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Artist Creates Special Images Of Missouri

By Cindy Allen

A rainbow of colorful blooms, manicured lawns, historic architecture and friendly residents greeted me in Charleston, Missouri during my April travels.

These are the same things that drew nationally known painter Billyo O'Donnell to Charleston that same day. It was warm, clear spring day, just before Charleston's annual Dogwood/Azalea Festival, after a few sales calls I decided to shoot some scenic pictures.

While photographing the house on the grounds of the Mississippi County Historical Society I met Billyo, who was painting their beautiful display of azaleas.

Billyo, a Missouri-born artist explained to me his goal of painting a scene from everyone of Missouri's 115 counties. He

and journalist, Karen Glines, also from Missouri, are working on putting together his paintings with her descriptive essays in a collection they hope will be published in an inspiring, memorable book titled "Painting Missouri."

Billyo stated "I like to paint what makes each county unique, so I couldn't miss the azaleas in Charleston for Mississippi County." If you have a unique, rare or widely known story about a Missouri area/county then let Billyo know by writing to: Painting Missouri, PO Box 31566, St. Louis, Mo. 63131-2038 or log on to his website: www.PaintingMissouri.com.

Billyo O'Donnell was born and raised in Warrenton, Missouri the fourth of nine children in a large Irish Catholic family. Billyo's unusual nickname came during his school

years, as his birth name, William Michael O'Donnell, was eventually shortened to Billy which O'Donnell couldn't stand, so soon people started calling him Billyo. "Now I sign my paintings that way. It's short and easy to remember and eventually it just became part of who I am." Said O'Donnell in an interview with Myrna Zanetell for an article "The O'Donnell Diary" that appeared in the September/October 2002 ART of the WEST.

O'Donnell studied painting, sculpture and illustration and earned a degree in art from Southwestern Missouri State University in Springfield, Missouri. After college he worked for Maritz as an illustrator. After 13 years of producing enticing images of travel destinations for Maritz's clients throughout the world, the Japan

Creators Association reproduced some of O'Donnell's artwork on the cover and first four pages of a book that marketed the work of hundreds of international artists. This worldwide exposure led to commissions or exotic locations from Nissan for some of its major events.

Eventually O'Donnell work was represented in a gallery in Laguna Beach, California and thrived in the California art market. However, after much soul searching O'Donnell decided to return home to Missouri. Although, the Missouri art market had not been very receptive to realism in art, he hoped to change the perception of landscapes in the Midwest. As this is the 200th anniversary of Lewis and Clark's journey of discovery, O'Donnell believes this unique period in local history will renew interest in the

Missouri River Valley.

In recent years O'Donnell has worked with the St. Louis Art Guild in developing the Forest Park Paint Out, and spearheaded, Artists Along the Katy Trail. This project was so innovative it captured the attention of the National Endowment for the Arts, which used O'Donnell's plan as a model for the Millennium Legacy Trail.

Zanetell concluded her story on Billyo by stating, "O'Donnell's bliss is synonymous with plein air painting. It has served him well and has brought much appreciated beauty to art aficionados throughout the country." As for me, I love his use of natural color and light and their sense of calm and relaxation made me want to be in the scene. I certainly look forward to the release of his book.

Fort de Chartres Celebrates 250 Years

Fort de Chartres State Historic Site near Prairie du Rocher, Ill., celebrates a milestone in 2003.

Fort de Chartres was established in 1720 by the French. An original wooden fort was destroyed by a flood; another structure was then built of stone. The third and final fort at the location was built during the years from 1753 to 1756 and became the seat of French military and civil power in what is now the United States.

It has been 250 years since the last French fort was built at the site and although most of the walls and buildings are reconstructions of the original structure, the powder magazine and most of the foundations are original. The powder magazine is one of the oldest buildings in Illinois. The 250th anniversary of Fort de Chartres will be observed during the annual Rendezvous event, which is scheduled for June 6-8.

Reenactors portraying soldiers and frontier dwellers from the 1700s era converge on Fort de Chartres by the hundreds during the Rendezvous, which the largest gathering of its kind in the Midwest.

This year's Rendezvous is scheduled to provide "an authentic and festive air to commemorate the fort's noteworthy birthday," organizers noted.

A complete schedule of Rendezvous activities was being finalized at press time.



Artist Billyo O'Donnell works on one of his artistic creations.