

Former banker now in her 'Element'



By Bill Bradshaw

Art shop opens in former jewelry store

JOSEPH — Leah Johnson is now in her Element: That's the name of the art studio and gift shop she opened recently in downtown Joseph.

"I like the simplicity of the word and the meaning — a part of something, a part of me, part of the community and science. I've always loved the periodic table of the elements, how it looks, how each element is made of atoms, specific parts," she said in a prepared statement. "It is a reference to me respecting more creative and artistic parts of myself with this new business."

After working for 17 years at Community Bank in Joseph — the past 12 as marketing manager — the Joseph native decided to go out on her own with her true passion: art.

"I also had been learning about the classical elements, earth, water, air and fire. I'm between an earth and a fire sign and my artwork uses earth (with wax, resin and pigment) and then is fused with fire or heat. ... So the name Element encompasses all the reasons I was going into the business and combining these things together."

Johnson's artistic medium fits well with her statement.

"I do encaustic painting and it's wax and resin, beeswax and tree resin are used to make the encaustic medium," she told the *Chieftain* Thursday, May 27. "You melt it and apply it on a flat surface. ... You can use oil paints to paint on your encaustic medium doing lay-



Element owner Leah Johnson shows one of her encaustic paintings that shows a view of the Wallowa Mountains from the Zumwalt Prairie on Thursday, May 27, 2021, in her new shop in Joseph.

ers and build up some color as you go. ... It's really fun. You have to fuse the layers together to make sure they adhere to the previous layers. You fuse it with a heat gun or a blowtorch."

After obtaining her college degrees in art and painting, she and husband, James Johnson, returned to Wallowa County. He owns Joseph Hardware across the street.

"When we moved back here, it was just a great job available and so I just stuck with (the bank) and didn't really give the energy toward my creative side for quite

a while," she said. "It was a pretty creative job, if you're going to be in a bank, doing marketing is probably the most creative you can be, but I just started feeling I needed a career change or else I was going to work in the bank my whole career. I stumbled across the fact that this portion of the building was for rent."

So she set up Element at 2 S. Main St., in the former location of Stewart Jones Designs. She opened May 18 with a "soft opening" posted on social media.

"Now I'm on my own and

doing it," she said.

In addition to her own art, Johnson sells works by other local artists. Some of those include pottery by local farmer Terra Leven, bronze by Shelley Curtiss, pottery and stoneware by Jack Coelho, woodworking by Christian Niece, robes and skulls from the Stangel Bison Ranch and vintage photos of the area.

"I'm hoping to get more of those in," Johnson said. "Some other people are working on things for me."

She also sells custom-made fur-

niture from Bilt Well in Portland, sheep-related items, down pillows and textiles.

Element also offers art classes on the encaustic medium.

"Part of the business is doing a Friday evening workshop if people are interested in learning and trying their hand at some small (encaustic) paintings," Johnson said.

Although she's been open only a short time, she's been encouraged by the start.

"I had a very good first week. Had a lot of good local support and a lot of people from out of town just happening by," she said. "I've already rearranged things on the wall because I sold a couple of my paintings and one of Shelley's bronzes yesterday. It's been really good."

Johnson is assisted part time by daughter Haven, who also has an artistic bent.

"A little. I do a little collage ... I am going to do some collage cards," Haven said.

Another local, Cailey Murray, also is helping for the summer.

Element is open 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. seven days a week for now. This fall or winter, after tourist season, Johnson expects she'll cut back her hours and take a little vacation time.

She said her husband and her parents, Joel and Marsha Svendsen, were a big help getting the building ready for Element's opening.

"They helped a lot with getting the building ready," she said.

For more information, call Johnson at 541-432-1911 or visit her website at www.leahjohnsonart.com/Element.

Bill Bradshaw is a reporter for the Wallowa County Chieftain. Have a business tip? Contact him at 541-398-5503 or bbradshaw@wallowa.com.



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CLUES ACROSS

- Protrude, with "out"
- Broad neckwear
- "C'est la vie"
- Greek H
- Group that sings hymns
- Huge concert venue
- Court, knight-style
- Late March, say (theme hint: in this answer, switch the last word's second letter with the one below it)
- Poem such as "Gilgamesh"
- Queen or drone
- Consumed
- Phoebe Buffay's portrayer on "Friends" (... first word's third letter ...)
- Reacts strongly to a sad movie
- Kafka's Gregor
- What puts the icing on the cake?
- Storefront info: Abbr.
- Hunk
- Aries animal
- Egg layer
- Perplexed
- First half of a pronoun pair
- Cheese sharpener
- Food with an al pastor style
- Best
- Iowan
- Dashes or sprints
- Prefix with "freeze"
- Come up with nothing (... last word's fourth letter ...)
- Word paired with neither
- A state of matter
- Without repeating
- Chinese regime known for its porcelain vases (... first word's second letter ...)
- Currently
- Toned down
- Verb that sounds like a cow part
- Flattering poem
- Focusing condition, briefly
- Drinks in steins
- ___ Talks

1	2	3		4	5	6	7	8		9	10	11	12	
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16				17						18				
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62	63	64						65				66		67
68								69					70	
71								72						73

CLUES DOWN

- Gems
- Perfect place
- Lao-tzu's philosophy
- Asexual, for short
- When doubled, Japanese hot pot
- Prepped, as an apple
- Fuel tanker
- Sample
- Put a halt to
- Hawaiian garland
- Author ___ M. Martin
- Droop
- Fitting
- Overlooked, as a fault
- "Cold, hard" money
- Activity that requires chops?
- Norwegian capital
- Plural possessive pronoun
- Uninspiring
- "___ time next week?"
- Soak up
- "Don't get soaked!"
- ___-mo
- "LMAO"
- Susan who played Belle on Broadway
- Its eye is in many a witch's brew
- PC company
- ___ Alto
- Crowned, in checkers
- Is unable to
- Make into a cipher
- Slantwise
- Striped gem
- Compost, e.g.
- September flower
- Drag queen Vander Von ___
- UFC combat style
- Birth control option, for short
- Indeterminate degree
- Short pencil
- Century's 100: Abbr.



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