

Local artist remembered for work on the 'Great Sneaker Spill'

McLeod from Page 1A

"He lived close to the rhythms of the tides and of the forests," said Watt Childress, co-owner of Jupiter's Rare and Used Books. "He really loved this place."

A memorial service will held 6 p.m. June 24 at the American Legion Post 168.

Beach scenes

Born Aug. 17, 1944, in Long Branch, N.J., under the name Steven McLeod Woodward, he was raised in the San Francisco Bay Area, served in the U.S. Coast Guard and earned a bachelor of arts degree at Utah State University. He adopted "Steve McLeod" as his artistic signature, though he never legally changed his given name, his older brother, Wayne Woodward, said.

In the early 1970s, McLeod settled into Arch Cape and, later, Cannon Beach, where he and other local artists, including Frank Lackaff and Bill Steidel, helped shape the town's identity as an arts colony.

McLeod co-founded the White Bird Gallery with

Evelyn Georges in 1971 and displayed his work there and in other regional galleries.

For years, McLeod mostly painted realistic beach scenes featuring things like dories, Haystack Rock, the Tillamook Rock Lighthouse and the Columbia River — work that Cannon Beach resident Marilyn Rooper called "absolutely gorgeous."

"His paintings were masterful," Cannon Beach resident Karolyin Adamson said. "What he could do with light on water was just magical."

Steidel said McLeod was "rather shy and bashful about his work."

"But, at the same time, he was very proud about what he did," Steidel said. "In my mind, he was one of the best artists that Cannon Beach has had."

A new direction

Then, Picasso-like, he entered a new period. His paintings grew less representational, more impressionistic. He began creating kelp-and-seaweed sculptures and collages and other artwork fashioned with the

spoils of his beachcombing, particularly plastic and Styrofoam litter.

"He was looking for things that were not useful to anybody else, stuff that had washed up," Wayne Woodward said. McLeod, a consummate environmentalist, didn't like to see trash on the beach. "He was trying to find useful ways to use that, so he would make sculptures out of it."

Some of McLeod's final work consisted of landscape imagery painted onto small cardboard wine boxes. "I believe (the wine boxes) allowed Steve to experiment with this style without having to commit with large expensive canvases or framing," White Bird Gallery owner Allyn Cantor said.

Though McLeod's later work didn't sell nearly as well as his more accessible seascapes, Sharon Amber, a Cannon Beach artist, told him his abstract work was top-notch. McLeod told her, "This is what's in my heart. This is what I really like to do," she said.

"A lot of people don't understand abstract art," she

said. "If he could have taken it to New York, he would have been famous, I think."

Rooper said that a true artist, like McLeod, "wants to go places where he hasn't been, moving on, trying new things."

Pierre Toutain-Dorbec, who was collaborating with McLeod on a photo book of three-dimensional landscapes based on the artist's sculptures before he died, said Steve was a "true free spirit," which is very rare, he said.

Soles lost at sea

Had McLeod never produced a single work of art, he still would have achieved a kind of immortality thanks to the Great Sneaker Spill of 1990.

On May 27, 1990, a freighter sailing from Seoul, South Korea, lost 21 steel containers; five held tens of thousands of Nike sneakers, four of which broke open, spilling 61,280 shoes into the North Pacific Ocean. The floating footwear eventually turned up along the coastlines of British Columbia, Washington and Oregon, according to a column by flotsam expert Curtis Ebbesmeyer and journalist Eric Scigliano.

When Ebbesmeyer met McLeod, the scientist learned that the "classic starving artist" had gathered beached Nikes from Cannon Beach, Arch Cape, Tillamook and elsewhere, recorded the location where each was found,



ERICK BENGEL PHOTO

In honor of his life, one of McLeod's kelp sculptures, which he made many of in his later years, sits in the window sill of The Bistro in downtown Cannon Beach.

sold many of them and sometimes incorporated the shoes into his art, Ebbesmeyer wrote. What's more, McLeod had networked with other beachcombers, arranging swap meets and trade fairs where owners of ocean-borne Nikes could acquire the missing mates.

