



**Easthampton Artist Cassandra Holden and Care Center Students
Install Mobile at Holyoke Community College**

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HOLYOKE — A dozen teenage girls crowded onto the stairwell in the Kittredge Center for Business and Workforce Development at Holyoke Community College on Wednesday, smiling up at a small crowd as cameras flashed, capturing the young women in front of the 12-foot high dangling mobile that they created over the last four months. “Superstars!” shouted someone in the crowd, and the girls giggled and smiled even wider.

They are students at the Care Center in Holyoke, a program that provides education to prepare teen moms who dropped out of high school to get their equivalency diplomas and go on to college.

Since September, they’ve been working with Easthampton artist Cassandra Holden, along with Care Center art teacher Ezra Parzybok, to dream up and create the massive mobile. Holden, 41, started the project when she received a \$23,000 Helen Gurley Brown Magic Grant from Smith College, where she earned her degree in 2009.

At the artists’ reception Wednesday in the Kittredge Center, Holden said she will miss working with the girls. “They could have dragged their feet and said, ‘Painting for the seventh day in a row?’ ” she said.

“But they didn’t. They came in, put their aprons on, someone would be the DJ and put music on and they’d get to work. There was a great sense of community.”

The mobile is 14 feet long, 12 feet high and six feet wide. From a frame of crisscrossed bamboo hangs dozens of long strips of metal painted in shades of green, yellow, brown and red.

“It took a while, it was fun, but it was hard work,” said Maribel Dones, 20. “Everyone had different ideas of what to do, so we all mixed our ideas together and came up with this.”

When Dones is ready to take her GED test, she will do so in the testing center located on the second floor of the building, but only after walking past the giant installation she helped create.

“As a GED teacher, I’m hoping they’ll be inspired seeing their own work when they walk in to take the test,” said Anita Gallers of the Care Center. “I think it will be an encouraging sign, it will give them a confidence boost to see their completed work.”

Holden said the process began in September. They spent the last two months cutting the thin aluminum strips, crumpling and painting them, and hanging them with wire from the giant bamboo frame. It took them 35 hours to hang the mobile.

“It feels good, like hard work has paid off,” said Angely Miranda, 17, of Holyoke, as she leaned on the railing on the second floor, overlooking the stairwell where the mobile swayed.

“We have the cuts from it and everything,” said Lesliann Perez, 18, also of Holyoke, explaining that they crumpled the metal by hand. She took her GED test in the Kittredge Center a few weeks ago and is waiting to get her scores. If she passes, her plan is to start taking classes at Holyoke Community College, as many Care Center graduates do.

Seeing the mobile, and the accompanying plaque that bears her name, while heading to class would be “pretty cool,” she said. “It’d be something cool, something achieved,” she said.

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