

Art studio gets busy



DEBBIE SCHWANKE/Colby Community College

Guest artist Cal Mahin conducted an art exercise on Friday, Sept. 6, during the first Studio Friday at Colby Community College. Mahin is a former instructor at the college and Colby High School. Studio Friday is to be held on the first Friday of each month at the college. About 20 people participated. For information about Studio Fridays, contact instructor Rebel Jay at 460-5459.

College art trip attendees to meet Wednesday evening

Colby Community College art instructor Rebel Jay will lead a fine-arts trip to Amarillo, Texas; Arizona; Albuquerque, N.M.; and Durango, Colo., from Thursday to Sunday, Oct. 17 to 20.

Highlights of the trip, she said, will include a stop at the Amarillo Art Museum, which houses several well-known artists' works. Participants will dine at the Big Texan for dinner. The restaurant includes a large gift shop, live music and a mini shooting range.

The group will have a chance to exhibit their spray-painting skills at the Cadillac Ranch just outside Amarillo. Cadillac Ranch is visible from the highway, and though it is on private land, visiting it is tacitly encouraged. Writing graffiti on or otherwise spray-painting the vehicles is encouraged, too, and the vehicles, which have long since lost their original colors, are wildly decorated.

The cars are repainted once in a while to provide a fresh canvas for future visitors, Jay said. The cars were briefly restored to their original colors by the motel chain Hampton Inn in a public relations-sponsored series of Route 66 landmark restoration projects. The new paint jobs and even the plaque commemorating the project lasted less than 24 hours before being covered with fresh graffiti.

The tour will spend the first night in Amarillo. On Friday, the group will travel to Albuquerque, where they will tour Old Town to visit galleries and shops. The next stop will be at Pie Town, N.M., which is featured in many of the photos taken during the 1930s.

The area is rich in Native American relics. Many Anasazi and Acoma pottery shards have been found in the area, along with grinding sticks, an ancient axe head, and petrified wood. Some fossilized bones have been found on the ground. The ruins of Native American communities, with from one to a few dozen structures, are found in and near Pie Town.

The next stop is Holbrook, Ariz., at the Rock Art Ranch. The group will visit a museum which houses many Indian petroglyphs. Holbrook is also well-known for the Hash Knife Gang, which was included in many Western novels.

The last stop of the day will be in Williams, Ariz., located on Route 66. The group will eat at Cruisers, walk the strip and spend the night.

Williams is the gateway to the Grand Canyon. On Saturday, the tour will visit the Grand Canyon and the Four Corners, the only spot in the United States where four states touch: the southwestern corner of Colorado, northwestern corner of New Mexico, northeastern corner of Arizona and southeastern corner of Utah. The tour will spend the night in Durango, where there are many studios and arts shops. Plans are to attend a cabaret performance.

On Sunday, the bus will stop in Manitou Springs, Colo., before returning to Colby late that evening.

An informational meeting for those interested in the trip will be held at 5 p.m. Wednesday in Ferguson Hall, room 503, on campus. Meetings will continue each Wednesday until the trip.

For information, call Jay at (785) 269-7065.

Crop loss prevention can cut insurance payments

Extreme weather forced the Federal Crop Insurance Program to pay out a record-breaking \$17.3 billion in crop losses last year.

According to the nonprofit Natural Resources Defense Council, payments made to farmers during the 2012 growing season to cover losses from drought, heat and hot wind alone accounted for 80 percent of all farm losses, with many Upper Midwest and Great Plains states hit hardest.

With extreme weather such as drought expected to become more common, record-breaking insurance payouts will likely continue to increase. However, widespread adoption of crop-loss-prevention methods — such as cover crops and no-till farming — that build soil health and improve water management on farms can limit losses. From 2001 to 2010, crop losses averaged just \$4.1 billion a year, making the 2012 record-breaking payouts even more staggering.

"Federal Crop Insurance Program has failed farmers and taxpayers by ignoring water challenges," said Claire O'Connor, an agricultural water policy analyst for the council. "The program was designed to be a safety net, not a subsidy for increasingly risky practices and less sustainable food production. We need to empower farmers to invest in low-risk, water-smart practices that are proven to reduce crop losses."

The study, "Soil Matters: How the Federal Crop Insurance Program should be reformed," includes a new interactive crop loss and weather map at www.nrdc.org/water/your-soil-matters detailing crop losses county-by-county in all 50 states last year, when more than 80 percent of agricultural lands nationwide suffered drought.

The report finds that American farms, particularly in the Upper Midwest and Great Plains, were primarily affected by three major forms of extreme weather in 2012: drought, heat and hot wind, all expected to increase. The top 10 states with the largest overall crop insurance payouts due to drought, heat and hot wind:

- Illinois: 98 percent of losses, costing \$3,011,443,799.
- Iowa: 97 percent, costing \$1,924,444,160.
- Nebraska: 92 percent, costing \$1,427,738,976.
- Kansas: 93 percent, costing \$1,273,662,944.
- Indiana: 97 percent, costing \$1,130,302,660.
- Missouri: 95 percent, costing \$1,098,310,111.
- South Dakota: 93 percent, costing \$1,029,780,352.
- Texas: 75 percent, costing \$974,548,606.
- Kentucky: 96 percent, costing \$454,380,256.
- Wisconsin: 94 percent, costing \$372,479,370.

