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“Art shouldn’t end just because they reside here in small quarters,” said Heidi Turner, assistant director of activities.

Turner works specifically with memory care residents, while Director of Activities Annette Posten works with those in assisted living. Throughout the week, they help guide residents through a multitude of art projects on various media, including wood, clay, jewelry, fabric, watercolors and acrylic paint.

“They’re very proud of what they’ve done,” Posten said. “We needed to help them show it off.”

The residents put in countless hours on art projects, with some finding completion months after the brush first graced the canvas.

“The families see their work that they put endless hours into, as they’re doing it, or as it’s done, but they don’t see all the other work that is done,” Turner said.

The artists at Spruce Point run the gamut from first-timers to seasoned pros. In fact, there are artists in the facility who have had their paintings sold and shown internationally, including Carol Van Curler, who won the Thiers Riverprize Commemorative Art Project for her work depicting the Siuslaw River Basin. She lives in the assisted living section of Spruce Point.

“I quit working at the Mapleton Post Office in 1979 and went up to Portland in the art school up there for a year,” Van Curler said. “Then I came back and started painting full time in 1980.”

Her medium of choice is oil or acrylic — watercolors are too hard.

She comes for all the art projects that Spruce Point holds, even if she isn’t feeling very artistic that day. She laughed at a small painting she did of a lighthouse.

“I hate to tell you this, but I wasn’t feeling good that day and I really didn’t want to paint,” she said. “So, I painted the least I could just so I could present something.”

The lighthouse she did paint was exquisitely detailed.

For Van Curler, art is a form of memory, encapsulating how she sees the world.

“I like to present things the way I see them,” she said. “Maybe that’s egotistical, but I think I see things better than other people.”

Her favorite painting, the only one she’s refused to sell, is one of the Mapleton Covered Bridge that resided just beside the post office she worked at. The bridge was torn down in 1971, but her portrayal of the bridge and how she viewed it at the time is a portal into her past, a specific time and place she lived in and how she viewed herself within it.

“I’m never going to sell it,” she said. “I still have it. I sell everything else, and I’ve sold a lot. But I’ll never sell that.”

Memory, time and art are intrinsically linked.

“Typically, for someone with a form of dementia, Alzheimer’s or otherwise, art helps them to stay focused and relaxed,” Turner said.

The purpose of art is not in the finished project, but in the process of doing it. The strokes of a brush, the mixing of the colors. It’s creating beauty in the moment.

“They could be doing something beautiful, but the second they look away, they just lost what they were doing,” Turner said. “You won’t have something for several days, but with encouragement and a little bit of coaxing, they get back into it. That’s why we’re so impressed with what they come up with.”

While helping the artists back into their work is a necessity, Turner said that they inherently know what piece of art is theirs.

“They know if they usually like to draw straight lines or shapes,” she said. “Let’s say you never in your life attempted to draw an animal, and all of a sudden there’s two horse heads looking at you. You know that’s not yours.”

The art that the group creates is inherently linked to who the artists are, and repeatedly recreating aspects of their personality in their work creates a connection that transcends cognitive memory.

The texture of the different media can also create a link to the past: a piece of wood that recalls a calming moment, the waxy feel



PHOTOS BY JARED ANDERSON/SIUSLAW NEWS

**Spruce Point artists practice art in a variety of media each week, led by their activities coordinators and a desire to connect to nature and their memories.**

of crayon that brings them back to their childhood.

“Texture is very big,” Turner said. “They can feel that and it can take them to somewhere that is, hopefully, comforting for them.”

Color is also a big component in helping express an artist’s personality, the importance of which can be seen in Moss’ work.

Moss has 60 percent vision loss. “Because of that, reds, oranges and yellows are the colors I see the best, so those are the ones I tend to drift towards,” she said.

Her artwork pops out from the canvas, with flowers saturated in various warm shades of red. It creates a different vision of nature not generally seen.

