

Perkins School for the Blind

Fine Arts Festival

"This festival is a celebration of the importance of fine arts for all people, and an exceptional opportunity to recognize the creative efforts of our Perkins students."

- Kevin Lessard
director of Perkins School for the Blind



Student Artwork

The Challenge:

Devillier Communications, Inc. (DCI), working with Perkins School for the Blind, sought to create an opportunity that would help realize two important goals of DCI's recent Strategic Communications Plan for the School. They were to increase the level of awareness of Perkins and to enhance perceptions about the abilities of blind and deafblind people among the general public.

Strategy:

DCI recommended creating the Perkins Fine Arts Festival that would showcase the fine arts activities at the school. The Festival would feature student art works including quilts, watercolors, collages and clay art, and student performing artists. The objectives were to:

- Provide a venue for the students' artistic endeavors while helping to build their self confidence.
- Enhance public perceptions of the talents of visually impaired people.
- Effectively demonstrate the excellence in education and care that Perkins provides its students.
- Help stimulate resource commitment and public support for Perkins.

Tactics:

To accomplish these goals, DCI:

- Secured the prestigious Mall at Chestnut Hill as Festival host.
- Developed a press list of reporters/editors who cover education, music and the arts as well as the general interest media (broadcast and print).
- Provided media training for students and Perkins teachers who would serve as official spokespersons.
- Posted Festival information on numerous Web sites.
- Distributed a media advisory just prior to the event.
- Coordinated interviews with students and teachers.
- Conducted aggressive media outreach by phone, email and fax.

- Coordinated logistics for press attendance during the opening days of the Festival.

Results:

The Perkins Fine Arts Festival opened exactly one month after the September 11 tragedy. In spite of this obvious distraction, visibility for the Festival was substantial. In fact, the press efforts generated more than three million media impressions including:

- *The Christian Science Monitor* devoted a full page to the story with color photos. *Purple Mountain Press*, a leading children's magazine, also published a feature story.
- *The Boston Globe* devoted a full-page and color photographs to the students' work and an Associated Press story ran in a dozen newspapers throughout New England including the *Boston Herald* and the *Portland Press Herald*.
- Online coverage included boston.com, boston.gov, kids.purplemountain.com, msn.com, google.com, lycos.com, about.com, yahoo.com, delphi.com and bostontravel.com, among many others. It is estimated the online placements were viewed by more than 224 million visitors.

"DCI was brilliant to conceptualize this project which has had so many valuable outcomes. The Perkins Fine Arts Festival not only increased Perkins' public visibility and support, it provided a meaningful opportunity for our students to demonstrate the joy they receive from self expression through art and music. Thanks to the dedicated efforts of the DCI team, the Festival achieved one of our most important objectives: to challenge public perception about the possibilities of students who are blind, deafblind and multi-handicapped."

**-- Jan Spitz, director,
Development and Public Relations,
Perkins School for the Blind**