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ASKED & ANSWERED

The benefits of local art collectives

Ivete Martinez is a member of SEMVA, Gallery 24

BY ANNE HALLIWELL
Post Bulletin

Ivete De Castro Martinez earned two master's degrees at Oxford and Stanford, and worked at Mayo Clinic long before she launched her career as an artist.

The seeds were there – Martinez had always enjoyed museums and works by “the old masters.”

“Usually I have strong emotional responses to ... art pieces in human history,” she said. “When I see art it doesn't matter if it's in the Cave of Altamira in Spain, or the Sistine Chapel in Rome, I always end up in tears. Maybe it's because I'm oversensitive, or maybe it's because of my deeper understanding of art.”

However, she had no idea she could draw – much less paint – until she began exploring the arts as therapy 17 years ago.

Now Martinez is a prominent member of local art collectives SEMVA and Gallery 24, with a hand in the development of the relatively recent Med City Art Festival.

What appeals to you most about the medium of oil paintings?

Although I explore other media like pastel, tempera, acrylics, pouring art, and collage, my heart belongs to oil painting. Oil has a quality that no other media has; the richness of the pigments, the variety of color-mixing possibilities, the thickness of

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Joe Ahlquist / Post Bulletin

Bob Walker, 80, is “retiring” from his deer hunting career after 66 years. Walker shot his first deer in 1955 at the age of 14 while hunting southeast of Rochester, and ended this last season shooting a deer just a few miles from where he shot his first deer. Walker is photographed at his home in Rochester on Nov. 15 with a mount of a 10-point buck he shot in the 90s.

On his own terms

A last buck as 6 decades of hunting are over for Walker

BY MATTHEW STOLLE
Post Bulletin

For the last couple years, Bob Walker of Rochester kept telling his son and hunting buddy, Jeff, that he was considering putting away his shotgun and “retiring” from hunting.

Walker had hunted almost every year for the past 66 years, ever since as a 14-year-old Pleasant Grove farm boy, he had killed his first deer with a .410 shotgun.

That was back in 1955, when Walker was among the first to get a one-day license for the first deer season in Southeast Minnesota. Nov. 9, 1955, was a date easy to remember. It was not only the day Walker got his first deer, but it was his mother's birthday.

Deer hunting before then had largely been confined to Minnesota's northern reaches, but as deer migrated south, it became a pastime for hunters in southern Minnesota.



Contributed / Bob Walker

(Left) Bob Walker poses in a photo with the first deer he shot in 1955. (Right) Walker poses for a photo with deer he shot during the 2021 firearm deer season.

For most of those 66 years, Walker had returned home with successful hunts that supplied enough venison, baloney, bacon and jerky to last for months.

But as Walker approached his 80th year, certain aspects of deer hunting began to wear on him. He couldn't hunt alone anymore. He couldn't get down and field dress deer any more.

Walker, a retired sheet metal manufacturer and former Rochester Parks and Recreation umpire and volleyball official, lives an active lifestyle, walking four to six miles a day. But a neighborhood stroll was not the same as trudging through uneven and branch-and-stick-strewn woods. He had backed up and tripped over a branch recently while setting up a blind.

“Why take any chances of breaking an arm or a leg at my age? I've been fortunate enough to hunt for many years,” Walker said.

Yet, Walker hesitated to call it quits. He wanted his hunting career to end on a high note. And for the last two years, father and son had started their hunting

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‘A survival story’ on the job site

Benike Construction opts for a COVID-19 vaccine mandate

BY NORA ECKERT
Rochester Post Bulletin

By many standards, Benike Construction has emerged from the pandemic thriving.

The business continued operations on key projects, adapted sites to be safe for employees and achieved a 99% vaccination rate among staff by Nov. 1.

But for Aaron and Mike Benike, there have been few victory laps.

“It's not in any way a success story,” said Mike. “It's just...”

“A survival story,” said Aaron, finishing his brother's

sentence.

The brothers recounted a year consumed with tracking COVID-19 cases, managing a mix of vaccinated and unvaccinated workers on job sites, and eventually letting some company veterans go because of their refusal to get the vaccine.

Benike Construction is one of 6,000 Minnesota businesses with more than 100 employees, according to the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce. This would make it subject to a vaccine mandate from the



Joe Ahlquist / Post Bulletin

Jordan Weyhrauch, with Benike Construction, works on demolishing an interior wall at the construction site for the Chatfield Center for the Arts remodeling project Nov. 30 in Chatfield.

