

Artist Michael Stehr shows work at Tally Home in Orinda

By Sora O'Doherty



Photo Sora O'Doherty

Tally Home in Orinda will host a reception and display works of local artist Michael Stehr at 5 p.m. Oct. 18. Currently some five of Stehr's pieces are on display in the shop. Stehr is a self-taught artist. A couple of years after he graduated from Stanford in 1991 with an art history degree, Stehr began to study the works of his favorite artists to learn how they handled techniques such as composition and color. Working alone in his studio, he copied his favorite works, learning in the manner of art students often seen copying great works of art in European museums. Stehr's favorite artist is Camille Corot. He likes to say that he's learned from his favorite artists and has had the greatest teachers. Corot, who painted in the early 19th century, was an inspiration to the Impressionists who followed him.

Unlike Corot, however, Stehr doesn't have an allowance from wealthy parents that allowed him the luxury of painting without concern about supporting his family. So Stehr in his day job is a decorative artist, offering his clients a range of special finishes for their interior decorating, including murals, gold leafing, and trompe l'oeil work. Stehr learned his trade putting himself through college as a house painter.

Stehr devotes himself to his fine art work on evenings, weekends and holidays. But he says, "I don't consider this work. It isn't a hardship; I would do it for fun." Nevertheless, Stehr actually does work very hard. He won't exhibit his works unframed, and doesn't want to spend what it would take to frame his works, so he does it himself. He has an annual exhibit at the Piedmont Center for the Arts each Novem-

ber, for which he produces some 40 new paintings and fabricates the frames for each, doing his own carpentry and metal leafing on the frames.

In addition, Stehr applies his art history expertise leading groups of art lovers through Rome and Paris several times a year. He has just conducted his 16th guided tour of Rome. He shares his own experience of the art aloud with his clients. He did his first guided tour in 2000. "It's been fun to build relationships," he notes, "with both the art and the people." He feels at home staying in the same hotels each time he visits. In fact, he has had an exhibition of about 16 of his paintings, which he brought over and displayed in the hotel where he stays. His clients usually extend their trips, either before or after joining him for the guided art tour. He is currently putting together a trip for painters, where they can practice their art in a European setting, likely either Sienna, Italy or the Loire Valley in France.

Stehr has done a lot of work in the Carmel home of Tally Home founder Megan Lindberg's father. Lindberg admires Stehr's European flare, which is what she wants people to experience at Tally Home. "I want it to feel like people are walking into Europe," she says of her store. The Oct. 18 event will be a Meet the Artist Open House, with light appetizers, wine and other beverages, starting at 5 p.m.

Beloved children's book author speaks at local Rotary meeting

By John T. Miller



Joanna H. Kraus Photo Andy Scheck

Renowned children's author and playwright Joanna H. Kraus spoke at the Lafayette Rotary meeting last week, entertaining the members with her recently published children's books.

Her two latest publications, "Bravo, Benny" and "The Blue Toboggan" are not at all alike. They are from different publishers, with their own illustrators and deal with very different subject matter.

"Both stories are based on actual events," said Kraus. "'Bravo, Benny' is more lighthearted about a girl who desperately wants a dog, but has to win over her grandmother's approval, while 'Blue Toboggan' deals with the grief of a young boy losing a close friend."

"Bravo, Benny," published in 2018 by Mirror Publishing, tells the story of Nina, who has wished for a dog on the last "eight years of birthday cakes," but must overcome her Granny Lil's unwillingness to have a dog in the house. In the end, Benny saves the day and wins Granny's reluctant approval.

"Blue Toboggan," a 2016 publication by Mascot Books, is a compassionate look at a young boy, Will, who loses his best friend Danny. The two of them were saving to buy a blue toboggan with silver stripes so they could "fly down Wildberry Hill, the two of us, faster than fast."

Kraus paraphrased from the blurb on the back of the book, saying, "With the help of a sympathetic teacher and class, Will learns that love and friendship don't have to die as long as you remember."

Rotary member Dr. Kelly Hood, who practices dermatology in Lafayette, invited Kraus to speak at the recent meeting.

"My kids read her books growing up," said Hood. "She's delightful to hear from and has lead such a varied and interesting life. Her books have universal themes appropriate for every age."

Kraus also spoke about her personal essay from the August issue of "Alive," a magazine published in Alamo. The article, titled "Aging in Place - My Manor and Me," describes a two-month nightmare at her Rossmoor home where sewage backed up into her tub. Just before that, she had endured bronchitis, an infected tooth, and a mysterious ailment that made walking extremely painful.

Once the problems were fixed - by plumbers and painters for the manor, and several medical experts for her body - all returned to normal. Until, that is, she learned shortly after that a patio support pillar and surrounding tile were cracking and she needed retinal surgery!

Kraus, who grew up in Maine, moved to California in the fall of 1995 when her adopted Korean son, who attended college at Sonoma State, announced that he would not be coming home to any more snow. She took an early retirement from her position as Professor Emerita of Theatre at the College at Brockport, State University of New York and moved to Rossmoor.

Kraus writes mostly for children and is an award-winning playwright of 18 published and widely produced scripts and an author of numerous short stories, children's books, articles and reviews.

Her books are available on the

websites of Amazon and Barnes & Noble, the publishers, or through your favorite bookstore via Ingram. They will also be sold at this year's Rossmoor Fall Bazaar from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 3 in the Oak Room at Gateway Clubhouse.

For more information, visit her website at www.joannakraus.com.

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