Gary DiVecchia

This Legends and Legacies interview with retired Prince William County Public Schools Art Supervisor Gary DiVecchia was conducted by Roger D. Tomhave, Ph.D., Emeritus Art Education Professor at James Madison University, Former Coordinator of the Arts for Fairfax County Public Schools, and Past President of the Virginia Art Education Association. The interview was conducted over several sessions in March and April of 2025.

RT (Roger Tomhave): Today, I am interviewing Gary DiVecchia, who for 21 years was the art supervisor of Prince William County Public Schools (1969-1990). He is also a Past President of the Virginia Art Education Association (1974-1975), and the 1991 Virginia Art Educator of the Year – truly a legend of art education in Virginia. Welcome, Gary.

GD: (Gary DiVecchia): Thank you, Roger. It is an honor to be interviewed as one of the Legends and Legacies of Art Education in Virginia.

RT: Glad you could be with us, and so glad I'm the one that could interview you about your history and your time in art education in Virginia. But let's start even earlier than that. Let's start with where you were born and raised.

GD: I was born in Washington DC on February 22, 1936. I was the last child born in a family of four siblings—two girls and two boys. My parents named me Gerald but every one called me Gary. My father was an Italian immigrant from Italy who arrived through Ellis Island. My mother was also Italian but was born in the United States. She was very creative and stylish with a great eye for design. She was the most influential person in my life.

I lived with my family in Maryland for most of my childhood and attended Woodside Elementary School, grades 1-5, in Montgomery Hills. I was small and spunky when I entered the school at the age of six. My dog, Speedy, was my pal and used to follow me to school and sometimes wait for me to walk back home. My favorite times in elementary school were art, story time, and recess. All three were taught or supervised by the classroom teacher.

When I was around seven years old my parents separated and me, my brother, and two sisters moved with our mother into an upstairs apartment over a local grocery store in the Montgomery Hills, Maryland. Our playground was the rooftop and sidewalks of the shopping center. My brother Freddy and I didn't mind because we both were very creative and had fun finding adventurous things to do. Being younger than my brother, I was always the person or thing he didn't want to be in our play. When we played cowboys and Indians, I was the Indian, he was the cowboy. When we made our wagon into a stage coach, he was the rider and I was the horse. When we made a fortunetelling box out of an old cardboard refrigerator carton, I was the guy in the box telling a person's fortune, he stood outside collecting the money. Fun times for sure, but I usual had the bit parts!

RT: Well, let's glean out the specific art education part of that story. So, tell me from your earliest childhood any early memories that you have, or maybe even your very first memories, of working with any kind of art materials.

GD: Okay! I never had a lot of art materials at home or at school. I loved to draw, so pencils and crayons were my medium at home. In school I did work with colored paper when we made craft items. I was more active in art at home than at school. I remember times when I was drawing, maybe for an hour or two, and my mother, God bless her, would yell, " Go out and play." And I did when I finished my drawings.

RT: So, what were you drawing?

GD: Anything that I could see indoors and outdoors. I just enjoyed drawing. If I got bored in class, I became a doodler and begin drawing on whatever I had in front of me. It got me in trouble if I was drawing when the teacher was talking. I still have a book with drawing on the inside of the covers. I hate to admit it, but I am still a doodler at boring meetings and events.

RT: Some of my earliest memories are very similar. But I liked to draw cartoons out of the Sunday paper. Peanuts or all kinds of cartoon characters. Disney and so forth. But you had no art education in school at all or just elementary grades?

GD: Art education was not taught as a class by an art teacher in any school I attended from elementary through high school. If there had been, I would have been the first to enroll. As I mentioned, I did draw a lot on my own and joined an art club if it was offered.

RT: So, tell me about the art club. Who organized that?

GD: I don't know who organized the club. Every high school I attended had an art club. It was usually a time during the school hours for students who had an interest in art or any other subject to meet. I remember sharing our artwork, putting up displays, and decorating for the prom. I don't remember any formal art instruction taking place.

RT: So, tell me about your path you took to become an art major with no art training before college.

GD: Yeah, I never had art instruction in any public school I attended. Yet, I majored in art in college. Can you believe that? I did take a class in Journalism in high school and enjoyed writing articles and drawing pictures for the school newspaper. But that was not a path.

