



Karin Jacobson, a 1991 Perpich Center graduate, works on her futuristic, playful jewelry in a Minneapolis studio space she sublets from a friend. Right after graduation, Jacobson served an apprenticeship with a jeweler who had been a visiting artist at the school. That led to a goldsmithing job that paid college tuition for her history major. She then put together a sample line of her creations, which she sold to buyers for Walker Art Center's gift shop. "So I decided, well, why not, and I started my own business."

BY DEBRA O'CONNOR
Pioneer Press

Karin Jacobson was 16 when she left Moorhead to join the first class of the statewide arts high school in Golden Valley. It was 1969. She knew she liked to draw pictures but was only dimly aware of other visual-art options.

"'Wew,' I said, 'you get to go to school and do art all the time and live away from home,'" Jacobson says. "I thought it would be cool to be an artist. But it didn't occur to me that it was feasible to do this for a living."

Now she's 29, and the past year has been a breakthrough for the jewelry-maker. She won the new-talent competition of the American Jewelry Design Council, was featured on a PBS program about making one's living in the arts — she represented the "starving artist" end of the spectrum — and she finally was able to support herself designing and making her own art.

The special state school was critical to her career, Jacobson says, because it introduced her not only to three-dimensional art but also to the notion that lots of people are professional artists. If they could do it, she reasoned, so could she.

The Perpich Center for Arts Education, which graduates its 12th class Friday, is a state-supported residential academy for 300 high school juniors and seniors that puts the arts on equal footing with college-prep academics. Mornings are consumed by traditional subjects, but after lunch and sometimes long into the evening, kids are dancing, painting, writing, acting, shooting movies and making music.

The concept was championed by former Gov. Rudy Perpich after he visited New York City's High School for Performing Arts, of "Fame" fame. The legislation establishing the school was controversial, as lawmakers wondered whether the state should bear the extra expense of a special school devoted to flutists, playwrights, poets and filmmakers.

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