Soil Matters' analysis reveals the key causes of the staggering crop-insurance payouts by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Risk Management Agency, and examines the systemic flaws in the agency's program, which fails to account for risky farming practices that create extreme weather vulnerabilities and ignores the risk-reducing value of healthy soil. The report outlines solutions for a pilot plan that would build soil health to help climate-proof American farms and would reduce costs by encouraging farmers to resist weather-related risks.

The pilot, which would not require legislation, would offer reduced premium rates to farmers who adopt soil-building practices

that sustain crop yields and result in greater water infiltration, less farm runoff and reduced flooding.

These best management practices include cover cropping, conservation tillage and an improved irrigation scheduling:

- Cover crops: crops grown with the purpose of building soil health and increasing biodiversity on farms focused on commodity crops. Farmers who used cover crops averaged higher yields than farmers who did not, according to a government survey. The yield benefit from cover crops was most pronounced in the areas hardest hit by the drought.
- No-till farming: a soil moisture management method when farmers plant directly into the stubble from the previous year's crops, rather than plowing up this residue. The protective stubble serves as mulch that retains soil moisture, suppresses weeds and increases capacity to grow high-yield crops. In 2010, corn farmers who used no-till were 30 percent less likely to file a crop insurance claim than conventional tilling corn farmers.
- Improved irrigation scheduling: a simple altering of often fixed irrigation times, whereby farmers apply adaptive irrigating schedules based on examinations of soil health. This could help

Writing career owes start to making great sauerkraut

It must have been at least 25 years ago when I wrote a garden-related article and fired it off to *Flower and Garden* magazine, hoping they would publish it. The "pink slip" came in the mail within a month, thanking me for thinking of them. So, I did what any persistent gardener would do. I made a few minor changes to my story, and sent it to *Gardens For All* magazine to see what they thought of it.

In a couple of weeks, I received a letter from the editor of *Gardens For All*, informing me that my submission would be published in next month's edition. The note was accompanied by a check for \$100. Sure enough, there was my article in next month's magazine, slightly edited for length, and illustrated by a very talented artist with the ability to sketch the important facets of my story. I can't find my copy of that magazine now, and in fact, the magazine is no longer in publication.

Charged up by my sudden journalistic success, I began writing and recording a short daily vignette garden program and mailed it to consenting radio stations who



Kay Melia

• The Gardener

played it each day on their air and sent me \$20 a month for my trouble before I tired of the effort.

Now, I write these little weekly things for a few of our best weekly newspapers and a lot of friends and relatives, and I do it for nothing other than the satisfaction of spreading the word about the most popular American pastime. Your feedback to what I write is my remuneration.

Anyway, that article that was published by *Gardens For All* magazine was my story about making sauerkraut. I remembered that episode with the magazine, and the other writing encounters, because today, I am canning this year's kraut crop that has been diligently fermenting in my crock for some 11 days now. It is indeed strongly flavored, and extremely crunchy. A little of it will be held out for immediate use. The bratwurst is patiently standing by.

The sauerkraut this year is the product of a bumper crop of cabbage out in the backyard. My variety of choice is Megaton, and it certainly lived up to its name this year. Several heads topped the scales at 12 pounds, and one of them weighed 14 pounds. It took only three heads to fill my small crock to the brim.

It seems that most years, I have difficulty coaxing my homegrown cabbage plants to maturity because of the dreaded little green animals called cabbage worms. But this year, they were delightfully a no-show. I credit my good fortune to several late frosts which apparently wiped out the diamondback moths responsible for laying the eggs that hatch into those little green worms with huge appetites.

Certainly, not everybody likes sauerkraut. Seems like most folks would just as soon stay as far away from it as possible. But I love the stuff. After all, one day many years ago, it provided me with a hundred bucks.

And now, I can't even find the magazine to prove it.

Rotary Club

The Colby Rotary Club met Tuesday with 33 members and guest Andrew Sonnermon. The monthly collection for Genesis-Thomas County was taken.

President Marilyn Unger read a thank you note from Sen. Jerry Moran regarding his Aug. 6 visit to the club. Membership recognition awards were presented to Brian Staats (15 years) and Terrel Harrison (five).

The public image and membership committees had the program. Each committee reported on the status of its goals for the current Rotary year and its future plans.

The themes for September (new generations), October (vocational services) and November (Rotary Foundation) were highlighted, along with club membership goals.

Each committee conducted a trivia contest in which members earned candy bars for correct answers.

J.L. Evins won Roto-Lotto.

The club meets at noon each Tuesday in Room 106 of the Colby Community College Student Union.

— Relda Galli

Gospel singer to be in Bird City

Kansas-born country gospel singer Michael Gracy will be singing and preaching on Sunday, Sept. 15, at the morning service of the Immanuel United Baptist Church in Bird City.



Michael Gracy

Gracy, originally from South Haven, took an interest in music at a young age, singing in church choirs. He was influenced by his fiddle-playing granddad and guitar-playing neighbor.

His father bought him a guitar when he was 14, and Gracy played in bands in high school and college.

He stopped playing when he married, but began playing again 25 years later when his pastor asked him to play in church and sing in the church choir.

Since then, he has turned his music into a full-time ministry, traveling across the country

singing his original songs and preaching.

To hear music from his latest album, "He Writes the Song," go to www.tatemusicgroup.com/epk/?id=13626&page=music.

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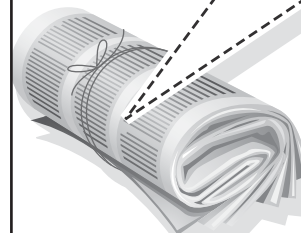
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