



Hosea Washington Jr. and Quincy Cameron make tiny adjustments for perfect registration of the print at Rickards High School. AMANDA THOMPSON

# Silk-screen skills

## Art and business of printmaking register with Rickards students

**Amanda Thompson** Council on Culture & Arts

Custom printing is big business and it's projected to get even bigger in the next few years. Currently an \$8 billion global industry, forecasters predict it to cross the \$10 billion mark by 2025. In our country, the state of Florida reigns supreme, cranking out custom apparel at an astonishing rate. In Tallahassee alone, there are more than a dozen independent screen printing businesses.

Evolutions in printing technology and ink formulations are driving fashion trends forward and consumers are taking notice. Customized apparel is especially popular with teenagers because it offers a nearly infinite array of choices, allowing them to express their creativity and individuality. Students at Rickards High School have recognized the opportunities within custom printed apparel and are harnessing its power as both an economic and cultural driver.

After introducing his students to the silk-screen printing process last year, art teacher Andrew Steinbrink saw the potential for a self-sustaining and mutually beneficial printing program for the school. "We deliver reduced prices for printed club T-shirts, sports bags, and team jerseys. Not only do clubs and teams save money, but the money they spend goes directly back into the Rickards art budget," he said.



A collection of transparencies used for transferring designs onto the silkscreens. AMANDA THOMPSON

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# Art

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Building on an initial investment from the school and the program's early success, Steinbrink received an Arts Education grant from the Council on Culture & Arts. The grant award, funded by Kia of Tallahassee, was used to purchase the specialized equipment and supplies needed for the growth of the program which combines fine art and commerce.

"This is an excellent model for learning how business works," said Steinbrink. "You have your suppliers and that goes for your ink, shirts, all of that. Then you have to take into account labor costs. You have to think about how fast can you do it, how cheap can you get it, and what are you going to sell it for in order to make ends meet. Hopefully, you can look at an image and realize that a four-color design is going to take you four times as long as a one color design. That's an incredibly important lesson to learn" and one that requires an understanding of the art form's complexities.

In the silk-screen process, the artist first creates a design on a transparent sheet using black ink. Then a layer of photosensitive emulsion is spread onto a framed, fine-mesh screen and left to dry completely. The transparent sheet is flipped onto its wrong side and secured to the surface of the screen using transparent tape.

It is then exposed to light which causes the emulsion to harden and bind to the screen in the transparent areas, creating an impermeable barrier. In the areas where the light is blocked by the black ink on the transparent sheet, the emulsion remains water-soluble and can be easily washed out. This is the area through which the printing ink will pass to create the design. Once the screen has been washed out and dried, it is laid on to the printing material. Ink is spread on the inside of the screen and pressed through with a squeegee.

For designs with multiple colors, each hue must be isolated and a separate screen prepared. Then begins the exacting process of registration, or lining up the separate images so they merge together properly in the final print. Ninth-grader Corey Fountain admits this is "the most tedious part. If you get one little thing wrong, even if it's just a tiny bit off, it's going to put the whole thing out of place. It has to be perfect and it's pretty hard."

Twelfth-grader Quincy Cameron agrees that printing can be frustrating though he's not one to give up easily. "If you quit at something, you're never going to be good at it. I want to be the best that I can be so I stick to it. If it



Rickards art teacher Andrew Steinbrink looks on as Corey Fountain prepares a shirt for printing. AMANDA THOMPSON

doesn't work, I just try again. Why stop now when I've gone this far?"

Eleventh-grader Hosea Washington Jr. is also determined to succeed

and is eager to explore the printing industry. "I want to go to college for business and also I want to apply for a job at a screen printing business in Tal-

lahassee so this is giving me experience."

In addition to fulfilling orders, Steinbrink encourages his students to

create their own designs that reflect their style, interests, and personality. "They can buy their own shirts and use the stuff

and if they want to try and sell their own clothes on their own time, they can do it," he said.

Eleventh-grader Ayan-na Lee helped launch the printing program last year and the team relies heavily on her experience and drawing skills.

The program has sharpened her business sense but she values printing primarily as an art form in itself and an outlet for self-expression. "It helps you be creative and have an open mind," she said.

Steinbrink echoed that sentiment and said "this is a great place to have your own voice and these students are helping to create the culture of Rickards. That's one of the things I love about this crew, they define their own culture and that's a great thing to be a part of."

Amanda Karioth Thompson is the Assistant Director for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture.

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