



CLOTH BANNERS like this one now hang on the walls of the Superior Court for Juvenile Matters in Willimantic. They were commissioned by Judge Francis J. Foley.

Photograph, Harrison Judd

In This Court, Turns Out Justice Isn't Blind After All

By **MAX BAKKE**
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WILLIMANTIC — Judge Francis J. Foley wanted to liven things up a bit at the Superior Court for Juvenile Matters and figured a little art would do the trick.

So he invited two Eastern Connecticut State University art professors, Anne Dawson and June Bisantz, to brainstorm how they could turn the stark courthouse into a friendlier place for the young people who come through it.

Bisantz, along with her design students, created banners for the courthouse as part of their senior design project, in which students create design projects for the community, and they will be a permanent fixture in the courthouse.

Foley has been at this court since May 2006, when the court added the child protection session. The building, which opened in November 2000, had barren walls until this project.

The project, titled "Visions of Optimism," is an attempt to make the courthouse a soothing and comforting place for people who enter it, especially children, Foley said.

Coming to a courthouse could be an anxious experience for a child. "The banners soften things," Foley said.

The cloth banners, on display in the lobby, were designed to absorb light coming in from the windows of the courthouse and give a "feeling of warmth," Bisantz said.

They were "designed to send a message of hope, strength and courage to young people passing through the juvenile justice system," Bisantz said in prepared statement.

Area school children also contributed to the project. Artworks of students from

Windham Center Elementary School, North Windham Elementary School, Natchaug Elementary School, and Windham Middle School line the walls of the courtroom.

Some of the best artwork came from very young children, Foley said.

Rachel Ensling, art history student at ECSU, compiled the works of students from Windham County elementary schools. She sent letters to art teachers asking them to contribute to the project and scanned and enlarged the artwork so that the children could keep their original work.

"We looked for uplifting and inspiring artwork that could bring a smile to your face," Ensling said.

Annette Schleicher, who teaches art at Natchaug Elementary School and Windham Center Elementary School, said the project "was a fabulous idea." Of the two schools, 17 pieces of artwork were selected for display in the courthouse.

Using both children's artwork and the banners of the design students will show young people how art is a craft that can be practiced, and will hopefully inspire young people, seeing their peers' work to explore their own creativity, Dawson said.

If they keep at it, eventually they could be making the impressive banners done by the Eastern students, she said.

One banner, titled "Respect," by student Jeffrey Fitzgerald, shows two faces that each resemble Easter Island statues. Facing one another, the two images create the outline of a house, reminding young people that respect is essential to a stable home life, Fitzgerald said.

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