

August 2013

meet the artist

Portraits take center stage in the art of Leslie Roberts Gregg

By Gerri Young • Photos by Teri Hoover

When Leslie Gregg's Air Force father heard she wanted to be an artist instead of a pilot, he suggested she might want to get a real job. That was all this determined lady needed to hear.



Leslie Gregg stands by the pastel portrait of her son Evan when he was 11 years old.

Today, she is a well-respected commission portrait artist with a strong client base and more completed portraits in oil, pastel and colored pencils than she can count—over 200. It is a real job that she loves.

Arriving in Blacksburg with her parents in 1967, then Leslie Roberts was mostly in love with ponies. They had driven from Kansas City, Mo., to Blacksburg towing a rented trailer with the family pony, bought a farm and ended the nomadic life of a military family. Her dad had been an Air Force ROTC instructor at then Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in the 1950's. He and his wife liked the area so much they wanted to eventually settle in Blacksburg.

In the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, the one pony became a bunch of horses which provided lots of adventures with friends. They could actually ride them along Prices Fork Road then, something not possible today.

Time moved on, horses shared Gregg's attention with art, and her father didn't forget about the Air Force. He decided his daughter should be a pilot. She went to flight school in North Carolina where her father was doing commercial flying. Perhaps not so strangely, the planes led right back to art.

"The place I was learning to fly also sold small planes," recalled Gregg. "Over time, I started thinking that if those people spent so much money on planes, maybe they would spend a little more on paintings of their planes. I sold every painting I did and I realized I didn't want to be a pilot, I wanted to be an artist."

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Upcoming

August 9

Art Reception, Donald Sunshine
The Gallery at Mish Mish
125 N. Main St., Blacksburg, 5–7 p.m.

This exhibit, "Goodland: A Threatened Historic Fishing Village" features a portion of more than 100 plein air paintings and sketches by Virginia Tech Professor Emeritus of Architecture Donald Sunshine.

August 18

Figure Drawing
The Artful Place
107 Faculty St., Blacksburg, 6–8 p.m.

Cost is \$10 and space is limited. For more information, contact diana@creekmorelaw.com.

August 24

Heritage Day
Montgomery Museum and Lewis Miller Art Center, Christiansburg, 10 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

This event includes antiques, activities, art, food, and live music. Admission is free.

October 18

New River Art Reception
Perspective Gallery, Squires Student Center, Virginia Tech Campus, 5–9 p.m.

Enjoy the winning entries in this biennial juried show.



**New River Art
Entries —
August 29
Deadline**

October 2 – November 7

Perspective Gallery, Squires Student Center, Virginia Tech

If you only apply for one juried show in 2013, make this the one!

There's still time to enter this biennial show that now features a fully automated online submission process at www.callforentry.org.

Leslie Roberts Gregg continued from page 1

"My father's words about getting a real job were a challenge to me and I wanted to show him it could be done," said Gregg, at home, standing amidst a collection of gallery-worthy portraits arranged for the benefit of clients. Today, of course, Gregg's father is one of the biggest fans of her artwork.

Gregg went on to earn her art degree from Virginia Tech in 1979, where she met her future husband, John Gregg, a now retired oral maxillofacial surgeon who teaches



Leslie Gregg's small but orderly studio in her converted barn allows sitting space for the model and painting space as well. On the walls, many of her works are displayed. Most of the work to convert this space to studio was done by Gregg herself.

medical students at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond three days a month. Married in 1988, they bought 20 beautiful acres in Ellett Valley and moved into an existing barn on the property.

Today, the renovated barn houses their 22-year-old son, Evan, a University of Michigan graduate back in town to start

his masters in public health at Virginia Tech on his way to medical school. In one small corner of the barn, Gregg has her very organized studio in which many of her clients sit for portraits in their choice of oil, pastel or colored pencils.

Just a few feet away is the home they built with an eye toward a beautifully expansive view and a pond lined in iris. Everywhere you look is a scene to be painted.

