

Friends of Portland Adult Education

FALL 2020 NEWSLETTER

From the FPAE Chair, Rob Wood



We want to reach out and announce that we have far exceeded our fundraising goal of \$106,000 for the response to the Covid pandemic!

More than 110 “Friends” stepped forward and donated. Many wrote checks for \$235 which is a strange donation sum until you remember that that amount will provide a student a Chromebook so they can easily connect to on-line classes.

Many others gave larger sums that surged the total past the goal. Of note, Bank of America Charitable Foundation awarded both local and national awards totalling \$40,000. Sherman Family Foundation, Marr-Anderson Family Foundation and Elmina B. Sewall also graciously contributed significant amounts.

The semester has begun successfully. Two immigrants with wonderful technology skills have been hired hourly to assist with distribution and trouble shooting support. The teachers have all returned and are employing different methods to provide quality instruction from ESOL Literacy through Algebra.

We support them and our students in their efforts.

Student Success.....Page 2
Learning Technology.....Page 3
Career Training.....Pages 4-5
Recognizing Volunteers.....Page 6
Student Writing.....Page 7

Message From The Executive Director, Anita St. Onge

Reading through the articles submitted by PAE staff for this Fall newsletter, I continue to be so impressed by the work that staff, students, volunteers and supporters are doing at Portland Adult Education.

As a relative newcomer to this world—I celebrate my 4 year anniversary in a few weeks—I was never aware of the tremendous work being done here. I want to thank Friends of Portland Adult Education and its supporters for your ongoing assistance. While we receive funding from local, state, and federal sources, our private funding allows us to be creative and to offer innovative programs.

So many of the projects that began with FPAE and foundation funding are now established programs. Our Learning Lab is a great example of this. Starting with funding from the JT Gorman foundation, we created a lab to enhance our English classes running a few hours each day. With support from FPAE, we have increased hours and upgraded our lab classroom. With help from the United Way



of Greater Portland, we added a component to assist students looking for support to get their HiSET (formerly GED) or High School Diploma.

The Portland community continues to reinforce our work with financial and volunteer support. When we had to move to remote learning in March, many people including Rachel Talbot Ross and the MLK Fellows, FPAE, Spectrum and numerous individuals, stepped up to help us with devices and hotspots to allow our students to continue their studies. Thanks to all for your ongoing support.

PAE Team Improves Virtual Learning

Submitted by Sara Staples

With the robust support of FPAE, our school launched its student technology loaner program. The program has been directed by Rod Mahoua and Yunus Ibrahim as the Student Tech Team (STT). Rod brings expertise in logistics and Yunus his experience in technology.

Their collaborative efforts have resulted in the efficient distribution of devices as well as the much needed tech support for hundreds of our students. Since mid September, they have deployed 149 laptops, 28 iPads and 144 hotspots. These have greatly increased student access to PAE courses in every department.



The STT eagerly awaits the arrival of an additional 330 devices and looks forward to getting them to students as soon as possible. Thank you to FPAE for making school possible for so many of our English language learners: High School diploma, College Transitions and Job Skill students.

Celebrating Student Success

August Inspirations

Submitted by Anja Hanson

Anxiety about the return to school makes sense in this hard year, but I've had recent reminders of the purpose of our work. With their permission to share, here are two unsolicited student messages I received last week.



Submitted by Anja Hanson

I was slow to check last spring's Dean's List at SMCC, but belated good news sometimes comes when it is needed. 30+ former PAE students are on that list! In spite of a global pandemic, not only did we have 50+ students graduate, but an amazing number of alumni also did excellent work in college as the world shut down and shifted online.

When I congratulated students on the list, I got the best replies and must share a few with you:

"Thank you so much! I am so grateful to be in Maine! I feel like home, and even though as a black person I see and hear all the negativity going on right now, it makes a big difference to see the support my kids and I receive every day. We are doing well because of people like Anja who believe in us. The expression 'together we are stronger' never makes more sense to me than it does now. I can only pray that more and more people could understand that. Loving the US right now for a black immigrant is like hugging a furious porcupine, but I still love this country and I want to be part of its history."