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OBITUARIES PAGE B6-7

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ROCHESTER, MINN.
VOL. 96, NO. 98, 30 PAGES
Talk to an editor 507-285-7700
Customer service 507-285-7676

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DAILY



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ANSWERMAN

Did WW Mayo have an office in the Half Barrel?

There is a historical marker that went up this summer on the old Bilotti's building that says it was W.W. Mayo's first medical office. Is this true and accurate? Seems like something that would have been marked long, long ago.

It's definitely an interesting marker, and I wondered about this myself. My assistant's first call was to the mayor of Historic Third Street, John Kruesel, who revealed to me that he himself funded and placed this marker.

"It has been known for many years – 100-plus – that he (William Worrall Mayo) had an office (via postings in the newspapers) on Third Street. But the exact location was unknown," John wrote. "This location became verified

by much due diligence on the primary part of Tim Schmitt and the History Center archives.

"This office was in a wooden structure that burned and was replaced with the current brick building that I and the Half Barrel occupy. Tim knows the details very well. This took years of work. I had the bronze plaque casted ... and put up by David Hewitt. I hope that people become more curious about how this community came to be, starting with the massive milling here that initially put this community on the map."

The old adage of journalism is that even if you mother says she loves you, get her assertion verified with a second source. So I called on Mother Mayo and got a thorough response

from Matthew Dacy, director of Mayo Clinic's Heritage Hall.

Dacy noted that for the first 50 years after Dr. Mayo came to Rochester in 1864, he worked in a variety of locations, including the old Bilotti's building, but also the site of the Mayo family farm, near the present location of Cub Foods, the Mayo family home (site of the Siebens Building) and the Massey Building.

The Massey Building is where Mayo was practicing at the time of the 1883 tornado that led to collaboration with the Franciscan Sisters, the opening of Saint Marys Hospital and the evolution of the Mayo family practice into Mayo Clinic. The Mayo brothers also rented space in the Masonic Temple building, which was on the site of the

current U.S. Bank Centerplace Building, prior to opening the 1914 building.

"Collectively, these sites trace the early history of the Mayo medical practice," according to Dacy. The first Mayo Clinic building opened on the site of today's Siebens Building, he said.

As a matter of detail, Kruesel's marker specifically says that Historic Third was the site of W.W. Mayo's "first (and only) dedicated medical office building." Given that narrow definition, as well as the time and energy John and Tim poured into this research project, I'm inclined to believe it.

Send questions for the Answer Man to answerman@postbulletin.com.



Contributed / John Kruesel

This plaque on Historic Third Street marks the site of one of Dr. W.W. Mayo's early offices in Rochester.

Benike

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Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration. The rule, announced Nov. 5, is embroiled in legal battles. If approved, it would take effect on Jan. 4.

While firms that employ more than 100 people make up just 6% of all businesses in the state, these businesses have a massive footprint, employing 68% of Minnesota workers, according to the state chamber of commerce.

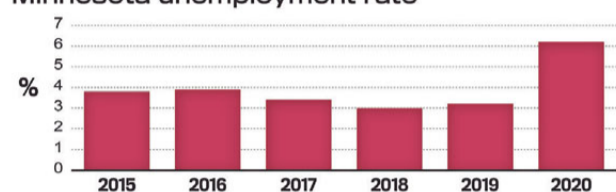
There are many questions for businesses that are preparing for a potential mandate, including who will pay for the cost of testing for unvaccinated employees, what legal protections companies may have against litigious ex-employees, and which parts of the workforce a firm should include in its total headcount.

"A LOT OF UNCOMFORTABLE CONVERSATIONS"

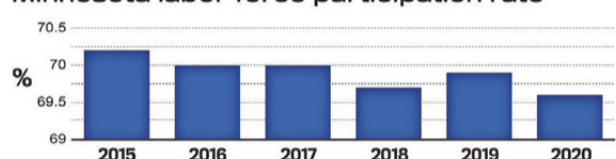
As the Benike team questioned whether to implement a vaccine mandate among its staff, they had conversations around staff health, how job sites could function with unvaccinated workers, and what their

Statewide labor numbers

Minnesota unemployment rate



Minnesota labor force participation rate



Source: Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development

Total jobs

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
All Industries	235,833	237,724	239,991	241,908	243,317	231,752
Leisure and Hospitality	21,598	21,799	22,537	22,932	23,171	18,437

CHANGE FROM 2016 TO 2021

All Industries -4,081
Leisure and Hospitality -3,161

PERCENT CHANGE, 2016 TO 2021

All Industries -1.7%
Leisure and Hospitality -14.6%

Source: Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development

Forum Design Center

clients required.

