

Donna Besel – Focus on Local Artists – Issue #1

May 2012

The Winnipeg River Arts Council Inc. (WRAC) is a new regional organization, serving communities along the Winnipeg River corridor. First proposed in 2009, the concept grew into a non-profit board, incorporated in 2011, ready to deliver services and programming throughout Eastman. WRAC's goals include: 1) supporting literary, visual, performing arts/artists 2) sharing regional resources, information, talents 3) connecting arts organizations, schools, recreation services 4) enhancing quality of life for residents and tourists 5) helping the region reap economic benefits of its diverse arts and culture. For more information, or to express your interest, please contact Don MacLellan, President at 367-2627/ dsmaclellan@mymts.net or Donna Besel, Secretary at 345-8513/ dab3@mymts.net.

To fulfill one of our stated goals, WRAC decided to focus on new members who are artists. Once a month, WRAC will submit a short article and the artist's picture to help Winnipeg River communities learn more about arts practitioners in our midst. The first featured artist is Donna Besel, a writer from Lac du Bonnet.

Donna Besel writes fiction and nonfiction for various publications across Canada and her writing has accumulated numerous honours, including shortlist nominations for CBC's 2009 Literary Awards and CBC's "Canada Writes" 2007 competition. She leads writing workshops for all ages and has instructed groups on subjects such as art, music, outdoor activities, and trauma. She also works in the Manitoba Arts Council's *Artists in the Schools* program, teaching students across Manitoba about creative writing.

Donna Besel has lived in Lac du Bonnet, on the Winnipeg River, for over thirty-five years. In 2002, her story, "Dead Skunk," won second place in *Prairie Fire's* international competition. Since then, various arts organizations have awarded her scholarships and grants. After *Prairie Fire*, the well-known literary journal, published "Dead Skunk" and the short story nominated for CBC's Literary Awards, "Lessons From a Nude Man," they invited her to read from both stories at McNally Robinson Bookstore. She has done other public readings at schools and libraries, including Winnipeg's Millennium Library. She also volunteers as a board member for the Manitoba Writers' Guild.



Donna Besel

On May 10, she presented on a panel with two other rural writers as part of the Manitoba Writers' Guild Symposium on Manitoba Writing, held at the Canadian Mennonite University, attended by writers and academics from across Canada and around the world. Their presentation was called "Writing from the Margins – Farm, Forest and Frontier." On May 31, at 7:00 pm, she will read from her story "Sam, Lump, and the Boathouse Reno" at McNally Robinson Bookstore. *Prairie Fire* published this story in their latest issue, as part of their ongoing Boreality Project. This lively event will feature several well-known Canadian authors. Come out and support a hard-working Eastman writer.

Leah Boulet – Focus on Local Artists – Issue #2

June 2012

The Winnipeg River Arts Council is a new regional organization, ready to support and promote artists and arts organizations throughout Eastman and the Winnipeg River corridor. Once a month, WRAC will highlight a local artist or arts organization. Our second featured member is **Leah Boulet**, a visual artist who lives in St. Georges. Although she grew up in Pine Falls, she moved to this vibrant and culturally strong community after she married a young Francophone, twenty-five years ago. Boulet has the honour of being the very first artist who joined WRAC. Because she works as an accounting clerk at the Rural Municipality of Alexander office, she welcomes the chance to use the creative and free-flowing right side of her brain in her art. She is also a talented writer but finds that writing often requires too much concentration. Visual art allows her mind to relax and open up after she uses the mathematical left side of her brain all day long.



Leah Boulet

Boulet does pencil drawings, water colours, and multi-media collages that incorporate “re-purposed” books, journals, and photos from her church. Although she considers herself to be mostly intuitive and self-taught as an artist, in the past, she has taken art classes from Pinawa art teachers and from Pine Falls artist, Roberta Laliberte. Recently, she spent almost a week (June 17 to 22) at an art retreat called Arts West, in the Riding Mountain area. This retreat has been held at Camp Wannakumbac, on the west shore of Clear Lake, for the past twenty-four years.

