

The Bear is back

By Erin Borla
Correspondent

“Skip” the bear and her cub made her triumphant return to the Sisters Elementary School foyer last week.

More than 25 years ago, as part of a class project for his daughter’s first-grade class, J. Chester “Skip” Armstrong, a world-renowned chainsaw sculptor from Sisters, made the bear on the playground during a recess with members of his daughter’s class.

Made of Mt. St. Helens Spirit Lake cedar, “Skip” has been a mainstay in the foyer ever since the day she was created. After 25 years, she and her cub needed a little refinishing. Community members approached Principal Becky Stoughton and asked if they could help coordinate getting the bear worked on — and the original artist was happy to help bring life back to the sculpture.

Sisters has always had a unique way to showcase community. This project was just one of many examples of caring and compassionate individuals making an impact locally on young Sisters residents.

“I did this project for my daughter’s first-grade class in 1987,” says Armstrong. “The kids gathered around during recess and watched as I created the bear with their suggestions. They even helped finish it with a little elbow grease and sanding.”

Armstrong was born and raised in Berkley, California, and attended UC Berkley, receiving his degree in theory and philosophy in the ’60s. In the early ’70s he worked at a YMCA camp outside of Spirit Lake, Washington where he discovered his natural gift for shape and proportions.

His sculptures, made primarily with chainsaws,



PHOTO BY ERIN BORLA

Principal Becky Stoughton welcomed back Skip Armstrong’s bear.

chisels and grinders, can be seen in the collections of Burt Reynolds, George W. Bush, Clint Eastwood, Olivia Newton John, Nic Nolte and many more. Most notably he created 16-foot cathedral doors for St. Mary’s Church in Boise, Idaho.

“The bear represents a mother-and-child scene, perfect for the Elementary School,” says Armstrong. “I wanted kids in kindergarten and first grade to feel at home when they came to school. The mother-and-child relationship is the most primary connection in nature.”

Armstrong picked the roughly 750-pound sculpture up in November, much to the dismay of students and staff. He touched up a few imperfections, fixed one minor repair and added a fresh coat of lacquer; then let the bear dry throughout the month of November.

“Students asked where

Skip had gone,” Principal Stoughton said. “It was wonderful to meet the man behind the bear and hear the story of how she came about. We are all glad to have her back.”

“It was a great way to be connected to the school and my daughter so many years ago, and now to be able to refinish it for current students... — “Skip” Armstrong

“I’m glad I was able to do this,” says Armstrong. “It was a great way to be connected to the school and my daughter so many years ago, and now to be able to refinish it for current students — I was happy to do it.”

Spear signs for beach volleyball

Savannah Spear, Sisters High School graduate, has officially signed a letter of intent to play sand/beach volleyball for Concordia University Irvine. Spear was a four-year letter winner for the Outlaws and played in the state playoffs all four years while helping lead her team to a third-place finish her senior year.

She plans on pursuing a focus of study in exercise and sports science. She is very excited to be an Eagle and is beginning her beach workouts this week.

She is grateful to SHS teachers, coaches, and Rimrock Club coaches for preparing her for academics and athletics at the next level.



PHOTO PROVIDED

Savannah Spear, right, will play for Concordia University.

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