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Five Questions with Amara Geffen

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Sidewalk chalk is a classic childhood and summertime staple of fun, and it is the medium that will be used to add some beauty to Meadville pavement Saturday during a community chalk art festival.



The event will take place at the Arc Community Greenspace's Mill Run Walkway on the corner of Market Street and Clinton Court from 9 a.m. to noon during downtown's Second Saturday Market.

Artists of all ages are able to participate and will be in three categories as individuals or teams. They are asked to preregister if possible. Those interested can call (814) 720-7089 for information or look on Facebook for the event page listing for Community Chalk Drawing at The Arc Community Greenspace on the Art-Environment Initiative Facebook page. Anyone wanting to draw can stop by the Market House event table, The Chalk Shop, or the event location for help planning out an idea.

Amara Geffen, retired from Allegheny College and now the Ella V. Bush Endowed Professor of Art (Emerita), is a public artist and founder of the Art and Environment Initiative and is coordinating the chalk project with the Second Saturday Market, The Arc of Crawford County, the Meadville Neighborhood Center, Meadville Council on the Arts and My Meadville as collaborators.

Q: How did the idea for the Community Chalk Drawing event come about?

A: As part of The Arc of Crawford County's Creative Communities Grant (funded through the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts) we are committed to hosting a series of arts-engagement events in The Arc Community Greenspace. The site will feature development of an ADA-accessible walkway over Mill Run, a historically important local stream that flows through a culvert beneath the Greenspace site. The Community Chalk Drawing — more of a chalk festival really — will feature artists' drawings along the intended walkway that will offer ideas for highlighting the presence of Mill Run in the Greenspace. As a community-focused artist, I am always looking for opportunities to engage local residents in fun-filled events where they can share their artistic skills and

visions. At the end of this long COVID-period of being socially and creatively isolated, and as things open back up, we wanted to bring community together to celebrate Mill Run, the creative process, and the vision for The Arc Community Greenspace — which is intended as a site that supports full community inclusion and will become a safe space where clients of The Arc and residents of Meadville can gather for safe, shared arts and culture events.

Q: What is your main goal for the event?

A: To have fun together while exploring ideas for highlighting Mill Run along the ADA-Walkway, and to feature the amazing creative talent of local artists.

Q: Why do you feel it is important to have community art and art events like this?

A: The arts are among the most powerful modes of human expression; they help us celebrate what we love; what matters most to us. They move us beyond partisan points of view, and help us find shared values and — in this case — our hopes for where we live ... our vision for Meadville.

Q: Chalk is not something that lasts, but what makes it so appealing to people of all ages?

A: Chalk is an easy medium to work in; the process of drawing with chalk is immediate, colorful, and lively. Artists can work with flat areas of color, or can hone in on intense representational details, depending on their subject and level of skill. It's a medium that works for professional artists as well as novice artists of all ages!

Q: Is there anything else you would like our readers to know about the event?

A: We hope people will participate by developing a drawing during the event, and by stopping by to see what is unfolding and voting on best drawings in each category (youth to 17-years-old; 18 — adults; and small group/teams) towards the end of the event. But

mostly, we hope artists of all ages and skill levels will register for the event to secure a place and materials and then share their visions with us. We also hope Tribune readers will help spread the word about this opportunity and encourage those who may be shy but talented to join us. We need the community's help to make this first chalk festival a success!

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