My decision to go to college and major in Art Education was influenced by many unusual events and happenings in my life. When I was twelve my father died and my mother remarried. We moved from Maryland to Florida. Over the next four years I attended five different high schools, one for only for two weeks. My final high school was Osbourn High School in Manassas, Virginia. Osbourn was a real blessing and just what I needed. There were only 260 students in the school. I played sports, was on the school newspaper staff, and had lots of friends, but like the other high schools I attended, art classes were not offered at Osbourn. Even so, my first art experiences at Osbourn evolved when I enrolled in a Journalism class and began drawing life events for the school newspaper. I later became the editor of the school newspaper and worked on the layout and design for publication.

Midyear of my first year at Osbourn, my parents decided to move back to Maryland. I enrolled in Coolidge High School, a school with an enrollment of over 1800 students. The school was too big and I was too small to play sports. After three weeks I talked my mother into letting me return to Manassas to finish my education at Osbourn. I told her that I was 16 and could make it on my own. She knew I was not happy at the new school, so she drove me back to Manassas and dropped me off at the gym. Both of my coaches were in the gym at the time.

When I saw coach I told him, "I'm back." "What do you mean you're back?" he said. "My mother brought me back.to Manassa to live." "Where's your mother?" he asked. I said, "I think she's gone by now." Coach got on the phone and called two of his old boys he had coached and found me a job at a gas station and a place to live in town.

RT: So where were you living?

GD: I lived in an old vocational school dorm in Manassas that housed military men seeking a vocation on the GI bill. I was only 16 and they were 22 to 30 years old. I also was the only high school student living in the dorm. So, I really grew up fast. I lived in the dorm for two years and ate my meals at the dorm dining hall. The second year they closed the vocational school and the dorm, but left all the utilities on and gave me a key to the front door. I was the only person living in the dorm. It was a little scary at times, especially when I returned to the dorm at night.

Because the dining hall was closed, I ate my meals at a boarding home for men in town. Mom Collins was the owner and only charged me $10 a week including packing my lunch for school. It was a growing up time for me. I did not have a television, phone, or air conditioning in my 2nd floor room. But I had my sketch book and plenty of time to draw.

RT: Yeah, I bet you did. So, what sports did you participate in?

GD: I played football, basketball, and baseball at Osbourn. I was small but quick and I made the varsity first team in all three sports. You also had to be rough and tough to play football back then. I remember in one game I sprained my ankle and Coach had to help me get off the field. He put a tight wrap on my ankle and I was back in the game.

RT: I bet you were! And the newspaper club was the art thing?

GD: Yeah! And the art club.

RT: So those were afterschool activities that you could participate in?

GD: No! The art club and newspaper club met during school hours, not after school.

RT: So how did you manage that and sports?

GD: No problem! Sports practice and games were my only after school activities.

RT: And it didn't interfere with the practice?

GD: No, practice began immediately after school, and I was able to adjust my evening and weekend work schedule at the gas station for Friday night games and special events.

RT: So, then you get to college. What path led you to art?

GD: Well, first I had to get to college. I was in a college preparatory program in high school, even though I had no incentive or funds to go to college. But that changed when one of my coaches asked me after baseball practice, "Gary, what are you going to do after graduation?”

At the time I was working in the evenings and weekends at a gas station in Manassas. I was also the school newspaper editor and coordinating the printing and editing with the local newspaper. I thought I would work full time for one or the other when I graduated.

So, I told him, “I don't have any money to go to college." And he came back, “But what if I get you a scholarship?” I told him, “If you get me a scholarship, I'll go to college!”

My Coach attended Concord Collage in Athens, West Virginia, on a sports scholarship. He thought I might be able to get a scholarship in baseball or football. So, I requested an

application from Concord and mailed it back. Coach followed up with a letter of recommendation on my behalf to the head coach of the athletic department. A month later, I received a letter from the college. I was accepted! Wow!! When I called home to tell my parents I was going to college, my mother told me I had some money my father put away for me and I could use it to go to college. It was not enough for four years, but it helped with my tuition and room and board.

After working at the gas station in Manassas all summer I packed my bags in my old 1949 Plymouth I purchased for $150 and headed to Concord College in Athens, West Virginia.

