

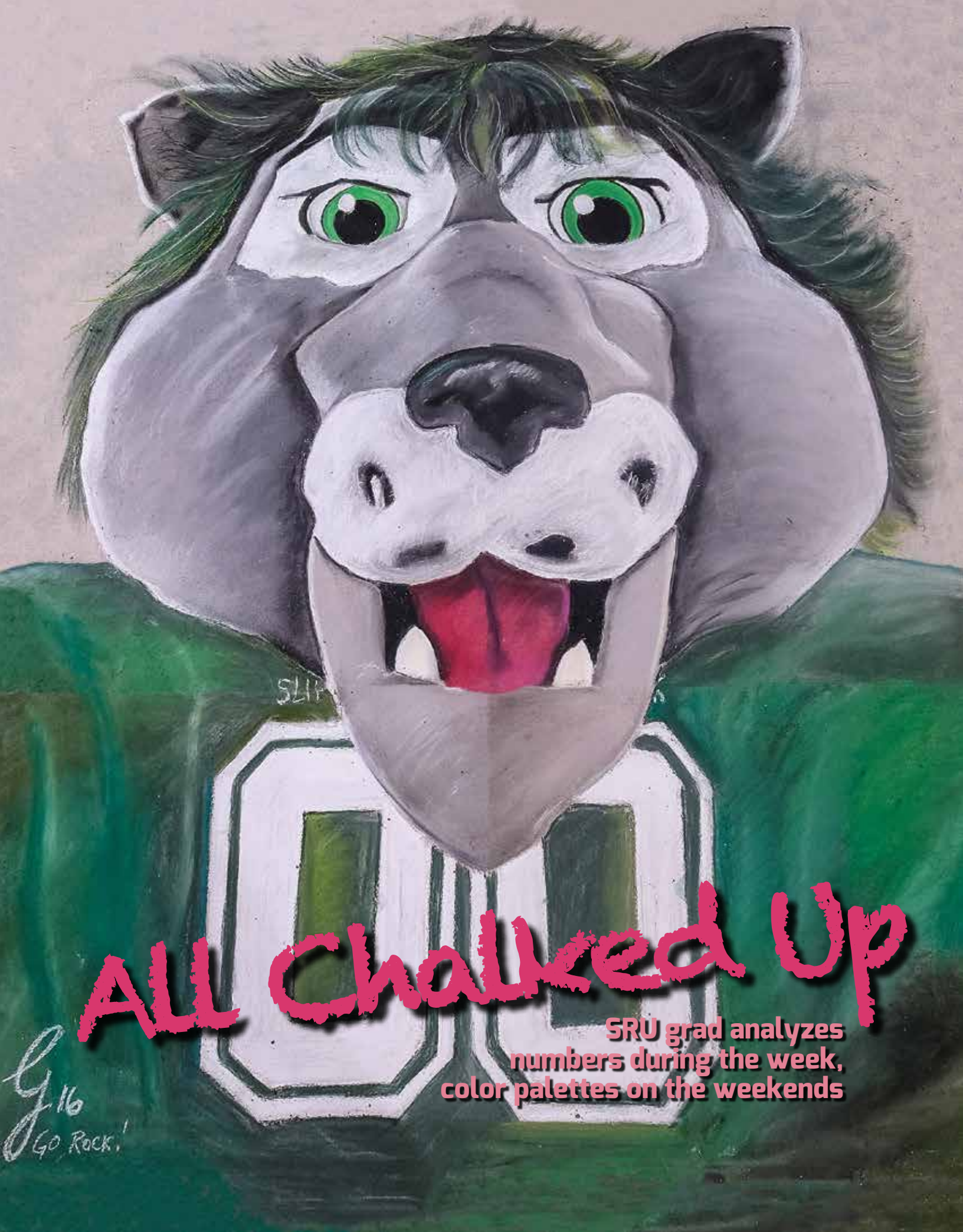


THE rock

Slippery Rock University Magazine

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“All chalked up”



All Chalked Up

SRU grad analyzes
numbers during the week,
color palettes on the weekends

g16
Go Rock!



Long before Twitter, Instagram, Facebook Messenger and today's other, ever-invasive social media communication systems, Slippery Rock University students relied on plain and simple chalk messages. The posts were hand-scrawled on sidewalks, steps, risers and all other flat surfaces to promote concerts, plays, recitals, guest lectures, elections, homecoming events and a myriad of other campus events.

The crude, but effective, dispatches created with large sticks or small chunks of everyday chalkboard chalk, sometimes were accompanied by laughable art work that kept the campus updated and enlightened with humorous comments on national events and causes.

Erik Greenawalt, a 1999 Slippery Rock University graduate who, as a student, kept the campus informed for two years as editor-in-chief of *The Rocket*, the award-winning weekly student newspaper, and served as the announcer for the SRU Marching Band at football games, is significantly and steadily



expanding the SRU chalking tradition to an art form that is drawing the attention of organizations, community groups, supporters and the public across the country, as well as abroad.

