

## INTARSIA ARTIST JOINS THE SISTERS ART SCENE

By Katy Yoder

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Marvin Benson hasn't wasted any time joining the art scene in Sisters.

When the Sisters Library invited local artists to display their work in an exhibit, the new Sisters resident jumped at the chance. The show runs from January 16 to February 25, and includes over 100 works of art.

Benson relocated from Colorado only six months ago and left behind quite a legacy when he and his wife decided to join their sons and grandchildren in Central Oregon. A member of the Colorado Woodworkers Guild, Benson brings with him a vast knowledge of the art of Intarsia.

Intarsia is an ancient craft that began in Italy in the 13th century. Pieces of three-quarter-inch wood of different types are meticulously shaped and fitted next to each other to create a three-dimensional image.

Benson fell in love with Intarsia six years ago. An avid woodworker, he enjoyed working with exotic woods and their countless colors and grains.

"I can live anywhere," he said, "as long as I have my shop."

When he moved from Colorado, Benson brought over 1,500 pounds of different kinds of hardwoods with him. His shop is in a hanger at Sisters Airport, giving him ample room to store his wood. His son Benny, an engineer specializing in alternative energy solutions, has his offices upstairs.

"I'm planning on making the space a bit warmer so I can start teaching classes again," said Marvin.

Teaching is one of Benson's passions. He enjoys introducing all of his students, especially women and young people, to a satisfying artistic outlet.

"You don't have to have a lot of fancy equipment to do this," said Benson.

He is especially proud of a student he had with a disability which made it impossible for him to use a foot pedal when he was sanding. Benson found a hand-operated sander and the man was thrilled with the new-found freedom he had to create works of art using Intarsia.

"It was a great feeling to see him so happy," said Benson.

Intarsia enthusiasts can find patterns to create designs online and in magazines like Scroll Saw and Creative Woodworks and Crafts. Pieces are shaped using a pattern similar to sewing. The pattern is laid over a piece of wood and is then cut out. The pieces are then sanded and refined to give the image depth and contour. All the pieces are fitted together like a puzzle and then glued together to complete an image.

In Benson's skilled hands, this craft can be transformed into fine art, especially when he creates pieces by experimenting and letting his imagination lead him.

"All I'm really doing is doodling," he said. "It's fun to see how they work out."

Delicate flowers with thin, intricate leaves and stems, along with abstract creations hang on his shop wall.



Marvin Benson specializes in Intarsia, a form of wood crafting. photo by Katy Yoder

"Right now," he said, "I'm just stockpiling my work." He does have some of his pieces on display at Redmond's private airfield and the Madras airport lounge. Benson also plans to sell his pieces in area shows later this year.

Benson has three pieces on display at the Sisters Library. Two are his original designs and one came from a pattern. When he makes an original piece he has to deconstruct the image and come up with his own pattern.

"I'm always happy to share what I've got," he said. "I don't sell my patterns, all people have to do is ask."

One of his original pieces on display is called Fighting Eagles. Benson saw a photograph of two bald eagles fighting in mid-air. The finished product has more than 250 pieces of wood in it. Each one was chosen for its color and grain. Benson doesn't stain any of his wood; the final step is to complete the image with a stain finish.

"It brings out the grain and colors," said Benson.

One of Benson's goals as a new Sisters resident is to start a woodworker's guild in town.

"It's always nice to share ideas and design techniques with other woodworkers," he said. To learn more about Intarsia, Marvin Benson can be reached at 541-588-6212 or via e-mail [mtbenson@bendbroadband.com](mailto:mtbenson@bendbroadband.com). Visit his Web site at [www.intarsiabymarvin.com](http://www.intarsiabymarvin.com).