

## Art teachers return to the craft during retreat

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Art teacher Lynette Dugan from Palmetto High School participates in the Embracing Our Differences Art Teacher Retreat at Ringling College of Art and Design on Friday, October 5th. Forty-one art teachers from public, private and charter schools got hands-on instruction in digital arts including PhotoShop, as they learn new skills and strategies for inspiring their students. [Herald-Tribune staff photo / Mike Lang]

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SARASOTA -- Middle school art teacher Stephanie Paas has a hand poised over the screen in front of her, lightly touching a pen to the vast white background.

She looks attentively toward the front of the room, where Ringling College of Art and Design professor of illustration John Herzog is making similar motions on a tablet of his own. A wave of the pen across the screen reveals an illustration as realistic as if it were found in an artist's sketchbook. There are the eyes, ears and nose of a cat, brought to life by each tap of the pen on the computer screen.

Paas considers what part of this lesson she will bring back to her students at Manatee County's Buffalo Creek Middle School. The school's technology will not allow for this type of instruction, she admits, but it stirs something within.

"It makes me want to make my own art again," Paas says, almost wistfully.

Such revelations are exactly what the organizers of this two-day retreat for local art teachers hope to achieve. For the sixth year in a row, local nonprofit Embracing Our Differences hosted event, which ended Friday, for 41 art teachers in nearby counties at Ringling College.

"Art teachers don't get enough professional development," said Embracing Our Differences executive director Sarah Wertheimer. "Art teachers touch so many kids -- they have a huge impact. Art can pull out so many emotions."

Lee Middle School art teachers Jessica Tilley and Stefania Daly plan to bring some of the lessons they learned back to the classroom. Tilley teaches studio art while Daly works with students on digital art. Daly was paying rapt attention to Herzog's illustrations while Tilley was moved by a painting presentation the day before.

Both teachers said they came away from the retreat with one thought -- feeling more like students again.

"Man, I want to take more classes."