“And I love painting nature, trees, the ocean, birds,” she said. “When I go outside and sit on the patio here, there are all these birds that fly around and they’re just chirping away. To me, it feels like they’re rejoicing. Praising God. Other people don’t hear that, but I do. I’m happy to be alive, tweet, tweet.”

Moss said that not everybody in assisted living appreciates the art projects.

“There’s a couple of residents here who go, ‘Oh, that’s silly and a waste of time.’ Honey, if you don’t like it, don’t do it,” she advised. “People who are traditionalists, or who have been forced into early retirement, all they can think about is going back to work. They live their job. That’s not the world, sweetie.”

Moss credited Spruce Point with giving her the time, and the opportunity, to help develop her artistic expression, which is something she felt she couldn’t do in the past.

“I think now that we’re older, we should have the opportuni-

ty to explore our creativity more than we did when we had to have a 9-to-5 job,” she said. “Now that we’re older, there should be no limits.”

Photographer Brigitt Lyon couldn’t wait to get out of her career to pursue art. She had worked in different media all of her life — drawing, painting and photography. She spent most of her career as an administrative secretary, which took her to cities like Berlin, which she found to be “quite the experience.”

But her job as a whole? “Boring stuff,” she said. “I’m sorry, but it was office work.”

It wasn’t until 2003 when she retired that she really hit the ground running when it came to her true passion — photography. She had always loved the medium but found developing intimidating.

“I was given a digital camera, and that’s really more instantaneous, and I really started playing around with it,” Lyon said. “I just enjoyed it very much.”

She grew up in Prussia, close to the Baltic Sea, and Lyon’s family would take vacations to the pen-

insula. The area had dunes and pine forests, right down to the water’s edge.

“It wasn’t until I settled here that I said, ‘My goodness, I’ve seen this before,’” she said.

It was just like coming home. “In Oregon, I think we’re really blessed with such beauty. You can’t help but try and capture it. The landscape just begs for it,” she added.

And it’s capturing that landscape that fulfills a need inherent in everyone.

“It’s part of the creative nature that we’re born with,” Lyon said. “And it’s satisfying. You know, the world around us is just full of amazing things. It just wows me what we see.”

Like Lyon, Audrey Carmical couldn’t wait to get to her art. She didn’t learn how to paint until she was 30 but has painted steadily since then.

“From about 30 on, I would say, ‘I get my work done, and then I can paint,’” Carmical said. “I loved it.”

Her first experience was with oils in Hawaii.

“I had a lot of small oil paintings drying with the fan, and they weren’t good at all,” Carmical said. “And my husband said, ‘I think you need lessons.’ That was an understatement.”

She started taking classes in watercolor because she felt waiting for oil to dry was tedious. She liked the fast nature of watercolors, and the pristine look of it.

Carmical said that every artist has to pick the medium that best fits their personality.

“I was addicted to painting — my passion was painting,” she said.

She was a school teacher for a while, then a housewife. She would clean the house as quickly as possible just so she could get to her studio. When her husband retired, he made frames and helped with matting.

“We moved to Florence, and they had exhibits that I’d compete in,” she said. “Competing was just for myself. First, I got in a rack in one room, and then I got on a wall. Just competing

with myself to get in bigger displays gave me something to work for.”

Carmical doesn’t paint much anymore, as she finds it difficult to get around. But she hasn’t lost her artistic touch. She’s taken prints from her original paintings and places them on cards that are sold in the area.

She said she couldn’t think of anything better.

“Art enriches your life,” Carmical said. “You see things that you’ve never seen before. You see shapes, you see shadows. You see so many things. It’s a must in your life. All of us need a creative outlet of some kind or another. It does enrich your life.”

The community can see these artists, along with many others, at the Art for Our Lives art show on Wednesday, Aug. 8, from 1 to 4 p.m. at Spruce Point, located at 375 9th St. in Florence. The event, which is free to attend, will include a wine walk, hors d’oeuvres, tours of Spruce Point and a chance to meet the artists.

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