

The Columbian Life

Section D

Today's weather picture by Nathaniel Fernandez, 9, Vancouver, Sunset Elementary



MONDAY, APRIL 16, 2007



MIKE BAILEY
Bits 'n' Pieces

Gallery thinks local artist is a pearl

More than 2,000 artists apply each year to have their work shown at Lawrence Gallery in Portland's Pearl District.

Only a handful make the cut, and it's rare for an artist with only a few years of experience to get a second look from owner **Gary Lawrence**.

But Lawrence says Vancouver's **Greg Bell** is the exception.

Lawrence has three of Bell's wall hangings, featuring streaks of glass coursing through a ceramic base, in his gallery.

"Bell's art is wonderfully done and shows craftsmanship with great use of color and composition," Lawrence said.

Bell began making wall hangings about three years ago and previously had shown only at a small gallery on the Oregon coast. Vancouver artists **Vickie Nelson** and **Bev Jozwiak** convinced Bell to apply at the Portland gallery.



Greg Bell

"They saw my work at an event in Hillsboro (Ore.) and tracked me down and said I should talk to Gary," he said.

Nelson and Jozwiak also have art at Lawrence Gallery.

Bell's wall hangings can cost up to \$1,500, but the ones at Lawrence Gallery range from \$750 to \$850.

Visit lawrencegallery.net for the artists and their work at the gallery.

Stamp of approval

When **Benjamin Berkompas** needs inspiration to paint, he looks to the sky above his family's Yacolt home.

"I've always been fascinated with the outdoors," Berkompas said. "We live in the country. Nature and wildlife are around us all day."

Berkompas, 17, enjoys creating images of waterfowl, and it was his painting of a bufflehead duck that won Best of Show in the Washington State Junior Duck Stamp art contest this month. His entry heads to Washington, D.C., to compete with other state winners for the national title. The first-place design at the national level will be printed and sold by the U.S. Postal Service.



"The bufflehead is small and cute and is one of my favorite ducks," said Berkompas, who is home-schooled. Berkompas continues a streak of local winners at the state level. Olivia Moon of Battle Ground won three state titles from 2004-2006.

For more on the contest, visit the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service at fws.gov.

Another Misty band

Vancouver singer and musician **Carol Harley** has performed for years in the group Misty River. But she also enjoys informal jam sessions with nonband members in her spare time.

It was during one of those sessions with three other women that she realized this group had potential as a band.

"I thought to myself we're all Misty Mamas," she said. The name was inspired by her other all-female band, Misty River.

Misty Mamas performs mostly bluegrass, and after practicing together for a few years is ready to branch out with concerts. The group will perform Friday at Sydney's Cafe in Portland.

"We've been keeping (our band) under the radar as we get stronger," Harley said.

Other members are Vancouver's **Katherine Nitsch** and **Eileen Rocci** and Portland's **April Parker**.

MIKE BAILEY's column appears Mondays and Wednesdays. Reach him at 360-759-8050 or mike.bailey@columbian.com.

ALL HANDS ON HOLODECK

WSUV professor develops next generation of virtual reality



WSU Vancouver professor Dene Grigar demonstrates the school's new virtual reality lab.

Photos by DAVE OLSON/The Columbian

By **BRETT OPPEGAARD**
Columbian staff writer

Something surprisingly like science fiction is being developed in the basement of WSU Vancouver's Classroom Building. The project started quietly but is now causing a commotion, like the smoke that recently oozed from the mysterious lab's corner doorway.

The building had to be cleared. The fire department responded. Professor Dene Grigar sheepishly let everyone know that there was nothing to worry about. It was just mist, coming from one of the peripherals of her new virtual reality lab.

Grigar is creating a prototype of a place where dream worlds can become elaborate interactive

environments, like the holodeck on "Star Trek." At this point, she needs smoke. No mirrors. She will open the lab to the public for the first time Wednesday.

Think back 40 years to the original "Star Trek" communicators that look like today's cell phones. Technology imagined in popular science fiction often inspires real-life scientists and researchers, such as Grigar and her colleagues, to make it so.

In "Star Trek," the ship's crew could go into the holodeck, and it would transform from a room



ON THE WEB

Dene Grigar shows off the MOVE Lab at columbian.com/video.



Virtual reality space at WSU Vancouver is controlled by this handheld infrared tracker. The location of the tracker in the three-dimensional grid of the lab triggers various effects, including sounds, lights, music and video.

with a grid into anything the operator could imagine. The holodeck could replay historical scenes,

Inside

■ For more science and technology news, see Page D3.

test theories, provide exercise, teach courses or just offer a reprieve from ship life by creating a virtual paradise for relaxation and recreation.