I arrived at Concord the same day. The campus was beautiful and situated on the top of a mountain. The town of Athens was very small, with a movie theater, church, grocery store, and barber shop. Nothing to brag about. After parking my car, I walked the campus and the first two students I met were sitting on the wall near the men's dorm. Each had to weigh 250 pounds or more. I was only five foot five inches tall and weighed 135 pounds soaking wet. One of them asked me if I was new to the campus and I said, "Yes, I'm here to play football." I thought they would never stop laughing. Bob Farmer and Ken Surber were two starting linemen on the football team. We became good friends and I never let them forget that day.

Baseball was my sport, and I played on the first team all four years in college. There were no scholarships in baseball, so the athletic department found me a job sweeping halls in the men's dorm for 50 cents an hour. Not a whole lot of money, but it helped to pay for books and school supplies. I also spent some time in the Journalism lab and wrote a few articles for the college newspaper. My second and third year I worked as a lifeguard at the college pool and waiter in the dining hall.

This was my path to get to and afford college. What led me to art in college was another thing. I really enjoyed creative writing and was leaning more toward Journalism as a major when I enrolled. That changed after I was able to take two elective art courses my first year.

RT: Tell me about that. So, you were taking classes in art at the college level? How did you decide to even sign up for one?

GD: I'm sure you know that most of the courses you take the first year in college are the required education courses. I was able to take one elective each semester and chose to sign up for art classes. Not surprisingly, many of the students in my art classes had up to four years of high school art. I had none. I was self-taught in art. But it didn't take me long to catch up. I received an A in both of my art classes. My second year in college, I decided to major in art education. I continued my interest in Journalism by writing stories for the college newspaper.

RT: What were your media classes that you really loved at that time?

GD: At the time I was more into drawing. My first drawing class in college was in two- and three-dimensional perspective. Wow, was that an eye opener for me! All my drawings took on a new dimension. Since I never had art instruction, all my art classes were new to me. My painting classes were the most interesting and challenging. Since I had never worked with mixing, tinting, or blending colors. I could not visualize colors. If I were painting a landscape, I had to go outside to see the colors before I mixed the paint. I still have to do that today.

I also enjoyed my jewelry class, taught by Mr. Castro. He was a great teacher and friend. He knew I would be in the jewelry lab whenever I had free time, so he gave me a key to the jewelry lab so I could work in the evenings. And I can't leave out my lithograph printmaking class which was taught in a small storage closet. There were four of us working in that small

space. Lots of bumping each other as we moved around. Fun time though, and I created two nice prints.

RT: So, along the way, were you getting some recognition for your art as well?

GD: Well, somewhat. In my Senior Art Exhibit, I had a large variety of my artwork on display in the main corridor of the administrative building. I had a lot of complimentary comments from the college staff and students. I never entered any of my art work in exhibits outside of the college.

My artwork did help me to land a job in the summer of my second year at Concord. Dr. Statton, an instructor at Greenbriar Military School and director of a summer overnight boy's camp for their student in Lewisburg, West Virginia, visited our campus looking for a craft teacher and counselor for his camp. I was an art major and had previous experience in camp work, so I interviewed for the job. I told him I had worked summer camp at Camp Letts, an overnight boy's camp in Maryland and showed him some of my artwork. He was impressed and offered me a job. I worked at the camp for two summers. I went directly from college to the camp and back to college when the camp closed.

RT: Well, let's back up a second, Gary. Somewhere along the line you must have also become interested in being a teacher, or not. How did you end up in art education?

GD: A good question! I knew from reading the Concord College catalogue that the college was primarily a teacher's college. Other major and minor degrees were offered but were of no interest to me. I never intended to go to college, but if I did, it would be to become a teacher and coach.

RT: So, there was really no decision to be made on your part about becoming a teacher?

GD: None whatsoever!

RT: Was a teaching credential an expectation of all art majors?

GD: No, not really. There was a fine arts degree offered, but most of the art majors were in education.

RT: Do you remember any decision point about becoming a teacher? Was there ever a time along the way of making art that you said, "No I'm not going to do that. I don't want to be a teacher, or yes, I'm going to do it."?

GD: Roger, I was always a leader in any group I joined. I believe I was born to be a teacher. It was just a natural career path for me. I didn't know it at the time, but looking back, all the indicators were there. I loved art and enjoyed working with children. I was also very creative and energetic, and children and adults seemed to follow my lead. I don't know why, but I was usually the one they came to for help or advice. I still have a dictionary given to me by a parent of one of my friends when I was around twelve years old. On the back of the front cover, she wrote, "Gary, I hope this will help. We know you are a born leader, so always develop your natural abilities by having a full knowledge of your chosen field. In doing so, you will be a great man and leader." I'm not sure about a great man, but I have accomplished more in life than I ever expected.

