

Stiles "bears" her artistic side



(Photo by Judy Hoyle, Illinois Valley News)

Karen Stiles and her Cowboy biker bear. You can see her bear at the C.J. Evergreen Bank.

By
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Karen Stiles' fiberglass cowboy bear seated on a motorcycle will be on display at Evergreen Federal Bank's Cave Junction branch through the summer. The bank will commemorate its 80th anniversary with 80 fiberglass bears installed along the streets of Grants Pass. 20 new bears will join 60 others between the Memorial Day and Labor Day weekends.

Established in 1934, the bank introduced the first Bearfest in 2003 at the behest of then-president Brady Adams. Over the past decade, 145 bears have been decorated by local artists. Sixty-five have been auctioned off, raising over \$250,000 for local charities.

Other projects have included "The Doors of Oregon" and specially decorated dog houses to raise funds for the Josephine County Sheriff's Office K-9 Team. The efforts of three Illinois Valley artists have been included in these projects including works by Lane Cosner, Alan Laurie and Stiles.

A self-taught watercolor artist, Stiles has been painting primarily in that medium for over 20 years. Her richly colored work has been displayed extensively in the region as well as in competitions of the Northwest Watercolor Society and the Watercolor Society of Oregon.

Stiles grew up in Medford and met her future husband, Jeff, when they were both working for Chevron stations in the area. They married and transferred to new jobs in Seattle, only to learn that the Oregon Caves Chevron station in Cave Junction was for sale. They jumped at the chance to move back home to raise their family and manage their own business.

"We love the Illinois Valley, its people and its beauty. Our first four kids successfully attended our

excellent schools, including Dome school and all three public schools," she stated, adding that she has home-schooled her youngest. "We take the best field trips ever!" she exclaims.

Stiles and her family enjoy outdoor activities, including hiking and bicycle riding. Currently, due to the many demands of family life, Stiles is only able to paint a few pieces a year.

Stiles' doghouse for Evergreen was purchased by Brady Adams' wife. Stiles' "Oregon Door," still part of the bank's collection, depicts familiar scenes of Oregon Caves National Monument (OCNM). The door may also be put on display at the Cave Junction branch this summer.

Stiles' first fiberglass bear also featured images of OCNM history, including a portrait of Elijah Davidson, the first white man to discover the caves. The bear is now displayed in the Gift Gallery at the OCNM Chateau. Barbara Fields won the bear at auction, and then donated it in memory of Lewis "Babe" Fields, who was Davidson's friend.

Another year Stiles did a pair of bears on the theme of Crater Lake. The larger one went to Salem and the smaller one was won by a motel owner in Grants Pass.

In 2010, the bank's theme was "Wild Bunch" featuring the bears on motorcycles; and Stiles' creation was titled "Giddyup." Under the tutelage of Bob Eddings, she fashioned a large fiberglass cowboy hat and boots for the bear. The piece was finished in acrylic paint.

Inscribed on the back of the bear's vest is a small heart with the initials LKS in memory of Linda Killion Smith, a much loved artist in Grants Pass who was originally commissioned to do the bear, but passed away before she could do the project.

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