He and fellow chalk artists create fleeting works of dramatic art with sticks of chalk that attract onlookers who stare in awe by the thousands as the creations take on a short-lived life on their hometown sidewalks. At the first rain, the intricate drawings disappear much quicker than they were created. However, some remain imbedded in the sidewalk or streets for weeks before being worn into oblivion by admirers and passers-by.

By weekday, Greenawalt is a manager of financial planning and analysis for the Pittsburgh-based grocery chain Giant Eagle Inc. By weekend, he spends much of his time kneeling – or lying – on sidewalks drawing larger-than-life chalk portraits of well-known sports figures, celebrities and historical leaders.

His wife, the former Julie Callanan, also a 1999 SRU graduate, and their daughters, Jaycie,



13, and Jenna, 10, often accompany him.

"Jenna likes to chalk right along with me, while Jaycie, who is also a strong artist, is not following in Dad's footsteps. She just doesn't like the feel of chalk beneath her fingers," Greenawalt said.

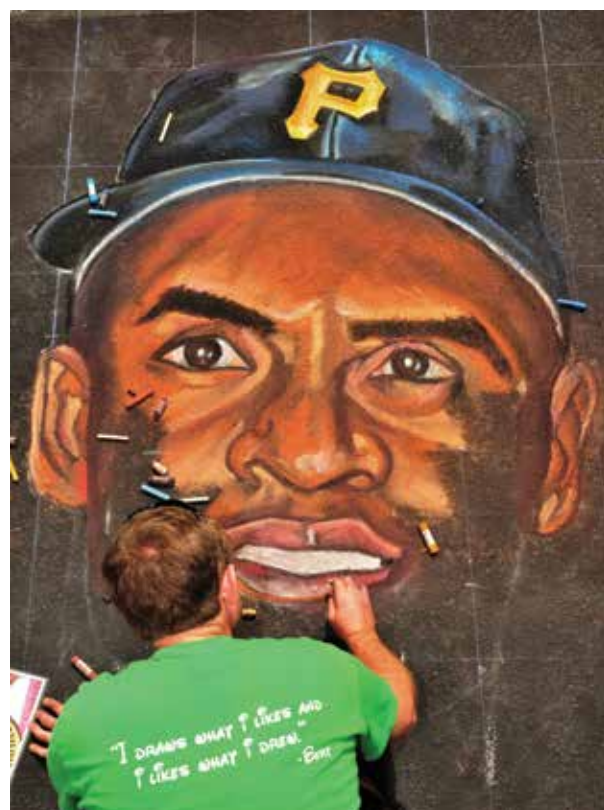
The SRU alumnus said he got into the chalking art realm quite accidentally.

"I did not take art classes at The Rock; I opted for music courses to fill my liberal arts requirements.

After working at the *Tribune-Review* newspaper right after graduation and later as a copy editor on the night shift at the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, I would be home with my girls in the daytime. At the time, Jaycie was

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about 3, and I had to find things to entertain her. One of those things was playing with sidewalk chalk in the driveway.

"The original pieces were pretty crude," Greenawalt admits, adding, "Jaycie was quite the critic, pointing out flaws and areas that needed improvement. I quickly started using a grid system, blocking an original piece of art into squares, and then transferring the 'squares' one-by-one to the pavement. I started by using regular, old Crayola sidewalk chalk; then I discovered the bright colors that soft pastels could provide. I tinkered and experimented for a couple of years with blending and shading. We both got better. It was a great way to spend quality time together.

"I started taking my chalk art on the road by going to local festivals and competitions and at a 2009 chalking festival event in Pittsburgh, I received the People's Choice Award for a drawing of the Pittsburgh Penguins' Sidney Crosby holding the Stanley Cup," he said. "In 2014, we went to Chalkfest Buffalo in New York, where I met people from the Florida Chalk Artists Association. They suggested I come to a festival in Clearwater Beach, where artists chalk in paradise, not 100 yards from the Gulf of Mexico."

Cities and communities, often backed by the local Chamber of Commerce or other civic groups, regularly host such festivals as a means of drawing local and regional residents to their city for a day of community exposure and fun.

"From there it has just expanded – and exploded. Various city festivals have contacted me, offering airfare, accommo-

dations and meals, sometimes even a small stipend, to participate. It is always great fun and provides a chance to visit the city and surrounding areas to take in the local history and sites," he said. "My family often comes along, so it really becomes a 'family outing,' and is educational for all."

Along the way, Greenawalt also found time to earn his masters of business administration at the University of Pittsburgh and said, "While there is nothing like being in a newsroom, working in corporate finance is enjoyable too ... and maybe more stable.

"Most of the festivals I attend are not competitions, in the true sense of the word. There may be awards, like 'Best of Show' or 'Audience Favorite,' but because each artist draws in their own genre, we aren't actually competing. The real winners are the spectators who get to see art come to life," he said.

Most times the art space he works in is 10-feet-by-10-feet, but sometimes larger, Greenawalt said. The Clearwater [Florida] event had 30 to 40 artists, but a two-day festival he attended in February in Lake Worth, Florida, near Palm Beach, drew between 400 and 500 chalk artists. It also drew some 100,000 festival visitors and took up a dozen city blocks.

