

Work of art **(<http://lockportjournal.com/local/x530790361/Work-of-art>)**

Retiring after 43 years of teaching, Earle Holt makes a difference in one more life

By Joe Olenick
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— One of the goals of a teacher is touch a student's life. On rare occasions, a teacher can touch a student's life, which then has the ability to touch others.

Lockport resident Earle Holt will be retiring after 43 years of teaching art at Heim Middle School in Williamsville. Holt leaves behind a number of legacies, making an impact on the over 12,500 students he taught.

"Teaching is an honor, it has a lot to do with wanting to impart to young people the good things in society so they can carry on, grow and learn," Holt said. "We're like farmers, we plant ideas."

But Holt's biggest legacy may be 13 year old Suneel Ram, a student he taught this past fall. Ram, a seventh grader, suffers from Duchennes Muscular Dystrophy, which makes things such as school a challenge.

Duchennes Muscular Dystrophy is caused by a mutation of the dystrophin gene, the gene that carries the genetic information for the construction of the dystrophin protein. Without the proper genetic information, the body does not produce a functional version of the dystrophin protein, which normally serves to surround the muscular cells, maintain their structure and hold



Lockport resident Earle Holt will be retiring after 43 years of teaching art at Heim Middle School in Amherst. Holt leaves behind a number of legacies, making an impact on the over 12,500 students he taught. Holt chats with 3 year old Suneel Ram, a student he taught this past fall. Ram, a seventh grader, suffers from Duchennes Muscular Dystrophy. Joe Eberle/US&J



Lockport resident Earle Holt will be retiring after 43 years of teaching art at Heim Middle School in Amherst. Holt leaves behind a number of legacies, making an impact on the over 12,500 students he taught. Joe Eberle/US&J



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the muscles together. Without this protein, the muscles become increasingly weaker, until the body can no longer survive.

More than 20,000 children nationwide and 100,000 worldwide suffer from Duchennes. There is no cure for the disease.

Ram would often be uncomfortable in class, struggling as he would become tired and unable to sit at his desk. Holt decided he could help Ram by making him a desk.

Noticing that Ram was comfortable working at different heights and angles each day, Holt took an old computer desk and worked on it at home. He went to Home Depot and purchased some schedule 40 plumbing piping and compression connectors, self-tapping screws to rebuild the desk with independently adjustable legs.

He designed the desk to adjust to Suneel regardless of his position. The desk can move in different directions.

“Suneel sits at different angles throughout the day,” Holt said. “It makes him more comfortable.”

The desk did the trick and met Ram’s needs. Being comfortable throughout the day helped Ram do even better at school.

“Suneel was so thrilled by it,” said Suneel’s mother Neera Manning. “I thought ‘yeah right,’ but he was so thrilled, it made a big difference.”

Holt has made other items to help students. Over the years Holt has built things like a small glass table that works as a magnifying glass, allowing students with visual impairments to read small print. Holt’s best tool is Styrofoam, which has multiple uses. For students who have difficulties with their hands, Holt puts a hole through a piece of Styrofoam and ties the piece to the student’s hand. It allows them to use a writing or coloring utensil much easier.

There is a not for profit organization whose mission is to raise public awareness as well as funding for Duchennes research. Founded in 2002, the organization is called Suneel’s Light Foundation.

On Thursday at the Lockport Public Library, Ram personally met with the foundation’s newest supporter: Earle Holt. Holt was given a T-shirt from the foundation.

“I love the idea you gave me a shirt,” Holt said to Ram. “It feels like we’ve traded, a table for a shirt.”

Over the years Holt had each of his students create and design a block to be placed on the hallway walls at Heim Middle School. Holt photographed, printed and recorded the entire project, which has since been included in the permanent collection of the Amherst Museum. Ram won an award for his wall tile, Holt said.

“It was for the most artistic,” Ram said.

In addition, each student received a piece of hand made pottery from Holt, so that everyone in his classes would have their own piece of original artwork. Holt estimates 17,000 pieces of pottery in his 43 years.



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While society has changed over the years, Holt said children really haven't. What has kept him in education and at Heim all these years was the families and the people he's come in contact with. And that includes the people he has met while living in Lockport for 35 years.

"This is a great place. I know everybody, they know me, I step into a restaurant, I don't even order. They know what I'm going to order," Holt said. "I guess that means I'm kind of boring."

"You're not boring," Ram told him.

Holt, 65, is in the process of writing a book about his educational experiences called "Unexpected Journeys." But as the years of working 10-, 12-, 14- or 16-hour days come to an end, Holt said he does have advice for those in the education field.

"Be prepared to listen a lot and to work very, very hard," Holt said. "Do the absolute best you can."

Contact reporter Joe Olenick at 439-9222, ext. 6241.



The advertisement features the Party City logo on the left with a star and the text "FREE SHIPPING" in large red letters, followed by "Free ground shipping on orders over \$45." in smaller text. To the right is a small image of the party kit. Further right, the text "Toy Story Party Supplies Grand Party Kit" is displayed in blue, with "Price: \$149.99" in red below it. An orange button with the text "Click to activate" and a right-pointing arrow is positioned on the far right.

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