

DragonFire celebrates 15 years by giving back

Art show raises funds for North Coast Land Conservancy

By Lyra Fontaine
Cannon Beach Gazette

DragonFire Gallery is getting “wild” this weekend at the Spring Unveiling Arts Festival. The gallery’s 25-artist group show “Wild Spirit, Conservation for Life” features artwork in various medias expressing the natural environment.

To mark its 15th year in Cannon Beach, DragonFire will donate 15 percent of sales during Spring Unveiling to the North Coast Land Conservancy.

“They went on my radar big-time when I heard about the clever work they were doing,” DragonFire owner Eeva Lantela said. “They’re such a great organization.”

Lantela wants to highlight the North Coast Land Conservancy’s work to connect and preserve lands and waterways. The local nonprofit helped expand Ecola Creek Forest Reserve, restored a floodplain at Circle Creek, and recently signed an agreement to purchase Boneyard Ridge on Tillamook Head.

Fundraisers like DragonFire’s could help raise money to help purchase Boneyard Ridge, which currently has about \$1.1 million of the \$1.3 million needed.

“Everything adds up,” Lantela said. “I think what I like more than anything is raising awareness both with our customers about it and their possible participation or donation to help.”

Lantela said moving to Cannon Beach in 1999 with her late partner, Mari Rockett, was “mind-blowing.” “I always thought that I was so lucky to be able to live here,” she said.

Lantela and Rockett had a “paint your own ceramics” shop before they decided to open a gallery. Eight years ago, DragonFire expanded and moved into its current space.

Starting a business in a seasonal town like Cannon Beach can be challenging, and Lantela said the gallery

was in “survival mode” until recent years. She brainstormed how to give back to the community that helped fuel DragonFire’s success, and its 15th anniversary presented one opportunity to do so.

“I’m excited to use my business that has been so good to me to give back to community and to raise awareness and be a part of something I feel is important,” she said. “It’s not all about making money and it’s so easy to get caught up in that, especially in the art world.”

DragonFire donates proceeds from its “Wild” section, started by Lantela several years ago, to the North Coast Land Conservancy, Clatsop Animal Assistance and the Wildlife Center of the North Coast. Last year, about \$10,000 of proceeds was donated from the section, which has books, notecards, T-shirts and more.

The “Wild” section is one way that tourists can help raise money for organizations that “keep the place so beautiful that people want to come and visit.”

Although she was born in Finland, Lantela spent her childhood in Canada, where her family worked in commercial fishing and she learned the importance of clean streams.

“If you don’t have clean land and water, what have you got?” Lantela said. “The most basic thing is a clean environment. We can’t live without it.”

Energetic art in a colorful space

Lantela attributes the success of both DragonFire and the artists whose work hangs inside to the close, trusting between the two.

“I care about all of the artists,” she said. “It’s such a personal business. I like to know the person and I like them to know us.”

The gallery is known for its diverse body of contemporary original art, 90 percent created by Northwest-ern artists.

“Even if there’s a storm outside, you forget about it when you’re in here,” Lantela said. “We meet a lot of really nice people. For the most part, I don’t think grumpy people like it here. We’re too happy.”



LYRA FONTAINE/CANNON BEACH GAZETTE

DragonFire Gallery’s owner Eeva Lantela is passionate about raising funds through the arts.

Lantela encourages people to come in and look at artwork, even if they don’t purchase it.

“I know people may not buy anything ever and they come regularly but they love the artwork,” she said. “It’s important for art to be looked at even if they don’t end up finding a home.”

The saying “Art saves lives” resonates with Lantela. She said she is driven by the strong, healing connections that can be made through artwork.

“There’s something important that happens with you connect with a piece of art that really speaks to you,” she said. “Everyone doesn’t necessarily buy art for a soul-level understanding, but I love when that connection happens for people.”



On Friday, May 6, from 4 to 6 p.m., the gallery will host a “Wine & Chocolate Reception” with an unveiling of Andrew Holmberg’s newest blown glass creations and a North Coast Land Conservancy presentation by Executive Director Katie Voelke. The group show begins at 10:40 a.m. on Saturday, May 7. The daylong event includes a book signing with Bonnie Henderson, artist demos and a reception with live music. An 11 a.m. brunch Sunday, May 8 includes artists, demos, music and unveiling.

Eagle sculptor ‘a rebel’

Eagle from Page 1A

To show her sculptures are 100 percent handmade, she prefers to sculpt “slightly stylized,” like when she adds personal, artistic touches to the eagle’s fathers.

“It’s realistic,” she said, “but there’s some contemporary stylization.”

After completing the clay original, she will cut the eagle into smaller sections, since she casts about 3-by-2-foot sections at a time, and the pieces will be made into about 300 molds.

Soderberg-Greene uses a foundry process that she said was used centuries ago.

“It’s the same method Michelangelo used and all the old civilizations used but with a little more technology,” she said. “I love welding and the whole production process, the whole historical process, keeping that alive.”

Soon, she will rent an old fire station to complete the eagle’s bronze casting, in time for the client commissioning the eagle to promote it using a large semi trailer.