-Odette Zouri

From Xiaoli Wu '20:

"I wish to express my heartfelt "thanks" to you. I received help and encouragement from you, PAE teachers, tutors, and officers in the past two years. As a newcomer to the U.S., I learned so much in English (even though I still have a long way to go). All the classes that I took, such as American

history, science, social studies, and job skills are very informative and relevant. After those classes, I found out how the government works, what should we do to finish the Census, something like this.

Every time when I came to school, I received nothing but the most useful advice and excellent support from you and the teachers. Your instructions about the classes that I need is perfect. There are something that I don't understand in my transcripts and you explain and correct them in a short time to me. Your efficiency and patience are very unmatched. I just want to say how much I appreciated that and inspiring comments from all of you.

As you already know, I graduated from PAE this summer. Having a high school diploma will give me an opportunity to get a better job and I look forward to doing that. In the coming fall, I plan to attend SMCC to continue my education if I can pass the Accuplacer test. All of these can become true are because of your hard work. For that, I'm totally grateful."

Xiaoli and I exchanged messages after this email, and I'm happy to report that she's likely to stick with PAE for a bit more college prep in the fall.

From Adiel Nimbona:

"Just a thank you to what PAE has offered to me. It really has been a huge stepping stone in my career. In fact I attended PAE in their GED program, where I was able to land a scholarship to help me start with college. After I earned my GED at PAE, I went to SMCC where I graduated this year with an associate degree in construction technology. Currently I am working with a industrial contractor building a gas plant in Westbrook. I am a member of carpenters union here locally in Maine and if it wasn't for a head start that I got for PAE I probably would even be close to where I am right now.

A huge thank you to all staff as well as administrators and teachers."

PAE Stars

"Big thanks to all teachers at PAE for the great work they did to show me the way. If it wasn't for them, maybe I wouldn't be in this position. Right now I'm taking classes @ University of Indiana Majoring in Aviation Science and Engineering."

-Charles Ndizeye

"Thank you so much for this message. I tried my best to keep working and to not be discouraged through this pandemic because I had a goal to finish all my liberal studies credits at SMCC so that I can transfer and start at USM this fall, and I made it. Hard work always pays off. I am proud of myself too."

-Lyse Niyokwizigirwa

"It's great to hear from you. We've been through a lot last spring, but dedication and determination made the difference. I'm so thankful for the whole journey and the new pathway that opened up for me. As you know, I graduated with honors, passed my registry as a radiologic technologist RT(R), and found a job at Northern Light Mercy Hospital. There's still a lot to accomplish, but this will for sure be the biggest step I've ever made. Thank you for your support and encouragements!!!"

-Danny Olemba

Learning Through Technology

View From The Classroom

Submitted by Heather Moore Wood and Rochelle Yanike Hale, Department Chairs

Imagine trying to meet and establish a powerful connection and sense of classroom community with a completely new group of 20 students... through Zoom. Imagine that these same students (and you!) are trying to practice English while also learning how to Chat, Mute and Unmute, and participate in Breakout Rooms. Imagine that while trying to pay attention to your class, they are also in charge of watching their children or have just gotten home after working the overnight shift. Imagine that some are on Zoom on their phones, some are on a computer, and some now realize that they need better wi-fi in order to hear what's going on. Imagine trying to hold students' attention and engage them actively in language learning... on Zoom.

Also imagine that you just successfully taught a student who's never used email before to start emailing their assignments to you. Imagine that a student who has never used a device learns how to access Zoom on a PAE-provided iPad. Imagine a student who says, "Finding the time to take enough classes has always been an obstacle for me, but now that classes are online and more flexible, I am going to reach my goal!"

These are some of the many challenges but also moments of inspiration that we've seen at the start of this unprecedented school year in our roles as ESOL and Language Arts teachers and department leaders. We are running approximately 40 ESOL classes at all levels (Literacy level through ESOL 5), and 10 courses at the Language Arts levels (high school diploma/College Transitions) -- all virtually, for now. We're trying a new teaching and learning model in which students attend their classes on Zoom once or twice a week, but for fewer hours than when we met in person. This means that we are expecting students to do some of their English study independently, outside of class time. This is a big shift in expectations, and a challenge! September has also been hard for another big



reason: when we "went virtual" way back in March, we knew our students already, and they knew their teachers and class routines. We are all now meeting students for the first time, while also trying to figure out how to troubleshoot their technology needs, all while trying to teach the content of our classes. We are so thankful for the support of

the new Student Technology Team and the many Chromebooks that we've been able to put into students' hands so far!

