

LIFESTYLES

Healing through art: Linda Arnold's mission recognized in Denver

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National connections are a driving force in Littleton painter Linda Arnold's life for tragic reasons. She was driving near Columbine High School on April 20, 1999 and heard sirens. Turning on the television when she arrived home, she learned of the tragedy and was stunned like

other area residents, but felt inspired to respond through her art.

In late July, three prints of her paintings were dedicated at the new Social Security office in the Byron G. Rogers Federal Office Building on Stout Street in Denver, in recognition of colleagues lost in Oklahoma City. A Columbine parent and federal

employee, Gary Radtke, knew about her art and spoke to regional commissioner Richard Gonzalez about her work.

The original of her "Columbine Forever" watercolor, which started it all, hangs at the high school and she has sold hundreds of prints, with part of the proceeds going to Ann Marie Hochhalter, a seriously injured student. The painting shows 12 small columbines in an aspen grove, with one larger flower honoring teacher David Sanders. One resembles a dove, a Columbine symbol and rain/tear drops fall from the flowers.

She says she had started the Colorado landscape painting before April 20, celebrating her favorite wildflower, which was plentiful in Idaho Springs, where she grew up. Two days after the shootings, she "had to do something to deal with the pain of what happened in my neighborhood. An idea came to me and I began to paint. I asked for God's help because I wasn't sure where I was going with this project..." At one point, she came close to destroying it, but finally felt it represents the true spirit of Columbine.

Arnold became acquainted with many Columbine family members who have connected with national networks of mourners, and also, through a chance meeting, Oklahoma City families who lost loved ones. A woman who lived near Oklahoma City purchased a columbine print and suggested

that Arnold create a similar painting featuring the "Survivor Tree of Oklahoma City."

Cuttings of that tree had been given to Columbine families, linking the two communities. She pictured it, fronted by the Oklahoma state flowers, colorful yellow and red Indian Blanket flowers, bearing 168 petals, one for each victim, again with tear drops. The original hangs in the Oklahoma governor's office and proceeds go to the memorial fund.

When the Sept. 11, 2001 tragedy struck, the same woman suggested yet another memorial painting. "In Memory of 9/11" was presented to firefighters at New York Fire Station No. 4, which lost 15 comrades. It has seven roses, one for each continent whose people lost their lives (and for seven World Trade Center buildings), backed by two columnar trees suggesting building images. An American flag represents the Pentagon.

Columbine family representatives, a close-knit community, have traveled with her on these and other missions to help people deal with overwhelming grief.

Arnold, who resides in Englewood, is a fourth generation Coloradan — her parents are Littleton High graduates — who despite a severe hearing loss, has become an award-winning watercolorist and in recent years, public speaker. She and her husband Stuart have two adult daughters, one of whom is enrolled in the Monterey, Calif.,



In late July, three prints of Linda Arnold's paintings (pictured below) were dedicated at the new Social Security office in the Byron G. Rogers Federal Office Building on Stout Street in Denver, in recognition of colleagues lost in Oklahoma City. Courtesy photos



military language school. Arnold plans a visit soon to explore striking new scenery that will probably appear in

paintings.

For information about the prints, Arnold may be reached at 303-798-6762.