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# Norwin

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IN **PERSON**

# Chalking It Up

North Huntingdon's "Chalking  
Dad" brings street art to life.

BY JENNIFER BROZAK





**E**rik Greenawalt's passion for outdoor chalk art had humble beginnings: in the driveway of his North Huntingdon home.

Greenawalt, known in the area and beyond as "The Chalking Dad," began his flourishing career as a chalk artist when his daughters, just toddlers at the time, asked him to draw portraits of Disney princesses and characters while they doodled alongside him.

Those early but elaborate drawings sparked a creative drive in Greenawalt that has continued for more than 10 years. Today, Greenawalt, 40, participates in some of the most renowned chalk art festivals in the country and has won widespread recognition for his work—not bad for an artist who took his last formal art class when he was a freshman in high school.

"I have to thank my daughters. They're the ones who got me into it," says Greenawalt, who works as a senior director of financial planning for Giant Eagle. "My neighbors began to call me 'the dad who chalks.'" This eventually evolved into being known as "The Chalking Dad."

Over the past several years, he has drawn portraits of various athletes, celebrities and characters, including Mario Lemieux, Prince, Jerome Bettis, Roberto Clemente, Walt Disney, Harry Potter and Disney characters like Moana. In August, Greenawalt drew a portrait of Steelers rookie running back James Conner, an Erie native, at the Celebrate Erie festival. The drawing earned him first place at the festival's "Chalk Walk."

Each drawing takes him between six and 16 hours over the course of one to two days. The 7' x 20' Conner portrait, for example, took him 14 hours to complete.

Several local events, including Norwin's annual Race for Grace and Relay For Life, stand out for Greenawalt.

He draws the Race for Grace logo each year and has contributed artwork at the Relay For Life for the past three years.

"This year at the Relay was particularly special and meaningful, because I drew a tribute to little Andrew O'Neil at the event," he says. O'Neil, a Norwin student, passed away on Dec. 12 at the age of 5 after battling cancer.

Greenawalt has also participated in chalk festivals in New York, Georgia, Ohio, Florida and Minnesota, among others. Florida's Lake Worth Street Painting Festival, which he joined last year, draws nearly 100,000 spectators and is considered one of the world's largest street art festivals. There he worked with another artist to create a 10' x 20' mural featuring the cast of "The Golden Girls."

While Greenawalt initially started drawing with standard Crayola sidewalk chalk, today he works with soft pastels, which are a different form of chalk. Of course, when artists are working outdoors with a temporary medium, they're at the mercy of the weather. The last couple of years, Greenawalt recalls, the weather has been on his side, allowing him to complete his drawings without the threat of rain. He doesn't mind the temporary aspect of his artwork, however.

"If it didn't rain, I wouldn't have job security," he notes with a laugh. "And, if I mess up, it washes away."

In fact, he enjoys street art more than working on traditional mediums like canvas, which he considers "prohibitive."

"To me, chalk art is like being able to draw large, legal graffiti," he says. "It's addictive and fun."

You can find photos of Greenawalt's artwork on Instagram and on Facebook as @thechalkingdad. ■