"We loved living in our barn and had no plans to build a house," said Gregg. "But we have a lot of family and they kept coming to visit, so here we are!"

Along the way, Gregg did take that real job. She worked in commercial art for a while and learned a lot about printing and design. She was hired by the College of Veterinary Medicine in Blacksburg to do biomedical illustration and later, pregnant with her son, decided to go freelance in biomedical and medical illustration.

That decision led to an exciting research trip to the Galapagos Islands 500 miles west of Ecuador in the Pacific Ocean.

"For seven days we did intensive diving to document sea invertebrates," said Gregg. "We would dive among large schools of sharks, sea lions, turtles and penguins, which was quite exciting. Also did an additional seven days on land to visit remote villages where I had the opportunity to sketch the Ecuadorian people."

Back in Blacksburg in 1993, she asked the owner of Mill Mountain Coffee & Tea if she could hold a portrait show and reception in his place. She had done some portraits in college and decided to pursue that once again.

"The show pretty well set the scene for my career as a portrait artist," said Gregg. "I went around and asked prominent people in Blacksburg to sit for a portrait and ended up with 16 pieces.

"I called the show "The Face of Blacksburg" and sent out a lot of invitations for the reception. Many people came and from then on my real job became that of

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■ Exhibit Opportunities

Lyric Gala Celebration

August 23

Lyric Theater

College Avenue, Blacksburg

The theme movie for this "going digital" celebration is *Back to the Future*. Artists are invited to do some drawings or paintings of what College Avenue (or anywhere downtown) might look like in the future. The pieces will hang in the Lyric lobby and artists' keep all the proceeds for works that sell.

Please contact Mark Lattanzi at marklattanzi@gmail.com or 540-449-6275 if you are interested in participating in this fun, historical event.

Heritage Day

August 24

Montgomery Museum and Lewis Miller Regional Art Center, Christiansburg

Artists are invited to bring work to show and also work on site. The museum is also seeking donations of works for a silent auction. For more information, contact Sue Farrar at director@montgomerymuseum.org.

Art on Lawn

September 14

Courthouse Lawn, Pearisburg

This eighth annual juried event offers awards in each of the artists categories with first prize, honorable mention, and overall best of show.

For more information, visit www.gilesartscouncil.org or contact Betty Herbert at jazsngr@hotmail.com.

Floyd Oktoberfest

September 28

Chantilly Festival Farm, Floyd

This event is sponsored by the Jacksonville Center for the Arts and Chantilly Festival Farm. Vendors of arts and fine crafts are encouraged to apply. The festival is from noon until 6 p.m. and the deadline for application is Sept. 17.

For more information, visit www.jacksonvillecenter.org/FloydOktoberfest.

The Glencoe: An Overlooked Gem

By Fred Jones

It was raining as I drove up to the Glencoe Museum and Gallery in Radford, Virginia. The light drizzle seemed to contribute to a sense of peacefulness surrounding this magnificent 140-year-old brick building. Some would say that "peacefulness" is an unlikely word to associate with a building that rose from the ashes of war.



Photo: Fred Jones

The Glencoe Museum and Gallery are listed on the National Registry of Historic Places.

In 1863, Confederate General Gabriel C. Wharton married Anne Rebecca Radford and they chose a spot on a river bluff to build their home in 1870. The site overlooks the location of a New River railroad bridge the Union army destroyed after overcoming Confederate resistance. In another connection to war, Anne Rebecca named their new home "Glencoe" after a Scottish town in which her ancestors prevailed in a famous clan battle.

Glencoe remained in the family for 110 years until 1981. When the City of Radford gained possession of the building they recognized its historical importance. Fortunately, in the 1990s, money was available to fund the restoration and development of the Glencoe Museum.

Today the Glencoe might be the best kept secret in the region. Its director, Scott Gardner, is

on a mission to change that. A Spanish major from Radford University, Gardner's first job concluded in 2008 at the peak of the recession. "I couldn't find work so I started volunteering in the museum." Shortly thereafter the director's job became available. The Radford Heritage Foundation operates the museum and recognized his passion for history and his organizational talents. The position was his.