Eventually, the latter factor pushed the firm to implement a Nov. 1 vaccination deadline. If staff didn't get the job by that time, and did not have an accepted religious or medical exemption, they were let go.

"A lot of uncomfortable conversations," said Aaron. "We did lose some team members. Some good people."

Some of them had been with the company for two decades, and went

on to work for other firms that didn't require vaccinations.

While the brothers wouldn't reveal how many employees they'd lost, they said they'd lost fewer than 20 people from their 220-person staff.

The Benikes tried to retain as many of their people as possible, engaging in individual, sit-down conversations with unvaccinated members. They provided paid time for employees to get vaccinated and offered

perks for those who did it on their own time.

They highlighted how unvaccinated team members affected the productivity of the entire team. If one unvaccinated person tested positive on a site, other unvaccinated people would be forced to leave for the day and quarantine.

"The job site close contact, everybody who's not vaccinated has to go home, is a deal breaker," said Aaron.

There were awkward conversations with vaccinated employees, too, before the Benikes made vaccinations mandatory. As vaccinated workers observed that some unvaccinated people weren't wearing masks, they were unsure of how to start conversations about complying with the rules. The mandate alleviated some of those tense situations.

ADAPTING BUSINESS PRACTICES

The nature of construction work affords different pros and cons when it comes to COVID-19 protocols. While staff are sometimes able to work on outdoor sites, there are often work areas where they have to be in close quarters or confined spaces alongside their clients.

This is why businesses should have the flexibility

to decide what restrictions they should implement for different circumstances, said Vicki Stute, the vice president of businesses and programming at the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce.

"I've always believed that businesses should have the fortitude and the autonomy to make those decisions for themselves," said Stute.

Stute has concerns about a potential mandate, particularly in the midst of a worker shortage. Minnesota's unemployment rate doubled from 2019 to 2020. She said she's anecdotally observed employees leaving larger companies for ones that don't have a vaccine rule. The Benikes echoed this observation.

"Being able to educate employees in terms of what the options may be moving forward, and really trying to understand where their employees are, at this point in time, so that they can understand what might happen after Jan. 4, will be an important consideration for employers," said Stute.

The OSHA ruling would mandate the covered businesses to comply by Jan. 4, or be hit with fines. The guidance wouldn't limit employers to requiring vaccinations across the board. Unvaccinated employees

could undergo weekly testing and mask up, but for businesses like Benike Construction, there were still too many logistical hurdles to implement these alternatives. In a webinar put on by the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce, employers voiced concerns that they hadn't been able to find test vendors that could keep up with their weekly testing needs.

A late-November survey of about 500 businesses found that more than half planned to require vaccinations regardless of the legal decisions regarding the OSHA rule. The Biden administration's rule immediately faced about three dozen legal challenges in 12 circuit courts. The 6th Circuit Court of Appeals, in Cincinnati, Ohio, won a lottery to hear the case.

While businesses across the United States await the ruling, the Benike brothers look forward to a future where their days aren't bogged down having conversations about public health or quarantine statuses.

"It'd be nice to be able to focus on construction again," said Mike.

Contact investigative reporter Nora Eckert at neckert@postbulletin.com

Asked

From page A1

paint, the slow drying, the sensation of your first brushstroke on canvas. These are all the elements that enchanted me.

How did you get involved with Gallery 24 and SEMVA?

The first gallery I was involved was SEMVA, about 11 or 12 years ago. SEMVA was the door to the art world for me at that time. I got involved with Gallery 24 about three or four years ago. SEMVA is pro-profit and G-24 non-profit, but both corporations work in the same manner. We are



Traci Westcott / Post Bulletin

Ivete De Castro Martionez on March 3 at her home in Rochester.

all responsible for basic activities at the gallery. My personal engagement with the galleries varies according to the leadership they have.

In the last three years, I've been developing Med City Art Festival, a nonprofit organization. It is an inclusive and diverse event that

partners with Gallery 24. We run several projects like the Berkman project, the Collage exhibition, the Art from the Unrepresentative.

What are the benefits of artists' collectives?

