



READER PHOTO BY EMILY REED

The statue of Christopher Columbus stands proudly on Pennsylvania Avenue in Wilmington.

DELAWARE

Using art to brighten a blighted area

ESTEBAN PARRA THE NEWS JOURNAL

West Center City is considered one of the most dangerous neighborhoods in Wilmington.

At least 13 people have been shot there so far this year, including two late Friday and one Saturday. The neighborhood has broken and boarded-up row homes, bullet-riddled fences and trash-filled gutters.

But Connections Community Support Programs Inc., a nonprofit headquartered in the neighborhood, is trying to shine a more positive light on the community by displaying artwork by local artists. On Saturday, Connections hosted its first Art in the Urban Garden event.

And while the light rain prevented the organization from holding the event in its outside garden, the artwork was displayed inside Connections' gallery located at 801 N. West St.

"It's actually really cool to be in here and seeing people that are local selling their stuff and they have much cooler stuff than the stores," said Shyanne Miller, a Newark resident who said she found out about the event online.

Miller liked that the event was held in West Center City.

"For them to come in and do something positive around here is a big deal," she said. "You're not close to the best areas so it's nice to see that there is something positive going on here for people to come and chill and do something fun."

Jessica Shulte, arts engagement coordinator at Connections, said they wanted to team up with the city's burgeoning creative district to have some input in showing a more positive light of the area. One of the first things they did was create Gallery 801, where they can display local artists during such events as the Wilmington Art Loop.

The hope is to show that there is great art beyond Market Street, Shulte said. "You can still have the same quality of art in West Center City," she added.

Jairus Branch, 14, stood by two of his photos, including a piece that was displayed at the vice president's residence and office in Washington D.C. Branch, who



DOUG CURRAN/SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

Theresa Emmett of 4 Youth Productions, Jairus Branch, a student artist at 4 Youth Productions, and Adele Meehan of Wilmington, discuss some art on display at an Art in the Urban Garden event at Connections in Wilmington on Saturday.

lives in Wilmington, said these type of events can motivate others in the area into the arts.

"It is very important because it can have inspiration on little kids," said Branch, a student at 4Youth Productions, a nonprofit group that teaches photography in combination with science, engineering and culinary art

to underprivileged youth.

Any money made from artwork sold by 4Youth Productions goes toward the artists' college fund.

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