Gardner is aware that museums can suffer from stagnation. In response he has implemented a dynamic program including changing exhibits, special events, a lecture series and the Gallery at Glencoe.

On the top floor of the building visitors will find various historical exhibits relating to the region. The middle floor showcases the house itself as it was when the

General and his family lived there: 11-foot ceilings, spectacular crown molding, original ceiling medallions, period furniture and items that belonged to General Wharton. Also located on the middle floor is the Radford Visitor's Center.

The lower level of Glencoe features the gallery. The two rooms devoted to art are spacious yet retain a sense of intimacy. Gardner has hosted shows by artists with conventional approaches to art as well as the avant-garde as demonstrated in a recent exhibit by



The Gallery at Glencoe hosts on average six different exhibits each year. The gallery consists of two spacious rooms on the lower level.



Photo: Fred Jones

Glencoe director Scott Gardner is dwarfed by 11-foot tall ceilings in the middle level of the building. These rooms are devoted to demonstrating how the Glencoe might have appeared when General Wharton and his family lived here.

photographer Jodie Rutzinski. Gardner's only criterion is that artists keep their work family friendly. "This is a community venue. It is a good place to view art and we have a broad range of work."

Most exhibits are on display for two months. The gallery receives a 25% commission on all sales. In return, Gardner says, "We provide the rest including a reception, publicity and mailing announcements for the show."

Past shows have been mainly two-dimensional works, however, Gardner remains open to working with 3-D artists. Artists wanting to be considered for the Glencoe Gallery need to send five to six digital images of their work along with a short biography or artist statement to: info.glencoe@gmail.com. "I would welcome the opportunity to have to sort through portfolios rather than to have to solicit work," said Gardner.

The Glencoe Museum and Gallery is an overlooked gem. Admission is free and it is open six days a week. As I packed up to leave, the rain had stopped and the sun came out. It seemed a fitting metaphor for the Glencoe under Gardner's leadership. ■

Remembering Mary

By Lois Stephens

Maybe it's her vibrant, beautiful paintings. Or the delicious array of food she provided for our gatherings. Or it could be just her friendly smile and pleasant personality that come to mind when you hear the name, Mary Montgomery.

A stalwart member of our association, Mary Montgomery died on July 16. She was a longtime participant in the Tuesday night painting group, and all who came in contact with her were frequently blessed by her generosity and kindness.

"She had a big heart," says Charlotte Chan, a fellow watercolorist and friend. "She loved art but her family always came first. Once a year, she and her daughter, April, would go to a painting workshop, and she cherished their art adventures and time spent together."

As a dedicated member and wonderful artist, Montgomery was appropriately chosen by Gerri Young for the first feature story in our newly remodeled newsletter in May 2012 (*Mary Montgomery, lover of light and shadow*).

Montgomery joined the BRAA shortly after she moved to Blacksburg in 1968. The former first grade teacher's love of learning extended to her art and she was always exploring and experimenting.

"Mary was so generous to share her knowledge with her friends and fellow artists," said Chan. "Each time after attending a workshop, she would come back with new painting techniques and new ideas to share. We miss her so much."

Yes, we certainly do. ■

En Plein Air, Anyone?

Plein air painters ... heads up! Our next plein air event is set for Smithfield Plantation in Blacksburg on Aug. 18 starting at 2:30 p.m.. You don't have to be a member to participate, just bring everything you need to paint or draw and pick a location on the grounds to do your thing. Restrooms close at 5:00 p.m. Email younggerri@gmail.com to let her know if you plan to attend.



As you can see by these participants in the July 28 event at Teri Hoover's house, plein air painting is a joyful thing!



