Sisters Folk Festival art is part of the fun

By Jim Cornelius
News Editor

The art that promotes the Sisters Folk Festival each year is much more than a simple poster advertising the event. The poster painting by Dennis McGregor captures the spirit of the event and the role of SFF in the community. And McGregor's work is loved and collected just like the music is.

McGregor has been the SFF poster artist since the 1990s.

"I'm enjoying it more now than I ever have in the past, and every year it's more so," he told *The Nugget* last week.

Festival organizers give McGregor full rein to create whatever image inspires him.

"It's a dream job," he said. "I just do whatever I want to do."

McGregor acknowledges that he put some constraints on himself in the festival's early years, based on his background as a graphic designer where "there was little room for creativity." His early posters, he says, were "pretty literal and conventional," featuring musical instruments.

But as the festival itself grew and evolved and expanded its boundaries, so, too, did McGregor's art.

"It became a whole different thing that encouraged creativity, kind of 'hang it out there…'" he said.

McGregor reckons that the 2014 painting of "Buck" for the poster was a turning point toward a whole new level of creativity. The poster featured a buck deer with a pompadour (pompadeer) and an earring (deering). The artist thought he might be pushing things a bit, but it turned out that Buck was a huge hit, probably the most popular poster ever. That was encouraging.

This year, McGregor tapped into Sisters Country's obsession with dogs to create a musical canine campfire howl-along. It, too, has been a hit.

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The artist's friends modeled for the poster image.

The artist assembled friends at his home east of Sisters for a couple of photo shoots.

"Just to get the instruments in the positions they would be in was a huge help right there," he said.

The shoot created an unexpected demand on the artist.

"Every guy, every friend (was) saying 'What kind of dog am I going to be?'" he said. The other question that came up repeatedly was, "Can my dog be in it?"

McGregor is emphatic that there is no symbolic content in which person turned out to be what dog.

"There's no connection, but I must say that the banjo player looks a bit like Willie Carmichael," he said.

He also acknowledged that one dog in particular has a specific identity — the accordion player is a friend's dog that recently died.

The Sisters Folk Festival's "merch" — hats, T-shirts, sweatshirts, etc. — traditionally picks up motifs from the poster art each year. That posed a bit of a creative challenge for McGregor to design around.

"I couldn't draw the whole herd of 'em around the fire (for a T-shirt imprint)," he said.

He thought about doing a dog picking a banjo in a rocking chair on the porch — but that didn't reflect the high-energy nature of the festival.

He ended up with a guitar-slinging dog leaping through the air with a paw over his head.

"It was actually the famous Springsteen shot from 'Born in the USA,'" he told *The Nugget*. "I pulled my album out and made the dog's body exactly like Bruce. This is a badass dog — this ain't no laid-back dog on the porch."

Naturally, McGregor calls him "Springsteener Spaniel."

McGregor's posters can be found all over Sisters. Sponsors receive hardboard posters each year, and many display them in their businesses.

"I love it when they find permanent places in public spaces," McGregor said. "That, to me, feels like success."

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Sisters Folk Festival went to the dogs this year.