

## Young Artist Sees Brighter World

**Jeff Hanson has raised more than \$100,000 for charities around the world through his colorful works.**

All Jeff Hanson wants to do is make the world a better place, and he's spent the past three years proving it.

With his artistic talent, the Overland Park teenager has raised more than \$100,000 for several local, national and international charities.

The young painter has sold more than 5,000 watercolor note cards and numerous canvas paintings, giving most of his proceeds to non-profit organizations.

His endeavors have made him a national winner in the Kohl's Kids Who Care scholarship program. As a result, the 15-year old will receive \$5,000 in college tuition.

Not bad for a young visual artist who is visually impaired.

Jeff lives with a genetic condition called neurofibromatosis, a disease that causes tumors on nerve tissue, including an optic nerve.

While undergoing medical treatment three years ago, he took up painting to ease his boredom.

"During chemo and radiation, I wanted to do something fun at home -- in my no-germ bubble -- because I couldn't be out in crowds," he said. "I started painting with my parents and loved it."

Then 12, Jeff began with water colored note cards and soon moved to acrylics. Family friends started to take notice of his work and soon his paintings were selling quickly.

The splashes of color that adorn his canvases still amaze his mother, Julie Hanson, since she knows of no other artistic talent in the family.

"I can't even draw stick people," she said laughing. "I think one of Jeff's greatest gifts is his knack for putting together electric colors. Because of his impairment, he sees the world differently than others."

Jeff's new hobby quickly became his passion. During school days, he spends one hour a day painting new images. On days off, his parents find him painting for two hours each day.

"I'm inspired by fabrics, photos, travel, swimsuits, clothes and television commercials," Jeff said. "I like painting bright colors. I call gray colors Prozac moments."

The high school sophomore is continually surprised by how popular his work has become.

In 2008, he sold 106 paintings and this year he has already sold 250. A few weeks ago Jeff was the sole artist for an exhibit, thanks to the help of one of his fans, Dan Nilsen, president of the meetings and incentive travel management company Bishop-McCann.

The downtown art show featured 136 of Jeff's paintings, of which 118 were sold. Portions from those sales went to the Baphumelele Children's HIV/AIDS Home in South Africa and the local Lisa Barth Chapel fund for Children's Mercy Hospital.

With the money left over from his sales, Jeff is funding his tuition at Horizon Academy for the next three years. The rest will help with college.

Now that he's back in school, the next couple of months are going to be busy for Jeff. Besides homework assignments, he's preparing for another major event: the opening of the Aloft W Hotel in Leawood. He was chosen as the official artist for the hotel.

The teenager is also busy with his latest ventures. His online art store features his 2009 calendar, note cards, note pads and electronic greeting cards. Sales will benefit Jeff's favorite charities.

"Jeff found his gift at a very young age and used it to better the world," Hanson said. "A lot of kids don't do that at 15."

Her son is even more excited this year because in addition to winning scholarship money, Kohl's will donate \$1,000 to the Children's Tumor Foundation on his behalf.

"In these economic times, non-profit foundations are suffering," Hanson said. "Jeff is giving them money they never would have had for research."

Plus, this year has brightened for the visually impaired kid. Literally, that is. In the past few months, he has been regaining his vision; something doctors didn't think would ever happen.

"I couldn't believe the things he was seeing – a grain of rice on the floor or a fly on the wall," Hanson said. "As a mom, I wanted to cry. I have said many prayers for this moment and I love how he can observe the small things in life he couldn't see before."

Everything that has happened has been overwhelming for the proud mom, whose optimistic spirit lingers through her son.

"As a mother, it made me so proud that Jeff had brought all these different fabulous groups of people with caring hearts together for charity," she said. "Now his vision improving has definitely made this a really great year for our family."

To learn more about Jeff Hanson or to order some of the teenager's artwork, go to

[www.JeffreyOwenHanson.com](http://www.JeffreyOwenHanson.com)