Mary Montgomery and one of her paintings (2012).

photo by Gerri Young

Now Showing

July 15 – October 15, 2013
(except where indicated otherwise)

Denisse Bento, See Mark Optical, 2401 S. Main Street, Blacksburg

Riley Chan, Real Life Dental Care, 202 South Main Street, Blacksburg

Leslye Bloom, Warm Hearth Village, Blacksburg and Signature Nine Gallery, Roanoke

Charlotte Chan, Zeppoli's, 810 University City Blvd., Blacksburg

Nancy Norton, StellarOne, Arbor Drive, Christiansburg

Diane Relf, Brown Insurance, 100 Hubbard Street, Blacksburg and ICTAS, Virginia Tech campus (until mid-November)

Cecilia Riegert, ICTAS, Virginia Tech Campus (until mid-December)

Lois Stephens, Holtzman Alumni Center Gallery, Virginia Tech Campus (until January)

Donald Sunshine, The Gallery at Mish Mish, 125 N. Main Street, Blacksburg (during August)

Joanna and Donald Sunshine, The Gallery at Glade Church, 1600 Glade Road, Blacksburg (August–September)

Gerri Young, Mill Mountain Coffee and Tea, 700 N. Main Street, Blacksburg

"Art enables us to find ourselves and lose ourselves at the same time."

~Thomas Merton

Good breakfast, good art at annual Blacksburg market event

By Gerri Young • Photos by Teri Hoover

If breakfast is the most important meal of the day, the hundreds of people who came out to the weekly farmer's market in Blacksburg on July 20, had the best of all worlds.

Sunny skies poured over a block of Draper Road, adding to the fun feel of a previously rain-drenched town. The usual Saturday morning farmer's market was booming with business. Children played on the grass and Kat Mills and Eric Lanoue played music on the corner. The Friends of the Farmer's Market manned the annual Breakfast at the Farmer's Market under a welcome tent on the street.



Robin Boucher, curator for Virginia Tech's Perspective Gallery, is surrounded by the selected award winners. They are (left to right) Leyla Kiran, Larry Mitchell, Sue Brozovsky, Susan Lockwood, Michael LaRoche, Franchell Mack Brown, Alexander Crookshanks and Sidra Kaluszka.

Cozied up next to these two popular spots was the annual Art at the Market presented by Downtown Blacksburg, Inc., and sponsored by local businesses Fringe Benefit and Mish Mish, as well as the Community Arts Information Office.

Lauren Blakemore, director, Downtown Blacksburg, Inc., could not have been happier with the turnout.

"We started doing Art at the Market about 24 years ago," said Blakemore. "We went through several different names and places and have settled into this location on Draper Road right next to our successful Farmer's Market.

"Between the market, the breakfast, the music and the artist booths, it has turned into a terrific event. I couldn't be happier."

Well-known artist and Blacksburg



photo by Gerri Young

Jones Receives Delight Award

With an entry that was irresistible to fellow artists and other reception attendees, Fred Jones was awarded Best of Theme for a gleeful oil painting of his daughter. The voting was held at the July 19 opening reception for the Delight-themed exhibit at the VTLS, Inc. gallery at the Corporate Research Center in Blacksburg. The award was presented by Jeanette Bowker, who organized the show. All entries will be on display until October 14. Congratulations, Fred!

resident, Sally Mook, has been taking part in the event from the beginning, winning several awards along the

way. "I started when the art was hung on a fence and was quite small," said Mook. "It's such fun because it's a great way to see and talk to friends all day. And, of course, I get to sell some art."

Giving the art event an international flavor was Fatma Elzahraa Eid of Egypt, a computer science student at Virginia Tech, just marking her eighth month in the U.S. Dressed in pristine white robes showing only her eyes, Eid was surrounded by painted canvases featuring only colored backgrounds. Those who stopped by her table could choose a canvas and have their name carefully painted on it in Arabic. Beside her was Tina Shamohammadi, an artist from Iran.

Twenty-one artists set up across from the market offering everything from traditional painting, to computer



Manning the Artsburg booth, Herb Schneider, helps five-year-old Jenna Crookshanks with an artwork of her own. Jenna's father, Alex, was one of the winners in the two dimensional category.

generated art, stone sculpture, pottery, fused glass, jewelry and more.

