



Strokes of genius

Penn State New Ken gallery displays work of local painters

By Rex Rutkoski
Staff writer

Carrie Plumbo had not been back to the mountain camp that she remembered from her girlhood in 50 years.

That's why it was such a special occasion when the Lower Burrell resident and her cousins returned for a day recently to see their old swimming hole and camp to re-live old times.

"It was so exciting. It inspired so many memories. I couldn't wait to paint it," she says.

The result is "Three Pines," a watercolor that she has entered in the East Suburban Artists League's annual show under way at Penn State New Kensington Art Gallery.

Each of the artists in the month-long show has stories behind the work they have hung.

Gloria Hersch of Murrysville was in a philosophical mood about the dawn of a new century last year when she took on her acrylic painting "The Dawn of Y2K." "I created the scene of a bird overlooking the dawn coming up, the birth of a new century. I wondered, 'What will this century be like?'" When her muse turned that bird into a predator, she wondered whether that was an omen about the millennium.

Intrigued by sunrises, Virginia Carey of North Apollo, a retired biology teacher, offers the watercolor "Sunrise."

"I just paint for my own benefit. I enjoy it. It's relaxing and stretches my limits," she says.

She likes the challenge of watercolors. "It's not like oils. You can't go over it again," she explains.

Lawyer Bob Bickers of Murrysville has a deep interest in American Indian art. One of his oils in the show is "Bushy Run Lunch Break," his painting of an Indian re-enactor



at Bushy Run stopping to eat lunch.

His love of the outdoors is seen in "Autumn Afternoon," an oil of a stream in Cook Forest with the autumn leaves backlit by the sun.

"It's a very exciting show to look at

The Penn State New Kensington Art Gallery is playing host to the East Suburban Artists League's annual show. At left, "The Dawn of Y2K" by Gloria Hersch of Murrysville. Below, "Bushy Run Lunch Break" by Bob Bickers of Murrysville. At bottom left, a stained glass work by Leslie Calhoun of North Huntingdon.

Photos by ERIC FELACK, staff photographer



because of the variety," says Bud Gibbons, gallery director and art instructor. "Each artist has a different style." The works range from stained-glass through oil to watercolor. The subject matter ranges from landscape to still life.

Such showcases remind people of the talent in the area, says artist Sue Foster of Export, show chairman. She teaches adult education watercolor and drawing classes at Franklin Regional School District.

"There is a lot of talent," says Mort Hersch

If you go

- **What:** East Suburban Artists League
- **When:** Through November. 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Mondays through Fridays, noon to 5 p.m. weekends.
- **Where:** Penn State New Kensington Art Gallery, Seventh Street Road, Upper Burrell.
- **Cost:** Free.
- **Details:** (724) 334-6055; East Suburban Artists League: (724) 325-3090.

of Murrysville, president of East Suburban Artists League. "This is an exhibit where there are no monetary prizes, just an exhibit to show people our work."

Visitors can vote for best-of-show. The League is open to anyone with an interest in art. It's not even necessary to be an artist. Monthly meetings (7:30 p.m. the first Thursday of the month at Christ Lutheran Church, Route 286, Plum) include speakers and demonstrations. "The purpose is to encourage and promote art. It's for all levels of ability, professionals and amateurs," Foster says.

Lawyer Bickers finds art a way to relax. "I like the freedom of being able to express feelings of putting something down that is permanent that you always can look back at," he says. "It's a statement that, 'This is yours and yours alone.'"

He has been involved with art since childhood. "I sold drawings of race cars and space craft to my fellow classmates for a nickel a piece," he recalls laughing.

Bickers still does commission work but says his rates have gone up. "It's more than a nickel at this point," he says.