Artist's seasonal images brighten local shop windows

BIZZ BUZZ

By Bill Bradshaw

Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain

John Michener, of Michener Murals, stands near a Halloween-themed window he painted at Sugar Time Bakery in Enterprise. Michener's work can be seen on numerous businesses around Wallowa County.

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A depiction of a bear wading across a stream while waterfowl are in flight by John Michener of Michener Murals graces one of the walls at the Back Country Little Store in Enterprise.

ENTERPRISE — In addition to the natural beauty of Wallowa County, John Michener decorates both homes and businesses with his artwork, and has been doing so for the past five years.

"I've been an artist my whole life," he said. "I've been doing murals since my 20s, so over 50 years now."

Many businesses in the county sport his works. One of the most noticed is El Bajío Mexican Restaurant at the corner of River and North streets in Enterprise. Michener added to the cuisine the restaurant serves by painting murals both inside and out, from Western-themed features to the agave plants on the walls of the bar. Agave is what tequila is made from.

Although most of Michener's work around Enterprise is on storefronts he's best known for his murals.

"I do everything from marine world theme parks, big 100-foot, 200-foot backdrops of whales or dolphins and that," he said. "There's not a lot of that here. I've been working at a new hotel they're building at the corner (of Main and River streets), I've got work inside there, the Elks Lodge mural, and NAPA Auto and El Bajío and in Joseph."

There's also Ace Hardware, Central Copy, Blue Mountain Computer, Umpqua Bank, the Bank of Eastern Oregon, Outlaw Motor Sports and others.

One of the more interesting is along the high walls of the Back Country Little Store in Enterprise. There, Michener painted depictions of a variety of wildlife in their natural setting.

Seasonal paintings

Many of the paintings go with the season, such as the Halloween-themed windows at Sugar Time Bakery.

"Some are waiting for Christmas," Michener said.

In fact, he said the seasonal decorations opened up a whole new area for his creativity.

"I started doing that about four years ago. I was doing it at Christmas and it caught on and started doing all the different seasons," he said. "It's fun because when I'm working on the different windows, people stop me in the streets and say they sure love the seasons and the storefronts all painted up."

International exposure

A Canadian by birth, Michener has done his artwork all over North America.

"I've got murals in different towns all over the United States and some in Mexico and some in Canada," he said. "I've done World's fairs and stuff," including Expo 86 in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

His medium

Michener paints almost exclusively with water-based acrylic and latex.

"All the windows are done water-based and it comes off really easy," he said.

His outdoor murals are of a high-quality latex water-based paint with a clear coat over them for protection against the sun's ultraviolet light. He said they hold up well.

"I have murals that are 20 or 25 years old," he said.

Generally, the only touching-up required is if a mural gets damaged. They do require a new clear coat every five years to protect against the UV light.

"If you get a good solid base and you don't have crumbling paint under it and you put a good primer on there and with the paint and clear coat, it works pretty good," he said. "The sun will beat down on certain colors — like reds will fade in the sun almost no matter what you do. If you put a clear coat on them, they last a lot longer."

Michener also does indoor work in homes, as well as businesses.

"I do all kinds of interior and exterior for homes," he said. "I can do kids' rooms or bathrooms. People can call me up and I can come by for a consultation and throw some ideas their way and how they can fix the place up, especially since people are stuck inside a lot these days, it's nice to bring another creative element into their house."

Credit where it's due

Michener appreciates the support he gets from the Wallowa County community.

"I've done all different kinds of styles over 50 years, from abstract to surrealism to realism and everything in between," he said. "A lot of times, because I've done different jobs for different people, I'm versatile, which is a good thing."

But he knows it's the people who fund his work who make it possible.

"I'm really grateful for the townspeople who throw out $100, $75 or $200 or whatever at this time of year (which) is often not a good decision … whether or not they can afford to do it," Michener said. "So the ones who do that, I'm really grateful for it and I want them to know that. The townspeople I run into all the time tell me how they love how the town gets decorated up. I can do it, but the credit goes to the store owners. They're the ones who make it possible and I really think it does contribute to lightening things up around here."

