

'One Tree – Many Songs' unveiled in the woods near Sisters

By Helen Schmidling
Correspondent

Young Frankie Borla gave a drum roll and 40 hardy souls clapped mittened hands at the grand unveiling of "One Tree – Many Songs" on the sawdust-covered snow outside the studio of master chainsaw sculptor J. Chester "Skip" Armstrong on Sunday.

Before Jan Hansson and David Hough moved the tarp, Armstrong called for a moment of silence, then revealed the sculpture's final name.

Luck was with everyone at the December 1 event. It wasn't snowing; in fact, temperatures warmed up to around 32 degrees, and the sun came out. Dozens of Sisters residents trucked up Edgington Road to the compound where Armstrong lives and creates his masterpieces, and only one vehicle got stuck (but rescued). The Sisters Arts Association sponsored the gathering, and served hot mulled cider and cookies to visitors.

"I came to see the sculpture made out of a 100-year-old maple tree," said Cathy Bullis of Sisters. "This is my first time here," said Tollgate resident Melanie Rose Dyer, a singer-songwriter with roots

in Nashville. "I've been following Skip's work on video and in newspapers, and now I get to be here," she said.

Armstrong led guests through his studio, full of years worth of wood sculpture, much of it soon to be loaded on a trailer for destinations in Idaho, Nevada, Utah, and Arizona. Every year, about this time, once Armstrong and his assistant Jan Hansson, the Great Swede, have finished their major projects, the work gets delivered to its new destinations. Guests got to see and touch and admire his work, up close.

Visitors chuckled at Armstrong's self-portrait as a prehistoric man with a chisel, proudly sporting a Boy Scout sash full of badges.

"Yes, I was an Eagle Scout," Armstrong said, displaying dozens of woodcarving badges on the sawdust-covered sash. "I was inspired because my mother collected wood carvings from around the world. I grew up around them, and I eventually discovered my perfect carving tool — the chainsaw!"

Sometime this month, his big new work will go to its new home in West Linn. It is special, and it has intimate ties to Sisters.



PHOTO BY DENNIS SCHMIDLING

The Sisters arts community gathered last weekend for the unveiling of a project that turned the loss of a tree into the gain of a sculpture.

Sisters Artist Kathy Deggendorfer's sister, Sally Bany, rescued an old church in West Linn, Oregon, and turned it into a music school. Bany co-founded the Youth Music Project, as a way to celebrate youth playing music, after her daughter, Annie, attended (and fell in love with) Sisters Folk Festival's Americana Song Academy. The nonprofit Youth Music Project now enrolls 3,000 kids a year, from around Clackamas County, teaching rock, pop, and country music via group and private lessons

and summer camps, based in the former church.

About two years ago, Bany received the sad news that a century-old maple tree

on the property had to come down. Bany contacted her sister. Deggendorfer facilitated

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