanish speaking world," he said. "He is that equivalent, that massively known. At our talk back at our performance last night one of the audience members, a professor of Spanish, brought up the fact that Spanish-speaking school children learn it in classes. In the same way we

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know 'to be or not to be,' they know his lines. So it was really poignant for us to talk about whether life is a dream or not. The deeper philosophical thoughts that are a part of this are something that today's college students encounter." But what is the author trying to say with such a provocative title?

"That's a tough one," said Wulfson. "I think, at least for me personally, it is deeply about who you are and what you are and to be true to that. The characters here really are doing that. Chuck Harper, the director, mentioned that the character Rosaura is a very strong and powerful female role who is going out and adopting a male role to restore her honor. But she is going out and doing it for herself. Segismundo, the main character, finds his own honor and intelligence and nobility. He finds that nobility within and brings that forward."

Another event was a concert from the steel band at SIUE. I talked with its director, Dan Smithiger. "I think a lot of students are very interested in the music of the Caribbean and they know it's open enrollment," he said. "They can come and play and audition a little bit for me and play in one of the groups. I think a lot of people want to be part of it."

A few months ago the band went to the birthplace of that music, the Caribbean country of Trinidad and Tobago. "I think it was a great experience," Smithiger said. "The kids took in a lot of the culture and got to interact with a lot of the people there. So we brought the culture, the music and some of the social aspects back and shared them with a lot of people here."

Aldemaro Romero Jr. is the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. His show, "Segue," can be heard every Sunday morning at 9 a.m. on WSIE, 88.7 FM. He can be reached at College_Arts_Sciences@siue.edu.