Boulet’s art work has been exhibited in La Broquerie at a French cultural community exhibit called Carousal, put on by the Societe Franco-Manitoban. Her father, Marcel Pitre, writes monthly newspaper articles and also produces small books about local history that he distributes to friends and family. She helps him by editing his work and hopes he will someday publish larger books so she can illustrate them with her beautiful and unique art.

Kim Wilson – Focus on Local Artists – Issue #3

July 2012

The Winnipeg River Arts Council's monthly featured artist is Kim Wilson from Powerview-Pine Falls area, who has combined his passion for his art (magic) with his job (drug and alcohol counsellor at Sakgeeng Mino Pimatziwin Family Treatment Centre). As a child, Wilson lived in Brandon and Gillam, but moved to Great Falls because of his father's work with Manitoba Hydro. He attended high school in Lac du Bonnet and is now married to Laurie (Breton), manager of their co-owned business, Broadlands Mall. When Wilson was fifteen, his mother bought him a plastic magic hat and his uncle showed him a couple of card and coin tricks. After that, magic's spell completely captivated him. As a young man, he discovered Toad Hall Toys and met the owner, Ray England, who directed him toward the International Brotherhood of Magicians. To this day, Wilson still visits Toad Hall to check out the latest magic props.

In his thirties, while employed at the Pine Falls paper mill, Wilson developed a unique combination comedy, music, and magic act with friend Joel Lamoureux. For seven years, their company, Pinnacle Entertainment, filled auditoriums and toured across Manitoba, promoting their "stay-in-school " message. But, as often happens, changes in daily life ended their performances.

About four years ago, when Wilson and his wife moved into their new home on the Winnipeg River, he rummaged through his old boxes of magic equipment. With inspiration from an Oprah Winnifrey show and the book "The Secret," he declared his intention to reclaim his magic act, posted pictures of his heroes, such as David Copperfield and Doug Henning, where he could see them, and then declared his goal to perform in Las Vegas. In six months, a chain of events led to his "discovery" by an association of chiefs from U.S. and Canada who hired him to perform for two nights at a corporate function at Caesar's Palace. While there, he attended the McBride Magic and Mystery School, a college for master magicians, and did street performances with some of the most famous magicians in the world (Eugene Burger, Penn and Teller, Jeff McBride, Lance Burton).

In keeping with his philosophies of "never give up and never give in," Wilson once again performs widely to rave reviews ("a spectacular show") while inspiring others to transform their lives ("a positive role model"). His gigs include boat shows, cruises, charity events and he get hired by clients such as Pepsi and Lund Boats. He also plans to teach his magic skills through videos and wants to use special screens to highlight his close-up tricks (hand manipulations). For Wilson, it's entirely fitting that name of his workplace "Mino Pimatziwin" means "the good life." For him, magic, fun, and focused intentions have captured it all.



Kim Wilson

Joye Platford – Focus on Local Artists – Issue #4

August 2012

For August, the Winnipeg River Arts Council would like to feature Joye Platford, a visual artist whose work was recently exhibited during the August long weekend at the Green Water Art Show in Lac du Bonnet. Platford grew up in Pinawa, and has always done some sort of art or creating. If you give her markers, crayons, clay, paper, scissors, paint and glue, she is one happy person. She did art all the way through to grade twelve. After graduation, she studied to be a teacher. She taught in Winnipeg and later moved to Montreal to study theology and became a Presbyterian Minister. She has always taken art classes on the side because they filled her creative spirit. She has lived in Quebec, Ontario, Alberta, and Saskatchewan and has always found a community of artists to have classes and share in creative pursuits.



Joye Platford

In 2009, she was diagnosed with colo-rectal cancer and returned to Manitoba. When she was sick, she found strength with her family and her faith. She also found strength and comfort in making art. After visiting the oncologist for the first time, she went to the art store and bought a big splurge of art supplies. She didn't make any great works of art while she was sick but she doodled, painted and did pottery and it helped her face her struggles. She is better now – two years since she finished her cancer treatments!

