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Artist links success to dedication, hard work



Fingerpainting artist Iris Scott stands in front of a projected image of Arctos, the painting she created for the dedication of Tahoma High School.

Tahoma alum Iris Scott shares her story with students

Effusive, colorful, vibrant. Those words describe not only the paintings of renowned artist Iris Scott, but also Scott herself.

The Tahoma High School graduate from the class of 2002 was the keynote speaker for freshmen and sophomores recently for Future Ready Day. Scott encouraged the students to find something they love to do, such as her passion for painting, and then devote lots of time to practicing that one thing.

“Pour the hours in. That’s when the magic can happen,” she said. “I am here to talk about a very serious career. I am a professional -- finger-painter! ... I’m going to tell you a story about how I made \$1 million fingerpainting.”

Scott mixed tales of her year spent living abroad -- when she developed her famous technique of fingerpainting with oils -- with funny lines to keep the students’ attention. She emphasized several times that she isn’t simply gifted at painting; rather, she worked hard and practiced relentlessly.

“I spend all day painting. It’s easy to spend all day painting,” Scott said. “It’s not talent. It’s not a gift. This is what 10,000 hours of practice can do. ... Art is learned. Skills are learned.”

Growing up in Maple Valley, Scott stayed busy with schoolwork, soccer, tennis and other activities, and although she took painting classes, she never felt she had enough time to paint.

“I really wanted to dive into it,” Scott said, bemoaning the fact that YouTube hadn’t yet been invented so that she could have had instant access to videos about painting. Instead, she checked out every applicable “how to” book

at the Maple Valley Library.

After being prompted by her high school art teacher, Suzanne Gardner, about pursuing a degree in art, Scott enrolled at Washington State University as an art major. She said many of the classes were focused on theory rather than on the act of making art. She felt as though she

wasn’t and couldn’t be a “serious” artist if she didn’t have deep meaning behind her works. After four years, Scott said she graduated from WSU with a degree and considerable debt, so she headed back to Maple Valley and got a job in Bellevue to pay off that debt.

“Three years later, I was debt-free, and I even had \$4,000 left over. I thought, ‘What can I do with this?’ So, I Googled it,” she recalled. After learning that Taiwan had a low cost of living, she packed a bag, booked a flight and announced to her parents that she was leaving the country.

Thanks to a local she made friends with, Scott said she found an apartment with incredible views of the ocean that only cost \$100 in rent per month. This announcement drew an audible reaction from the students.

“Taiwan was amazing. It was probably the single-most transformative experience of my life. Please go abroad. At least

consider it. It allows you to reinvent yourself,” she said, describing the monkeys, the heat, the incredible food and the memories that she made. It also was where Scott rededicated herself to art.

“It was the first time in my life I had time to paint seven days a week. I painted everything in Taiwan,” she said. At about that time, Facebook was becoming more widely used, and Scott eventually decided to share her art on



Iris Scott speaks to THS students at Future Ready Day.

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New school board eager to begin its work

Tahoma voters chose Malia Hollowell, Pete Miller, and Katrina Montgomery to serve on the School Board in the Nov. 5 election. On Nov. 26, Interim Superintendent Mike Maryanski swore in Hollowell and Miller as board directors. Montgomery could not attend the meeting but was sworn in at the Dec. 3 work-study session.

Hollowell represents District 3, and Miller represents District 4. They replaced former School Board members Mary Jane Glaser and Didem Pierson, respectively. (See related article, below). Montgomery represents District 2 and was appointed to the board last spring to complete the unexpired term of Bill Clausmeyer, who resigned so that he can spend more time with his wife, who is dealing with chronic health concerns. To read more about Montgomery, visit the Tahoma web page (www.Tahomasd.us) and see the Feb. 28 issue of Tahoma Matters, which is archived under newsletters on the Communications Office page.

The board's newest members said they are eager to get started.

"I'm looking forward to working together as a team with our interim superintendent to achieve exciting goals for our district, like hiring a new superintendent and setting our five-year goals," Hollowell said. "I'm excited to collaborate with the amazing staff, who are boots on the ground with our kids every day, and support them and help them."

