



CLAY PLAY

Artist-in-residence Annie Heron helps Seneca School fifth-grader James Mabe with his clay tile during a recent art project. Heron led the students in creating the tiles which depict area wildlife, and are now mounted in the school's restrooms. An open house of the new artwork will be held on Wednesday.

By Cheryl Hoefler

Blue Mountain Eagle |

SENECA – Bear Valley history and images grace many parts of Seneca School.

Now even the restrooms have gotten a makeover reflecting the Seneca area, thanks to a student art project led by artist-in-residence Annie Heron and the ingenuity of teacher Judith Beaudet-Reed.

Heron spent two weeks in late April helping the students make clay tiles depicting “Bear Valley flora and fauna.” The tiles are now adorning the walls of the school restrooms; those made by girls are in the girls room, and those by boys, in the boys room.

The students also made additional tiles to keep.

The idea was the brainstorm of Beaudet-Reed, who saw a similar project done by area school children in Bend, in the restrooms of Drake Park’s Mirror Pond Gallery.

“I thought to myself, ‘We could do that!’” said Beaudet-Reed.

Each tile has a drawing or imprint of a plant or critter ... beavers, eagles, trout and more ... native to the Bear Valley area.

The students first drew their pictures on 5X5-inch squares of paper, then traced the images into clay squares, sculpting out sections to give the image depth in a technique called “bas-relief.”

Once dry, the tiles were painted and fired in a kiln.

Seneca resident Suzi Hood assisted in the classroom.

Hood became not only neighbors with Heron, whose temporary Seneca home was next door, but friends, too, as they shared their common interest in ceramics.

Several people from the community helped mount the finished tiles, into a wooden framework built by Pete Walker and Levi Williams. “Spacer” 3x5 tiles, textured by pressing in objects such as pine cones, needles, bark and sage, were placed between the larger tiles.

Heron is from Eugene, where she’s lived for about 40 years. She has a bachelor’s degree in elementary education and a master’s in art education, both from the University of Oregon, and has taught art at many age levels, from preschool through high school.

Her medium of choice is clay, both free form and on the wheel. She frequents crafts fairs, including Eugene’s weekly Saturday Markets, and the annual Clay Fest, Oct. 7-9 this year, also in Eugene. Her work is also shown at Dirty Dishes gallery in Portland.

Heron’s stay in Seneca was thanks to Eastern Oregon Arts Council’s artist-in-residence program. Materials were purchased by Seneca School PTA from the school’s Educational Project Fund, which is funded by individual donors and Scratch-it Lottery winnings.

She said she enjoyed her time in Seneca and “would love to be called on by other schools.”

“I am quite thrilled to be discovering the natural beauty of Eastern Oregon.”

An open house to celebrate the art project will be from 5:30-6:30 p.m. Wednesday, May 4. The students’ individual keepsake tiles will be on display in the school library. Refreshments will be provided.