



School District of Manatee County

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MTI grads selected to open new gallery

(Bradenton, FL—July 22, 2010) August 3rd, from 5 to 7 p.m. marks the grand opening of the Vista Gallery at Harbor Vista Hotel and Marina (formerly the Holiday Inn), 7150 North Tamiami Trail, Sarasota (Manatee County). Artists featured to exhibit their sculptures are Heide Parson and Brenda Cook, recent graduates of the welding program at Manatee Technical Institute. Exhibit title is *Women Welders Working Wonders*. In April, they received a gold medal for their welding project at the Florida SkillsUSA Competition.

The Vista Gallery selected the works of Parson and Cook for their imaginative use of rebar and other metals in fashioning nautical and other decorative sculptures. The largest piece is a seven foot fish; smaller ones feature blue crabs. The exhibit will be on display through September.

Parson and Cook are both natives of Manatee County, having recently returned from Kentucky. They lost their jobs at a wire and cable factory there when 52 jobs went overseas. Returning home, their interest in metal work and decorative arts and in learning a new trade and career drew them to MTI.

Parson attended Manatee High School, and the former Manatee Junior College, with a certificate in arts education. She is also a painter. Cook is a graduate of Southeast High School and likes working with wood. Neither woman had ever welded before. Prior to getting settled back home where they have family and many friends, they lived for nine months in a 29-foot motor home with three dogs, two cats and a bird.

MTI trains around 2,500 students per year for new careers. MTI is known throughout the nation: its students have won more medals than students from any other school or college in the United States seven years in a row at the SkillsUSA Championships.

The Vista Gallery will focus on emerging artists in the area and is directed by Geneva Presha, Angela Washington and Karen Carpenter. The hotel will also display works by established artists from Sarasota and Manatee.

The hotel is owned by Henry Lawrence, Manatee High graduate and three time Super Bowl NFL Champion. Lawrence, himself an art collector and talented musician, recently returned from the DocMiami International Film Festival where the METV production, *Through the Tunnel*, featuring the 1969 integration of Manatee High, won 'best in category.'

The mission of Manatee Technical Institute is to meet and exceed our community's training and educational expectations. MTI is a 2007 Tampa Bay Business of the Year and has won more SkillsUSA medals than any other school in the nation for the past seven years.

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