Eight of those artists were recognized following judging by Robin Boucher, arts program director for Virginia Tech's Student Center and Activities as well as head curator for Tech's Perspective Gallery.

Leslie Roberts Gregg *continued from page 2*

commission portrait artist. I really wanted to be able to stay home with my son and be a fulltime mom. Concentrating on my art through portraits made that possible."

Her client-oriented gallery at home features works in the three mediums she uses. Portraits of friends and family members hang on walls or sit on easels. A few pastel landscapes show the diversity of her skills and provide her with pieces she sometimes donates to worthy cause auctions. "It's hard to donate a portrait because of all the time involved to create them and how personal they are, but the landscapes are universally appreciated by everyone," she said.

Most commissions come by word of mouth, but at least two institutions are regular customers. Gregg paints portraits of the All-American athletes and head coaches for Virginia Tech. Her artwork hangs in the Merryman Athletic Facility attached to the VT coliseum.

In a rare twist for her art, the Merryman Athletic Facility also displays one of the familiar Hokie Bird statues seen so many places around town. "This was a fun project that took a lot of work!" said Gregg. "There are seven coats of acrylic paint on it and it took auto body filler, a saw and tape to make a real football helmet fit on the statue's head."

The Chesterfield, Va., police department has commissioned her for portraits of their police chiefs and any officers

**Upcoming Shows
at The Artful Lawyer,
A Fine Art Gallery Inc.**

(318 N. Main St., Blacksburg)

**Wednesday, October 16
A World of Color**

- Denisse Bento, Den Bento Art & Design
- Kanta Bosniak
- Becca Imbur, Bimbur Books
- Franchell Mack Brown Fibers, Franchell Mack Art
- Lisa Plummer
- Starroot
- Wendy Wrenn, Wrenn Pottery
- Artists from The NRV Weavers' Guild

killed in the line of duty. "When these portraits are unveiled, the police department wants me to attend the event," said Gregg. "It is very hard. It is an honor to commemorate the fallen officers, but I meet their families, most often young, and hear their stories. I look through many photos of the officers in order to get a good likeness. It is all a very personal and touching experience."

In Malcolm Gladwell's book, "Outliers: The Story of Success," he states that to reach the highest level of success people must practice their skill at least 10,000 hours. Gregg says, "I don't know if I've worked 10,000 yet, but I am very fortunate to be able to do this."

Gregg is a charter member of the Portrait Society of America, the Southeast Pastel Society, the Pastel Society of North Carolina and the Blacksburg Regional Art Association. Her art can be found at www.phoenixneststudio.com. ■

Blacksburg market

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"There were many wonderful works of art here today," said Boucher. "The eight artists I have chosen to receive awards show strong evidence of their constant striving to create quality artworks. With the presentation of these ribbons, I want to be sure they know that what they are doing is super important."

Winners from among the artists were: In the 2-D category, Sidra Kaluszka of Floyd, First Place; Leyla Kiran of Blacksburg, Second Place; Susan Lockwood of Radford, Third Place and Alexander Crookshanks of Blacksburg, Honorable Mention.

In the 3-D category Michael LaRoche of Blacksburg won First Place; Larry Mitchell of Blacksburg won second place; Sue Brozovsky of Catawba won Third Place and Franchell Mack Brown took Honorable Mention.

The art featured in this month's nameplate is "Koi Fish" (right, photograph, 11x14") by Riley Chan. This and more of his work can be viewed at Real Life Dental through mid-October.



BRAA Officers

- Robi Sallee**, president
- Nancy Norton**, co-vice president
- Danie Janov**, co-vice president
- Tom Barnhart**, membership
- Vikki King**, treasurer



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Gerri Young at younggerri@googlemail.com
or **Nancy Norton**
at nancypnorton@comcast.net

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<http://www.blacksburgart.org/>

Send news, photos, comments, or newsletter suggestions to Lois Stephens (stephens1@pemtel.net)

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