

Artists Brighten Homeless Shelter

By Teke Wiggin

STAMFORD -- In a paint-spattered button-down standing next to two ladders, Shelly Denning issued instructions to a dozen artists huddled around an elaborately paned window offering a primer on the art of stenciling.

"I go really lightly, and I get a feel for what's going on," she said, rolling paint to fill in one of the stencils on the window's depressed outer framing. "Like everything else in life: start out slowly and don't go in full-force."

As a group, the artists of the Loft Artist's Association turned out to help redecorate the community hall of St. Luke's LifeWork's shelter didn't follow the maxim Saturday: They showed up in full force.

The artists took instructions from Denning, the decorative painting professional of the 44-member group, on how to redecorate the community hall, which is used by shelter clients to eat meals but also serves as a gathering place for neighborhood clubs and events.

The decorative effort comes on the heels of the hall's repainting, which St. Luke's arranged three weeks before to breathe new life into a room which dates back to the late 19th century.

"The place looked so gloomy," said Renee Kahn, director of the Stamford Historic Neighborhood Preservation program, who helped organize the project.

Following her seminar, artists cut out a stencil of Dennis's own design and painted it onto the large windows' inner framing, encircling the glass with stencils of Christmas-like colors. Dennis said she based the design on the woodwork of the hall's loft but also incorporated her own Victorian-era spin.

On a round table in the middle of the room, two middle-school students did their part to contribute to the effort, cutting small strips of tape used to line up the stencils and ensure symmetry.



Members of the Loft Artists Association stencil the windows at St. Luke's Lifeworks in Stamford, Conn. on Saturday April 30, 2011. Photo: Kathleen O'Rourke

"It's going to turn out really cool," said Masha Yevemee on a snack break next to a stack of cookies, a donation from Stella's Bakery for the occasion. "If we wouldn't have come here, then it would have taken a longer time."

Following the application of a fresh coat of beige, Kahn set out to make the restoration complete by enlisting the help of the Loft Artist's Association.

"Renee hunted me down," Denning said with a grin.

The association, whose artist lofts are located at 845 Canal St., was only too happy to oblige, said group president Lisa Cuscuna.

A regular supporter of community service initiatives, the organization saw it as another opportunity for its members to give back and satisfy the 10-hour-a-year service requirement each member is held to, she said.

"I told everyone that they could get credit for this."

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