

Artistic Integrity

Trout Lake festival grew from humble beginnings to annual regional event

By Judy Holman, Trout Lake Arts Council

In 1996, Laurie Sherburne had an idea for Trout Lake: "This place could use an art festival."

In the foothills of Mount Adams, the small valley's economy is based on agriculture and timber. It might seem problematic to try organizing an art festival in such a place.

But there is more than first meets the eye. The natural resources and beauty of the area draw numerous visitors. Summer brings campers, huckleberry and mushroom pickers, hikers, mountain climbers and cyclists. Fall is time for hunting, and winter for snow sports.

The Trout Lake Valley has enticed more than its share of artists and art lovers with its natural beauty and tranquility. So when Laurie suggested an art festival, there were those who listened.

Laurie, an artist and teacher, was joined by Bonnie Reynolds, an art lover, and Jim Bull, an activist in theater, to make the first event a reality the third weekend in July 1996.

Little did the three pioneers realize what lay ahead. The first year was simple. Jim was active in the Volkssport club in Klickitat County, and organized a walk and bike ride in Trout Lake on the festival date.

Members of Volkssport and the Trout Lake community visited the first show. After a garage sale for seed money, the festival premiered with 12 artists at the local school.

Sixteen years later, the festival will host 50 juried artists and expect more than 3,500 visitors July 15-16.

Laurie still spearheads the festival, which, in its second year, produced the nonprofit Trout Lake Arts Council. The council's 14 members plan the event all year.

However, without community support, the festival never would have grown into the largest art event in Klickitat County.

The event found a permanent home in its second year after Dean and Rose Hostetter, owners of the Farm Bed and Breakfast, volunteered to host the festival.



Artist Bonnie White of White Salmon, who has been part of the Trout Lake Festival of the Arts since its beginning, chats with a patron at her booth.

The Farm's historic farmhouse celebrated its 100th birthday in 2010. The rustic barn and perennial garden show off the art. Large shade trees make a perfect place to rest and enjoy the music on the backyard stage. Food and beverages are available nearby. The hospitality of Dean and Rosie is legend. There are no strangers at The Farm.

It has not always been butterflies and rainbows for the festival. The greatest concern was the Cold Spring fire in the forest above Trout Lake in July 2008. Trout Lake School became home to 350 firefighters who battled the blaze. Fortunately, prevailing winds spared the valley from the fire's smoke. The festival benefitted from a media blitz in the area covering fire-related stories and hosted a record crowd.

From the beginning, the council's mission has been to support art and artists of the Mid-Columbia Gorge.

Bonnie White of White Salmon was one of the original 12 artists. A full-time employee in a law office, in her spare time she enjoys working with watercolors. Bonnie Reynolds had seen some of Bonnie's work and asked her to exhibit in Trout Lake, but the artist was reluctant.



Artist Michael Stewart of White Salmon displays her carved jewelry.

“Who would want to see my work, much less buy,” she wondered.

The first person to purchase a piece of her work was a well-known area artist. Now Bonnie’s full-time job is creating with watercolor. Her work is available on the Internet and the Made in the Gorge Artists Cooperative in Hood River. She will attend the Trout Lake Festival for the 16th consecutive year.

This year’s festival poster will feature a sterling silver sheet and wire necklace by Sarah Burr Arnold of Trout Lake, and a black and white print, “Raven and the Mountain,” by Charlotte Van Zant-King of Goldendale.

Other artists from across Klickitat County have enriched the festival and the county with their creative talent.

- Linda Steider of White Salmon does kiln-form glass. She is a teacher of art glass and co-founder of the Gorge Chapter of the Oregon Glass Guild.
- Jerry Fenter of Appleton creates watercolor and acrylics in brilliant colors with a humorous bent. She also teaches.
- Jan Muir of Husum does watercolor paintings and illustrations, and has held children’s art camps in Trout Lake.
- Michael Stewart of White Salmon is a jewelry artist who carves on bone and fossils. She finds her work “a true marriage

of form and color imbued by nature.”

- Many gardens are bedecked by the unusual sculptures by David Sherburne of Trout Lake. Bold acrylic paintings recently have been added to his shows.

- Scott Gray, a Goldendale High School art teacher, creates raku pottery.

Besides the artists, the festival is made possible through generous community participation.

- Cheri VanLaar, owner of the local espresso shop and café, caters food for the two-day event.
- The Trout Lake Foundation, the Mountain Adams Riders and Jonah Ministries loan needed equipment.
- The Trout Lake Grocery, Little Mountain Hardware and Trout Lake Farms provide support and expertise.
- The young men and women of the Northwest Service Academy offer their enthusiasm and muscle.
- Primary sponsors are Maryhill Winery, Riverview Community Bank of White Salmon and Turtle Island Foods. All of these efforts come together to put on first-class arts festival. ■

Learn more at <http://troutlakefestivalofthearts.wordpress.com>.