"In reality, the works are done over two or three days and often take 10 to 15 hours. It is always outside, and I carry tarps to cover the pavement if we get a small rain. I enjoy being

outdoors and being in the sunshine. Truly, it is about performance as much as about art. You get the chance to interact with people who come by to watch. Each festival includes time to talk with the visitors, many of whom offer suggestions and tips about their local community while admiring and critiquing the art," he said.

"I sit in an office all week working behind a computer, so chalking is a great chance to do something with my hands. Some guys spend their weekends playing golf; I spend my weekends playing on the pavement," Greenawalt said.

Among his favorite festivals is Chalktoberfest in Marietta, Georgia, just north of Atlanta. The event is sponsored by the Marietta/Cobb Museum of Art and is growing every year. This year, there will be nearly 80 artists from all over the world.

Chalk artists offer portraits, animals, historical events,

comedy, cartoon characters, reproductions of classic art pieces and just about everything else imaginable. Greenawalt draws a lot of sports figures and historical people. "I think I have come into my own in that area -- drawing dead people," he said with a laugh.

In addition to the Penguins' Crosby and Baseball Hall of Famers Cal Ripken Jr. of the Orioles and Roberto Clemente of the Pirates, Greenawalt chalked The Ohio State University's famed football coach Woody Hayes at an event last fall in Columbus. Other recent portraits he has done range from Daryl Dixon of "The

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Walking Dead" to President Thomas Jefferson.

Some chalk artists specialize in "3-D" drawings that give the illusion of deep holes or waterfalls on the sidewalk or roadway, but are really on a two-dimensional, flat plane. "I also do that type of chalking on occasion, and it is always fun to see the viewers' reactions," he said.

Greenawalt recently returned to the SRU campus to exhibit his chalking skills outside the Robert M. Smith Student Center, but the day's weather was uncooperative, so he chalked a large portrait of Rocky, SRU's friendly mascot, on cement board inside the lobby of Old Main. The drawing graces the front cover of this edition of The ROCK magazine.

"While I have not met many 'celebrities' at the various festivals, a chalk portrait I did of Pittsburgh Steelers' running back Jerome Bettis caught the football star's attention. He re-Tweeted it and reposted it on Instagram," Greenawalt said.

Attending more than a dozen chalk festivals each year keeps the SRU graduate busy.

"I usually do some research on the hosting festival city so I can draw something visitors will relate to. In Elmira, New York, where Mark Twain lived, – and is buried – I drew his portrait joined by Huck Finn. Last June, at the chalk festival in Minneapolis, I drew a tribute to hometown music artist Prince who had recently died."

Greenawalt attended his first international chalking festival in August when he was invited to Canada for a street painting festival in Cambridge, Ontario. He reproduced an Arnold Friberg painting of a Royal Canadian

Mounted Police officer and his trusty steed.

On his wish list is to attend some chalk festivals in Europe.

"I usually take about 30 pounds of chalk and other gear with me, including broken Styrofoam chunks used to blend the various shades. The Styrofoam saves a lot on the fingers," he said. "There have been times, when I have just about worn off my fingerprints rubbing in the chalk to blend specific colors," he said.

His chalk supply ranges from robust, strong, bright color chalk sticks to small, pebble-like nubs. His tool kit also includes duct tape, tempera paints used as a base, and lots of pastel chalk for blending to create the perfect shading and color.

However, he says his most important pieces of equipment -- are "Sunscreen and water; chalking is a hot hobby."

While the SRU-connected chalk artist may be using an ancient medium traced to prehistoric people for his art, he is still high-tech and computer/cell phone savvy, including Instagram and Twitter accounts – @TheChalkingDad – created because youngsters in his Pittsburgh neighborhood refer to him as "The Chalking Dad." His works can also be viewed on Facebook at: www.facebook.com/TheChalkingDad

He is available via email at: TheChalkingDad@gmail.com

To view a time lapse video of Erik Greenawalt creating Rocky's portrait, visit:
www.sru.edu/rockyinchalk

Perfect Chalk Recipe

MAKING SIDEWALK CHALK IS EASY.

Chalk molds can be as simple as empty cardboard paper towel or toilet tissue rolls, inexpensive ice cube trays, muffin tins or plastic candy molds with interesting shapes.

If using cardboard tubes, line them with rolled wax paper leaving enough to partially fold over outside of tube. For added stability, tightly secure a square of duct tape on one end of the tube before mixing chalk.

All needed supplies are available from craft or art supply stores.

RECIPE:

- 1 cup plaster of Paris
- ¾ cup water
- Enough powdered tempera paint to create the desired color
- Mix thoroughly in plastic bag-lined mixing bowl to evenly distribute color
- Pour or spoon into molds (will be cake-mix thick)
- Allow to dry overnight
- Remove from mold

Chalk is ready to use



CAUTION:
Do not rinse extra residue down sink drains.