Hollowell was a classroom teacher for eight years and earned her National Board Certification. She also was a Fulbright-Hays scholar through the U.S. Department of Education, and traveled to West Africa to learn about their educational programs and share about American educational programs. Hollowell earned a master's degree from Stanford University in International Comparative Education, then, when she



Newly elected board directors, from left: Malia Hollowell, Pete Miller, and Katrina Montgomery.

was on maternity leave with her second son, started an educational blog that she later turned into a company. In that business, she talks with teachers around the country. "I'm excited to apply those lessons that I've learned, so that our kids can benefit from those ideas."

Hollowell also volunteered as Shadow Lake Elementary PTA president for two years, helped with fundraisers and as an art docent. In addition, she supports Backpack Buddies and has been active with the Voice of Tahoma Education Committee. When she's not working or volunteering, she enjoys traveling with her family; she has been to every continent except Antarctica and hopes to make it there one day, too.

She and her husband have three children in Tahoma schools.

Both Hollowell and Miller recently attended the annual Washington State School Directors Association conference in Bellevue, where a big focus was on equity and how to help all students achieve success. "They all come to us with different backgrounds and different needs," Hollowell said. "As a school district, we need to meet them where they are and go from there."

Miller said the three-day conference included a first-day,

"boot camp"-style learning session designed to get new School Board members acquainted with their duties and requirements.

"The next two days were 'Choose Your Own Adventure'-style. You could choose the breakout sessions that you wanted to attend," he explained, noting that he attended one about a partnership that the Issaquah School District has with Swedish Medical Center to bring mental health professionals into their buildings. "The three days were just what I was looking for and a great introduction to what I can look forward to over my term."

Miller said he has been waiting to get to work, and that he looks forward to making a difference "for the district, the families and, most importantly, the students."

His background includes a career as a Certified Public Accountant with Clark Nuber for the past 19 years; service on the Kidsquest Children's Museum Board for 10 years; and service on the boards of four professional organizations. He also has worked as a Certified Fraud Examiner.

Miller and his wife have two children in Tahoma schools, and his personal interests include listening to music of many genres and playing in a CPA band called the "Accounting Crows."

Miller said he thinks the biggest immediate challenges that the board will face are selecting a new superintendent and the two proposed levy measures on the February ballot.

"There's no mistaking that we're two new board members. We need to create a common vision and get in a rhythm as a board," he said. "I'm looking forward to seeing how the work that is done by the board and the district translates to making a difference for the kids and the classrooms."

Outgoing board directors lauded at final meeting

The board room at the Central Services Center was full Nov. 26, as students, staff and community members gathered to share their appreciation for retiring School Board President Didem Pierson and Director Mary Jane Glaser, both of whom decided not to run for reelection.

"Thank you guys, so much," Student Board representative Zachary Anderson said. "Since I've joined, you guys have been really supportive."

Glaser served for more than 21 years. She was appointed to the board in July of 1998, then elected in November of 1999. She noted that she has spent one-third of her life as a school director and is grateful for the relationships she has made. "It's a gift that you have all given me," she said.

Pierson served for 16 years, after being elected to the board in November of 2003. She expressed her thanks for the evening's accolades but also gave credit

to other board members and district staff. "Mary Jane and I didn't do these things alone," she said. She thanked her husband, children and parents, along with Interim Superintendent Mike Maryanski, whom she described as her mentor. "Love you all," she said.

In attendance to thank the directors for their service on the board were many elected officials, a former Maple Valley mayor and council member, current Mayor Sean P. Kelly and the City Council. Taking turns, the City Councilors read aloud from two proclamations, one each in honor of Glaser and Pierson.

The council declared the week of Nov. 25 as both "Didem Pierson Week" and "Mary Jane Glaser Week."

Others who spoke thanking Pierson and Glaser included the district department directors, Tahoma Education Association President David Aaby, Public School



President Tami Henkel offers her thoughts about retiring directors Mary Jane Glaser, left, and Didem Pierson, center right.

Employees of Washington Tahoma Chapter President Ruthie Mackie and Lake Wilderness Elementary administrative assistant Barbara Roessler.

Aaby said that the 531 members of the TEA are thankful for Glaser and Pierson's

collaboration and spirit of unity, and said that the school district is often held up as an example in other parts of Washington. "'The Tahoma Way' is known throughout the state. ... Our district is a better place because of both of you."

