

For Malden High School Teens, Leading Tours Through the Malden Public Library's Art Galleries is a Teaching and Learning Experience

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A group of Malden High School (MHS) students has been crossing the street this year for a unique educational opportunity at the Malden Public Library. The students are serving as docents for the Library's extensive art collection, leading tours through the building's art galleries, answering visitors' questions, and getting people excited about the treasure trove of artwork on display.

Docents are guides found in museums, galleries and cathedrals. The word comes from the Latin "docere," meaning to teach. While some docents are paid, the majority are volunteers, like the current group of MHS students. This volunteer opportunity was the brainchild of Library Trustee Frank Molis, who runs a community program through the Malden YMCA, getting teenagers involved in meaningful service projects.

"The docents are getting a first-hand look at the Library's incredible art collection, learning about art, history and community through this volunteer work," Molis explained. "Plus, they're learning important skills, like being a strong communicator, how to think on your feet when visitors ask questions and how to engage with all types of people on their tours. These skills will serve them well throughout their schooling – and in whatever they do beyond high school."

For the students, taking the role of docent allows them to create an engaging experience with people visiting the MPL's renowned art collection – many of whom are there for the first time. Docent Benny

Mei, a sophomore at MHS, says he enjoys seeing the surprise that first-time visitors experience when they see the Library's collection.

"A lot of people didn't know about the art galleries. I like introducing them to what they're seeing," Mei explained. "My favorites are the pieces by Frank Stella. I love that he's from Malden. His mother has artwork here, too."

But these teens are learning as much as they are teaching – especially about the history of their community.

"Being a docent is really interesting. My favorite part is seeing the history of Malden," explained docent Thomas Phan, a junior at MHS. "I love the old picture of the YMCA, the way it used to be."

Phan said visitors ask not only ask about the artwork itself, but also about his favorite paintings, and about the local philanthropist who established the Library. Before beginning their jobs, the docents learned the story of Elisha Converse and how his son's tragic death led him to create a world-class public library and set aside a generous fund to pay for its upkeep, books, artwork and more. The trust is overseen by nine Trustees, who volunteer their time.

"I grew up here, so it's interesting to learn all this historic information," said docent Terrance Zeng, a junior at MHS. "In school, we learn about worldwide history and major events. At the Library, we're learning details about Malden's history – things we didn't study in class."

Because Malden High School sits across the street, many of students rely on the Library as a quiet place to study and do homework.

“We have such a strong partnership with the Library. So many of our students use it on a daily basis. Whenever we can return the favor and help them, it creates a balance of services,” said Chris Mastrangelo, Principal of Malden High School. “To have such a beautiful and safe space for our students that is literally steps from our front door is a blessing.”

The Malden Public Library is located at 36 Salem Street in Malden. For more information, visit <https://maldenpubliclibrary.org>.