

A homegrown program offers eighth graders a real-world taste of creative careers.

Creative Direction

BY JUSTIN BRAUN

Eighth graders at Memorial, Howard, and Westridge middle schools are on the fast track to careers in the entertainment industry, thanks to a partnership between Universal Orlando® and Orange County Public Schools (OCPS). The two teamed up to create The Art of Tomorrow, an innovative program that introduces students at the County Title I, high-risk schools to possible careers in the arts.

“We want to help kids understand how their involvement in the arts can translate into a real job as an adult,” says Scott T. Evans, coordinator of visual and performing arts for OCPS.

The program lasts the duration of the school year and is woven into the curriculum of the schools’ eighth-grade Visual and Performing Arts Classes, such as dance, drama, art and band, so every student enrolled in these courses automatically gets to participate.

Through Skype sessions and classroom visits, Universal team members, such as writers, set designers, stunt consultants and sound technicians, share how they turned their passions into careers. And twice a year, the students visit Universal Studios and Islands of Adventure, where they work one-on-one with Universal’s creative team, including the director of art and design, the manager of art entertainment, and show directors and costume design managers. Last year, students got real-world experience by helping decorate Mardi Gras floats, learning about make-up application and costume design, and getting a crash course on the computer program used by the Universal Art & Design team.

The Art of Tomorrow program began two years ago when Universal Orlando approached Evans about investing Universal Foundation funds in local arts education. “Empowering youth to be extraordinary is part of our community relations focus, and two key components are arts and education,” says Diane O’Dell, Universal’s vice president of community & diversity relations and executive director of the Universal Orlando Foundation. “We reached out to OCPS to gain a better understanding of their needs and how we could assist with the various resources we have to offer. They were in the process of designing a curriculum for eighth graders that focused on college and

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A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN Universal Orlando and Orange County Public Schools introduces eighth graders at select schools to careers in the arts and entertainment industry.

career readiness in the arts. Leaders from our Entertainment division immediately jumped on board to collaborate on what ultimately became The Art of Tomorrow program.”

Students keep a journal throughout the year and as a final project they give presentations illustrating what they learned in the program. Everyone receives a certificate of participation at a special closing ceremony.

“This has been a true partnership,” says O’Dell, “and our collaboration with OCPS continues to inspire us.”

For more information about The Art of Tomorrow, contact Evans at 407.317.3200 x2769 or scott.evans@ocps.net. **oam**

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