

# Entertainment

## What is art?

By Holly Reed

Steven Strange is the newest artist to join the East Hartford Art League. Recipient of the "Best New Artist" award during the annual Spring Art Fest, Steve has enjoyed art as far back as he can remember - - even in kindergarten in Rome NY where he was born (and grew up). His kindergarten teacher wrote on his report card "uses art materials very well."

Although all his life Steve has received accolades for his artistic ability, he chose a career path to become a teacher of Spanish language, literature, and culture. Steve taught in the Rocky Hill Public Schools, and even after retirement in the field of education, Steve continues to research Spanish expeditions and eye-witness testimonies of these expeditions. In 2014, he was one of the presenters at the Library of Congress in Washington D.C. during the 40th anniversary celebration of the founding of the North American Academy of the Spanish Language. His topic was "Antes de que se fundara Jamestown..." or "Before Jamestown was founded..."

Steve's paintings are done with oil, but he has currently delved into using acrylics. Even if you did not know about Steve's flair for the Spanish (and Italian) languages, his use of vibrant colors and natural backgrounds point to a European or Spanish influence. One can tell from viewing that these scenes depict a warm climate, almost a travel scene from Italy or Spain. While attending SUNY in Oswego, Steve spent a summer in Madrid where he attended the Instituto de Cultura Hispanica, and received his "Certificate of Study".

Now retired from teaching, Steve manages to balance the best of all worlds; he continues to travel back and forth to Rome, NY where his Mother (now 93 years old) still lives, along with his brother and sisters. He is active with the North American Academy of



An oil painting "Aranjuez" by Steven Strange was awarded Best New Artist during this year's Spring Art Fest at Alumni Park Town Green.

the Spanish Language (ANLE) in professional activities. He has served as Adjunct Professor of Spanish at Quinnipiac University. Steve also finds time to take an active interest in the Town of East Hartford, where he has lived for many years. Recently, he donated a reproduction of the Glastonbury chair to the new wing of the Raymond Library, and was given a tour of the newly renovated library, which he said was fantastic. He still has time, however, to devote to one of his passions, which remains oil painting.

"My ideas for the future of the East Hartford Art League would possibly include field trips to museums, as well as presentations by furniture makers, master carvers, or sculptors," says Steve. "I would also be interested in setting up a month to month exhibit of Town art work..., perhaps in the renovated and remodeled Town Library."

Steve believes that the term "art" encompasses many creative endeavors such as writing, drawing, painting, sculpture, weaving, hooking rugs, quilting, lyrics for songs, etcetera as well as the fine arts, too. The definition of fine arts originally excluded the applied or decorative arts, and the products of what were regarded as crafts. However, in contemporary practice, these distinctions and restrictions have become somewhat blurred, as the concept or intention of the artist is now given primacy, regardless of the means through which his creativity

and ingenuity are expressed.

Steve grew up in Rome NY, a working class town that compares to East Hartford (except that recently Rome has grown smaller from 55,000 residents down to about 35,000). His family still lives in Rome, and he journeys there several times a year.

"Watching these two communities flourish, and then grow smaller makes me realize that the sum really is made up from all the components - - in other words, you reap what you sow!" says Steve, as he describes how Rome lost many manufacturing jobs and still looks to replace them with other jobs. Perhaps because East Hartford has such a central location for all of Connecticut, there-in lies a great asset and our power of sustainability?

"Right now I am working on a painting that depicts a scene from Center Cemetery. I am fascinated by this location as there are many famous people buried there, including artist Henry Raymond Ahl (1869-1953) whose works can be found in the Wadsworth Antheneum, Springfield Art Museum, Worcester Art Museum, and the East Hartford Public Library!" Although Steve usually completes about two or three paintings a year, he may increase that number now that he is retired.

One thing is for sure, art keeps dreams alive, as well as making people happier and more productive. Maybe that is the true definition of "What is Art?"