This pandemic has put into focus some very real inequities in our society, especially around wi-fi and access to technology. PAE teachers, staff, and students have been rising to the challenge.

Math Updates

Submitted by Jill Gorneau,
Math Department Chair

The math department at PAE continues to teach all math classes on zoom twice per week for 1.5 hours each class. Thanks to FPAE, math teachers received a digital pen for use on an electronic whiteboard, or a document camera to project their handwriting or the book. These tools allow students to see the work of math and have been incredible.

Many math students were lost in the Spring, absent from the lack of technology. This fall, students are attending math classes with low drop rates. More students who need internet access or a laptop have what they need to attend and be successful. Teachers are grateful for the high level of support that has been received.

Inspirational moments and successes:

A young student who had pre-existing health conditions contracted Covid early in the Spring and struggled with the ability to

attend online classes. This fall the student is recovered and attending classes online regularly, with even better attendance than before the shut-down. This student is thriving within the group after being isolated in the Spring, and is grateful for the opportunity to study online.

Students in one evening math class enjoy their evening meal together. The class is small and the students and teacher are all from Africa. They enjoy "sharing" their African food with one another during class time.

It's always inspiring to see students in zoom classes with children hanging on them and saying hello. Sometimes the parent retreats to a room with a closed door, only to hear the children knocking or yelling on the other side. Online learning has opened up new opportunities for many students, especially for those with lack of childcare or transportation. Students are incredibly thankful to have access to online learning, they mention it often and are hopeful it will continue to be offered.

Training For The Future

Bangor Savings Bank Applauds Teller Training Program

Submitted by Liz Love, Assistant Director, P.A.E. and Bridget Kahn, Instructor/Project Coordinator

We are looking forward to launching Teller Training 2.0 in January as a primarily online program. We're proud that six of our Spring graduates have been hired as Tellers in local credit unions and banks, all since the beginning of the COVID outbreak. Several new banks have joined the partnership for Teller 2.0, as well as a growing number of students interested in the class.

David Pease, Director of Talent, Diversity and Inclusion at Bangor Savings Bank, submitted a wonderful testimonial of the program:

"Bangor Savings Bank works with many workforce development and education partners throughout Maine and New Hampshire. The program creation, communication, collaboration and results with Portland Adult



Education and five other financial institutions with the Today Teller Program in 2020 is clearly one of the most meaningful and impactful. The students (selected by PAE) were all highly motivated and skilled – they just needed some attention, training

and support! Every interaction our Bank employees had with the PAE staff was extremely professional and positive; the curiosity, courage and confidence of the students was inspiring! To see the depth of talent and knowledge in our immigrant community is incredible – more employers need to have the magical experience we had. As the Diversity Office of the Bank, this program helped develop highly employable employees for the Portland workforce and these

individuals have great potential and promise to advance and grow. Simply put – this is a one-of-a-kind, dynamic and impactful workforce development initiative. Bangor Savings Bank will be making a financial and staff time commitment for a 2nd year program."

Maurice—from CNA to Beyond

Submitted by Catherine Eliot, CNA Instructor

Maurice moved to Maine with his family in 2013 and started working at Maine Medical Center in 2014. He took a CNA class at Portland Adult Education



in the Fall of 2015, and did his student clinicals at St. Joseph's Rehabilitation and Residence in Portland. At the time, he was working full-time at Maine Medical Center in Environmental Services, caring for his family, and showing up faithfully for class. He was an excellent student, not surprising since he had a BSc from his home country, Rwanda, and spoke five languages. Maurice was a delight to have in class and never showed the stress of juggling work, family, and school. He also worked with Sally Sutton at the New Mainers Resource Center, to plan for his future and work on career goals. He says he is very thankful for Sally's help.

Maurice got a job as a CNA on the oncology unit at Maine Medical Center immediately after he passed his CNA Certification Exam. He wrote, "It is at MMC where I met numerous care providers who inspired me to keep

following my dreams of curing diseases. So, I went back to school, earned a four-years scholarship from the Career Center of Portland, and tuition assistance from Maine Medical Center. Besides that, my eagerness to be a Nurse increases whenever I open the chart of patients at my work and see a long list of diseases that attack beautiful people in my community."

Maurice went to University of New England, graduated this year with a BSN, and passed his NCLEX exams, making him a Registered Nurse. He is currently working on the Telemetry Unit at Northern Light Health/Eastern Maine Medical Center in Bangor.

He says, "Becoming a RN is a good opportunity for me to give back to my community. Furthermore, It is the easiest way to pay respect to the children who lost their life in Rwandan Genocide, especially those I couldn't help."

College and Career Access Program for Graduating Seniors

Submitted by Erin Krivicky, Program Coordinator

With funding from the United Way of Greater Portland, PAE launched a program this summer to support students as they transition from high school to postsecondary education. PAE advisors worked with students one-on-one to set individual goals, discuss financial readiness, address academic preparedness, and review tasks to complete before matriculation.

PAE developed the program to address “summer melt”, a phenomenon in which high-school graduates apply, are accepted, and plan to enroll in college—but don’t. Students from low income families and those planning to attend community college are disproportionately affected. Program coordinator, Erin Krivicky, highlights the essential need for this program, “All of the students we work with want to continue their education beyond high

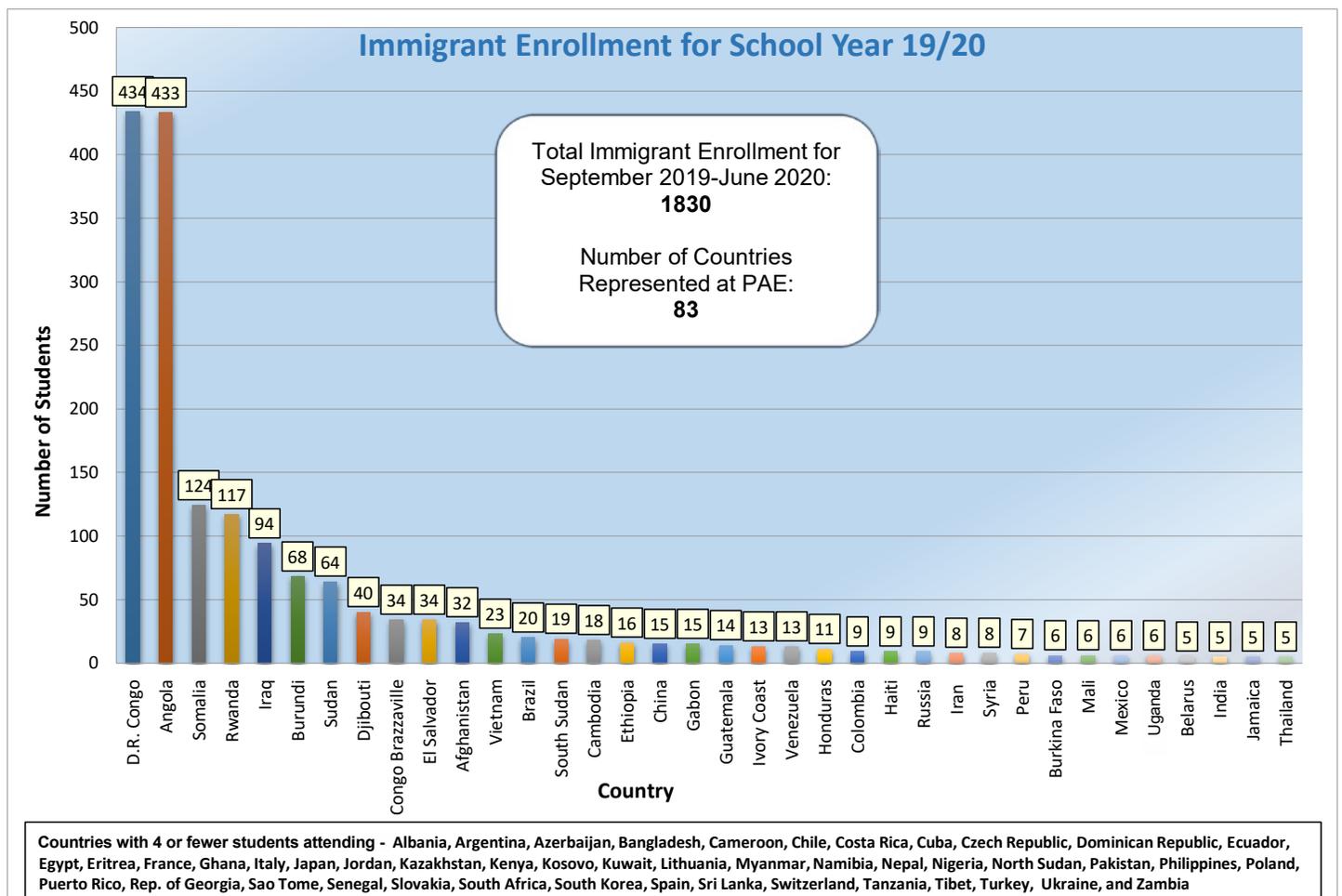
school. But many are uncertain how to navigate the financial piece or to determine whether they are academically ready. Additionally, many students seek support to complete administrative tasks such as registering for orientation or completing health paperwork.”