Ebbesmeyer used McLeod's information to refine his models of ocean currents. The Smithsonian Institution put on an exhibition illustrating current flows that included some of McLeod's Nikes, Cannon Beach resident Peter Lindsey said.

'More caterpillar than butterfly'

By all accounts, McLeod was kind and intelligent,

known for hiking and foraging in the North Coast wilderness and living softly on the land.

While surviving on his art, McLeod secured a few patrons and held down part-time jobs. He often ventured into the nearby forest reserves to hunt for chanterelle mushrooms and sell them to restaurants.

"Steve was an extremely wiry, agile person who could get across the landscape quite handily," Lindsey said.

McLeod lived an independent and intensely private life, which bordered on reclusive, Wayne Woodward said.

"He was more caterpillar than butterfly, socially speaking," Childress said.

McLeod told his family that, upon his death, he wanted all of his artwork and belongings given away. So, late last month, his older brother, Wayne Woodward, and Woodward's wife, Marci Woodward, opened McLeod's loft apartment, just west of the Coaster Theatre, for the community to take what they wanted. His paintings were claimed in no time.

"The community was his family, too," Marci Woodward said.

Days before he died, McLeod told his brother that he was "pretty happy with his life," Wayne Woodward said.

Council selects budget items

Budget from Page 1A

on measures including renovations to City Hall, repair of the city's downtown tennis and basketball courts, and construction of a new plaza at the west end of Second Street. The plaza will feature benches, low lighting and a rebuilt sidewalk. Funds will be available for the reconstruction of the Spruce Street blocks between First and Third streets to make them ADA-accessible, and for repair of the public works garage.

With the filling of two new staff positions, the information technology director Russell "Rusty Barrett" and finance director, Laurie Sawry, personnel costs will increase about 12 percent for fiscal year 2015-16. Barrett is to earn an annual salary of \$67,000 for a 32-hour week; Sawry will receive an annual salary of \$85,000.

In a May letter to the council, however, City Manager Brant Kucera told members the actual amount the city has spent on IT services during the last two years has exceeded the budgeted amount by more than 50 percent.

Personnel services overall, including the roads fund, total \$3,489,355.

Room tax to support visitors' center

Seventy percent of a 1-percent room tax increase will help fund the Visitor Information Center through the Chamber of Commerce while 30 percent would go into the city's general fund. The increase is expected to generate approximately \$260,000 for the next fiscal year; 70 percent, or \$182,000, would go to the chamber to spend on its information center, and 30 percent, or \$78,000, would go into the city's general fund. In previous meetings, the budget committee discussed a half-percent tax increase that would have kicked in July 1, 2015, and raised only \$140,000 exclusively to fund the information center.

With the 1-percent tax hike, the chamber will enhance its website, grow its marketing efforts, continue leveraging social networks, make repairs to the chamber building and add spindle racks to the information center, Courtland Carrier, executive director of the chamber, said.

If the tax carries over into FY 2016-17 — the tax's first full fiscal year in effect — it would generate at least

\$280,000: that is, \$196,000 (70 percent) for the information center, \$84,000 (30 percent) for the general fund. The extra tax revenue in the general fund could support the Cannon Beach Library, which Kucera recommended in May should become a line item in the city budget.

Vote of confidence

In an executive session prior to the regular meeting, Mayor Sam Steidel and council members provided an evaluation of City Manager Kucera. The council discussed their six-month evaluation at the city's May 5 meeting, and prior to Tuesday's meeting the council reviewed the evaluation with Kucera. Kucera was hired in October 2014.

"I think he's doing a great job," said councilor Wendy Higgins. "We're keeping him."

"I'd like to say thank you, Brant, for a great job," said councilor Mike Benefield.

The board unanimously adopted the six-month performance evaluation.

"Brant Kucera has met or exceeded all our expectations," said council member Melissa Cadwallader after the meeting.

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