

The Sanders County Ledger  
And The Paradise Center Present

**Ava Erny**  
Hot Springs High School  
Spotlight on the Arts – April 2022



"Spotlight" is a new feature, sponsored by The Paradise Center and local newspapers, to highlight the talents of Sanders County students participating in the arts. This first article introduces Ava Erny of the Hot Springs High School. Ava, a senior, is a visual artist who has studied with Mrs. Mindy Leichtnam for the past five years.

Ava has been creating art since she was very young and has many sketchbooks full of drawings showing how her work has progressed. She credits her mother for inspiring her and encouraging her talent. "My mom is an amazing abstract artist, but she is her own worst critic. The nursing home where she works has murals that she painted in every room. She's the activities director and helps the people

there express their artistic abilities." Ave added that there are many dimensions of artistic talent in her family.

Mrs. Leichtnam has a teaching style that suits Ava's abilities. Students are asked at the beginning of each school year to draw a face and an object which is then used as a reference for determining growth as the semester progresses. She asks students what media they wish to explore and develops units to fit those needs. Mrs. Leichtnam is a Sanders County native herself, graduating from Plains High School before going to Northern MSU at Havre. She understands what an

impact studying art can have in influencing young people to become their own best selves.

Because of the many aspects of visual art Ava has been able to try, she has an unusual "favorite" genre. "Honestly, I like the new media, even though each time it's probably my worst. It might look awful, but I still love it because it's fun to do."

Mrs. Leichtnam agrees. "Mistakes just add character." She values Ava's attitude for learning new things. Pottery, for instance, isn't a favorite, but Ava is willing to try. Ava added, "I've started playing with digital art. I won't show any of it to you because I haven't learned enough yet."

"One of my best things to do is cross-hatching roses. I also really like "anime-istic mouths." Ava has a gift for using a reference image and putting her personal twist on it. "An artist always puts part of themselves into their work."

Ava finds creating art to be "happy and joyful" even if the subject matter might not reflect that. "When I am down and have strong, sad emotions, my art is at its best." Channeling emotion into her artwork makes each piece special. One drawing had a negative impact on her life, "in a bad way," and she didn't realize it until the picture was finished. People would ask, "Are you okay? And I would be. I was just into myself studying techniques."

When Ava is missing someone, art helps her cope. "I'll draw, starting with a picture from my phone. Sometimes I'll just draw their eyes from memory."

Her work covers many forms: scratch, watercolor sharpie and ink, charcoal, pastels, but her best is probably pen. The featured portrait of Marilyn Monroe is a study in graphite. Portraits are a comfortable subject for her. "You get into your brain and lose track of time."

Ava also enjoys theatrical makeup, like creating fake scars and making jewelry. In the future she would like to sell her work locally and go to school for tech, maybe even becoming an art teacher one day. Whatever path she chooses, Ava Erny is an artist for life.