Of the twenty-eight students served this summer, over 70% successfully enrolled in a postsecondary institution or PAE’s College Transitions program, which assists students in further preparing for college.

Sumayo Shaib, a recent Deering High School graduate, said of the program “I am really thankful for all the help I got from my PAE advisor. If it wasn’t for her I don’t think I would have known more about college or my schedule.” Sumayo is now a first-year student at Southern Maine Community College and continues to meet with her PAE



advisor. She is studying to get her associate degree in nursing and then plans to transfer to a four-year college.



Making A Difference

PAE Volunteers Aid Remote Learning

When PAE cancelled in-person classes in March because of the Covid 19 outbreak, it was not clear what role volunteers would play in the aftermath. Our flexible and hard-working volunteers rose to the challenge. In the first few weeks, both students, teachers, and volunteers struggled to adapt to the new online education. In response, Sara Staples managed a volunteer tech support team to call students and help them access their classes on the new online platforms such as Zoom. In conjunction with Rachel Evenson, the program director at LearningWorks, PAE provided training for volunteers in remote learning. Almost immediately, volunteers joined Zoom classes as classroom aides. Because Zoom allows breakout rooms, volunteers were able to lead small groups within the online classroom. Some worked one-on-one with students in breakout rooms and others lead small reading groups.

This fall even more PAE volunteers are participating in online classes and others are tutoring students in English, citizenship, medical terminology, and language arts through online platforms. In addition, a group of PAE volunteers have offered to help students with voting awareness- how to register to vote, where to vote, and how to find information about the issues and the candidates. Three other volunteers are running Zoom conversation classes once a week. Clearly, PAE Volunteers have joined PAE students and teachers in adapting their skills to this new online learning.

Remembering Jon Halvorsen

By Shoshana Hoose

Jon Halvorsen, a longtime and dedicated volunteer at Portland Adult Education (PAE), died this year. He was the best kind of volunteer, one who befriended his tutees and cheered them on as they pursued their goals.

Jon made his living through his skillful use of the English language, as a newspaper journalist and college magazine editor. I met Jon and his wife, Donna, 33 years ago, when we all worked at the Portland Newspapers, and we have been friends ever since. Jon began volunteering as a PAE tutor in 2014, working with two students in my ESOL2 class.

One of them, Shire, had immigrated from Somalia nine years earlier. His goal was to bring his six children to the U.S., and that required becoming a U.S. citizen. Shire worked long shifts at the Green Giant factory in Saco, then squeezed in citizenship tutoring sessions with Jon before the evening ESOL class.

On June 5, 2015, I met Jon and Shire at the Homeland Security office near the mall. Jon and I watched with tears in our eyes as Shire became a U.S. citizen. Afterward, the two of them went to McDonald's to celebrate.