Platford is fascinated with the connection between the creation of art and the human spirit. For her, making art is like another language, and it is like prayer. People say sometimes to her, "I can't do art." And she says, "Yes, you can you just have to start." She did an art and prayer class with Pinawa Christian Fellowship (PCF) last spring. She is going to offer another class this fall called "Art and Spirit," on Monday night for youth and Tuesday night for adults. The class will begin on September 17, \$25 for five weeks at the PCF office in the Lewis Center in Pinawa. Email joyezart@gmail.com if interested.

Platford is looking forward to continued good health and to being part of a creative community of artists in the Winnipeg River Arts Council.

Shirley Kurian – Focus on Local Artists – Issue #5

September 2012

The Winnipeg River Arts Council's September featured artist is Shirley Kurian, a photographer who has lived in Lac du Bonnet area for the past 10 years and works as a hairstylist in Shirley's Hair Salon. She loves living on the Lee River where the constantly changing natural environment provides opportunities for great shots. Just as she enjoys helping her clients look and feel great, she enjoys finding beauty in her surroundings. She says, "I love to take photographs! The outdoors is my inspiration, and photography is my passion and obsession." Her other passions include travel, gardening, walking, hiking, and kayaking.

For as long as she can remember, Kurian has liked taking pictures. She says, "My goal is to share what I see, through my lens." She photographs anything and everything that catches her eye. Recently, she exhibited her work at the Green Water Art Show, held in Lac du Bonnet on the August long weekend, where visitors responded with great enthusiasm to her pictures. She uses her camera to create unique images, aided by the changing light at dusk and dawn, and seeks to capture the abstract shapes, colours and muted tones she discovers around her. From her stunning photos, she creates framed prints and also makes her pictures into greeting cards. Her work can be found for sale at her own hair salon, Daisy Dew Drop in Lac du Bonnet, and the PCDC store in the Pinawa mall.

Kurian does not have formal training but has taught herself, refining her work through trial and error. However, she has taken photography workshops and courses, reads *Photography Magazine*, and finds plenty of information on the internet. She believes photography is the one thing that connects us to everything in the world. Her motto – "Find Beauty in All Things" is reflected in her art, and in many other parts of her life.



Shirley Kurian

Irene Friesen – Focus on Local Artists – Issue #6

October 2012

For October, Winnipeg River Arts Council features Irene Friesen, a potter, writer and gardener from Pinawa. She is also President of Pinawa ART 211 – an association of visual artists in Pinawa and area, and a member of Winnipeg River Arts Council.

As a potter, Friesen creates functional and decorative works from wheel thrown porcelain with incised designs, influenced by totem art and the prehistoric pottery of Old Europe. Her love of nature, in the guise of Mother Earth, infuses her work. As much as possible, she uses environmentally friendly methods in her pottery production process. For 30 years, Friesen has honed her artistic skills, working with potters in various communities. While in Winnipeg, she learned from master potter, Kathy Koop, at Stoneware Gallery. Now Friesen teaches emerging potters in North Eastman how to create wheel thrown pottery.

In 2011, she participated as one of six artists in the “Art in the Forest” event. In recent years, she has exhibited at Eastman Juried Exhibitions, EMAC Art Shows, the Forks and Green Water Art Show. Prior to moving to Pinawa in 2007, she sold her work out of Winnipeg’s Medea Gallery and Gallery 659. Each year, Friesen holds spring and fall sales in her Pinawa home, the “round house” at 1 Lisgar Place. Upcoming sale on November 10 will feature “bowls, bowls, bowls.” She also sells her work at Lac du Bonnet Christmas Craft Sale and Pinawa Market.

As a gardener, she incorporates nature’s designs and sculptures in her Terra Mandala Meditation Garden, which draws up to 400 visitors from all over the world every year. As a writer, Friesen has published several books based on the oral history method, as well as numerous articles and technical publications. Her other passion is train travel. She has travelled on Trans Siberian Railway, Trans Mongolian Railway, Pacific Coastliner, and Deutsche Bahn, as well as Via Rail.



