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**“STIGMA HIGHLIGHTED” ART EXHIBIT ADDRESSES
NEGATIVITY TOWARDS INDIVIDUALS BATTLING ADDICTION,
OPENS ON OCT. 7 AT OCEAN CITY CENTER FOR THE ARTS**

OCEAN CITY, MD — *Sept. 30, 2022* — “As an artist, a mother, a friend, and having personally dealt with other’s addictions, I agreed [to participate in the Stigma project,] knowing it will travel, and others will hear the journey each of these strong and courageous people have traveled through to get where they are today,” portrait artist Teri Edgeworth, wrote. “If their story touches a heart and saves people from going down their path or even for starting one step in that direction, I am grateful...”

The “Stigma Highlighted: Portraits of Recovery” project is designed to use artwork and personal stories to challenge misconceptions and negativity towards individuals battling addiction. The program is sponsored by the Giving Spirit Foundation, Worcester County Health Department, Worcester Goes Purple, Talbot Goes Purple, and the Art League of Ocean City.

The Stigma exhibit is free and opens to the public on First Friday, Oct. 7, 5-8 p.m. at the Ocean City Center for the Arts, 502 94th St. bayside. The original paintings will be on exhibit in Studio E until Oct. 29. Reproductions of the paintings, along with a video and resource

materials, will travel to the middle and high schools in Worcester Co. the week of Oct. 24.

Local artists, including Edgeworth, created portraits influenced by their stories of 12 survivors from Worcester, Wicomico, Talbot and Somerset counties in various stages of recovery. The artists personally met with the individuals, listened to their journeys, and interpreted them in hand-painted portraits. The artists also wrote accounts of their interactions with their subjects, writing how it personally affected them.

A team recorded each participant's interview where they shared their personal stories. These interviews make up a 15-minute video where the individuals speak directly to young people, sharing experiences and wisdom, and the video will accompany the exhibition to the local schools. Viewers can scan QR codes next to each portrait to see each individual's video.

In conjunction with the Stigma show, Debbie Smullen, Worcester Connects program coordinator and the face of Worcester Goes Purple, will speak about her work with people who are dealing with addictions or are in recovery. The event is free, and all are welcome at Ocean City Center for the Arts on Tuesday, Oct. 11, 6 p.m.

“The Art League of Ocean City has made it our mission to connect all the people in our community through the arts,” Katrin Huber, education director for the Art League, said. “By creating 12 strong and beautiful portraits by local artists, we want to use the power of art to shine a light on the stigma around addiction and recovery by giving it a face and the opportunity to meet these 12 individuals and hear their stories.”

A new website – www.StigmaHighlighted.com – is currently active and displays the 12 portraits and stories as well as the 15-minute video.

More information is available at ArtLeagueofOceanCity.org or by calling 410-524-9433.

The Ocean City Center for the Arts at 502 94th Street is the home of the Art League of Ocean City, a nonprofit organization dedicated to bringing the visual arts to the community through education, exhibits, scholarship, programs and community art projects. More information is available at 410-524-9433 or ArtLeagueofOceanCity.org.

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EDITORS: Three of the portraits with words by the artists are attached. We have other files if needed.

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Portrait - Brandon O'Brien Artist - Izzy Huber

Speaking with Brandon, it very quickly became clear to me that he was one of the most down-to-earth and humble people I had ever met. His story inspired me in many ways, but one of the most striking things was his determination and ability to face his fears. In his darkest moment battling addiction, Brandon made what he calls "the best decision of my life": going to a recovery house. He was terrified, but being at the recovery house saved his life. Since beginning his journey away from addiction, Brandon has flourished. It was a great honor meeting him and seeing how his hard work has paid off. I was able to visit his very own recovery house, which he has opened to help his community, in the same way he was given help when he needed it most. In the background of the portrait, I added a few symbols for the things in his life which he loves, including a dog, guitar, and cross. These represent his support system and the things and people that bring him the most joy, giving him the strength to continue his journey with a positive outlook. I am so grateful I had the opportunity to meet and paint Brandon for this project, and I hope I was able to capture the feeling of hopefulness for the future that his story gives me.





Portrait - Jerry Elston Artist - Jessica Schlegel

When I met Jerry, he was beaming with positive energy. When we went into the studio, this whole experience was new to the both of us. So when I asked him how he wanted to be portrayed, he didn't really know. He knew he felt more comfortable with it being more closely cropped to his face. Jerry took off his glasses, we tried a few angles, and smile vs serious shots. In the past, most of my portraits have been commissioned by the customer who knew exactly what they wanted. With Jerry, I got to hear his whole back story. I got to hear about the demons he faced and how hard he fought to overcome them. He works hard every day to live his life the best way he can and enjoy every minute of it. So, as I scrolled through the references photos I took from that day in the studio, I knew right away - That's the one! He wasn't quite smiling, and he wasn't serious. He just had this smirk as if he were saying, "Yeah, I've got this." Since he wanted the image to be closer to his face, I did not have much room in the background to work with. I left the paint darker and shifted to a slightly lighter shade on the opposite side. This gives contrast to his image, but also signifies him leaving the darkness and coming into the light, facing each day knowing his demons are behind him and that he is heading on to a brighter future.





Portrait - Kristin Jones - Koko Artist - Teri Edgeworth

Being invited to participate in this project is a huge honor. As an artist, a mother, a friend, and having personally dealt with other's addictions, I agreed, knowing this exhibit will travel, and others will hear the journey each one of these strong and courageous people have traveled through to get to where they are today. If their story touches a heart and saves people from going through their path or from even starting one step in that direction, I am grateful to have had a part of the Stigma project. Meeting Koko and hearing her story moved me to the center of my heart, and reminds us all that people get caught up in circumstance sometimes. Then addiction is a dealing mechanism that just swirls more storms into troubled waters, and people need a helping hand and positive attitudes from others to help beat this problem, not be looked down upon. Looking into her eyes to paint her for weeks after hearing her story and meeting her makes me as an artist feel like I knew her. Behind her smile is the best kept secret, just like looking at the Mona Lisa! I hope you enjoy my interpretation of Miss Koko and take away your own smile knowing there's a better future there for everyone!

