

*** READER SPEAK**

"It's so much easier to just say, 'We just can't do it,' than it is to find a solution. ... If only those who had the ability to help would get their hands dirty, the world would be a better place." — how typical at courant.com/readerspeak, on Hartford's inability to gather wood from Keney Park

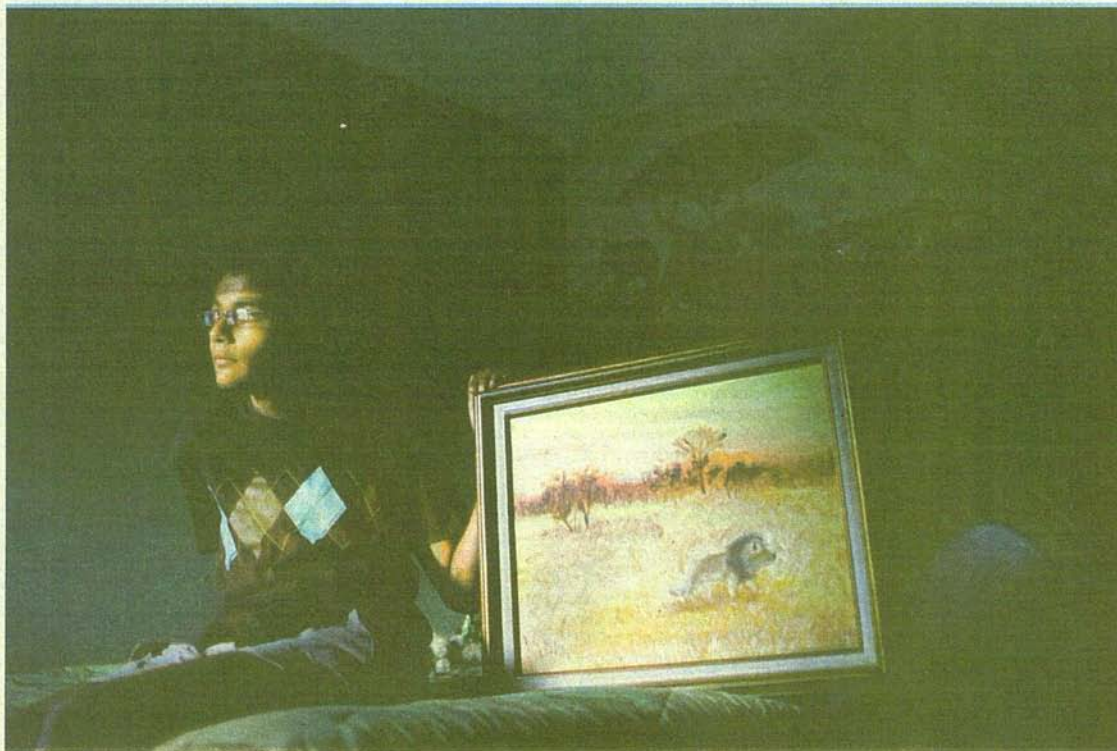
CTNEWS

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I AM...

"I AM..." APPEARING EVERY OTHER MONDAY, EXPLORES THE LIFE EXPERIENCES OF TEENAGERS AND YOUNG ADULTS IN THEIR OWN WORDS.

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Ben Carroll, 14, was born in Bulgaria in July 1994 and was placed in an orphanage. When he was 18 months old, Manchester residents Ed and Laura-Lee Carroll adopted him. He attends the Intensive Education Academy in West Hartford.

I love to paint animals. I never paint people. I never paint buildings, trees and flowers. I only like to paint animals because I'm a big animal lover.

The only animals I don't like to paint are the scary animals that eat other animals. I just like to paint the friendlier animals.

When I was little, I used to look at animals books. I used to get all afraid and upset at the animals that eat the other animals. Mom said, "Put the book away till later."

I love to paint elephants. I painted a giraffe. When I paint, I always draw lightly and gentle. ... I do a very, very beautiful job.

I did one colored-pencil picture, which was an elephant, which was called,

"Beautiful Elephant." He was standing proud and tall because he was going to look out for enemies and danger, like if someone was going to attack him or eat him up.

When Mom sees a picture, she says, "Ahh, is that beautiful." And my lips go like this [he smiles]. I'm so proud of myself.

This picture is called "Lion in Africa." This picture that I did took about three weeks. My favorite part of this is it's a lion in the grass. It's a friendly lion, not a scary one. People love this painting.

It's friendly, not scary, not with the teeth gleaming.

... AN ARTIST WITH AUTISM

* See a video slide show about Ben Carroll at www.courant.com/iam

PUBLIC POLICY

'This Is About Sharing Power'

At Rally, A Push For 'Direct Initiative'

By DANIELA ALTIMARI
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Former state Rep. John Woodcock defines himself as a progressive Democrat who favors gay rights; Peter Wolfgang is a conservative whose main job is battling same-sex marriage.

They wouldn't seem to agree on much. But Woodcock and Wolfgang have found common ground on a question that will appear on the November ballot: Should the state hold a convention to amend the state constitution? They both say yes because they want to see the constitution reworked to allow for something called "direct initiative," a mechanism that permits citizens to force a vote on matters of public policy.

"This is about opening up democracy and sharing power," said Woodcock, who served in the legislature in the 1990s and now teaches at Central Connecticut State University. "It's an establishment vs. the people issue."

Opponents of direct initiative say it would clog government with endless and expensive referendums on a host of arcane matters. Gay-rights activists say it will become a tool for those who want to quash the rights of same-sex couples.

The question has drawn its most vocal support from conservative groups who feel shut out of the circles of power at the Capitol. They include the anti-gay-rights Family Institute of Connecticut, which Wolfgang leads, as well as advocates of tougher penalties for criminals, critics of eminent domain and taxpayer activists.

But it has also piqued the interest of some progressives who are similarly