

SOLAR PANEL: Area middle-schoolers are involved in a DMS study to determine the best way to keep teens from over-tanning. Dr. Ardis Olson says a machine that shows skin damage invisible to the eye seems so far to be the best tool.



Man and dog are like peas in a pod

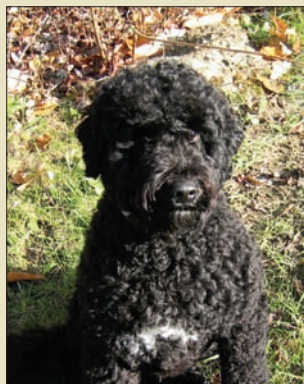
Dr. Athos Rassias, an anesthesiologist at DHMC, suspects that his wife has a greater-than-average interest in gray-streaked curly black hair. That would explain, he says, the strong resemblance he bears to Phoebe, the couple's year-and-a-half old Portuguese water dog. Man and dog look enough alike that they won third prize in the dog-and-owner look-alike competition at the Green Mountain Humane Society's annual Bark in the Park festivities this past fall.

"I think I'll be participating in the Bark in the Park until I turn more gray than the dog," Rassias says. "It's a lot of fun, and it was one of those events where I saw a lot of people I knew from both the community and work."

Rassias's wife, Dr. Marcia Procopio, also an anesthesiologist at DHMC, chose both Phoebe and her predecessor, another Portuguese water dog, after falling in love with the breed on a sailing trip, Rassias says. As might be assumed from the name, Phoebe and her ilk love the water, as do Rassias and Procopio, who go sailing, he says, "any time someone invites us to."

Breed: Rassias says that Phoebe is typical of her breed—she's high-energy, intense, and eager to be part of whatever's going on. The couple have two children, ages seven and five, which ensures that the energy level in their household comes up to Phoebe's standards for a good time.

And if readers are wondering who else they're reminded of by the anesthesiologist's curly locks, it's Professor John Rassias, longtime chair of Dartmouth's Department of French and Italian. A nationally renowned language teacher, Rassias père is pictured periodically in these pages at DMS's graduation ceremonies, where every year he performs—in the original Greek—a rousing rendition of the Hippocratic Oath. M.M.



Is it that Athos Rassias looks like his dog, Phoebe? Or the other way around?

To Sol Levenson, a blank wall is a canvas

Sol Levenson peers at the terrified face of a Confederate soldier. The soldier is arching back; he has just been shot and is yanking his horse's reins to keep from toppling off. Levenson, DHMC's self-taught muralist-in-residence, dabs at the soldier's cheeks with pale pink paint. He's hard at work, in the Norris Cotton Cancer Center radiation-oncology waiting room, on one of three murals depicting a Civil War cavalry battle.

Life: Painting murals, says Levenson, is like being a casting director. He has to think out each character's life story and facial expression before he knows how he wants them to look on the canvas. "I will not do the same figure twice, no matter what," he says. "See this guy, the Southerner [the soldier who has just been shot]—I realized I had never done a head in that position before. So it took five or six times before I got it where I wanted it, where it convinced me."

Levenson does extensive research in libraries and museums about the historical background for every scene he paints. For his current series, a friend of his who belongs to a Civil War reenactment group gave him photos of Confederate and Union uniforms so he could commit the details to memory, right down to the soldiers' shoelaces, their coat buttons, and the shape of their hat brims.

At age 95, Levenson is still a prolific painter. Since 1990, he has completed more than 15 historical murals—most of them at

DHMC. They depict Shakers felling trees and lathing the wood into pieces of furniture, Herbert Hoover giving a whistle-stop tour, a horse-drawn fire wagon rushing to the rescue, and railroad workers repairing a locomotive.

He especially likes pulling subjects from his childhood in then-rural Danvers, Mass., where, he says, the way of life was similar to that of the Shakers. "Everything was horse-drawn," he recalls. "Sometimes I saw more horses than people. My generation was the last that had any close contact with rural America. I think there's just one more generation after me that had to chop wood to start a fire in the kitchen stove."