Irene Friesen

Charles Niedermayer – Focus on Local Artists – Issue #7

November 2012

This month, WRAC features Charles Niedermayer, from Powerview, a multi-talented artist who creates custom knives, carves wood, does taxidermy and makes jewelry. He also handcrafts paddles, snowshoes and various outdoor equipment. Now retired, Niedermayer worked as a power engineer at the Pine Falls mill but he always created his many artistic projects in between shifts and on weekends. And, although he recently turned eighty-four, he continues to make beautiful works of art.

His great love of the outdoors led him to knife making. In 1970, he made his first knife and when friends saw his creations, they wanted to buy them. When asked, he smiles and says he is self-taught, but took one metal heat-treating course, by correspondence. He also read books and magazines, and asked steel companies lots of questions. First he made his own grinder and then bought a professional unit. Then he collected tools such as a band saw and drill press. By the early 1980's, he had established a knife making business.



Charles Niedermayer



Niedermayer Knives

Niedermayer knives have been exhibited at knife shows in Toronto, Vancouver, and Calgary, and at gun shows in Winnipeg. He has sold them to customers from all across Canada, Africa, Scotland, Germany, New Zealand, and United States. Hunters in the Arctic especially love his knives. All sales are generated by word-of-mouth. Despite no advertisements, he still can't keep up with requests, which new owners seek as exquisite gifts or as collectors' items. His customers do not quibble at his prices, because they can instantly see the amount of work which has gone into each creation.

Niedermayer crafts his knife handles from various materials: deer, elk and moose antlers, ivory, bison horn, metals, jawbones of bear and timber wolf, and exotic woods and shells from all over the world. He shapes and heat treats his blades in the summer, making a few copies of the popular styles. He also handcrafts the sheaths, cutting leather, hand sewing, decorating the outersurfaces with stencils and etchings, and installing plastic inserts so the knives are protected and don't slip out. He also makes knives for chefs, for which he creates special wooden sheaths. His wife Christine has an impressive collection of kitchen

Brenda McKenzie – Focus on Local Artists – Issue #8

December 2012

For December, Winnipeg River Arts Council features Pinawa artist/author, Brenda McKenzie. After a Christmas gift of a paint-by-number kit sparked her interest in painting, McKenzie's Grade 9 art teacher, John Eisler, encouraged her to take youth classes at Winnipeg Art Gallery. Later, she enrolled in University of Manitoba's Faculty of Interior Design, where she learned about design, composition, value work, and colour, under the tutelage of Grant Marshall and Harry Adaskin.

In 1971, newly married, McKenzie arrived in Pinawa, took art lessons with Vivian Thomson, and learned water colour and oil painting techniques. Presently, her repertoire also includes graphite work, pen and ink, and mixed media – using inks, coloured pencil and water-based media. When Thomson retired from the Whiteshell School District, McKenzie replaced her in the school's art program.

Five decades after that first kit, McKenzie continues to produce landscapes but recent creations include portraits and still life. She sells her work at Eastern Manitoba Artists' Collective and Pinawa Art 211 shows. It is displayed at the Cre8ery Gallery (Winnipeg) and Gwen Fox Gallery (Selkirk). The Parish of St. Francis (Pinawa) commissioned her to do a painting of their new church, displayed at Sobering Funeral Chapel (Beausejour). Recently, she illustrated a local author's cookbook and has started pencil drawings for a book on World War II London.

After McKenzie retired in 2004, she wrote a novel, Loving You, based on her family's experience of Alzheimer's disease and the resulting three year wait for her mother-in-law's placement. The book can be purchased at "Uniquely Pinawa" (Pinawa), Ingham's Pharmacy (Lac du Bonnet), Pharmasave (Beausejour), Blaines Books, Movies and Music Store (Selkirk Plaza Mall), and McNally Robinson and Coles in Kildonan Place and City Centre (Winnipeg).

Recently, McKenzie volunteered to coordinate the 2013 Eastman Judged Art Exhibition. This event will be hosted by Pinawa Art 211 at the Pinawa Community Centre, June 12-15, 2013, and will showcase hundreds of artistic entries from throughout the Eastman region. To enter or learn more, contact lejaemckenzie@gmail.com.



Brenda McKenzie