

HUNTINGTON

Bringing Autism Awareness To Schools

Halesite resident tells his story

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There are people all over the world that have the inclination and ambition to put forth their talents to help make the world a better place. But people like Erich Preis, a Halesite resident who has experienced a great deal of challenges on his own, often have a lot more to bring to the table.

Preis has been through an array of twists and turns in his life, beginning with bullying from fellow students in the Harborfields school district. Preis had no idea why they were singling him out. Last year he finally discovered that he had Asperger's Syndrome, a condition on the Autism Spectrum, and he has since set to work trying to bring his case to the public eye.

"When I was first diagnosed, I thought it was a bad, horrible thing," Preis said. "But I've turned it into something very positive."

Preis recently appeared at Long Island University's C.W. Post campus to give a presenta-

tion on conflict resolution through art therapy, and to show the students his work while describing how the act of painting helped him through a very rough time in his life.

After losing his best friend Michael A. Noeth during the September 11 terrorist attacks, Preis also lost his job, got into a serious car accident and required physical therapy. It was during this time that he was also diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome. Glad to have solved the lingering question but also scared and confused, Preis began painting what would come to be an entire collection entitled *Images of Storm*.

Preis is now offering a program on Autism Awareness to middle schools and high schools in Suffolk County.

"I represent the voiceless people that have autism but cannot speak," Preis said. "I would like to promote awareness in the schools for students who have disabilities so they are not picked on."

The program includes a slide show of *Images of Storm* with a soundtrack played in the background, eliciting a response from the students on their reaction to the show, and an explanation of what the paintings represent and how Preis found

solace through his art.

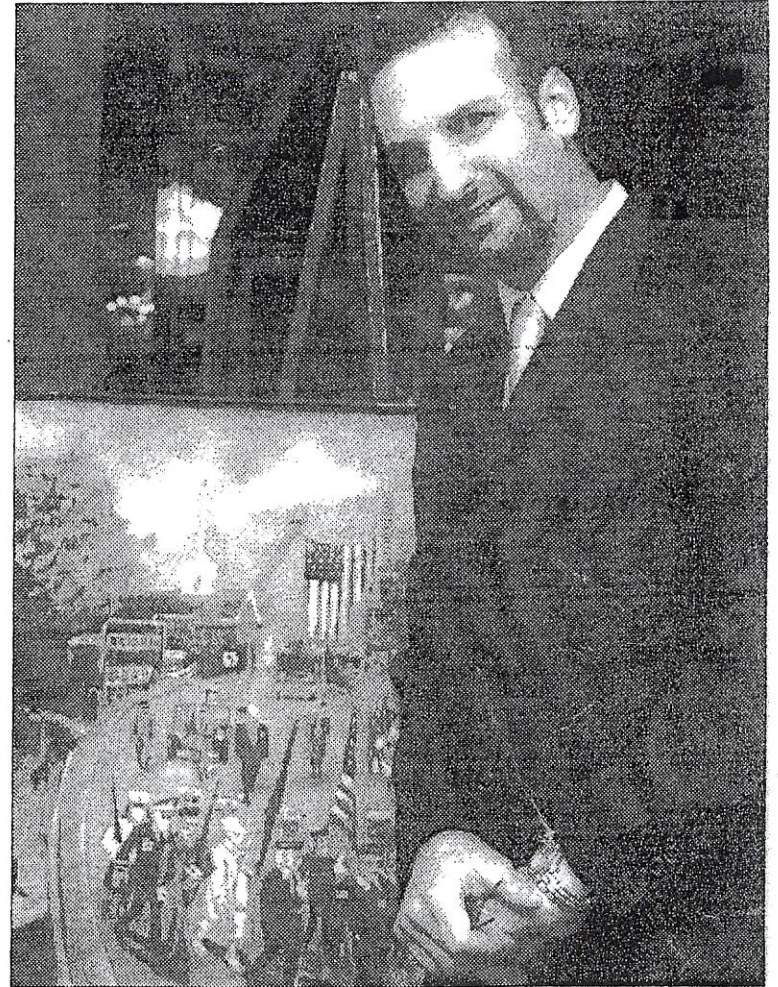
"I needed it to get through everything I was going through," he said.

During the program, Preis also discussed his trip to Manhattan post-September 11. After losing his job, he brought the \$300 worth of art supplies that were left in his closet, took to the streets of Manhattan and helped victims through art therapy. One woman, who had lost her entire staff of 700 people, sat for two hours and painted.

Preis also worked with students in the Bronx on conflict resolution through art, helping each student create sculptures, and he currently works as a recreational therapist at United Cerebral Palsy. "Having a disability myself gives me empathy for the clients I work with," Preis said. "Art is very healing. It's something that we all need."

Preis can be reached by telephone at 631-270-4738, or by visiting his website at www.image-sofstorm.com.

Erich Preis is a Halesite resident recently diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome. He is offering autism awareness seminars to middle schools and high schools in Suffolk County.



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