Palen's artistic talents run from comic to serious

By DEBRA BAKER BRYK, Alumnus\'s Editor

Renowned artist and 1998 distinguished alumnus Jerry Palen (BS 66) has never been too timid to follow his dreams.

"I was always intimidated by the kids who could keep their crayons with the lines," he admits. "I was one of those kids who could never keep it in the lines. I wanted to go off and do my own thing."

Apparantly, that rebel streak has set his mark well—the Wyoming native grew up to be a world-renowned cartoonist who is equally talented in other media, particularly sculpture and painting.

Art was his destiny. Jerry's father developed a massive western art collection over the years, including original paintings from western art and in western Americana.

"I grew up with his interest in it and his affection for fine art," Palen says of his father's influence. "I spent a lot of time with artists, art critics and art museum directors coming and going out of our house." Jerry also spent a significant amount of his travels as a youth visiting galleries and museums around the country.

"Going to college was my father's idea," he says.

"My mother said, 'Look, I know you're going to be an artist and a bum. But you're going to get an education.' That is how Palen ended up at UW, where he studied political science and economics.

After college, Jerry headed to Santa Barbara, CA, a sleepy artist community in the 1960s. There, he studied with two masters, who took him under their wing and helped develop the fundamentals behind a good background in fine art.

Palen still draws upon that background as he spends about half of his time creating commissioned pieces in bronze and in various other media. The time this interview was conducted, Palen was working on a life-sized bronze of a "young Wyoming-type kid" that would stand in front of the state's Capitol.

Palaen built in Cheyenne when complete and on a fountain for a private residence.

Watercolor is another favorite medium for Palen. He sells about 20 per year, most of them commissioned works. Usually, he gets to pick the subject; and it’s frequently a scenic piece that is almost abstract in style. Palen likes to take risks in this medium, which means he regularly discards pieces that just don’t work.

"I'm pushing the watercolor medium right to the breaking point," he says.

His art is part of some of the finest public and private collections in the U.S., Canada and Europe. It's even made it to Africa. This spring, when President Bill Clinton traveled to that continent, so did a Palen sculpture. Clinton presented the work, which featured a moving steer, the leader of the horse of the African nations he visited there; and the gift was well-received.

Art lovers also can find work by Palen on the UW campus—a bronze bust of P.A.B. Widener sits permanently in the Widener Room of the Williams Conservatory. Other Palen works call the UW American Heritage Center home.

Elmo and Flo

Palen probably is most famous for his cartoon series, "Stampede," which chronicles life through the eyes of Elmo and Flo, a ranch couple. Though distinctly rural in flavor, "Stampede" draws a global audience that follows Elmo and Flo and relates to their perspectives. "Stampede" appears in publications around the world, and related products—including books, t-shirts and calendars—also are available. In addition, several large companies (e.g., Merck Animal Health Products and SOLIDOCK, one of the world's largest fence manufacturers) incorporate the "Stampede" characters into their advertising campaigns.

"Why does the 25-year-old cartoon appeal to so many different cultures? It's simple. Art is a kind of a universal language," Palen explains, whatever the medium may be. Simplicity and universality are qualities he strives for in all of his artistic endeavors, including the cartoon.

That universal ability to draw a reaction is why "Stampede" works so well: virtually everyone can think of someone who resembles Elmo or Flo in some way.

The cartoon couple are a composite of many ranch families Palen met during the late 1950s and 1960s, while accompanying his father, a large animal veterinarian, on his rounds across southeast Wyoming. "Elmo and Flo are just a collection of those people," Palen said.

"Stampede" is a ranchers' comic, and Palen understands them. "They are very independent. They are very strong. They are not interested in other people's opinions. They are just interested in the job at hand and doing the job at hand."

While focusing on fairly timeless themes, he admits that the couple have changed a bit over the years. "They've probably gotten simpler, just because as I get older, I get older."

Flo's unique ability to accessorize—she's known for her trademark oversized boots and gloves—comes from Palen's wife, Ann. Called out to help with some chore on the family ranch outside of Cheyenne, Ann would grab the first set of boots and work gloves she could find, usually something far too big. That "look" became Flo's.

Flo is a pretty popular girl, according to marketing studies conducted by companies using "Stampede" in their ad campaigns.

"Flo is more well-known than Snoopy (of the 'Peanuts' cartoon in the agriculture set)," Palen says. "Schultz ('Peanuts' creator Charles) and I have something in common—he's rich and Flo's recognizable."

Elmo's a bit different character.

"He's always grumpy, and he's always grumpy at the wrong time," Palen says of Flo's spouse.

Fan mail comes from everywhere and is always positive. Palen has been known to actually receive letters addressed to "Stampede Cartoons, Wyoming." He's also fielded calls from people like comic book and advertising icon Paul Harvey who usually wants copies of cartoons that mention him, and a nameless Illinois farmer who regularly called to say, "I liked that cartoon in the paper." Before hanging up, Palen never knew which cartoon or which paper.

"Stampede" is more than a cultural phenomenon—it's also a thriving business. Stampede, Inc., of which Palen is the founder and CEO is based in Saratoga, Wyo., a small town just over the Snowy Range in Carbon County. At that organization handles the production and marketing of the cartoon and related merchandise.

The Palens also run Saratoga Publishing, which produces a variety of printing jobs. Two recent publications were a book commemorating the National Cartoonist's Association centennial and a cookbook for the National Football League's Jacksonville Jaguars.

Unique Grazing Approach

Art isn't the only area where Palen has won acclaim. He's also well known for implementing a relatively unique approach to grazing on his Cheyenne ranch, which he owned until moving to Saratoga. Palen is one of the first ranchers to practice an intensive, holistic approach to grazing. It was inspired by Allan Savory of Rhodesia, who noticed that during African droughts, animals move in and out of fenced areas in masses. Whenever they leave an area, vegetation would spring back up, even better than before.