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

MICHENER MURALS

Who: John Michener

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Email: michenermurals@gmail.com

Online: Google John Michener artist; website coming

book loft & Skylight Gallery

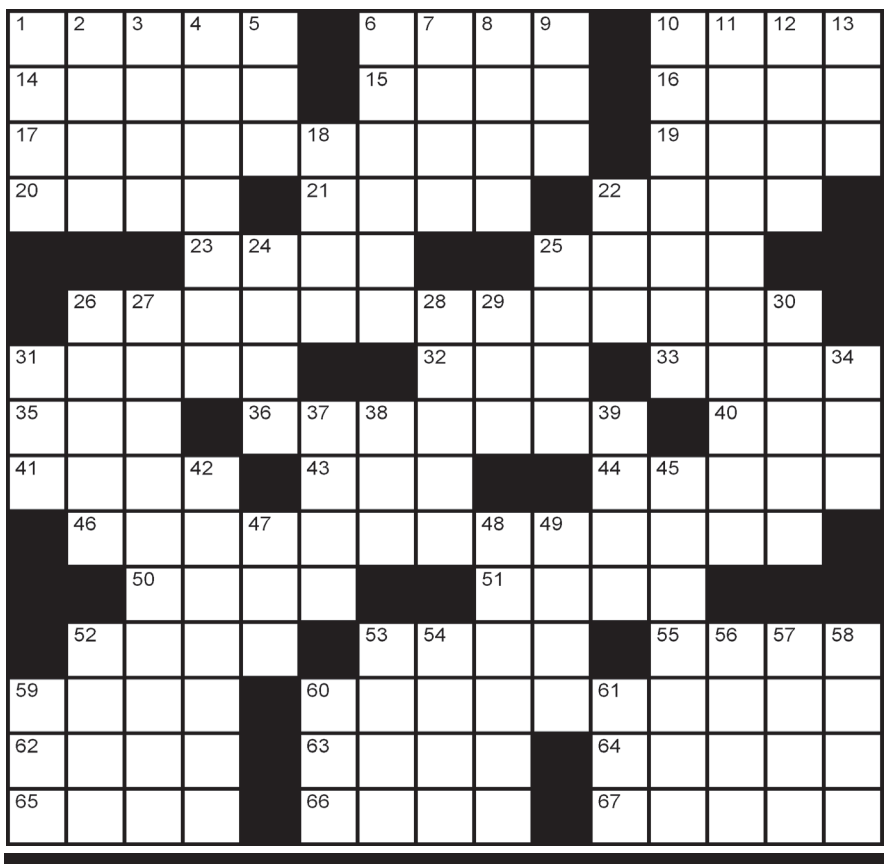
Finding books is our specialty

CLUES ACROSS

1. Luxury craft
6. Big oil grp.
10. "Just Do It" company
14. Possible reaction to unwanted flowers
15. Temporarily bright star
16. Sign of the future
17. Fantastic '90s card carrier?
19. Zipped and zoomed
20. Actor Rogen
21. "High ___" (classic Western)
22. Way off base, say?: Abbr.
23. "Como ___ usted?"
25. Draws on
26. "Hey, who's pretending to be rocker Liz?"?
31. Leather for some jackets
32. Toned
33. 'Vette roof option
35. Western neighbor of Ga.
36. "Why are you still bothering me?"
40. Sometimes-hazy brew, briefly
41. They're smart and funny
43. Futbol stadium cry
44. Crude abode
46. Connections at a scam call center?
50. Ad agency award
51. Take it easy
52. Varieties
53. Told, as a yarn
55. Muddy spot
59. Child's play, maybe?
60. Epic sigh of relief?
62. Mortgage adjustment, for short
63. Light snack
64. Do more than apologize
65. Word a sliding runner likes to hear
66. Kyle's bestie on "South Park"
67. Heavily promotes

CLUES DOWN

1. Puppy sounds
2. Tooth or ear malady
3. Have a convo
4. Someone with a short fuse
5. AAA service
6. From another museum, perhaps
7. Water ___ (Olympic sport)
8. Divisible by two
9. One may be feral
10. "Easy peasy!"
11. "Are you sure?" response
12. Backbone of a boat
13. Word before "point," "line" or "zone"
18. Marching insects
22. Firepit residue
24. Meal in a Crock-Pot
25. "I've had it ___ here!"
26. Blooming bulb
27. Annoying feline in comics
28. Frequently
29. Altoids container
30. Lassos
31. Didn't miss?
34. Friend
37. Hostess product similar to a Yodel
38. Famous boxer and trash-talker
39. Expert
42. Dressy neckwear
45. Nearly out of gas
47. Certain sib
48. ___-free restaurant
49. Penny, but not Abbey
52. Assemble-it-yourself furniture brand
53. Executive's apparel
54. Hummus scooper
56. Stack chain
57. Russo of "Thor"
58. Lambs' mothers
59. 12th graders: Abbr.
60. NFL signal-callers
61. "That feels wonderful!"



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