Building and casting a sculpture of such massive scale is no easy feat. The sculptor said that although she sometimes wishes she had

“a robot doing all the hard work,” going up and down ladders and scaffolding all day is a “great workout.”

Soderberg-Greene is used to creating large-scale sculptures, though much smaller than 55 feet.

“The biggest I’ve done before are monuments of people,” she said, “and they’re only about 11 feet tall.”

The Port of Cascade Locks commissioned her statues of Sacagawea and Seaman, important figures in regional history. Soderberg-Greene said she enjoyed learning about Sacagawea’s “life and stories” and creating art for the community.

“I love public art,” she said. “I like to do bronze pieces because people can jump on it and interact with it and it won’t hurt it.”

Soderberg-Greene recently created a life-size bronze sculpture of a 5-year-old from Hood River who died from cancer. The sculpture will be placed on the girl’s grave.

“It was a pretty emotional experience. My heart just broke,” she said. “She was an amazing little girl, so vibrant and amazing and she fought it so much.”

The artist has also sculpted a pelican, owl, puffins, turtles, life-size dogs and more.

“I have a little bit more freedom sculpting animals,” she said, while portraits are focused on accuracy.

Although she creates prolific sculptures for various clients and is one of the first women to own a bronze foundry in the United States, Soderberg-Greene wasn’t always sure about making art a full-time career.

Growing up in Arizona, she created and sold her work before she was even in kindergarten. Her early sculpting skills, shaped by spending time in the foundry with her artist father, landed her in People magazine and National Geographic World.

Instead of pursuing art, Soderberg-Greene opted to study criminal science and psychology in college. After, she became a certified scuba diver in Hawaii.

“I completely rebelled and wanted nothing to do with art,” she said. “Then I understood that’s what I was meant to do.”

An near-drowning experience drew her back to sculpting.

“I took it for granted growing up in the foundry,” she said. “Now I love it and appreciate it.”

She got a job welding in a Portland foundry, began running her own foundry in 2009 and expanded to her current location in Cascade Locks.

Soderberg-Greene will return to Cannon Beach to unveil new work at Primary Elements Gallery, where her sculptures can be found year-round. She will be available to answer questions and demonstrate sculpting in clay for bronze sculpture Friday, May 6, from 1 to 5 p.m.

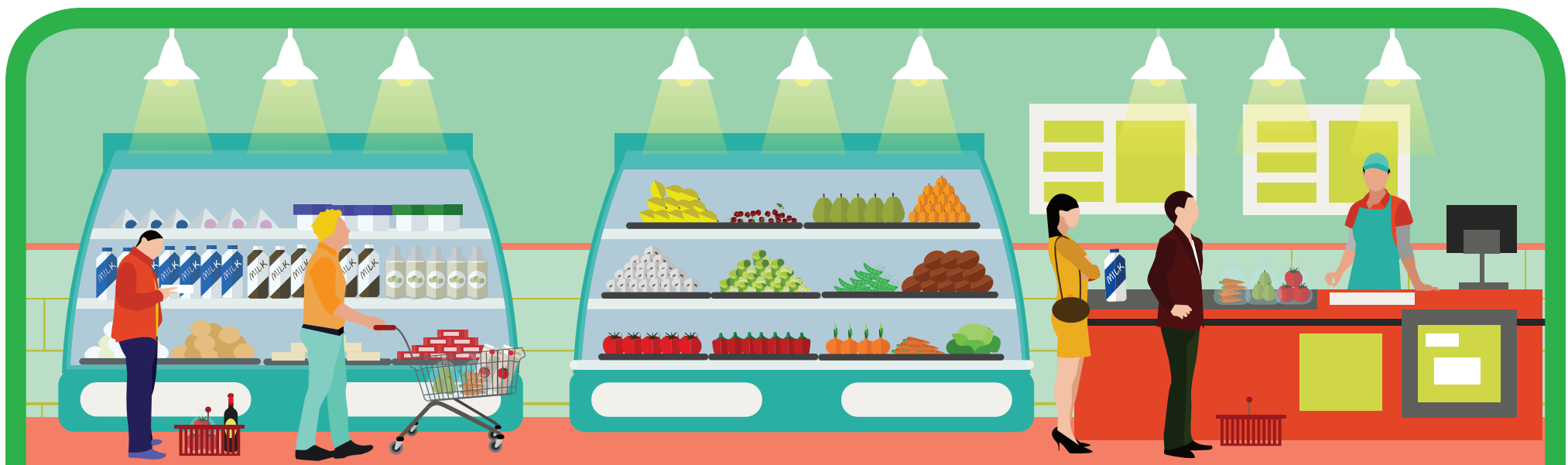
“Any chance I get to go there and participate in arts shows is just so much fun,” she said.

After the eagle, she has another sculpture lined up.

“It’s crazy in the art world,” she said. “It’s either total chaos or it’s dead.”

‘It’s the same method Michelangelo used ... but with a little more technology!’

Heather Soderberg-Greene



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