Transition students practice life skills

Special Education program partners with local businesses to provide learning opportunities

On a recent morning, a team of four students from the Tahoma Student Transition Program arrived at Safeway to report for work. The 18- to 21-year-old students paired up and tackled a large shopping basket full of “go-backs,” or items that customers decided they didn’t want at the registers.

On any given day, other groups of students from the program work or volunteer at Grocery Outlet, the Greater Maple Valley Community Center, the FFA farm at Maple View Middle School, Johnson’s, Walgreens, Elk Run Farm, and the Lake Wilderness Arboretum. One student also has a paid job with Trillium, and two have internships with Skills Inc.

At Safeway, Hanna White and Isaiah Shorter have been working together for some time and have a fun, cooperative rapport. Although Shorter knows where most items are, the two take turns leading the way and letting White lead the way through the store.

While in the dairy section, White holds up the next item, a box of granola bars.

“Hanna, do you know which aisle?” Shorter asks.

“Aisle 5! I got it right here,” White replies, tapping the side of her head.

On occasion, an item stumps them both, but they don’t give up. Instead, they walk to a new aisle and begin searching for the correct placement.

The definition of Conscientious Worker states “Students are trustworthy, dependable and effectively interact with others to get work done. Students take responsibility for results and demonstrate a strong work ethic.” Those



Students Hanna White and Isaiah Shorter give each other a fist bump after re-shelving an item a customer decided not to purchase, during their job site visit at Safeway.

qualities are a great description of what the Transition students are working toward and displaying on the job at Safeway.

Job coach and paraeducator Beverly Attix drives the group to Safeway and other job sites, and talks with them

about maintaining a professional voice level, parking carts to one side of the aisle so that customers can pass by easily, how to “face” or arrange products neatly on the shelves and other tips.

“I absolutely think this program is awesome,” Attix said. “These kids come out at the end of the three years ready to work.”

As she, Shorter and White turn the corner of another aisle, they find a cart that has been left abandoned for more than an hour since their arrival. The team decides to add it to their tasks for the morning, and return the items in the cart to their proper locations throughout the store.

In general, the Transition program helps students learn job skills, social skills and life skills such as cooking, shopping, cleaning and budgeting. They talk about things such as recycling, loading a dishwasher properly, doing their own laundry, healthy eating and more. On some days, the group takes outings to restaurants and practices how to order properly, and how to tip. During many afternoons, students work on projects at training tables, such as sorting and bagging items, bundling silverware, folding T-shirts, hanging tools or, on one recent afternoon, creating tiny crafted turkeys that will sit on the table during a Thanksgiving meal the students are learning how to plan, cook and eat together.

“The Transition team of: Special Education teachers, para-educators (job coaches and one-to-one para-educators), Behavior Technician, Speech Language Pathologist, Occupational Therapy Assistant and Physical Therapist work cooperatively to develop conscientious workers who can demonstrate a strong work ethic,” said Laurie Olson-Pennington, the lead instructor, who is in her first year with Tahoma. She has been a special education teacher for 35 years and worked in similar programs in Tacoma and Enumclaw. “Students have the opportunity to learn job skills in real life work settings, develop leisure skills in community settings and learn activities of daily living in an apartment-like setting.”

Shorter, who is in his second year in the program, gestured at his fellow students, teachers and classroom, and said, “This is a great place!”

Iris Scott

Continued from Page 1

social media. She sold a painting for \$50 plus shipping, and incrementally increased the prices to \$65, then \$70.

“I was shocked because I had just turned myself into a full-time artist, thanks to that low cost of living in Taiwan,” Scott told the students. Somewhere along the way, because she disliked going down the hallway to the communal sink to wash her brushes because of the cockroaches and spiders, she tried finishing a painting with her fingers.

“This happy little accident was about to change my life,” she said. That first fingerpainting sold for \$100. Her style began to change and became more impressionistic. She increased her prices until they reached \$500 per piece, and sank the money back into her materials. That year, she painted about 100 pieces. When her time in Taiwan was over, she moved back home, where the cost of living adjustment was an unpleasant shock.