Mark: Even though he's pushing the century mark, he still remembers his very first drawing—a pencil sketch that he did from memory of Charlie Chaplin on a storefront theater poster. He was four and a half. "I did it," he says, "so I could take him home."

His career has been both long and wide-ranging. He wrote a book on the history of drawing. He taught landscape painting to female inmates at a Vermont state prison. He served three times as a Fulbright Scholar, teaching mural painting (in Spanish) at Mexico's University of Veracruz. And one of his murals hangs in the university's School of Artificial Intelligence. Remarkably, given its location, it is a criticism of the Internet. The school's top professors approved his concept, even though



BOTH MARK WASHBURN



Top, 95-year-old artist Sol Levenson contemplates one of his murals in Dartmouth's Cancer Center; this one depicts an early 20th-century railroad scene. And above, he poses before another of his DHMC murals with his assistant, Janice Munro.

it was “sharply critical of branches of education,” Levenson explains. “They allowed me free self-expression.”

Blank: He was volunteering at the Cancer Center close to 20 years ago, doing layout and advertising, when he noticed the facility’s blank walls and offered to paint murals for them. He is still painting at DHMC, now in the new radiation-oncology wing. What keeps him going? The patients, he says, who sit and talk with him—about their families, the characters he is

painting, politics. “My philosophy of life can change,” he says, “because of what [patients] say to me here at DHMC.”

It was in radiation oncology that Levenson met Janice Munro, a former breast cancer patient and nurse administrator at DHMC. She now serves as his assistant, helping him with his paint supplies and painting in backgrounds. “She understands my stuff better than anyone,” says Levenson.

“We consider Sol a part of our team,” says Dr. Eugen Hug, section chief of radiation oncology. “[He] helps us add a more humanistic component to an intensive therapy that is very technically driven. Patients love him,” Hug adds. “He makes their daily trips much easier.”

MATTHEW C. WIENCKE

DANCING THE NIGHT AWAY

Music hath charms . . . to soften rocks, or bend the knotted oak,” wrote English dramatist William Congreve 300 years ago. And, at DHMC today, to ensure a good night’s sleep.

The Medical Center’s rotunda—thanks to a donated Steinway grand piano and about a dozen volunteer pianists—is the site of regular performances that soothe patients, calm visitors, and entertain staff. One of the volunteer musicians recently shared word with DARTMOUTH MEDICINE of an especially appreciative listener. One evening, explained the pianist in an e-mail, “a male cancer patient and his female nurse came down to the rotunda. I was playing a waltz, and they started dancing around the piano. So I kept playing every upbeat, danceable piece I had—waltzes, foxtrots, and the ragtime music of Scott Joplin and Joseph Lamb. The two of them actually danced for 45 minutes. It was quite amazing.



“It turned out the patient was having surgery the next day and needed a good night’s sleep,” the pianist explained. “So his nurse and he were taking a walk around the hospital for exercise” when they heard the music in the rotunda. “The dancing really made him happy,” concluded the pianist—who seemed pretty happy himself by the impact his playing had. A.S.

A SIGN OF STREET SMARTS

There’s a place where Fifth Avenue, Sesame Street, Route 66, Broadway, and Sunset Boulevard intersect—and it’s not in the *Twilight Zone*.

It’s in the new Outpatient Clinic of the Children’s Hospital at Dartmouth (CHaD), where the hallways were recently given creative names. “When we moved here last year,” explains Sharon Markowitz, unit coordinator for outpatient services, “the staff found the area difficult to navigate—all the hallways looked alike. One of our physicians, Elvin Kaplan, came up with the idea to put up street signs and have a naming contest.”

Some of the winning entries have kid-friendly connotations, and all of the names are proving memorable. The large green signs that now prominently mark the unit’s corridors are not only a hit with CHaD’s patients and their families, but they do indeed help the staff with wayfinding. A.P.

