

EVERGREEN TATTOO EXPO SHOWCASES ART AND ARTISTS

BY RICK LEVIN

Gallons of ink will flow through Springfield this weekend, Feb. 21-23, as some of the finest tattoo artists from across the country and around the world etch beauty into flesh at the inaugural Evergreen Tattoo Expo at Willamalane Center.

Conceived by co-founders Riley Smith and Joshua Carlton as a celebration of the art of tattooing — by and for the artists — Evergreen will gather together more than 200 professionals from 30 states and four countries for three days of workshops, music, performances, hobnobbing and, yes, tattooing, to which the public is invited.

Some of the big names appearing at Evergreen include painters Sean Cheetham and Carl Dobsy, special-effects master Chet Zar, Joey Hamilton and Sarah Miller of Spike TV's *Ink Masters* fame, Canadian painter and tattoo artist David Gluck, as well as Carlton and Smith and a slew of local and national artists.

Carlton, a founding member of Eugene's Crimson Torch Tattoo Collective who is nationally recognized for his exquisite work, says that Evergreen is a dream come true. "This is a chance of a lifetime for me, so a little bit of it is selfish," he says. "I'm like a kid watching a magic trick. I'm drooling over it. Even if I wasn't putting it on, I would not miss it."

Smith, who runs Lifetime School of Tattooing in Springfield, says the nature of the expo is unique, if not unprecedented. First, he points out, the weekend-long event is an invitational, meaning only the best artists were hand-selected; second, the focus is on art, which includes not just tattooing but work by figurative painters and illustrators as well; and, last but not least, although Evergreen offers a chance for anyone to get tatted by the world's best, it's also a chance for tatters to teach and learn from one another.

"The real scope of what we're doing is so foreign to the environment here," Smith says, noting that this is one of the only national conventions hosted by tattoo artists rather than corporations. "It's off-the-scale infinity, the size and scope of what we're doing. It's never really been done," he says.

"We want it to be an event that's by artists, for artists," says Erin, Smith's wife, who's played a key role in organizing the event over the past 10 months. "And not just tattoo artists but the community as a whole. We want to bring back a big Springfield event that the whole community can get behind."

The idea of holding a tattoo expo of this magnitude was first sparked last year, when Smith took a painting class hosted by Carlton, whose *Advanced Tattooing Techniques: A Guide to Realism* is the best-selling how-to book written on the subject. Smith and Carlton struck up a conversation about tattoo conventions, and it wasn't long before they realized they shared a similar vision. "We started brainstorming," Smith says. "I talked to him a day or so after that and said, 'Maybe we ought to do that.' I went home and talked to Erin about it; we crunched numbers, and a week later we sat down and talked to Joshua and Nikki [Carlton's wife] and said, 'Let's do it.' The company was formed at midnight."



EVERGREEN ORGANIZER
AND LIFETIME TATTOO
CO-OWNER ERIN SMITH

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