Eventually, Scott moved to New York, where she met hundreds of people in all parts of the arts, from directors and filmmakers to entrepreneurs. She opened galleries in three states, and had the chance to create larger works and expand into performance art.

Along the way, social media helped her but it was also harmful, creating doubt and a distraction from her work. Scott told the students that she made a conscious decision to turn away from Instagram, unfollowing 3,000 accounts in one night.

“Social media is a blast, but be careful of it,” Scott cautioned. “I was an addict. ... It’s only going to become more and more distracting.” She encouraged students to only use social media if they can be disciplined enough to “use it for good.”

Displaying a picture of her painting, “Arctos,” which hangs next to the grand staircase in the high school, Scott said that she hopes the students will remember her talk when they walk past the mighty bear, and that the painting will help them remember to work hard on that one thing they are passionate about. “She’s so focused.”



Shadow Lake Elementary teacher Liz White shows Iris Scott samples of student art that was created in conjunction with the artist’s visit to the school. Scott grew up in Maple Valley and returned recently to talk to students about her experiences as a professional artist.

Levies would maintain programs, restore tech

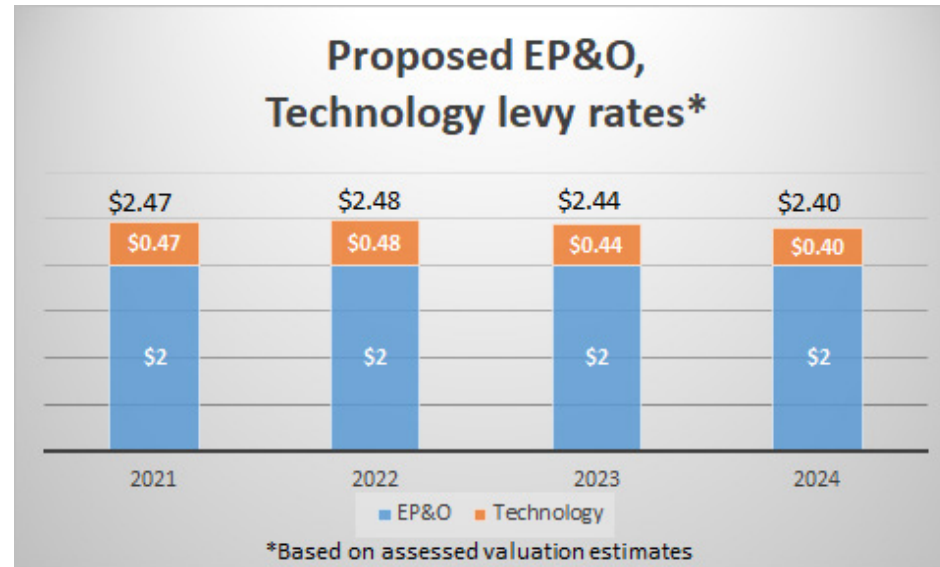
Tahoma voters will be asked to decide whether to approve two levy measures that would pay for classroom technology and a wide range of services, supplies and staffing that are not fully supported through state funding or other sources.

The Tahoma School Board directors voted unanimously to place two levy measures on the Feb. 11 ballot: a four-year replacement Educational Programs and Operations levy (EP&O) and a four-year Technology levy. The vote is the culmination of months of research and discussion by the board, district administrators, community members, and staff.

"We worked hard," School Board Director Val Paganelli said. "A lot of numbers, a lot of investigation, and a lot of asking questions. I'm looking forward to the commitment to our community of sharing a lot with them so they can see what went into our decision."

The EP&O levy would replace a two-year levy approved by voters in 2018, which expires at the end of 2020. The levy provides funds that support people, programs, supplies and equipment that are either not funded or not fully funded by state education dollars. Staff supported in some way by EP&O funds include school nurses, counselors, principals, custodians, school safety officers, paraeducators, reading and math specialists, substitute teachers, coaches, special education teachers, and food service workers. Programs include athletics, clubs and activities, professional staff development, food service, summer school, and highly capable classes.

Board Director Tami Henkel said the EP&O levy also provides funding for



new programs required by the state, such as paraeducator certification training, dyslexia screening, graduation pathways, and closing growth and achievement gaps. Henkel said those and other state-required programs are needed but not all are funded, in part or full, by the state. Because they are mandatory, they must be provided with or without EP&O funding.