RT: Did someone ever say to you, "You know, Gary, you need to be an art teacher."?

GD: No! I don't remember ever being told that. But my art instructors in college encouraged me to major in art. I'm sure my parents and friends were surprised that I became a teacher and an art major. But not me, teaching was the only field, and art, journalism, and physical education were the only subjects I enjoyed.

RT: So, you were a teacher all along.

GD: Yeah. I think so. It was just a natural thing for me to become a teacher. I was always in a leadership role in whatever group I joined. In high school I was editor of the school newspaper. In college I was president of freshman class, president of my fraternity, and selected by the college president in my junior year to be on the freshmen orientation team.

I also did my student teaching in art at a high school in West Virginia. Strangely enough, the art teacher at the school was an English teacher and taught three classes of art.

RT: So, you were student teaching with an English teacher. Tell me what your job search was like once you had your degree and your license.

GD: Yes, I student taught art at a high school in Bluefield, West Virginia. The art class was being taught by a very nice English teacher who I assume had an interest or a minor in art. On my first day of student teaching, she introduced me to the class and showed me around the room. We talked about what she had been teaching and the art supplies available. She then told me, "The class is yours," handed me the room keys and left. She came back a couple of times to see if I needed anything. So, my student teacher experience was actually as a teacher and not as a student teacher with a cooperating teacher which would be required today.

I really enjoyed my student teaching experience, and the freedom I had to teach my favorite subject. My students seemed to enjoy the variety of art instruction I brought to the classroom. Before I left, they asked me to help in decorating for the senior prom. I selected a group of students from my class to help design and decorate the gym. It became their art project for the month. I was told by many of those who attended the prom, that' it was one of best decorated proms they had ever seen.

RT: Where did you apply for jobs? Where were you hoping to get a job?

GD: I planned to marry Betty Earls, my college girlfriend, in a Catholic Church in Princeton, West Virginia after graduation. Because we both loved West Virginia and Princeton was only a few miles from Concord, I applied there for an art teacher position. I was called in for an interview and offered an art teaching and coaching position at one of their middle schools. It was only a part-time position and the salary was not enough for me to live on, so, I thanked them and turned it down. I also applied at several other school systems in West Virginia and my home town, Manassas, Virginia. I did receive a reply for an interview from Prince William Couty Schools, the school system which services the town of Manassas.

RT: What year is this?

GD: This was. In 1958. Without a job offer, I returned to my parent's home in Maryland after graduation. While there I secured a job teaching crafts at a summer day camp nearby and completed my interview in Manassas for a teaching position. There were no art positions open in the county or town of Manassas at the time, but being a certified education teacher in grades 6-12, they offered me a sixth-grade teaching position at Yorkshire Elementary School in Manassas. To make the offer even better, they offered Betty, my fiancé, a 3rd grade

teaching position at the same school. I needed a teaching job so I signed a contract. What a relief! The following week, I borrowed my mother's car and returned to Princeton, West Virginia, to get married.

RT: How long did you teach sixth grade.

GD: I taught sixth grade for four years and I dearly loved it. Teaching all the subjects was a real challenge. Fortunately, I was able to use my art as a teaching tool in all the subjects. And, of course, being an art major, I was given the bulletin board display assignment, which was not a problem for my students because they kept it full. I was also delegated to be the acting teacher/principal when the principal was out of the office.

As much as I enjoyed teaching at Yorkshire Elementary School, when the county opened several new middle schools with instruction in art, music, and home arts, my desire to teach art full-time was now available.

RT: Is that something you had to apply for?

GD: Yes, I did apply. I was offered and accepted a middle school art teaching position for grades 6 through 8 at Marsteller Middle School in Manassas. My old coach in high school was my principal. I was the only art teacher in the school. The school system had no curriculum or budget for art. I taught what I wanted and purchased my art supplies directly from Kurtz Brothers, a basic school supplies company. In my second year of teaching art and while I had begun working on my master's degree in education, the Director of Instruction asked me to work with other art teachers to develop an art curriculum.

RT: For the middle school?

