

Please touch the art at this show

By TARA LYNNE GROTH
Correspondent

HILLSBOROUGH It's something we probably haven't considered if we have our vision.

The visually impaired have Braille for reading words, but how can they "see" images?
According to the American Foundation for the Blind, more than 236,000 people in North Carolina experience visual loss. The National Federation of the Blind reports some 700,000 children nationally have a visual disability or are legally blind.

Warhol, da Vinci, Seurat, and other artists told stories through art. But their masterpieces and many other iconic works of art were unknowable to the visually impaired, until Hillsborough-based artist Sally Barker - SallyB in the art world - designed a tactile color system.

When SallyB retired, she thought she would learn Spanish or how to play the piano. Art never crossed her mind. Then she thought of a system that matched colors with textures - assigning the feel of satin, wool, velvet and other textiles to respective colors on a color wheel. She mentioned her idea to quilters, but none of them wanted to do it. "They say it's 'too hard, too detailed,'" she said.

So she took the idea in her own hands, gathering fabrics, and recreating signature works by Picasso, Matisse and other painters. The pesky swarm of bees in Seurat's "Sunday Afternoon" required her attention for two years. Most of the other pieces took six to nine months to complete.

The resulting exhibit, on display this month at the Orange County Campus of Durham Technical Community College, is different from your typical art gallery scene with clusters of hushed people standing back and admiring work. At this exhibit, visitors along a brightly lit hallway are encouraged to get close up with the art, often with eyes closed and a growing smile as their fingers gently trace the textured quilts.

Although she has displayed her work across the United States and twice in the United Kingdom, SallyB has never hung her own artwork until now. For the first time she chose exactly how she wanted her art to be showcased.

Another first for SallyB: She premieres an original piece in the Hillsborough exhibit called "Abundance." Before this show, titled "Once More with Feeling," her work was a collection of homages to famous works of art.

The exhibit continues to grow. She is working on Monet's "Water Lilies" and is eager to start a Renoir. Her passion for creating art can be seen and touched, and you can hear it when her voice cracks in excitement as she rattles off the art



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The ocean froth in Sally "SallyB" Barker's homage to "The Great Wave off Kanagawa" resembles terry cloth.

contests she is entering.

She is entering art contests now to try to raise money. She develops and displays pieces on her dime. Occasionally a site will pay shipping costs. Many times SallyB and her husband deliver the artwork themselves, driving up to Boston for an exhibition or flying to Birmingham, England, for the National Federation for the Blind convention.

Her concept has stretched around the world. A father in Pakistan with a visually impaired son contacted SallyB through Facebook. SallyB helped bridge the geography gap. Knowing the man could not afford a trip for his son to feel the art, she sent him a kit, color wheel, and samples of each fabric. He was able to create art using similar materials in his area. He developed art for his son and other children in the community to enjoy.

Leonardo da Vinci's "Mona Lisa" is 600 years old and untouchable behind bulletproof glass in a climate-controlled space. SallyB's quilted homage is about a decade old and ready for visitors' fingertips.

Does she launder the pieces? Not once. Typically a lint remover is sufficient. She spot-cleaned Georgia O'Keeffe's "Red Poppy" to remove a stain; a laundry cycle could destroy the integrity of the fabrics.

With so many people touching each quilt to experience the textures, how long does she think it will be before she has to retire any of the pieces? She laughs. "I'll be long gone before that happens."

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Senior condos on Chapel Hill council's agenda

Developer says project wouldn't increase traffic

By TAMMY GRUBB
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CHAPEL HILL A third developer is making a run at building a housing subdivision on Homestead Road - this time for older adults.

At Monday's Town Council meeting, Ohio-based developer Epcon Communities will propose 66 single-family condominium homes on roughly 18 acres. The council could offer feedback on the Courtyards of Homestead proposal but won't make any decisions.

The council also will hold a public hearing on proposed changes to the town's Planning Board and Community Design Commission. The meeting begins at 7 p.m. at the Southern Human Services Center, 2501 Homestead Road.

Developers have offered two other plans in the past few years for 2209 Homestead Road, just west of the Southern Human Services Center complex.

In 2010, Alabama-based Capstone Co. proposed more than 190 apartments on 33 acres, and Landmark Proper-

ties, of Athens, Ga., offered the Retreat at Homestead Road in 2011, with 174 student cottages on roughly 38 acres.

Both projects were dropped without being formally submitted to the town.

Epcon officials envision homes for adults ages 50 and older who are looking to downsize in their retirement years. The plan calls for two- and three-bedroom homes with private courtyards and two-car garages, priced between \$240,000 and \$400,000.

The developer is offering to keep at least 15 percent of the condos affordable to those with lower incomes.

Management would be responsible for yard maintenance and common areas, including a clubhouse and community pool.

Because most residents would be older and retired, the development is not expected to increase the demand on Homestead Road at peak traffic hours, the developer said.

The project would replace two homes and several small farm buildings on three parcels adjacent to the railroad tracks.

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