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COMMUNITY

Giving back to nature through art

Endangered species painting gives nod to Mount Nemo, Jefferson salamander

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While we're often concerned about the plight of wildlife around the world, we can lose sight of the beautiful creatures in our own backyard, said artist Sherry Hayes.

"We must become and remain great stewards of our local treasured flora and fauna. I truly believe that we can all work together for the greater good of our wild spaces and species," said Hayes.

She grew up on 15 acres of land "that housed a wetland forest brimming with cedar and birch trees, and with an adjacent rolling landscape heavily dotted with maple trees," near Burlington's Mount Nemo area.

The purity of it enthralled her back then, but she has since realized the fragility of the wild species and spaces that call the Niagara Escarpment home.

Hayes "felt an urgency to respond to this critical situation in the best way I was able and that was through art. I wanted to give back to nature, to its beauty and as a reminder of the quiet comfort that it provided me in my youth."

The result is Hayes' "Shades of Darkness" endangered species series of paintings dedicated to raising awareness regarding the plight of wildlife and the organizations that work to protect them.

The series portrays vulnerable species and habitats in a bold, edgy fashion with slightly exaggerated realism, said Hayes.

"All paintings move progressively from light to dark to show 'what is', and 'what could be'. When possible, subjects look back toward the viewer as if to ask, 'why?' Each piece is designed to be eye-catching and thought provoking."

A portion of the proceeds, which includes the sale of the original work, prints and greeting cards, will go toward organizations devoted to the preservation of natural areas and which align with issues important to Hayes.

"That is, the health, well-being and protection of natural spaces and the inhabitants within, especially those at risk."

One of those paintings, "Within the Darkened Forest," focuses on the "magnificent yet fragile" Niagara Escarpment and "precious inhabitants such as the tiny, elusive endangered Jefferson salamander."

Proceed recipients from this piece are PERL (Protecting Escarpment Rural Land) and CORE Burlington (Conserving Our Rural Ecosystems of Burlington).

PERL and CORE Burlington are very appreciative of the wonderful art created by Hayes, and her caring and generosity directed to the benefit of the natural world, commented Roger Goulet, PERL's executive director.

Hayes' donations will assist the organization in continuing its scientific quest to better understand the interrelated dependences of the plant, animal, amphibian, fish, insect species and water resources present in the escarpment and continue to advocate for the long-term sustainability of our natural heritage systems, said Goulet.

"Nature's interconnected systems are critical to overcoming climate change impacts, and securing our food supply, and safeguarding our health and quality of life," he added. "Our natural world sustains our very existence, all for free. Unfortunately, not enough people understand how life on planet one works."

Each donation she chooses is unique and dependent on the species she chooses to "speak for," and the organization she selects, said Hayes.

"This particular program for these recipients is not a single donation. Rather, it has been designed to work in several phases to provide ongoing support to these two dedicated organizations," she said.

Items within this program consist of the original painting and limited edition (signed and numbered) and unlimited edition giclee prints, as well as note cards.

For more information, visit artscapesbyserry.ca.