GD: No, for the county art program. We only had 16 middle and high school art teachers in the county, So I arranged a meeting of all the art teacher on one of our Inservice days. It was the first time we had all got together, so the meeting became a social gathering as well. We. began sharing what we were teaching and the funds we were appropriated to support our individual art programs. It was really surprising to hear all the differences in what was taught and the funding between schools. Overall, it was a great meeting and the beginning of our curriculum development for grades 1–12.

RT: For the county. Wow!

GD: After four years of teaching art, I was only one course from completing my Master's Degree in Education, when a middle school assistant principal job opened at our school. An appointment as an assistant principal would be a step forward in my desire to be an elementary school principal or supervisor. With the backing of my middle school principal, I applied for the position and was appointed the Assistant Principal.

RT: That's still at the middle school level?

GD: Yes. I became Assistant Principal of the same middle school where I taught art.

Halfway into my first year as an Assistant Principal, I learned that a new elementary school was opening In January. With my Principal's approval, I applied for the Principal position. I knew the odds of my being appointed was not great, but my Principal told me to put my name in anyway. Two weeks later in the middle of the school day, the Associate Superintendent and Director of Elementary Schools entered our middle school. When my

Director saw me, he said, "Gary get your things, you have been appointed the Principal of Sinclair Elementary School." It was so sudden and unexpected, I didn't know what to say. I gathered my personal things from my office and walked out to my car to follow my director to my new school. I don't think anyone knew I was gone. I couldn't wait to return home to tell my wife the good news.

RT: Wow!

GD: Yeah. Wow! My appointment was unexpected. My Principal knew I had been appointed but hadn't say a word to me. I definitely had my work cut out for me. The school was to open in three weeks and I had to hire a secretary. That was a priority, and I interviewed and hired one my second day on the job. My school was an overload school of sixth grade students and their teacher the first year. The teaching staff came over three days before opening to set up their rooms. We opened on time without any major problems.

RT: How did you go from a Principal to an Art Supervisor?

GD: Roger, it was another unbelievable move. Prince William County Schools was growing and so was the art staff. The school system decided to hire an art supervisor and advertised the position. I was happy in my second year as an Elementary Principal, so I didn't apply. My Director of Instruction came by my office at Sinclair Elementary and asked if I would go with him to interview a college art professor who had applied for the supervisor position. I said, "Sure." I went with him to VCU in Richmond the following week. After the interview, he asked me; "Gary, what do you think?" I told him he seems to be a great teacher. I like him! But I asked, "What you are looking for in an art supervisor? If you are looking for an art instructor at the college level who has never taught art in the public schools, he is your man."

Several weeks after that interview, the Director of Instruction stopped by my office at Sinclair Elementary and told me if I were interested, he would like to have my application for the art supervisor position. I loved my principalship, but the art supervisor position was very appealing, so I forwarded my application the next day. I knew I had the qualifications for the position: a Master's Degree in Education with a major in Supervision and Administration and experience as an art teacher and administrator, so my chances of an appointment were good. My good fortune continued. I became the Art Supervisor for Prince William County Schools. It was the first year we employed elementary art teachers.

I was told by my Director that I would be involved in curriculum development, school construction, budgeting, and interviewing art applicants for employment. I knew I would be interviewing candidates for any new art positions, but the Principals of each individual school had the final approval for employment. I also knew the strengths and needs of the art teaching staff in each school and what the Principal needed to strengthen their art program. If the Principal needed an art teacher and club sponsor, I informed the applicant you may be asked to sponsor a club during your interview with the Principal.

RT: Well, it sounded like the principals really knew they could depend on you to find them the right person.

GD: Yes, I believe they did! School principals have different needs and priorities, as I'm sure you know from experience with Fairfax County Schools. As a former art teacher and principal, I had a good working relationship with all the principals which helped.

RT: What do you think were the biggest changes in art education or in Prince William County Schools that occurred during your career?

GD: We had many changes, but I would say the most important change in art education for Prince William County Schools was the hiring of an art supervisor to support and oversee the staffing, budgeting, curriculum and building plans for the art program. I just happened to be the one to take on this position.

Definitely, next was the development and implementation of an art curriculum for grades 1-12, which laid out an art program with basic art instruction, objectives, and creative activities at each grade level. And to support the curriculum, art education became required in grade 1–8, and an elective in grades 9-12, resulting in an art teaching staff increased from 22 to 75 teachers.