"If we don't get EP&O money, in order to be in compliance with the state we are going to have to take away from something else," she said.

The EP&O levy would collect \$16.4 million in 2021 and would peak at \$21.3 million in 2024. The estimated cost is \$2 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation. The current levy costs \$1.50 per \$1,000. During its last session, the state Legislature recognized the need for school districts

You're invited!

Learn more about the proposed levies at three public meetings:

Jan. 9: 10-11:30 a.m. and 6-7:30 p.m. in the Board Room at Central Services Center, 25720 Maple Valley-Black Diamond Road SE.

Jan. 11: 1-2:30 p.m., Tahoma High School Performing Arts Center, 23499 SE Tahoma Way.

to seek additional local levy funding and authorized districts to collect up to a maximum of \$2.50 per \$1,000. The school board and administrators saw the need to increase levy collections in order to maintain a balanced budget but want to ensure taxes remain as low as possible.

Language is included in the levy resolution that requires the district to review levy income each year and "roll back" (reduce) the levy if the funds exceed the collection limit.

"We spent a lot of time deciding on what we thought was the absolute right number to go out into the community and ask for," Director Katrina Montgomery said. "I am very comfortable and confident that we worked through everything we needed to work through and our work was thorough and that this ask is what our students need from our community."

The Technology levy would reinstate funding that stopped when a renewal levy was turned down by voters in 2018. The school district is currently using reserve funds to maintain classroom technology equipment and support. The levy would collect \$3.9 million in 2021 and \$4.3 million in each of the next three years for a total of \$16.8 million. It would cost property owners an estimated 47 cents per \$1,000 of assessed valuation in 2021, 48 cents in 2022, 44 cents in 2023, and 40 cents in 2024.

Paganelli said the district's months-long process to define educational technology needs and goals will allow the district to catch up with equipment replacement, maintenance, and training. It also enables teachers to take the next step in their use of classroom technology by providing more support for them as they further integrate technology into curriculum.

"There needs to be a comfort level with technology not just in our students, but in those who are leading our students," she said.

Moody's upgrades TSD financial rating

For many years, Tahoma School District students have been among the top performers in the state. Now, the district's financial rating also is among the best of Washington's 295 school districts.

Moody's Investors Service, an international company that provides credit ratings, research, and risk analysis, recently evaluated the school district's financial standing and upgraded its credit rating from Aa3 to Aa2. The rating of Aa2 means that financial obligations, such as construction bonds, are "judged to be of high quality and are subject to very low credit risk," according to Moody's website. The change reflects Tahoma's "strengthened financial profile," according to a news release from Moody's.

Ryan Swanson, senior vice president for Public Finance Investment Banking at Piper Jaffray & Co. in Seattle, said the

new rating should result in lower interest borrowing rates for the school district and its taxpayers in the future. Swanson said the new rating puts Tahoma above the national average and among a handful of school districts in Washington.

"It's a third-party indication of the strong fiscal responsibility evidenced by the board and district administration. That's how I think of it," he said. "The district is in the top 10 percent of school districts in the state in this regard."

In a credit opinion report issued by Moody's Investors Service, Tahoma's fiscal management is described this way: "Overall, prudent management is a strength for the district, which we expect to contribute to continued stability. The district budgets conservatively and exercises strong expense control."



Tahoma Community Report is produced by the Tahoma School District Communication Office and mailed to all school district residents four times a year. Contact the Communications Office by calling 425-413-3409 or by email to Kevin Patterson, communications director, at: kpatters@tahomasd.us

The Tahoma School District does not discriminate in any programs or activities on the basis of sex, race, creed, religion, color, national origin, age, veteran or military status, sexual orientation, gender expression or identity, disability, or the use of a trained dog guide or service animal and provides equal access to the Boy Scouts and other designated youth groups.

The following employees have been designated to handle questions and complaints of alleged discrimination:

Title IX Officer

Director of Human Resources
25720 Maple Valley Highway
Maple Valley, WA 98038
425-413-3400

ADA Coordinator

Director of Human Resources
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Section 504 Coordinator

Director of Special Services
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