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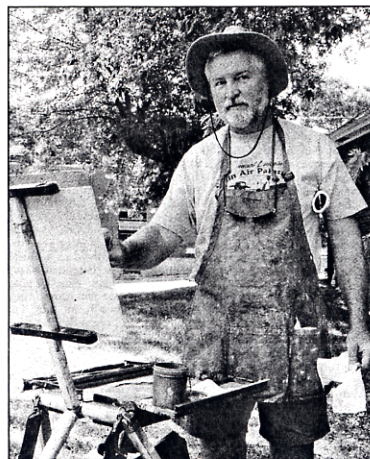
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Painting His Way Across Missouri



People can share rare and unique stories about their area with O'Donnell through his Web site, www.paintingmissouri.com.
Submitted Artwork.



Billyo O'Donnell, an alumnus of East Central College, is nearing the end of a project he's been working on for the last two years to paint scenes from every county in the state of Missouri. He expects to be finished painting by the first of the year, when he'll select at least one painting from each county to be included in a book along with descriptive essays of each county written by journalist Karen Glines.
Missourian Photos.

OVER THE LAST TWO YEARS, LOCAL ARTIST BILLYO O'DONNELL HAS TRAVELED TO EVERY COUNTY IN MISSOURI TO PAINT ON LOCATION, CAPTURING ON CANVAS WHAT MAKES EACH AREA UNIQUE AS A TRIBUTE TO HIS HOME STATE.

By Karen Cernich,
Missourian Features Editor

Billyo O'Donnell pulled his van into a spot in front of Aldo's Restaurant in downtown New Haven and turned to look up the hill. It was a bright sunny

day and the temperature was expected to soar, but O'Donnell had come here to this exact spot to paint for the day.

"I like the way this place sits in a valley," he remarked, sitting down for a bite of pizza before he headed up the hill to work.

There are lots of places around Missouri that O'Donnell is intrigued by and many more that he's discovered only recently. Over the last two years he's been traveling around the state, making specific trips to each of the counties to find and paint the many "historical, geological and unique places along the way."

O'Donnell is calling this project, appropriately enough, Painting Missouri. For him, a native of the Show-Me state, it's the realization of a long held goal.

"For a long time I've wanted to do something on the state of Missouri," said O'Donnell, a graduate of East Central College, Union. "I used to think about painting the rivers, maybe the century farms or doing something else uniquely Missouri."

Then journalist Karen Glines, who worked with O'Donnell on his Artists Along the Katy Trail project several years ago, told him about a book of paintings she had seen that spotlighted areas in Indiana. Using that as a jumping off point, the two came up with an idea all their own.

"We feel we've taken the idea in the Indiana book and made it better for Missouri," said O'Donnell. "Our project is good for artists and good for people who love the state of Missouri."

Glines is working with O'Donnell on Painting Missouri, writing descriptive essays on each of the counties he's painting. In the end her essays and O'Donnell's paintings will be compiled into a

years. He has, however, been rewarded in other ways.

"I didn't get into this because of the money," he said with a chuckle, admitting it's been tough getting by since he started Painting Missouri. "I'm doing this because Missouri has a lot of wonderful qualities to it."

"This project has given me the opportunity to explore my home state," he remarked. "I've seen things I never thought I would see,

anyone ever stop," he said. "The cars always just pass me by."

"But in the Ozarks, no matter where I stop, the first, second, third cars to pass by always stop to see if I'm having car trouble," he said. "It's a really interesting contrast."

O'Donnell's travels have also helped him discover beautiful places like Pierce City with its unique architecture of stone arches and tile roofs, or historic places like Scott County where he stopped to paint a popular

stop in a couple of places, like the local newspaper office or historical society, to talk to them about any historic places or beautiful local sites.

"I may have an idea of what I want to paint already before I get there . . . some places are so unique and special, but a lot of times I have to ask around for information," he said.

O'Donnell noted that over the course of this project he's made a point of going back to each of Missouri's counties several times to paint in various places.

"Some places I've gone and done a painting because I was inspired," he said, "but the painting wasn't necessarily right to include in the book."

The counties that have presented O'Donnell the biggest challenge in narrowing down a place to paint have been those he knows best—Franklin, Warren, Jefferson, St. Charles and St. Louis.

"It's places like this (Franklin County) that I struggle with," he said, "because I know so much more of the history and because I've already painted the area so much . . . I don't know what I'll select for the book."

In the two years O'Donnell has been working on Painting Missouri he hasn't been away from home more than a few days at a time. When he's needed to, he's camped overnight in places so he could capture just the right light, maybe a sunset or sunrise.

"The great thing about this project is that I'm never more than five hours from home," said O'Donnell, who has a wife and three grown kids. "Of course, my van has over 280,000 miles on it now and I think 85 or 90,000 of that is because of this project alone."

For years O'Donnell has been spreading the word to other artists about all Missouri has to offer, and he's hoping the book that will come from this project will drive that point home even more.

"If you go down into the Ozarks far enough, there are parts of Missouri that look like Colorado," he said. "There are parts of the Missouri River Valley area that look like Germany and parts of Europe."

"You can find plantations that look like you're in the deep South, cattle ranches that



O'Donnell chose to paint on the hill overlooking downtown New Haven and the Missouri River on an excursion to Franklin County several weeks ago, but that work will likely not be the painting he selects to represent this area in his forthcoming book. That decision will require careful consideration. The woman whose backyard was part of this painting came outside to welcome O'Donnell and offer him some of her homegrown tomatoes—moments like that, he said, are what have made his work on Painting Missouri so worthwhile.

things that have fascinated me."

He's learned about the town of New London (near Hannibal) where the people

watermelon stand and was told by the locals,

"You're capturing history." O'Donnell researched the area a bit and discovered at