Also of importance, the Art Department became the budget holder for art supplies and equipment based on the program and student enrollment, and the advisor in the planning department for determining the size, space, location and layout of the art rooms in new and existing schools.

RT: When did you get involved with the Virginia Art Education Association? In what ways have you participated?

GD: I became aware of the VAEA and a member my second year as an art supervisor. The first business meeting I attended was held at the John Marshall Hotel in Richmond. I attended with a car full of my art teachers. When we approached the meeting room, Betty Tisinger took me aside and said, “We want to nominate you as President of the VAEA.” I told her I wasn’t interested. She put me on the ballot anyway. There was one other person on the ballot. After the ballots were counted, I discovered I was elected the new VAEA President for the next two years. This was an unexpected addition to my recent election as President of the Administrative Group for Prince William County Schools.

I was an active member of the VAEA and NAEA and Kappa Pi Honorary art fraternity my entire career as an art supervisor and beyond. I participated in both organizations as a workshop participant and presenter at conferences. I also served as president of the VAEA and chairperson of the VAEA Retired Educators when I retired.

RT: Any great or fun remembrances of your interactions with VAEA colleagues over the years?

GD: There were many, many fun times. Besides my teaching staff, my friends in the VAEA became my second family. I had so many wonderful and funny times with friends at the VAEA conferences and summer workshops sponsored by the State Art Department. At both events it was a time to renew our friendships and attend some wonderful art workshops. Baylor Nichols was the State Art Supervisor back then and as fun loving and playful as he is known to be, he had to be the chaperone, the guy to quiet us down in the evenings when we were laughing during quiet hour. I still love and miss him. He was the best!

One of the most fun times for Betty and I was not at an art conference, but at Betty Tisinger’s cottage on Smith Mountain Lake in Roanoke. Getting together with VAEA members, Al and Mary Landis, Gail and Baylor Nichols, Bucky and Jane Wise, and Jan and John Jones, for a day on her waterlogged boat, and an evening of hilarious storytelling, and my wife and I trying to sleep in the bedroom with a large picture window without curtains, was a weekend and night to remember. Great lifetime friends.

RT: Looking back at your career, what do you consider were your best accomplishments as an artist, as an art educator, and as an advocate for art education?

GD: Wow, that's a lot to cover.

First, I was always an artist. I never lost that desire or opportunity to create art. I consider my greatest accomplishment as an artist was to become an art teacher, whereby I could stimulate the minds of my students to be visually inspired, creative thinkers, art appreciators, and creators of art.

The stimulation for me to create art evolved from my participation in hands-on workshops I attended at VAEA conferences and the summer art workshops provided by the State Department of Art Education. Some of outstanding workshops I attended were creative jewelry taught by Al Landis at VCU, silk screen printmaking by Barbara Bishop at Longwood college, and Wood Collage taught by Joe Falsetti at Gatlinburg, Tenn.

It was at the Wood Collage workshop at Gatlinburg, where I became fascinated with the material, processes, and creative opportunities of working with wood. I remember returning home with two beautiful sculptures and telling my wife I believe I had found my niche. I began creating wood sculptures as wall hanging pieces. My first showing of my sculptures was a two-person exhibit at Art Factory Gallery in Manassas. From there I exhibited my sculptures in juried art shows from New Jersey to Florida.

After 15 years of creating and exhibiting wood collages, I put the wood aside and began creating self-standing sculptures from found objects. I named them *Re Creations* because I assembled five or six different objects into a new sculpture, often painting and adding small items so that the finished sculpture would have its own identity. Even though I have created over a hundred
Re Creations, I still enjoy the fun process of finding objects to create new sculptures.

Now, regarding instructional accomplishments as an art educator, my staff and I had many. The most prominent was in curriculum, where we developed a grade 1-12 art curriculum with objectives that focused on teaching basic art knowledge, processes and skills, art vocabulary, aesthetic education, and creative art activities as culminating and art experiences.

To enhance our art appreciation and history components at the elementary and secondary level, we introduced a required Art Gallery tour for all 5th grade students to one of the four national art galleries in Washington DC. And through the outreach program at the Kennedy Center, we secured fifty workshops and performances each year for secondary art students.

