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TD Bank helps SmartARTS expand

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The Metropolitan Arts Council's arts-integration program in local schools got a hefty boost with a \$200,000 pledge from TD Bank on Tuesday.

The program, SmartARTS, uses the visual and performing arts to engage students and improve achievement in the core academic subjects in dozens of

Greenville County schools.

Cal Hurst, regional vice president of TD Bank, announced the grant at a Tuesday press conference in downtown Greenville.

"SmartARTS has a proven track record of success in improving academic achievement through integration of the arts into the standard curricular of our public schools," Hurst said.

The pledge will establish the TD Cen-

ter for Arts Integration at MAC's office at 16 Augusta Street.

"TD Bank believes in investing in the communities in which we serve by carefully selecting projects and programs of cultural and education value," Hurst said.

The money, to be paid over several years, will be used "to continue and expand the SmartARTS program," said Alan Ethridge, executive director of

MAC, the Greenville arts umbrella organization.

SmartARTS currently has a budget of \$225,000 annually. That money is used to train teachers and artists to partner in the classroom.

Arts integration "is a natural way to engage students and to keep their interest," said Mary Leslie Anderson, princi-

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pal at League Academy of Communication Arts.

SmartARTS helps students “to be analytical, critical, reflective thinkers,” Anderson said.

In a classroom with an arts-integration component, an English teacher might use landscape or abstract paintings to inspire student essays. He or she might use self-portraits throughout history to encourage students to write reflections about themselves. Science teachers might use creative movement to help younger students understand cloud formation.

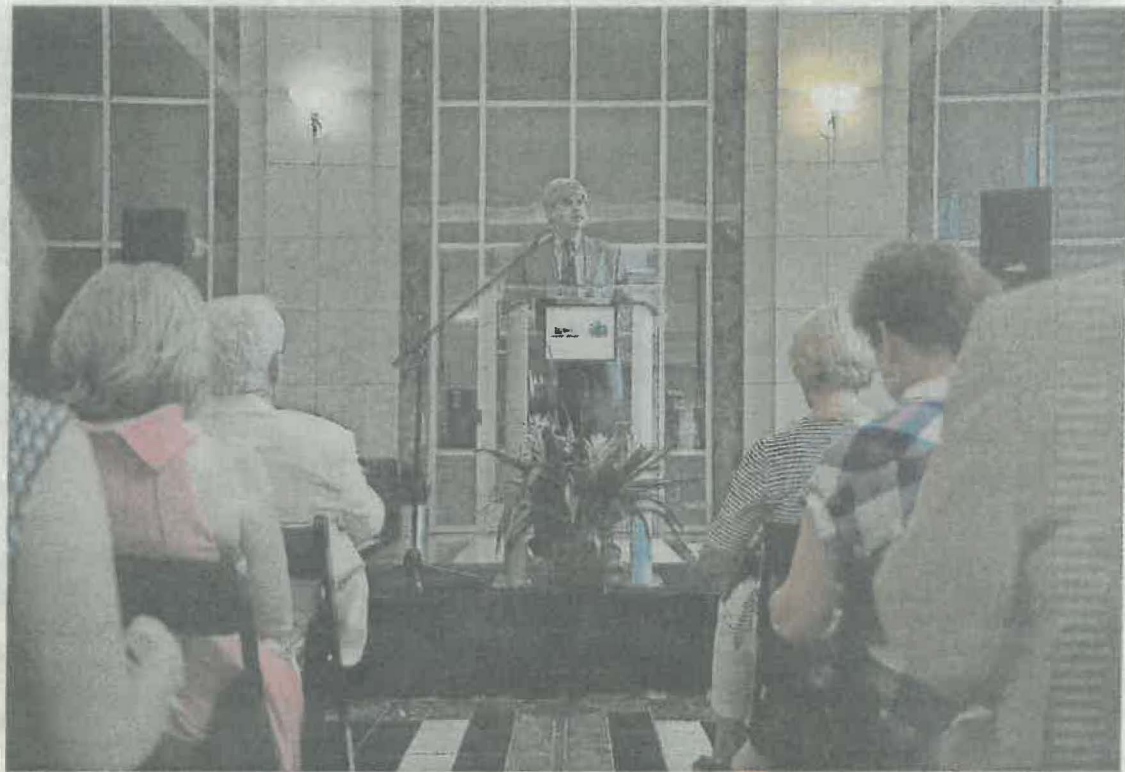
The arts build student confidence and teach broad “21st century skills,” said Elaine Donnan, magnet coordinator at League Academy

“Students will take these creative and problem-solving skills and the confidence they get through these programs and apply them to everything they do in the future,” Donnan said.

League Academy, a magnet middle school with students in grades six through eight, has a particularly strong commitment to the SmartARTS program.

“We try to get as many teachers as we can to do the SmartARTS training in the summer,” Anderson said. “It really helps the newer teachers especially to understand what arts integration looks like.”

SmartARTS began in 2002 with three federal grants from the U.S. Department of Education totaling \$2.1 million, said Charles Ratterree, MAC board



HEIDI HEILBRUNN/STAFF

Charles Ratterree, Metropolitan Arts Council Board of Directors chairman, speaks during an announcement that the Metropolitan Arts Council will receive \$200,000 from TD Bank for Greenville County Schools arts programs.

chairman and assistant director of the Fine Arts Center.

Beginning in two high-poverty schools, SmartARTS subsequently expanded to meet the demand from other schools, including the Charles Townes Center, Greenville’s public school for the highly gifted.

After federal funding expired in 2007, the MAC board decided to continue the program with local funding.

“Since then, over \$2.1 million has been raised to expand SmartARTS,” Ratterree said. “It has trained over 200 artists and more than 250 teachers during its training institutes.”

More than 60 Greenville

schools have participated in a SmartARTS project since 2002, Ethridge said.

SmartARTS helps to bridge the gaps teachers often find between students’ different learning styles, Ethridge said.

Ratterree drew attention Tuesday to TD Bank’s strong commitment to Greenville.

“For MAC to be able to share in the phenomenal philanthropy of TD Bank is a real privilege,” Ratterree said. “This collaboration between the two organizations is further evidence of TD Bank’s commitment to making Greenville the best city it can possibly be. Since its founding locally in 1986, TD Bank has provided million of

dollars in charitable support for Greenville-area initiatives. This is a staggering accomplishment, and one of which the entire community can be very proud.”

TD Bank’s Hurst said the arts contribute substantially to a city’s economic vitality.

“We recognize the value of the arts to a community’s growth and prosperity,” Hurst said. “It’s something we’ve seen vividly in Greenville.”

For more information about the SmartARTS program, call MAC at 864-467-3132.

For the latest in local arts news and reviews, follow Paul Hyde on Facebook and Twitter: @PaulHyde7.