

THE DISTRICT CORRESPONDENT

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MJHS Art Students Ornaments Adorn the 2024 National Christmas Tree

As Mr. Eric Phagan was wrapping up his Teacher of the Year nomination in-person interview and finalizing his written responses, he left behind his (now) infamous *WhoArted?* lapel pin - which, by doing so, he often spreads smiles. On March 14, he received an email from Dr. Rebecca Estes, Assistant Secretary of Educator Talent at the Indiana Department of Education with the subject line of Timely Request. She indicated in her message that they will often reach out to Top 10 candidates when opportunities in their area of expertise arise - and she remembered the lapel pin. She extended an invitation from the U.S. Department of Education Chief School Officer, Juliette Rizzo, and the National Park Service (NPS) to participate in the America Displays ornament display competition. By March 22, they were committed and the clock was ticking! Mr. Phagan's (then) 7th and 8th-grade art students began working on the ornament project that turned out to be a top-secret assignment.

Each year, the National Park Service has a design contest to collect ornaments from around the nation that will, if selected, adorn the holiday trees in President's Park around the National Christmas Tree in Washington, D.C.

The 2024 America Celebrates display ornament criteria included:

- Each state/territory was responsible for designing at least 24 ornaments (MJHS submitted 30) that would be hung on your state/territory tree as part of the *America Celebrates* display on the Ellipse in President's Park in Washington, D.C.
- Each design had to fit within the 6" template, and could not have any identifying marks, logos, statements, slogans, or representations of any kind.
- Each design must be emblematic of your state. (i.e. state flower, tree, landmark, or geographical feature.)



Photo from the National Park Service archives



Canaan Hornbrook



Eloise Fennig, Allison Torres, Lydia Horvath, Teegan Thacker, and Tayleigh Johnson



Zoey White

“Right away, I knew we were going to rock this project!” shared Phagan. “I knew that we would compete well and what better way to showcase the incredible talent of our students than with this unique project?” Each year Phagan’s classes do extensive research and work around the history of our community and state and have created some really cool and unique pieces as a result. “I saw this as a way to tie back to the work we did a few years ago with nationally renowned sculptor, Dale Rogers, and our student-created sculptures that depict the rich history and traditions that make our community unique. While some of the work is pretty specific to Madison, the students did a great job tying into the larger scope criteria of the state emblems while including uniquely Madison things on each design.”



Janelle Scudder and Ava Overfield

The project had a quick start and a slow finish. “The timeline on this one was crazy,” Phagan recalled. “We had the projects wrapped up by May and submitted in early June and then we waited and waited. With the contest spanning the summer, some of the students are now freshmen at the high school.” On October 30, Phagan received word that the ornaments the MJHS students had created were selected to represent the state of Indiana on the holiday trees on the Ellipse in President’s Park in our nation’s capital. “This is one of those lifetime, core memory projects that you carry with you forever...to be able to say that you had artwork displayed on the National Christmas tree and represented your state is something truly unique and awesome!

Below is the description that accompanied the works submitted by Mr. Phagan’s students. In all, students and Phagan logged 190 hours throughout the process.

INDIANA

The ornaments representing the great state of Indiana were created by 7th and 8th-grade art students at Madison Junior High School in Madison, Indiana. Madison is a picturesque community that not only celebrates its rich history but also the convenience of 21st-century living. Madison sits along the banks of the mighty Ohio River surrounded by beautiful Clifty Falls State Park and retains the distinction of the largest contiguous National Historic Landmark District in the U.S. Students at Madison Junior High chose to represent Indiana by incorporating state symbols, favorite things about Indiana, Indy 500, local and state landmarks, season imagery and wildlife. We at Madison Junior High feel honored and proud to represent the Hoosier state in this project.

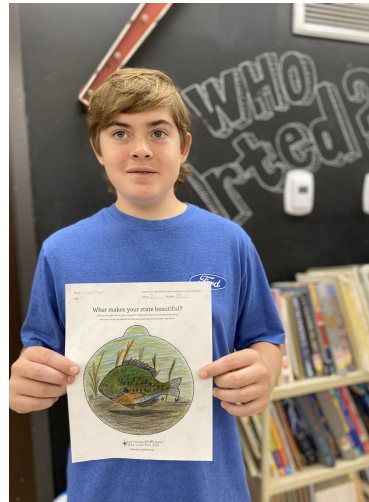
*Eric Phagan
Madison Junior High Art Teacher*



Pictured above are all thirty participants from Mr. Phagan's 2023-2024 7th and 8th grade art classes.

You can see all of the state ornaments selected to be displayed on the National Christmas tree by [visiting this link](#). This year's annual lighting celebration marks the 102nd year and took place on Thursday, December 5, 2024. The nationally televised broadcast can be seen on CBS on December 20, 2024, or you can view it from the link above.

"I would like to congratulate Mr. Phagan and our students on this prestigious honor," stated Superintendent, Dr. Teresa Brown. "This is an exciting opportunity for our students, our school, and our community. The work that went into making these beautiful pieces will be forever captured as they will be kept by the National Park Service for future generations to enjoy. I would like to express my appreciation and gratitude to Mr. Phagan for always seeking out ways to help our students challenge themselves, express their creativity, and shine a light on the many incredible opportunities our fine arts programming offers for students."



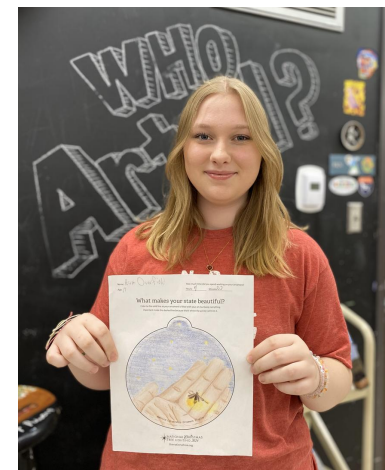
Vinson Phagan



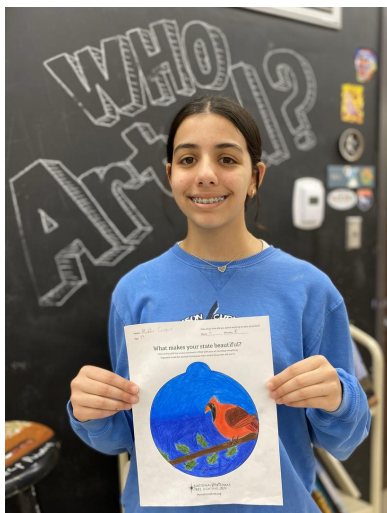
Shelby Speer



Aubrie Smith



Ava Overfield



Maddie Guirguis

To learn more about the Fine Arts Academy and the opportunities for students, [click here to watch our spotlight videos!](#)

To see all thirty student ornaments submitted, [click here](#) for a slideshow.