We also increased the art awareness in the schools and community by taking one of the old school buses and converting it into an Art Gallery on Wheels (Art Mobile). Student art work from all schools were selected to be exhibited in the Art Mobile. The Art Mobile visited all schools and several community sites for student and community viewing.

To recognize and enhance the enrichment opportunities for high school students in art, the Art Department created a one week, all expenses paid, summer art program for 35 students to attend one of four Virginia colleges offering art as a major. Instruction was provided by the college art instructors.

As an artist and educator, I have always been an advocate for art and the arts at the local, state, and national levels. It was one of my personal goals to promote art and the arts wherever and whenever I have an opportunity.

I have conducted workshops in art for the local art clubs and adjudicated many of their art shows. I have also written several articles about our special programs in art and presented our curriculum at the VAEA and NAEA conferences and as a keynote speaker at the Maine Art Education Conference. I also taught graduate and undergraduate art courses locally as an adjunct teacher for the University of Virginia and a seminar course for art student teachers at Virgina Commonwealth University.

RT: Tell us what it was like when you decided to retire. Is it what you imagined?

GD: It was definitely more than I imagined. After thirty-two years in education, and at 55 years of age, I had full retirement benefits and I decided to retire. It was not an easy decision because I enjoyed all the positions I held as an art educator. But the pressures were growing and I knew it was time. The first few weeks in retirement I was a little antsy, answering the phone like I was in my office and getting up early as to go to work. Realizing I now had more time to do whatever I wanted, my wife and I decided to spend our winters in Sarasota, Florida, and travel and tour places in Europe and the United States. Two of our most memorable tours were a fifteen-day tour of Italy, and twelve-day tour of France. Two places I would love to return is the Louvre in France and the city of Venice in Italy.

After six months of retirement, I received a call from my friend, Dan Reeves, Department Chair in Art Education at VCU, inquiring if I would be interested in teaching a seminar class for student art teachers one evening a week and also observe several students the same day in their schools. It was an exciting offer, and a new adventure, so I accepted and taught the class for two years. It was a great experience for me to teach at the college level and share with student teachers my knowledge of the art teaching field, as an art supervisor and art teacher.

After accepting the teaching position at VCU, I began getting calls from some of my former art teachers asking me if I would mind coming by their school to repair some of their art equipment, a service I provided while I was art supervisor. I always carried my toolbox with me when I visited art teachers since school maintenance departments knew little about repairing art equipment. There was such a great need for this service, I contacted Flavius Hall, the new art supervisor, and together we put in a request for an equipment maintenance employee to service all the art equipment in each school once a year. Unable to find someone with the necessary experience, the school system hired me part time to service and inventory the art equipment in all 65 schools.

In addition to all of the above, I did find time in my retirement to write four books; my memoirs, “Gary’s Place”, the story of my life from age 6 to 65, “Ann B and Alfredo”, a love story of my father and mother, “My Brother Fred and Me”, a story about the fun times my brother and I shared, and “Where the Sun Never Shines”, a story of the life Clarence Earls, my wife’s father who worked in the coal mines in West Virginia.

At age of seventy I decided to retire from retirement.

RT: What advice do you have for undergraduates thinking about going into the field of art education now?

GD: Go for it! There is no more gratifying and rewarding profession than that of a classroom teacher. My classroom teaching days as an elementary teacher and art teacher, were the most memorable of my educational career. Where else can you work where you can be creative every day and leave with a smile on your face. Go for it!

Even though there have been many changes since I was teaching art, some things never change. To become an art teacher, you must first have a passion for teaching and a love for art, and a desire to share both with your students, staff, and community. You must consider your classroom as your haven, a place where your students can feel free to create and express themselves visually through their art. Your art room should look like one, with student art work flowing throughout. And remember, you are a teacher of art, not just a facilitator. You also need to be prepared to stand up for art education. You can't sit back and complain. Speak up and join the decision-making committees. If you can remember all of the above, "Welcome to Art Education."

Thanks for the interview and opportunity to share my life's story as an art educator and artist. I am just a normal guy, who by chance became a teacher, and by enjoying my teaching and life, advanced through the rank and file with no other means than just being me. I owe my success in life to my loving wife who encouraged and supported me in my educational pursuits, and my wonderful creative children who shared our adventurous life. I have no regrets, only admirations for all my friends who were a part of my life's journey. I now must go to my art studio and create a sculpture.

RT: Thank you so much for your time, thank you for sharing your amazing story.