

Second life

Hermiston resident blossoms as a painter after painful hands force her to quit cake decorating

By ERICK PETERSON
Hermiston Herald

Barbara Swan, artist and Hermiston resident, had a 30-year career as a cake decorator. It was, for her, a way to express herself artistically.

Toward the end of this career, however, she happened upon painting. This hobby became a passion, renewing a love of art and stepping in to be a new creative outlet when her hands

pained her too much to continue with cake decoration.

The Hermiston Public Library honored Swan recently by making her the library's artist of the month. A collection of Swan's paintings is on display in the library through October.

When her father-in-law died in 2016, she inherited his art supplies. These supplies still were pretty new, because he had not used them much. This is a pity,

Swan said, as she thinks he had the ability to become a great artist. But she is glad to have received the paints, brushes, canvases and easel, and she intends to use them to the best of her abilities.

As she blossomed as a painter, she was declining physically as a professional cake decorator. The constant pressure of fulfilling orders was grueling. Her hands ached. And she could not go on.

Painting, however, did not hurt her hands. By 2019, she retired as a cake decorator, and she gave herself more fully to painting. By watching Bob Ross DVDs gifted to her by family members, and by studying under oil painter Ginger Blodgett and other instructors, she was improving her craft. Her brother, Steven Brunette, also was influential in her growth, as he is also an artist and could offer suggestions.

Brunette does ink-and-pen drawings of animals, including leopards and lions. He communicates frequently with Swan. She credited him when keeping her going when she grew irritated. Some of his suggestions included walking away from a painting for a while when it becomes frustrating. He also recommends stepping back from a painting and looking at it from a distance before proceeding on it.

From other artists, she has learned such techniques as painting or writing with the opposite hand to "trigger brain functions, getting left and right firing against each other," she said.

"To learn from other artist was eye-opening for me," she said.

She realized how little she knew, but she



Barbara Swan poses Thursday, Oct. 7, 2021, in front of a mural she painted on her property. The Hermiston artist frequently paints nature.



Barbara Swan paints on Thursday, Oct. 7, 2021, in her office, a studio in her Hermiston home.

also rekindled a love for painting.

In doing this work, Swan said she is happy to participate in the community of area artists, who are phenomenal, she said. Hermiston artist Mary Corp, watercolorist, is a favorite, but Swan has more.

Children and childhood

When she was in the sixth grade, she remembers, art entered her life. The mother of a fellow Girl Scout showed Swan's troop how to do pastels and chalk art.

She thought, "I can do this."

She got busy with other things, though, and she did not explore paint. A busy childhood led to an even busier adulthood. She had three children, who gave her 10 grandchildren. Now 64 years old, she looks forward to becoming a great-grandmother.

"They wear me out," she said of her grandchildren.

Laughing, she joked about the great energy the children have and the effort she has to expend to keep up with them. Still, she loves them dearly.

The youngsters have her paintings hanging in their homes, and they frequently sit with her and practice their own painting.

She paints to their interests, as well as her own. Their favorite works are her paintings of nature — animals and landscapes, in particular. They shy away from her abstract paintings, which she still enjoys.

Becoming established and growing

Many other of her paintings are hung in other people's homes, but she has also gained recognition from local businesses. She has some watercolors hung in Sno Road Winery, Echo, and some others in nearby business offices.

The Hermiston Public Library recognition makes her feel good. With it, and with some first-place awards at recent county fairs, she sees other people like her work and accept her as a quality artist. She hopes to continue gaining the attention of others, who will hang her painting in their homes and businesses.

She would also like to do mural work around town. She has painted a sunflower mural at her home, and it was fun. Maybe, she said, she can do similar work around town.

Swan's influences

Picasso and Monet are historical greats and Swan's favorites, as they were "cut-

ting edge of their times." She also likes the Impressionists. Having studied art history, she has other people she likes. Mary Shulman, Nicolas Wilton and Nellie Gill are contemporary favorites.

She is particularly impressed by artists who can paint quickly what is in front of them, or who can conjure a piece from an original idea. Swan works from photos, and she puts long thought into a work before even picking up a brush.

"Doing it spontaneously would be more difficult for me," she said, though she added she is practicing to be more spur-of-the-moment and looser.

As an artist, she is trying to share her experience and show the things she has seen. She has done some of this as a photographer, taking photos with her husband as they travel, but she finds more freedom with painting than with photography.

Through painting, she is able to convey her impression of a thing, rather than its literal appearance.

"I love nature, flowers, butterflies, bugs, all that stuff. They have their own beauty, but painting is different than photographs," Swan said. "I try to get others to see what I see."

Hermiston City Council tables action on local laws

Hermiston Herald

The Hermiston City Council's agenda for its meeting Monday, Oct. 11, had three updates to local laws. The council, though, voted to table all three to a future meeting.

The action drew a rebuke from Mayor Dave Drotzmann.

The council was going to consider updating following local laws:

- The code enforcement provision to give the code enforcement officer the authority to enforce parking violations, establish the option to cite violations to a hearing officer, establish

a parade permit process and simplify the regulation of bicycles.

- The nuisances ordinance to clarify and add a number of definitions and update language to current best practices.

- And structural maintenance regulations to clarify and update definitions, remove redundant material and establish the path of appeals.

But in each case, councilors raised concerns, particularly about appeals processes for possible violations, and one by one, the council voted to table the updates.

City Manager Byron

Smith suggested that in the future, the council review proposals and send their questions in advance of the meeting so staff can be ready with information.

Mayor Dave Drotzmann was more direct. He told the council it had asked staff to provide these proposals earlier in the week so there was time to review language before the meeting.

"So please review the stuff ahead of time," he told the councilors and get questions to staff before the meeting instead of "putting them on the spot."

The council did not set a time for when it would consider the updates.

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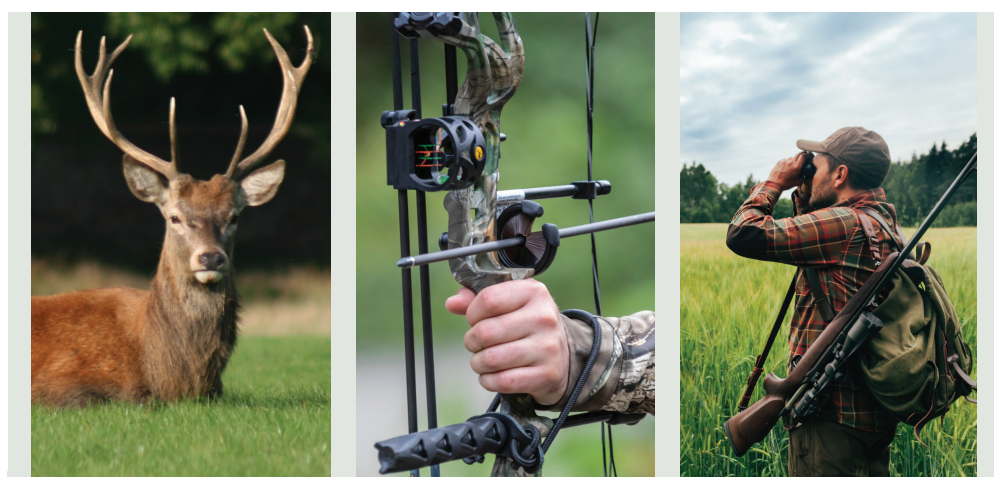
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