

Hat Rock artist puts abstract spin on nature

Hat Rock artist develops an international following with fresh look at nature

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
STAFF WRITER

Jean Cristofori Howton sees beauty everywhere.

"Cabbages are wonderful to paint and draw," she said, holding up a small painting layered in every shade of green imaginable. "They're drowning in deep shadows."

She slid the cabbage painting into a blank section of wall underneath a drawing of sheep, testing the fit. She was working last-Wednesday afternoon — as she was every day that week — to transform her home into the Hat Rock Art Gallery ahead of an open house she was planning for Saturday.

The house's architecture already has an art gallery vibe. Visitors walking through the front door are greeted by a mirrored wall underneath a spacious loft with vaulted ceilings. Natural lighting filters through skylights and tall windows with views of the Columbia River.

Most noticeable is the art covering every wall. In the kitchen, it's black and white pencil drawings of llamas and chickens. Upstairs, large abstract paintings present swirling mixes of rich color in the loft, while the "skywalk" connected to



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS
Artist Jean Cristofori Howton holds up a print of one of her original pencil drawings at her home Wednesday in Hat Rock.

the loft features oil paintings of planets in purple and blue.

On Wednesday, there were still some blank spaces to be filled with the paintings stretched across the carpet of the loft. Howton said she pulled much of the artwork from every nook and cranny of her house, where it has been stashed for years, but she was also working on

some new pieces that would be available at the open house.

"I had so many pieces of art tucked away everywhere, I'm getting everything uncluttered," she said.

Howton said she feels she was born an artist. She remembers how much she loved finger painting during her earliest school years, and after that she was

always "scribbling" something. Her art matured as she did, and in college she took plenty of art classes in various mediums.

She fell in love, got married and raised a family, but she never stopped drawing and painting.

"It just kept creeping along, and finally it was on a level that was professional," she said.

Howton has shown her work at galleries in the Pacific Northwest and in Europe. Posters from her French openings can be seen around the house.

She and her husband bought their Hat Rock home in 1986, but he died only seven years later. Afterward, Howton decided to head to France with a friend who was from there,

and she stayed 10 years in Normandy.

She loved the French art scene.

"They're very enthralled with artwork," she said.

The French countryside was an inspiration for much of her representational art, which often features rolling pastures of cows or herds of sheep. She is also fascinated by llamas.

"They're such strange creatures," she said.

Even the cabbage comes from France, where large, colorful, fresh produce was abundant.

"Vegetable shopping in France was absolutely amazing," she said.

Her abstract art is rooted in the natural world as well. A painting with yellow shapes is titled "Bug Wings," while one in beige and black is titled "Wren's First Nest."

Howton finds inspiration in walks around the Hat Rock area and paints in her loft, using wooden boards as palettes. After the boards are filled with layers of color, she cuts them up into their own unique pieces of art.

On Saturday, all of Howton's art was on display at her Hat Rock Art Gallery. She called it Le Crescendo, or "The Grand Sale," and welcomed prospective buyers. Photos of her work and other information about her past exhibitions can be found online at www.jean-creates.com.

Umatilla, Morrow counties look at joint transit plan

By **JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN**
STAFF WRITER

Mass transit is big-city fixture, but rural ride-sharing could soon be making a surge in Eastern Oregon.

Morrow and Umatilla county commissioners held a joint meeting Oct. 10 to hear a presentation about transit strategies for the region, which looked at the needs in each county for getting people to work, and some possible shuttle services that the counties could implement.

Commissioners from both boards said they will likely approve the plan at meetings later this month.

The Portland planning firm Kittleson and Associates spent about two years collecting data to complete the transit study, which included a breakdown of how many people work in each county, the major employers in each, the percentage of people that live and work in the same county versus those that commute, and the public transportation options currently available in each county.

The bulk of the report, which is available on both counties' websites, was devoted to identifying several transit strategies to target the region's current needs, along with each strategy's priority level and a time frame in which it could be implemented (near-term or long-term). Five potential new bus or shuttle services were identified, as well as two that would modify existing services. The services included four high-priority projects: transit from Board-

man to Hermiston, from Pendleton to Kennewick, from Heppner to Boardman, and a shuttle within the Port of Morrow. The report also included a strategy for a shuttle from Arlington to Boardman, ranked as a medium-level priority.

The report also offered plans to modify existing services between Grant County and Pendleton, using the existing transit service, Grant County People Mover.

Principal planner Matt Hughart noted that statewide, 8 percent of households have zero cars. The same is true for Umatilla County, and in Morrow County, only 3 percent of households have no access to a vehicle.

Hughart also broke down the numbers of people that get to work.

Only 37 percent of Morrow County's workforce lives there, with about 28 percent commuting from Umatilla County.

Sixty-six percent of Umatilla County's workforce lives in the county but, as Hughart noted, people frequently travel across the county to get to work. Hughart said the strategies address all targeted areas where there is a significant need, and that would serve the largest number of households and workforce.

According to the study, all of the strategies could be implemented by existing transit companies, such as The Loop in Morrow County or Kayak in Umatilla County.

Although the report laid out several specific trans-

it strategies that the two counties could implement, Hughart said none of the details are set in stone.

He added that while plans could be implemented separately, they would be most beneficial to the region if they function as pieces of one larger system.

"They really should be considered as layers — all implemented one on top of the other," he said.

The report included cost estimates to implement all the strategies. Hughart noted that the cost to implement the Boardman-Hermiston shuttle would be on the higher side — \$250,000 to \$300,000 — but would likely be the most utilized.

The funds would come from some statewide payroll taxes: the Statewide Transportation Improvement Fund (STIF), and the Special Transportation Fund.

Morrow County Planning Director Carla McLane said though both commissions may approve the plan this month, it may take some time to start implementing the strategies.

"I think the real question

is, how much money is actually being collected through the tax program, and how much is going back to the local communities?" She said. "And which projects will we prioritize?"

McLane said there are STIF Advisory Committees in both Umatilla and Morrow counties that will make recommendations to the boards of commissioners about which projects are most relevant to the area. Though the strategies have been formulated for both counties, each county will approve the plan separately, and can make changes to it individually.

The report also suggested setting up park-and-ride areas, which would allow people in rural areas to commute to a more central location in their own vehicles, and then take public transit to work. Though it identified park-and-ride areas as lower priority projects, Umatilla County Commissioner George Murdock said such areas could be beneficial to the region.

"It's about education and habit," he said. "We don't live in an area that embraces

anything other than driving your own vehicle — I don't think people think about that. So I appreciate the inclusion of park-and-ride."

To collect commuting data, the firm surveyed businesses in Umatilla and Morrow counties, asking employers about the number of full-time employees at the company, the hours of operation, whether the company offers any type of ride-sharing program and if they think employees would utilize such a service. Twenty-seven businesses and groups from both counties participated in the survey, including many of the largest employers: Hermiston and Pendleton school districts, Good Shepherd Medical Center, St. Anthony Hospital, Blue


Mountain Community College, Wildhorse Resort and Casino, and Port of Morrow Warehousing. Employers were surveyed, but individual employees did not provide information.

Umatilla County Commissioner Bill Elfering said while he thinks the plan is a good start, the second component is growing the workforce.

"I think this may help, but will it create a new worker? I don't know," he said.

Commissioners from both boards said they were happy with the increased inter-county collaboration.

"I think it's our third joint meeting, and I look forward to more," said Morrow County Commissioner Melissa Lindsay.



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