Shire and Jon met weekly at McDonald's

to continue their English tutoring sessions, and to catch up as old friends do. Over time, Jon began tutoring some of Shire's friends.

PAE volunteers may never know the impact they have. But there is no doubt that Jon made a huge difference in Shire's life. As a result of becoming a U.S. citizen, Shire was able to return to Somalia last year, and to see his children for the first time in 15 years.

When I told Shire of Jon's death, he replied, "Always he is nice friend to me... I am so sorry, my heart is so sad... I hope he is help(ing) angels."



Note from volunteer Andy Meyer to Anja Hanson, Student Advisor

Anja,

It is I who marvels at you - and your drive. How many years ago did I work for you? Decades, I'm sure. Bravo.

I can appreciate the value of Chromebooks and hotspots. I'm still tutoring ESL and it's 100% remote. I just met one student in person Friday after several months of tutoring. He, his family, and I went for a free cruise on a 40' SailMairne catamaran. It's bizarre to be such good friends for so long and never actually meet in person. His wife (who I see every week) had a baby a month ago and I didn't even know she's pregnant.

He has a laptop and web access, but my other student has only a phone. we use WhatsApp to video conference and I show her my computer screen using my phone. Ridiculous. But, as you say, she never complains.

Thank you for all you do to help people reach their maximum potential.

Your fan,
Andy

Student Writing Spotlight

PAE Student Reflects on Lessons Learned From The Pandemic

PPAE Teacher Alison Perkins asked her class, “What is something that you have learned from the COVID pandemic (not about the pandemic - but FROM the pandemic)?” Mysette Misenga offered the following response:

I am a housekeeper at the hospital. Working at the hospital gives you another sense of the value of life. Cleaning the patient rooms is a time of great questioning: Why is he so lonely? Why is he so young, suffering from cancer? Why does this new little innocent boy have to undergo such a big surgery? What happened to the patient who was here yesterday? Did he make it? I asked myself these questions before the pandemic because I cleaned the patient rooms for duty and to pay my bills.

But when the pandemic began, I saw the hospital take measures to restrict staff and visitors. Training on cleaning rooms for patients with the virus was quickly done, and we are now facing the worst reality. The Covid 19 virus patient rooms are being cleaned thoroughly and without any negligence. So it is in these rooms that I learned the great lessons of my life.

No one chooses the disease that can knock him down. The human race may be vulnerable, but it is hard as iron when people put aside their prejudices and egos and decide to give their best to save the world.

The pandemic was there, and everyone could have it in different ways, but it is the strength with which you decide to fight for life that you triumph.

During the pandemic, I lovingly cleaned the rooms of those who were sick with the virus, I cleaned with care, with a desire to see the sick person recover from it. I was not a doctor, not a nurse, but the best I could give was to offer a clean room by saying a prayer asking God for healing for the sick person.

The pandemic, did not choose the forest, but it chose our communities. It did not choose the animals, but it chose the people, and it succeeded in imposing fear, distancing, distrust. In short, it succeeded in pushing us away from each other.

With the pandemic, I realized how fragile the world is. Life is only at the end of a thread. You have to live it, and living it for others makes it better. A smile can give hope to another person. Man is vulnerable, and the wars of race and gender are stupidity that make the human being miss the point.

Mysette Misenga
September 30, 2020

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No additional cost but FPAE benefits!

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More Good News

Spectrum Donates 25 New Laptops to PAE

“I am very happy to receive this computer which is new and easy to use. I want to become a CNA or a phlebotomist or a medical assistant when I get my work permit. I prefer to work in my field as I worked a long time with people with HIV for different International NGOs in my country.”

Thank you to Spectrum for providing 25 laptops to Violette Zola and other PAE students preparing for better employment!



Photo courtesy of The Foundation for Portland Public Schools
Violette Zola (PAE student), Melinda Kinney (Regional Senior Director of Charter Communications) and Mayor Kate Snyder



Art Classes Continue!

Art teacher Chris Reed for Community Life has jumped at the possibilities of Virtual Learning. Community Life Coordinator Adam Perron reports that Chris has offered 10 or more art classes since we went virtual. They are well received and have solid enrollment. The photo is him teaching one of his landscape painting classes. You can see the video camera in the background.

