New artwork adorns museum walls

BY MIKE EADS
THE JOURNAL

WALHALLA — A couple of local artists have donated their talents to the Oconee Veterans Museum.

The museum celebrated its sixth anniversary Saturday with a brass band, comments by state legislators Thomas Alexander and Bill Whitmire and the unveiling of new murals by local artists Jim and Donna Juras.

"The board members wanted a mural," said Jim, a U.S. Air Force veteran of Vietnam. "We did a mural for the Keowee Key fitness center, so they approached us."

Board members approached Jim and Donna in 2010 with a concept: depictions of each war the United States has fought over its 236 years.

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Jim and Donna Juras lent their artistic talents to the Oconee Veterans Museum, painting the second floor walls with panels depicting the military history of the United States.

The couple eagerly agreed to donate their time and talents.

"We were very impressed with what they have accomplished here ... we had some input from board members and it kind of evolved (over a year and a half)," Jim recalled.

Each conflict has its own panel, depicting battle scenes and famous quotes. Jim designed the panels and drew them. Donna, an art teacher whose work has been displayed by the Blue Ridge Arts Council, went behind and painted in each image.

The stairwell and second floor walls were only empty spaces left in the museum, which is packed full of weapons, medals, uniforms and other mementos chronicling the military history of the United States all the way back to the Revolutionary War.

A patriotic stained glass window by local artist Sandy Nelson was also unveiled during Saturday's event.

Board member Joyce Brickett said her peers would love to display more work by local artists, but "we're out of space."

Brickett added that the museum hopes to get space in the old county courthouse when it is renovated. Developers have approached the Oconee County Council about transforming the building into a high-end hotel and retail complex. Museum board members have had initial discussions with the developers about setting up displays, but nothing close to an agreement is in place.



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The Oconee Veterans Museum celebrated its sixth anniversary Saturday. State Rep. Bill Whitmire, left, praised the museum and the work of the Patriot's Hall Association before an audience of 30, as well as PHA board members and the brass band on hand. Whitmire was joined for the event by State Sen. Thomas Alexander (not pictured).

Anyone interested in seeing the panels should visit the museum at 13 Short St. in Walhalla (behind the Oconee County Courthouse) any Saturday between 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Patriot's Hall Association (PHA), an IRS approved 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, welcomes new members and/or donations to help with the museum's operations. Memberships are as follows: students, $5; veterans, $10; individuals, $15; families, $25; and businesses, $100. Volunteers are also needed. Call (864) 638-5455 or visit www.oconeeveteransmuseum.org for more information.

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