One of the first steps in making a mass-produced version of immersive and physically interactive technology was Dance Dance Revolution, created by Konami Digital Entertainment Inc. in the late 1990s. Players of that game interact with a virtual environment that plays out on a video screen by dancing around on a stage-like controller pad.

Nintendo Co. followed with Wii late last year. Wii

VIRTUAL, Page D4

If you go

■ **What:** Demonstration of the new MOVE (Motion-tracking Virtual Environment) Lab at WSU Vancouver, connecting in real-time with a similar lab in Canada.

■ **When:** 10:35 a.m. Wednesday.

■ **Where:** WSU Vancouver, 14204 N.E. Salmon Creek Ave., Vancouver, in the basement of the Classroom Building, room No. 3.

■ **Cost:** Free.

■ **Information:** Audience members must reserve spots in advance through 360-546-9487. Seating is extremely limited.

LATTES COME WITH SHOT OF ARTISTIC FLAIR

Creative baristas turn plain old foam into drinkable masterpieces

By **CARYN ROUSSEAU**
Associated Press writer

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — With a few flicks of Aaron Duckworth's latte-pouring wrist, he can turn your regular low-fat hazelnut drink into art.

Duckworth is a practitioner of latte art, or the process of creating intricate designs on the top of lattes while pouring the steamed milk into the espresso. At his shop, Espresso dell'Anatra, Duckworth trains his baristas in the art — creating fern leaves and hearts.

"Your drink is going to naturally taste better because in order for us to do latte art, the espresso has got to be perfect, the milk has got to be perfect," Duckworth says. "Everything has to come together at the

same time. If one of your components is off, then you don't have a chance."

He also teaches etching, or making snowflake, rosetta and swirl designs by drawing on top of the latte with a sharp object, like the edge of a spoon.

Duckworth, a representative for the Barista Guild of America, says the first known latte art was created by accident in Seattle in 1990, when a barista became distracted, looked down and saw a heart had formed on the drink. Since then, training videos and word of mouth have spread the art form, which even has its own competitions.

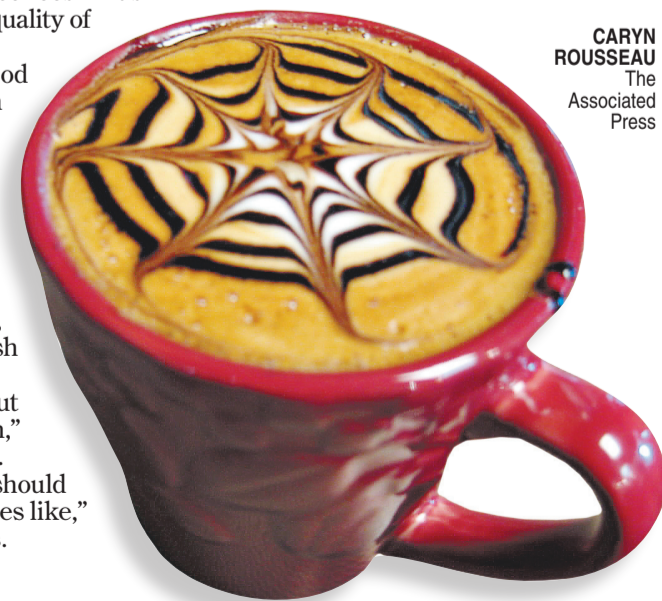
And while latte art can be memorable for the customer — Duckworth says he's had people take

pictures of their coffees — it's more about the quality of the drink.

But is this a good use of time when you've got a coffee shop full of customers? Duckworth thinks it is.

"You've taken your time to really slow it down, and not be so rush rush rush, get them out as fast as you can," Duckworth says.

"The real art should be in what it tastes like," Duckworth says.



It's caffeinated, but is it art?

CARYN ROUSSEAU
The Associated Press

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Printmaker's legacy shapes sisters' relationship /D1

Virtual:

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enables players to control the on-screen action by physically acting out intended movements, such as swinging an arm as if rolling a bowling ball or punching like a boxer.

Wii is rudimentary compared to the technology in the WSU Vancouver lab.

"This is the future of game development," Grigar says. "If people are going to want this in their house, then they are going to want more and more sophisticated games. ... This is the beginning of the holodeck experience."

In the WSU Vancouver room, the lab's equipment connects high-powered computers and cameras with sophisticated motion-tracking software to create an invisible grid that's 12 feet wide, 12 feet long and 6 feet 8 inches high. The grid serves

as a sophisticated motion detector for what looks like a dance floor in the center of the room.

When a player stands on the dance floor with a hand-held tracking device, about the size of a hockey puck, the system can locate precisely where the device is. As the tracking device is moved around, the computer reacts with preprogrammed responses, based on time and space.

As an example, a person holding the tracker at waist level in the center of the room could turn on a spotlight. Raising the tracker to shoulder height could then trigger a video to play on a wall. A few seconds later, moving the tracker back down to waist level could start a song. The options of manipulating the system to get a variety of responses are limitless. What researchers using this technology haven't yet figured out is how to make the responses

HOW MUCH DOES VIRTUAL REALITY TECHNOLOGY COST?

Virtual reality comes in a variety of forms, ranging from Web-based games to a helmet-and-gloves kit to full-sized immersion rooms.

On the high end is the Cave Automatic Virtual Environment which costs about \$1 million. It creates simulated realities with projected images on the walls, floor and ceiling of a room-sized cube.

A motion-capture lab, which costs about \$300,000, looks at objects from multiple angles to capture and store shapes and types of movement.

In motion-tracking, a hand-held device called a tracker allows

computers to pinpoint coordinates in a three-dimensional space and respond as instructed. The hardware used in the WSU Vancouver lab, designed by APR Inc. of Edmonton, Canada, costs \$30,000. The money to pay for the lab was donated by the Canadian Foundation for Innovation through Steve Gibson at the University of Victoria in Canada. WSU Vancouver provided another \$50,000 to transform one of its standard classrooms into the specifications needed for the research and application of these tools.

Source: Dene Grigar, WSU Vancouver professor of digital technology and culture.

create an experience so rich that it feels like an alternate reality.

The equipment in WSU Vancouver's lab was developed by APR Inc. in Edmon-

ton, Alberta.

APR President and Founder Will Bauer is a leader in the research and development of motion-tracking systems. Along with academic research, APR's technology is being used in the entertainment industry to manipulate lights and smoke machines at pop music concerts as well as theatrical productions. It was, for example, incorporated into the extravagant Broadway rendition of "The Lion King."

Grigar hopes to eventually use the lab to create her own performance art.

First, though, she has to master the tools. So Grigar is experimenting with her three-dimensional virtual space. The grid in the lab can be programmed to trigger various media, including music, sound, animation, still images, light, smoke and wall-sized videos as well as any combination of those. Better yet, through a high-speed Internet connection, Grigar and her research partner, Steve Gibson at the University of Victoria in Canada, can operate their labs together in real-time, including performing joint artistic pieces. They can manipulate the technology to

appear as virtual figures in each other's spaces.

Grigar says the future of this technology will feature even more intuitive controls.

These labs will be using voice recognition within a year, Bauer predicts, and full-body recognition in about three years.

By adding this lab to its campus, WSU Vancouver is giving the 100 or so students in the digital technology and culture program access to tools, technology and concepts being studied in only about a half-dozen other universities in North America.

Even though this field is pushing the borders of known research, Gibson says, anyone who has watched an episode of "Star Trek" can begin to imagine where it could go.

"Real-time video is still really difficult" for computers to process and respond to without lag, Gibson acknowledges. "Real-time holograms, at this point, are out of the question."

Grigar, who started working at WSU in the fall, has been finishing her lab and calibrating it over the past few months in preparation for the public unveiling this

week. She also has begun work on an exhibit for the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry, called "Mindful Play Environment," that will debut in November. In that, three people at a time will be able to collaborate to make music and a multimedia presentation together.

"The technology is not only educational and cutting-edge, but it's also a whole lot of fun," says Janell Jones, OMSI's director of traveling and temporary exhibits. "It gives our visitors the opportunity to be creative, to move their bodies in different ways and to learn about new technologies."

Bauer is working on infrared trackers that have more controls built into them, to allow more complex and sophisticated responses from the computers. Processing speeds, Internet connections and cameras are getting more powerful. Researchers and scientists intensely are studying the idea. But a holodeck?

"That's pretty far in the future," Grigar says. "Yet you can see where we are headed. We already are simulating parts of it. ... It's an intellectual curiosity. When you get something like this in your head, you want to see it happen. When you start getting close to it, you start thinking what else do I need to do?"

BRETT OPPEGAARD writes general-interest features. Reach him at 360-759-8028 or brett.oppegaard@columbian.com.

Resorts for body, nature planned

Tourists can assist in scientific study

By PAT BRENNAN
The Orange County Register

SANTA ANA, Calif. — Fifteen years of work is about to bring something new to Panama: a tropical resort that will double as a scientific research station.

Former University of California-Irvine social ecology professor Hana Ayala wants to build a string of such facilities across the globe that has a small development footprint, strong conservation ethic and generous financial support for wildlife, habitat, geological and evolutionary research.

A German investor has agreed to place the first one on two Panamanian islands he owns called Isla Bayoneta and Isla Canas.

The islands, in the Las Perlas Archipelago off Panama's Pacific coast, are uninhabited and untouched by development.

"It's a pristine, natural treasure," Ayala said at a meeting with the investor, Claus Mittermayer, in Newport Beach, Calif. The two signed a development agreement last year and announced the project last month.

Ayala calls her project IQ Resorts but says she wants to create far more than just another chain of "eco-resorts." She speaks of establishing an economic engine for local people, who would gain jobs and profit from their association with it.


She thinks her vision would provide a monetary incentive to preserve the tropical habitat of the region for high-end, low-impact tourism instead of filling it with homes and businesses as development pressure increases.

Mittermayer owns three islands in the archipelago. He and Ayala talk about a resort with interpretive exhibits on the science and culture of the area built into the grounds and architecture — all of it using minimal power and producing minimal waste with state-of-the-art technology.

Ayala, the wife of University of California-Irvine evolutionary biologist Francisco Ayala, thinks her resort would generate enough money from guests to fund scientific research projects on the archipelago and surrounding region.

The findings from the science projects, in turn, would enhance environmental and scientific tourism. Guests would not just take guided hikes or hear lectures, but absorb detailed science as deeply as they wished from presentations woven into their day. They could even take part in the science, gathering some of the data, and would get invitations to make financial investments in specific projects.

"A spa for the body will join a spa for the mind," Ayala says.



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Wealth Management: Plan now for a retirement you'll love! PAGE 5

FOCUS

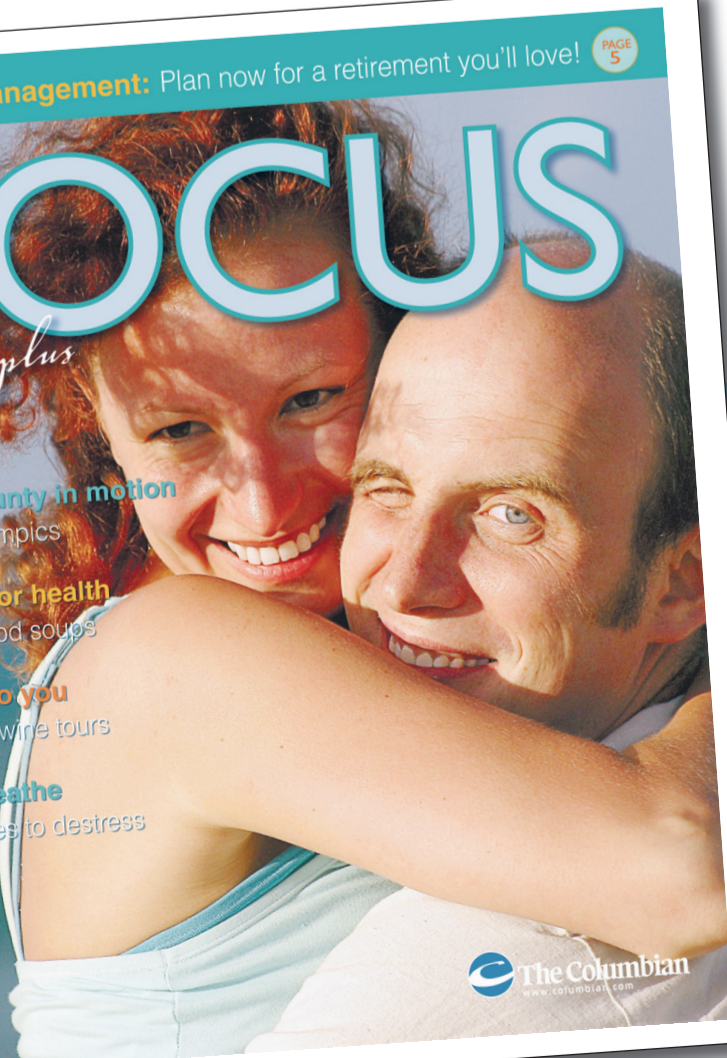
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