

[Area News](#) | [Home](#) | [Marketplace](#) | [Community](#)

[Return to Archived Stories](#)

Paynesville Press - March 30, 2005

## Paynesville native's art on exhibit at St. John's

By Bonnie Jo Hanson

Heidi Henderson's art comes naturally to her. Born with the gift of creativity, she was always drawn to the form of trees and to wood, she said. It was only fitting for her to use a natural "canvas."

Inspired by pods, seeds, trees, leaves, flowers, and by the human body, Henderson's paintings portray scenes from nature on old doors and bits of wood.

A PHS graduate who now lives in St. Paul, Henderson's work has appeared in nearly a dozen gallery shows. She has won numerous awards and mentions for her work.

Currently, Henderson's art is on display in the Target Gallery at the St. John's Art Center. There, visitors can view a dozen pieces that range in size (from postcard size to very large paintings). Henderson, a 1993 graduate of the College of St. Benedict, uses vivid colors on old doors for her current art, including a series of paintings on wood pieces displayed on a "tree" of driftwood found near her parent's Lake Koronis home.

Her show at St. John's Univeristy ends on Sunday, April 17.

After college, Henderson began her art career painting - when she could find the time - in her home and holding other "regular" jobs to pay the rent, she said.

*Paynesville native Heidi Henderson paints in vivid colors on old doors and bits of wood. Henderson's work is currently on display in the Target Gallery at the St. John's Art Center at St. John's University.*

Her early paintings were mostly done on paper and art board, she said, but about five years ago Henderson realized she needed another surface for her work. "Canvas is very uninspiring," she said. "It has no history or story,"

Looking for inspiration, she visited a recycling center. "Somehow, walking through the center, I got the idea that



my canvas was to be wood, and I started flipping through the many doors they had for sale," she said. Before long, she came across a wonderful door that would change the look of her work. "It was perfect - the age, the character, the color; I was so excited!" she said.

Since then, wood has been Henderson's canvas. Mostly, she uses old doors given to her by friends or acquaintances. Now she's working on pieces of a 60-year-old door that an elderly man had to cut into small pieces to get it out of his basement, she said. She rarely ever needs to search for doors to use, and her father, Bill, is always willing to cut the wood to her specifications.

Once the perfect piece of wood has been found, Henderson coaxes a story from it, she said. When she sits down with a blank door or bit of wood, she has no idea what the end result will be. She lets the wood tell the story, she explained.

Henderson begins each painting by building layers of acrylic paint on the wood with her fingers until an image begins to emerge. Then she brings the image into focus using oil paints and brushes.

Henderson's renderings may be fantasy, or of another world, she said, but she really isn't sure. "Maybe that's what's in the back yard or garden, but you don't notice it," she said.

Each of Henderson's paintings tells its own story, she said. For instance, "The Willpower of a Lima Bean" portrays a bean-like figure struggling to resist temptation.



And each painting also tells a story about Henderson herself. She can tell where she was and what was going on in her life during the creation of each and every painting, she said. Through her paintings, Henderson can track the course of her own life, from student to artist.

*Each of artist Heidi Henderson's paintings tells a story. This painting, titled "Pop Back and Pump" portrays finding a balance between responsibility and play.*

Sometimes, Henderson even finds that she has created something without knowing it. In some of her paintings, others see things that she can't or see things that she didn't know were in the painting, she said. On the flip side, sometimes she incorporates things into her paintings that only she can see, she added. Maybe the most difficult part is naming her art, according to Henderson. "My grandma used to tell me, 'A work of art is not finished until it has a title,' " she said.

Many of her titles are crucial in telling the painting's full story.

For instance, one of her works, titled "Pop Back and Pump," portrays a woman's high-heeled shoe teetering on a bottle. Inspired by a woman with whom Henderson used to work who used to "pop" into a back room to pump breast milk for her infant, the work represents finding a balance between responsibility and play.

It's also not unusual for her pieces to take a long time to name. Just as each piece creates itself, it

must also inspire its own name. Her latest finished piece, "Butterfly Days," took several days to name, and she was beginning to worry that it would be untitled for her current show, but at the last minute, the title was revealed, she said.

In order to become a commercial success as an artist, Henderson began to feel an increased need for a real studio and a flexible job. Recently, Henderson gave up working in her home and joined an artists' co-operative, where she shares a studio with other artists. She loves being able to separate work from home, and she also likes being in an environment with other artists. The atmosphere and energy is invaluable, she said. Soon she will have her own little studio in the building, she said.

Because each of her works takes a long time to complete - up to 119 hours - finding the perfect place to work was important, but finding a job that would not only pay the rent but also allow her the flexibility to work on her art was also important. Recently, she took the plunge and gave up her regular job for part-time work as a house painter and muralist, allowing her more flexibility to work on her art.

As an artist, Henderson isn't sure what her future will be. "I love what I do, and I want to continue," she said. Eventually she hopes she to make a living from her art, and not depend on other jobs for support.

With a lot of support from her parents, Bill and Kris, and with a very supportive boyfriend, Henderson is looking forward to learning what her future holds.

To learn more, go to Heidi's website at [www.hkhpaintings.com](http://www.hkhpaintings.com).

---

**Contact the author at [editor@paynesvillepress.com](mailto:editor@paynesvillepress.com) • [Return to News Menu](#)**

**[Home](#) | [Marketplace](#) | [Community](#)**

---