



**Positive impact**

Downers Grove teacher Marty Voelker earns 2015 Illinois Secondary Art Educator of the Year award. **Page 4**

**NEWS**

# Downers Grove art teacher wins state award

**BY ANNEMARIE MANNION**  
Chicago Tribune

Art, not economics, is what inspires Downers Grove North High School teacher Marty Voelker, who is being recognized with a statewide award for transmitting that passion to others.

Voelker, 50, of Wheaton, has been named the 2015 Illinois Secondary Art Educator of the Year bestowed by the Illinois Art Education Association.

The award recognizes exemplary contributions, service and achievement of one IAEA member annually.

While interviewing for a job with a bank after he earned a university degree in economics, Voelker made the decision to take an entirely different path from the one he prepared for.

"I realized I didn't want to do economics every day for the rest of my life. I hadn't thought about what my passion was up to that point," Voelker said.

Voelker, who now teaches drawing, painting and computer art, had always had an interest in art, but hadn't pursued it.

"I took my art talent for granted, and focused on academics," he said. "I guess it seemed more prestigious."

That changed as soon as he made the decision to make art his career. After earning a bachelor's degree in economics from the University of Michigan, he studied comic illustration for two years at the Kubert School in New Jersey.

He received his teacher certification at the School of the Art Institute in Chicago. Along the way, he also has completed a Master of Arts degree in illustration at Syracuse University and a Master of Fine Arts from Hartford Art School, University of Hartford-Connecticut.

Voelker said one of the best parts of teaching is helping students discover their talents.

"Seeing kids develop skills they never imagined they had is amaz-

ing," he said. "They're amazed at the quality of work they can do if they commit to it."

He was nominated for the award by a parent, Ana Wilson, who said Voelker has had a positive impact on students.

"He shows compassion, commitment and dedication to his students on a daily basis," she said.

One of his former students, Michelle Lytle, 30, of Chicago, agreed. She credits Voelker with encouraging her interest in art, and now works as a professional photographer.

"I never had another teacher who had such an impact on the direction I am taking," she said. He also helps students gain recognition for their artwork by serving as the head of the Regional Suburban Chicago Affiliate for the Scholastic Art Awards.

Voelker's desire to help students, other teachers and the community as a whole made him stand out for the award, said Karen Popovich, IAEA vice presi-

dent.

To be selected for the award, Voelker had to submit a current lesson plan, information about how he supports art in the community, samples of students' artwork and his own artwork.

Voelker, who is married and has three daughters, uses his spare time to make drawings of interesting buildings and comic book art. He grew up in Western Springs, and one of his works is of the village's water tower.

"I like doing (the architectural drawings) because it highlights the gems of architecture that go unnoticed a little bit," Voelker said.

For his students, parents and other teachers, Voelker is a superhero of art, which seems fitting given his lifelong interest in comic book art.

"I've always loved the idea of superheroes. They are always an inspiration for me," he said.

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DOWNERS GROVE COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT 99 PHOTO

Marty Voelker, a teacher at Downers Grove North, has earned a statewide award for art educators.