



RENTON MAGAZINE / KIMBERLY COLLETTE
 Wil draws while grandma looks on at Common Grounds.



Above, one of Wil's favorite pastimes, swinging. Photo courtesy of Susan Mooring. Left, Wil's piece named 'Buddies'. Photo by Kimberly Collette.

Paper cutouts break barrier of autism

BY KIMBERLY COLLETTE

Thirteen-year-old Wil Kerner's art is vibrant, lively, and loveable. With swift scissor snips and colored construction paper, Wil creates vivid images that have emotion and depth. He began shaping paper characters a couple of years ago. Each piece shares a story and a bit of Wil's world.

At age 2, Wil was diagnosed with autism, which severely limits a person's ability to interact with the world and the people in it. Wil lives with his mother and father, Debra and Wilfried Kerner, in the outskirts of Renton. He loves jumping on his trampoline, going for ATV rides with his parents, and exploring new roads.

When Wil's family saw he wasn't thriving in public school, they decided to move his schooling to the home of his grandmother, Susan Mooring, where he works with a committed teacher, Leroy Maxwell.

Wil found a way to reach out. He began shaping and molding Play Doh when he was 9. He re-created one of his favorite TV characters, Diego, which is still displayed in his grandmother's home.

Wil's mother suggested buying colored paper, but Wil simply said "nope." But as he was walking through the store with his father, Wil changed his mind. He pushed the shopping cart straight to the paper and started loading up. Wil's world began to open.



Left, Wil's art hangs in Covington's City Hall. Photo by Kimberly Collette. Right, Wil's piece named 'Dog & Boy'. Photo courtesy of Susan Mooring.



Wil's characters on exhibit

Wil Kerner's paper cutout art is being displayed at the Covington City Hall until Feb. 5. His grandmother has created a Web site on behalf of Wil at www.wilpapercutouts.com.

Many of the one-eyed characters show emotions that Wil's autism keeps him from expressing. Some are happy, sad, silly, devious, or hurt. Wil spreads his piles of paper on his grandmother's kitchen counter. He looks, thinks, cuts, rearranges and sometimes speaks sweetly to the character that is taking shape.

He grips the scissors unconventionally by wrapping his palm around them rather than placing his fingers in the hole. Somehow the circles he cuts for heads are smooth, the strips for the necks are thin and long, and the pupils in the eyes are perfectly small.

His grandmother is unsure whether Wil will con-

tinue with paper as his medium or move to something new, but she knows Wil will be the one guiding it.

"To me, it's all about letting the child determine what makes his world work. Fortunately, Wil is a self-initiator and all I have to do is go along with his creative ideas and discoveries. I think often parents see a child trying something and immediately encourage the child to lean a little right or left, as though it will be better instead of letting the child encourage himself through his own creative angles."

Fortunately Wil has found a creative way to share his world.