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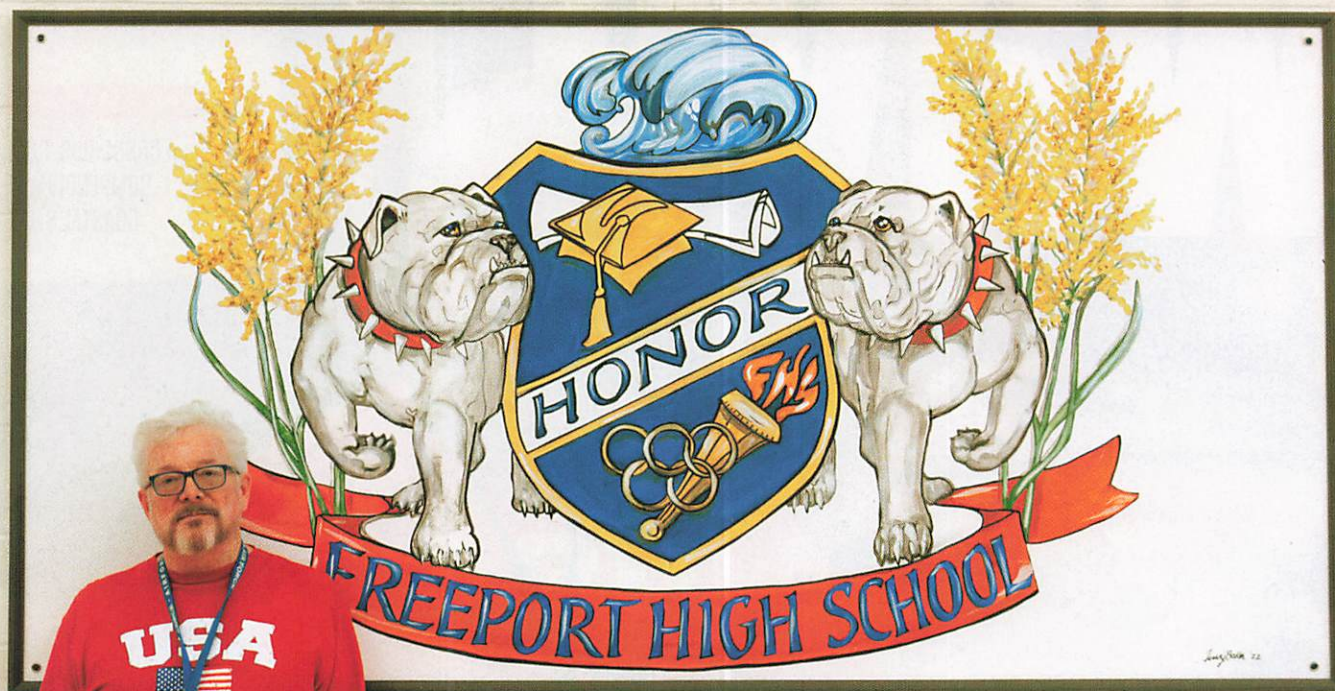
BAKER'S BRUSH PAINTS LEGACY

Local teacher makes lasting
impact across Freeport High
School walls and halls ➔

by LAURIE EINSTEIN KOSZUTA

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Terry Baker dabbled in visual art during his college days. But he soon found himself drawn to the dramatic arts, too. Today, he teaches government, economics, and theater while flexing his painting skills after hours.

FESTIVALS Billy Bowlegs



"I'm not a fan of blank walls,"

says artist and teacher Terry Baker. Thanks to him, you won't find many empty walls throughout Freeport High School.

He's painted the school's bulldog mascot, which hangs in the main hallway, and several of his large and vibrant murals are prominently displayed in the school's media center. Some of his murals feature well-known figures in math, science, art, and music. Another showcases symbols and scenery unique to Freeport.

"I like to bring color to otherwise sterile spaces," Baker says. "I do whatever I can to make Freeport High School better because the students and faculty here are the best."

While Baker is popular among students who take his government, economics, and theater classes, he doesn't teach art, and he doesn't tout his talent despite his hallway displays. Some students at the school, he presumes, aren't even aware he's the artist behind the displays.

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Baker brings life to the sterile nature of school halls with designs that elicit school spirit and encourage education.



↔ Baker aims to inspire students at Freeport High School with his large-scale works. Paintings can be found throughout classrooms and work spaces featuring accomplished historical figures of math, science, art, music, and other fields of study.

"At school, it's not about me," explains Baker, who supplied the materials needed and dedicated his personal time to complete the projects. "It's about creating an environment that adds warmth to student spaces."

Baker's lifelong love of art began in childhood when he would copy pictures from the Little Golden Books children's series. With no formal training beyond a few college art classes, he describes himself as a commercial artist with a focus on creating practical works rather than gallery pieces.