Being an artist is a solitary enterprise. It is you, in your studio, working on your piece of art. Collective corporations like a gallery will take an artist into a space of interactions with other artists and the community. It's a solution for those who tend to procrastinate or lose motivation.

Working with other artists can promote creativity, discipline

and higher self-esteem. Artists have a space to connect on a deeper level with colleagues around them.

It's important to point out that working as part of a collective art group allows us to succeed more easily (by participating in multiple projects simultaneously through shared efforts).

What are a few good things about Rochester's art scene? What would you change about it, given the chance?

In terms of raw materials, we have everything: diversity in cultures, races, creativity, cosmopolitan views, financial power, government incentives,

etc. But we're still operating in isolated systems. It's very difficult to make long-term partnerships in this environment. But I do believe that Rochester's art scene is changing for the better.

Through art festival, we try to create, in a small way, this ecosystem. ... We try to reach all forms of art: music, poetry, painting, 2D, 3D, dance, theater, and everything in between. All parts of Med City Art Festival depend on the individual artist and the community. I have great hopes for the future of the art scene in Rochester.

Hunter

From page A1

weekend with high hopes of Walker getting his climatic last deer. They settled themselves in different parts of a 60-acre wooded area between Marion and Chatfield that the two had hunted for two decades.

Both outings had unfolded similarly and disappointingly – at least for Bob. Jeff Walker, an accomplished hunter, got the first deer. Then he would hold back, hoping his dad would get the other. But as the day showed signs of expiring, Walker gave his son permission to shoot if an opportunity presented itself. For those two years, Walker had taken down

and folded up his stand empty-handed, and "we'd take our two deer and have them processed."

"I went a couple of years without getting one," Bob Walker said. "I really didn't want to quit without getting one."

HUNTING TRADITION

Bob Walker's earliest memories are steeped in hunting on his family farm. His dad started him on pheasant hunting as a young teen, after buying him a 16-gauge shotgun and a full box of shells for \$12. Even before that, as a young boy, he helped flush squirrels for his Aunt Mary. They developed a technique to outfox them.

"Anybody who has hunted squirrels knows that squirrels go up the opposite side of the tree from where you're at. You

walk around, the squirrel goes around," Walker said. "So, she would stand still. I would walk around the tree. The squirrel would come around and she'd shoot it. That's the way we worked."

Then one Christmas, his dad bought him a .410 shotgun, and it was with that gun that Walker shot his first deer at 14.

Determined to give it another try, 66 years later, on Nov. 7 the Walkers went to the same hunting grounds outside Chatfield. The elder Walker was set up in his blind at 6:30 a.m. They could begin shooting an hour later. Jeff set up a distance from his dad "down over a hill."

The day before, Walker had been in his blind all day and spied only one deer: a little six-pointer on

a trail that walked within 10 yards of his blind. Walker let it pass.

"It was small and a small rack. Let him grow up hopefully," he said. "He was not a deer I wanted to shoot."

Later in the day, Walker heard a shot from the direction of his son. His son had gotten a deer. Jeff began tracking it and eventually found the dead deer. Some time later, sitting in a swivel chair in his blind, Bob Walker saw movement to his left. The deer trotted right up to Walker. The deer suddenly locked up. Walker is convinced that the deer sensed something out of the ordinary. His gun barrel poking out a window, Walker fired the weapon.

"I put a good shot on

her. She whirled around, and she took off," Walker said.

"When I heard the shot, I knew it was him," Jeff Walker said. "I was kind of praying that it was a successful shot."

Jeff called on his phone and asked his dad if he got one. His dad said he did. Did it go down, he asked? No, it hadn't. The deer had turned and run back in the direction from which it came. Jeff told his dad: Just stay where you're at. When Jeff got to Bob's blind, Bob pointed where the deer had run.

Jeff walked in that direction and not much later, Bob heard his son give out a celebratory yell. At 80, Walker had gotten his last deer. When he shot at it, Walker thought it was a doe, but it was a

button buck.

"He grabbed a hold of me and gave me a big hug," Bob said about his son's response. "He was as happy and excited just as much as I was. I let out a war whoop."

Walker's last successful hunt occurred only two days before the 66th anniversary of his first successful deer hunt. It had happened in the same woods.

When the two got to the car, Walker took out the 14 slugs he still had in his fanny pack and handed them to his son.

"I want you to use them. I won't need them anymore," Walker told his son. "And that was kind of the way it goes."

Contact reporter Matt Stolle at mstolle@postbulletin.com