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Agricultural heritage will go on display

Cultural Center will show 'Harvest of Heritage, Colorado Masterpieces'

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Journal Staff Writer

A slice of rural Colorado's heritage and artistry will be on display at the Cortez Cultural Center this week as part of a traveling exhibit.

The opening for "Harvest of Heritage, Colorado Masterpieces: Celebrating Agricultural Life and Art" will be held at 5:30 p.m. Friday, Dec. 3. The show will run through Dec. 11.

"A lot of people in Colorado don't realize how important agriculture is to our way of life, so this is a way to celebrate that and also to let people know there is a link between art and everyday life," said Ronna Lee Sharpe, the exhibit's organizer who will be on hand Friday to give a presentation. "The important thing (about agricultural art) is the pieces they make are also useful as well as being beautiful."

The agriculture-based art exhibit includes leather work, wheat weaving, woodwork, braided wheat and rawhide, and even a saddle made by the Colorado Saddle Makers Association.

"They meet several times a year, and whenever they meet, they also work on a saddle. It's just beautiful," said Cortez Cultural Center Executive Director Brenda Hindmarsh. "There are also photos that talk about the artists (who contributed) from all over the state of Colorado. There are so many different kinds of art - from Mexican fabric art to weaving and painting - all types of things."

Colorado Creative Industries, a state agency formerly known as the Colorado Council on the Arts, is working in conjunction with the Museum of Western Colorado to promote the show.

"We selected artists that over the years have been recognized through the Colorado Council on the Arts various grants and fellowship programs," Sharpe said. "They're all traditional artists and people working within cultural traditions related to agriculture. All have gone through the grant review processes and have been awarded on their excellence as master artists."

Sharpe said there are eight cases in the traveling exhibit - plus the saddle - with photographs and interpretive material that represent 25 artists and feature a dozen traditional celebrations around Colorado.

Mesa Verde Country's Agritourism program will be featured, as will the oral history project of Farmers Telephone Co.

Hindmarsh said traveling exhibits like this one give smaller museums like the Cortez Cultural Center access to a broader range of resources.

"It's an effort to bring an expanded form of art to rural museums," she said, noting the Smithsonian traveling exhibit they had last month, "Between Fences," was a huge success.

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According to Sharpe, the exhibit has been to the Fort Garland museum in the San Luis Valley, the Old Time Museum in Burlington and the Museum of Northwest Colorado in Craig.

"We've had a lot of great comments, and a lot of people have come to see it specifically as well as people who just happened to come to the museum. And it let them know more about Colorado artists and agriculture," Sharpe said.

For more information, call the Cortez Cultural Center at 565-1151.

Reach hopen@cortezjournal.com.

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