A pivotal moment in college steered Baker into other artistic avenues. While attending Abilene Christian University in Texas, Baker planned to enroll in a sculpture class. Realizing the class was already full, he opted for theater instead.

"I loved that class," he recalls. "I gained experience constructing sets and backdrops, ensuring everything looked realistic. I also learned skills like

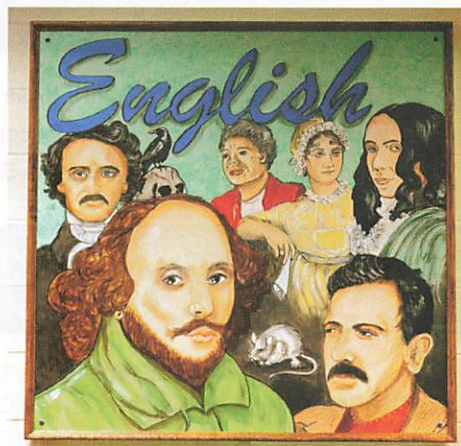
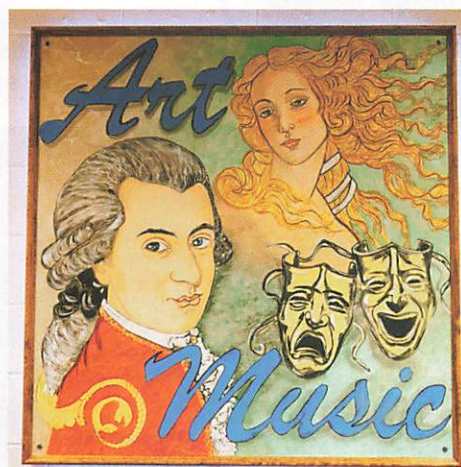
working with glazes, creating textures, and mastering faux painting techniques. Years later, I used those skills to collaborate with home builders and designers in Dallas to earn extra income while teaching."

After college, Baker worked full-time in ministry in Scotland, India, California, and Rhode Island. However, he stepped away from the ministry and into education after discovering that one of his sons was on the autism spectrum.

"I wanted to understand and support my son," he says.

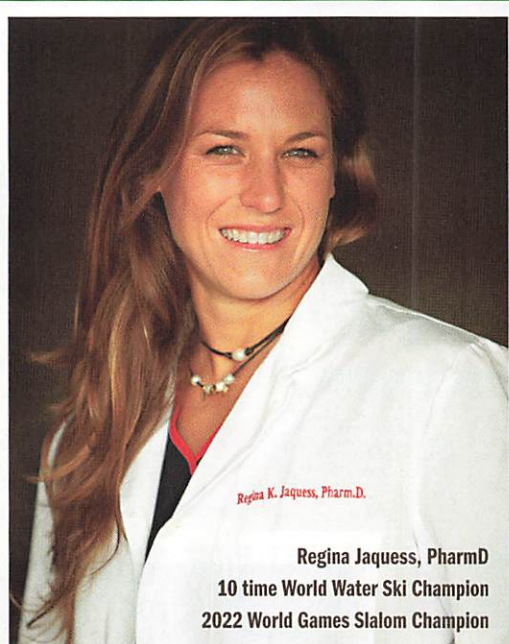
He achieved his teaching credentials and began teaching in northern California in a self-contained classroom for students expelled from public education due to behavioral challenges. Some time later, he moved to New Mexico to be with his parents and returned to the high school he'd attended in the 1970s, this time as a faculty member.

"I lived in the same bedroom where I grew up," Baker says. "I was caring >>



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↑ Freeport High School's bulldog mascot appears in another of Baker's paintings, posed against the picturesque backdrop of the town's Four-Mile Creek covered bridge.

for my aging parents, which I can liken to *The Twilight Zone* meets *Back to the Future*."

After his parents passed, Baker decided to move to Northwest Florida to be closer to one of his sons and grandchildren. While at church, a friend mentioned a teaching opportunity at Freeport High School. After an interview, Baker was hired the same day.

Without a home studio, Baker transforms his classroom into an after-hours workspace.

"Depending on the project," he says, "I use acrylics, oils, pin-tura, and even house paint as my preferred mediums. I use brushes, foam sponges, or fingers to achieve the desired effect."

Beyond school murals, Baker has often been commissioned to paint lively designs for children's rooms and businesses. In 2022, he lent his expertise to help design sets for a Mattie Kelly Arts Center summer production.

Baker plans to continue improving spaces at Freeport High School with more muraled walls. Future project ideas include portraits of historical figures such as Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, and Martin Luther King.

"When I leave, I want to leave behind something that inspires or blesses someone," he says.

As Baker's brush paints his legacy, Freeport High School's blank hallways and classrooms transform into creative spaces. **EB**



↑ At the school day's end, Baker's classroom becomes his studio space.