

Art and relaxation are key to pottery class in Hyattsville

By Rachel Mauro
Special to The Sentinel

Dozens of pottery makers and enthusiasts gathered at Langley Park Community Center in Hyattsville last Saturday to display, sell and examine stoneware pottery. This was their 22nd annual sale.

All of the 13 potters are students and teachers from ceramics classes offered by the center.

"We're doing well," said Mary Giammatteo, director of the center's pottery program. "We have customers every year," listing the approximate number at a few hundred patrons.

"People came before the doors even opened," she added. But the real purpose of this event, she said, was for the potters to learn how to set up, greet the public, and receive feedback.

Giammatteo's program originally started with a grant funded by the Maryland State Arts Council. At the time, they also did weaving and quilting "but the program kept growing,"

Giammatteo said. She finally moved her program to the Langley Park Community Center in 1985, with its 10 pottery wheels in a classroom in the back. They have been there ever since.

"We don't get into pottery to make money," Giammatteo said. "It's the joy of creating something out of a ball of clay, or seeing beautiful art. It's very comforting."

Giammatteo's students seem to agree with her.

"I'm a newcomer; I've only been doing this since three years ago," said Berta Romero, of East Silver Spring. "I started for therapy. It's a great skill, it forces creativity."

Though she has not started to sell her pottery at other places, she is thinking about possibly starting at the Takoma Park Festival.

"I'm very humbled," she said. "I'm humbled by working with the clay. Sometimes it doesn't do what you want."

Diana Little, of Hyattsville, who sells her product under the name A Little Pottery, agrees, saying she feels like she is "actually doing something

as opposed to keyboarding life away. It's rewarding, relaxing, and stress relieving."

She has been taking classes at the Center since 1989, and joked, "I come here and wedge clay so I don't have to bring an uzi to work." She has sold some of her pottery at Riverdale Farmers Market, USDA Farmers, Takoma Park, and Gaithersburg fairs.

The patrons mostly walked around the Center's multi-purpose room, where the sale was held, and talked to the vendors about their original dishware and Christmas decorations. Parents with small children sat at the tables in the back and ate some provided food. Stacks of pottery started to accumulate on the stage in front, and when patrons were ready to buy, the cashier would flip each piece to the back, where each artist's initials were carved into the stoneware.

"[The pottery is] safe to eat and drink from and all of that," Giammatteo said.

The sale was sponsored by The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission.