Where art and nature meet

The entrance to the Price Sculpture Forest was designed and built by Ken Price, Scott Price’s father, and Langley artist Michael Hauser.

The Price Sculpture Forest in Coupeville, open since October 23, is a magic carpet ride, an inviting view of remarkable art in a natural forest setting.

Greeting us on a drizzly, cold and gray November Saturday afternoon, Scott Price exudes joie de vivre. Strolling along the park’s well-maintained trails — which he and active park volunteer/wood artist Michael Hauser had swept to clear tree debris from a recent windstorm— creates the sense, much like the house elves do at Hogwarts school in the Harry Potter series, that clear walking paths and impressive art just naturally appear in a hundred-year-old forest.
Olympia artist Elizabeth Berrien is a world-renowned wire sculptor. Her piece, “Golden Pegasus,” is suspended high in the trees. The white dots in the photo are from raindrops on David Welk’s lens.

Snooty it isn’t. Intriguing it is. And the art is improved by the setting of fir, cedar, hemlock, yew, maple and alder trees.

As we began the park’s tour — which is enhanced by scanning a QR code with your smartphone, providing a virtual visit with each of the park’s artists — Langley sculptor Sue Taves’ marble and granite piece, “We Are Water,” greets us at the entrance.

“We’re so lucky to have this new addition to Whidbey,” Sue wrote in an email. “I think Scott has done an incredible job bringing in a variety of sculpture here from all over the country. I’m honored to have one of my sculptures placed there and I’m impressed with how much care he’s taken with every aspect of the Forest, from placing the sculptures, providing video explanations by the artists, and even creative signs contribute to the experience. Scott has been dedicated to this project and has worked steadily to bring it from the idea stage to a wonder-filled reality.”

We begin walking the Nature Nurtured loop, whose artists represent beauty in the form of natural elements. The other loop is Whimsy Way, where art takes a turn to the fanciful. “The two loops were built pre-COVID,” Scott explained, “and its design naturally creates social distancing. Another reason for the one-way loops is we designed the approach for the best impact.”

Wind Shear, by Pennsylvania artist Jeff Kahn is a hypnotic aluminum kinetic sculpture whose gently turning arms/branches replicate the movement found in a gentle breeze. In a video on the sculpture forest’s webpage, Jeff says the piece was inspired by watching his wife riding her horse.

Some of the art is for sale, some is on loan, and some is donated, as in the Soaring Eagle piece by Coupeville artist Greg Neal. His homage to birds is evident in his steel creations. Scott’s neighbor David Young bought the piece after it was installed and donated it to the park in memory of his beloved wife, Pam Young, who found inspiration in eagles who soared overhead.
Scott Price, whose Price Sculpture Forest opened last month, with artist Greg Neal’s sculpture, “Soaring Eagle,” purchased by David Young and donated to the sculpture forest. Greg Neal’s patina and feather detail in “Soaring Eagle.” Wood artist Pat McVay is on the left and Scott Price of Price is on the top right.

The Price family bought the 16.3 acre site in 2008 with the intention of building a house and enjoying the natural landscape and community feel of Whidbey. But the family ended up building elsewhere and searched for the best use for the land, keeping in mind a conservation-minded buyer. But the market dictated cutting down most of the hundred-year-old forest and subdividing the land into three view lots overlooking Penn Cove below and Mt. Baker in the distance. Scott contacted the Whidbey Camano Land Trust, who with the US Navy, worked together to create a permanent conservation easement, removing residential development and preserving the park and forest in perpetuity.

“The easement goes on even if I sell the property,” Scott said.

Prior to building his own sculpture forest, Scott visited outdoor art parks that inspired him. Among Scott’s favorites: Webster’s Woods in Port Angeles; Big Rock Garden in Bellingham; and, San Juan Islands Sculpture Park in Roche Harbor on San Juan Island.

Here in the Coupeville woods, art weaves itself into the natural world, recalling ancient myths.

Wood artist Pat McVay, whose popular woodworks are seen at the “Welcome to Whidbey Island” sign when exiting the Clinton ferry, and at the entrance to South Whidbey Parks and Recreation entrance on Maxwelton Road, walked with us, carrying a feather he carved to add to his ever-evolving piece, Icarus Was Here. Icarus is known in Greek myths for being foolish and flying too close to the sun. The carved wooden feathers are fastened to a tree trunk which fell over and popped back up. Pat recalled the angled tree trunk possibly being pushed over by a feather, and imagined a series of feathers fastened to cables suspended in the trees.

“Icarus could be a tale for now,” Pat said. “He wasn’t listening to advice and got burned.”

Pat’s other piece is a carved cedar bench whose seat reveals a pair of salmon and is called Heading Upstream to mark the halfway point of the uphill Whimsy Way loop. Pat is well-known and loved in the community. Look for a story about him in our next issue.

Stevo’s Dream – the Ultimate Flying Machine by MacRae Wylde of Hood River

How was Scott able to be so generous to the community? A little Googling found Scott and his wife Karen Price to be savvy progressive-minded investors who wish to give back.

During the nineties, the couple created a vision board imagining their future, which turned into savvy real estate investment and other successful financial pursuits. Scott is currently a manager and investor broker of Bonvolo Real Estate Investments.

From the website: “He actively maintains his broker license to invest in real estate and works with other brokers as their client. Scott provides professional consulting/coaching for
aspiring real estate investors on a unique hourly / as-needed basis. He has been a featured guest on numerous top-rated real estate investing podcast shows, guest speaker at real estate conventions and associations, and interviewed by magazines, newspapers, and book authors. Scott also actively participates in many local and national real estate investment organizations. Scott is an active volunteer and pro bono consultant to multiple local community organizations, and he is currently leading the creation of a personally funded nature & sculpture park."

Popular Clinton artist Pat McVay with his "Heading Upstream" salmon bench carved in cedar

Interested in adding more art to the park’s collection? Visit this page for more information on how to submit your piece.

The website also invites volunteers to help maintain trails, coordinate with sculptors, make donations, help with landscaping, act as tour guides, in writing grants, and other opportunities.

For now, visiting the art-forest certainly charges one’s batteries during these dark and uncertain days.

Meanwhile, visit David Welton’s Facebook page for more photos of this extraordinary new gift to our community.

Kate Poss | With Photos by David Welton

Kate Poss

This is Whidbey was founded by Kate Poss for readers who are interested in cultivating our island’s quality of life, including its land, sea, and air, its people, plants, and animals; and the bodies, minds, and spirits of its inhabitants. You may know Kate from her work in island libraries through May of 2016. Her background includes a career in newspaper reporting in Los Angeles for various weeklies and dailies, including The Los Angeles Times. She was a frequent contributor to the online Whidbey Life Magazine and still writes for the biannual print magazine.

David Welton

Stories are highlighted by David Welton’s excellent photography. David is a retired physician who was a staff photographer for Whidbey Life Magazine since its early days. His work has also appeared in museums, art galleries, newspapers, regional and national magazines, books, nonprofit publicity, and on the back of the Whidbey Sea-Tac Shuttle.

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