Palen took that observation and applied it to the Wyoming 'range land.' With the help of his ranch manager and his teenage son, he partitioned the ranch into 40-acre parcels then moved the herd from section to section. The result of having hundreds of hooves "roto-tilling" the soil doubled the land's carrying capacity. Besides improving the

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Rechard...

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for municipal clients. The core services, mining and environmental work, will remain staples; but they are not anticipated to be growth areas.

The key, Rechard says, is to diversify their operations and avoid boom-and-bust cycles.

Biographical Information

Paul and his wife, Mary Lou (BA ’49), have two children: Rob (BS ’78, MS ’80) and Karen Rechard Davis (BS ’85, MB ’88).

Paul is a life member of the UW Alumni Association and a member of the Cowboy Joe Club. He has played a significant leadership role in the Laramie Lions Club since 1964, serving as its president in 1968. He also has been active in the Albany County United Way since 1980, the United Presbyterian Church since 1965, the Sigma Nu house board since 1994, and the Laramie Lodge No. 3 AF&AM since 1964.

Professional affiliations include: Sigma Tau, Phi Kappa Phi, Sigma Xi, Gamma Sigma Delta, American Society of Civil Engineers (fellow and life member).


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By Lindsay Thompson

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Palen...

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overall productivity of his ranch, his efforts in this area have earned him several conservation and agricultural awards.

Miscellany

Palen and his wife, Ann Prosser Palen (EX ’67), have two sons: Eric (BS ’59), a law student at UW; and Brian, a student at Creighton Medical School. Ann’s grandfather, Dean Prosser Sr., served on the UW trustees. He was that group’s president in 1927 and 1928.

In 1997, Jerry donated a significant portion of his father’s art collection to the UW American Heritage Center. He also donated an artist’s fee for the Widener sculpture at UW, continuing a long tradition of philanthropy through art.

Palen is listed in Who’s Who of American Art and is a member of the prestigious National Cartoonist Society. He has been honored by agricultural groups for his contributions to that industry. Jerry also has been selected to be in the Governor’s Art Show during Cheyenne Frontier Days for the past five years and is a multi-year nominee for the Governor’s Art Award.

By LINDSAY THOMPSON

ALLUNNEWS Editorial Assistant

ASSOCIATION

KEY FOR DEGREE ABBREVIATIONS

BA Bachelor of Arts
BD Bachelor of Science in
Dental Hygiene
BF Bachelor of Fine Arts
BH Bachelor of Science in
Home Economics
BM Bachelor of Music
BN Bachelor of Science in Nursing
BP Bachelor of Science in
Pharmacy
BS Bachelor of Science
BT Bachelor of Theatre and Dance
BW Bachelor of Social Work
DE Doctor of Education
ED Educational Specialist
EX Expected Graduation Date
HD Honorary Degree
JD Juris Doctor
MA Master of Arts
MB Master of Business Administration
ME Master of Education
MF Master of Fine Arts
MM Master of Music
MP Master of Planning
MR Master of Arts in Teaching
MS Master of Science
MT Master of Science in
Teaching
MU Master of Public Administration
PH Doctor of Philosophy
OZ Normal Degree
07 Pro. Civil Engineering

WILBUR L. BUNCH, BS ’48, Physics, Richland, Wash., has received the Lifetime Achievement Award for 1997. The Radiation Protection Foundation presented the award for outstanding individual contributions in research and development or education in the fields of radiation dosimetry, shielding, and radiation protection.

Among his many contributions are design of high density cameras, shielding of furniture designers, removal of molds, evaluation and analysis, conceptual design of Fast Flux Test Facility, design, and evaluation of the FPP shields. He was named Commander of RPM in 1976. Wilbur profoundly contributed to the evolution of radiation shielding.

MEL WOLFE, EX ’43, Geology, Denver, Colo., and his wife, Elaine Wolfe, will be honored at the Food Bank of the Rockies’ 30th Annual Heart of Gold Ball at the Hyatt Regency Denver on Sept. 10, 1998. Among the many significant contributions they have made to the Denver area’s Outpatient Surgery Center, Children’s Hospital’s Mental Health Unit, the low-income Apartments, the Children’s Hospital Cancer Center, and the Denver Zoo.

FRANK MANNING, EX ’55, Pro-Dentistry, Thermopolis, Wyo., will retire this 47-year dental practice in Thermopolis. He received the Thermopolis Citizen of the Year Award in 1998 from the Chamber of Commerce.

MAURICE G. BARR, BS ’50, Art, Boulder, Colo., is looking for a Hitchcock Chair. Hitchcock Chairs are famous for their hand-crafted furniture built in accordance with the standards and excellence set by Lambe Hitchcock back in the early 1900s. If anyone has any information on Hitchcock Chairs, please contact Maurice at 303-624-9837 at 303-624-9837.

JAMES GOODMAN, BS ’56, Civil Engineering, Redfeather Lake, Colo., recently moved to the foothills of Colorado after several years at the South Dakota School of Mines in Rapid City. He spent most of his career at Colorado State University teaching and conducting research in civil engineering. He also enjoyed part-time teaching and research at the University of Wyoming.

CHARLES STEINER, EX ’57, Laramie, Wyo., recently received a lifetime member award from the Lions Club International. Steiner joined the Laramie Lions Club in 1933, 13 years after the club was chartered. He remains active in the noon club, attending meetings regularly and offering an occasional quip to keep members on their toes. It is said that Lionism is strong in Laramie today because of Steiner’s 63 years of commitment to the ideals of community service.

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