

## Suburban Life

Lorraine McClellan editor/477-5450



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## Show catches artists at play

By Jan Loveland  
special writer

**D**O you think of toys as kids' stuff, not meriting art gallery attention? If so, the current exhibit at the Paint Creek Center for the Arts may change your view.

Set to run until Saturday, Aug. 4, the show at the Rochester PCCA is billed as a "juried competition of imaginative, functional, nonfunctional and decorative" toys.

In fact, the PCCA's managed to transform itself into something resembling an avant garde toyland. Kites and banners festively hang from the ceiling. A group of fifth-graders from McGregor Elementary School in Rochester contributed an interesting assortment of handmade wooden toys.

A large statue of a clown greets visitors. In one of the gallery rooms, a huge toy train dominates. The other room is full of strange puppets and dolls, including a Dracula popping out of his coffin. In the hallway, an interesting diorama and a mobile made of crushed pop cans preside.

Not your average art show. But for parents wanting to introduce their children to the fine arts, the show presents an ideal opportunity.

For Paint Creek faculty member, Sherre Rensel, a sculptor and painter, the show offered a chance to present to the public a series of colorful stuffed dolls fashioned several years ago when her toddler was an infant.

"She was really glad to see them," Rensel said, describing her daughter's reaction to having her old play things mounted as art.

BUT RENSEL'S train, a delicate arrangement of branches, comes straight from her studio instead of her daughter's nursery.

"Ordinarily, I make art and then if a show comes up, I put them in it. It just happens that right now, a lot of my work incorporates natural forms and found objects," said the artist who lives in Detroit's Cass Corridor.

"I had all these branches in my studio and I saw a use for them. Ordinarily, my work is very sturdy but the train is very delicate."

Her train set, a decorative rather

than a functional toy sits atop a large cube at a height which allows youngsters an easy view. The entire track and most of the cars are made of twigs glued together. Bright and shiny bits of other objects decorate the setting for an elegant effect.

"I really didn't make those pieces with children in mind," she said.

Besides the PCCA show, Rensel has another professional connection with children. In addition to teaching adult watercolor classes at the center, she also guides young children through art activities there.

Still, making toys gave her a new perspective on her work. "It was a good release. You get to be recognized for certain things in the art community. You get labeled," she said. But she realizes that her usual genre is her favorite. "I don't think I'll do any more toys."

The show also revealed a rarely seen side of another of its participants, Steve La Gattula. An advertising executive and clandestine woodcarver, La Gattula has long been making puppets — an extension of his college art training. His efforts, limited to making gifts for his children, were known only to his family and close friends.

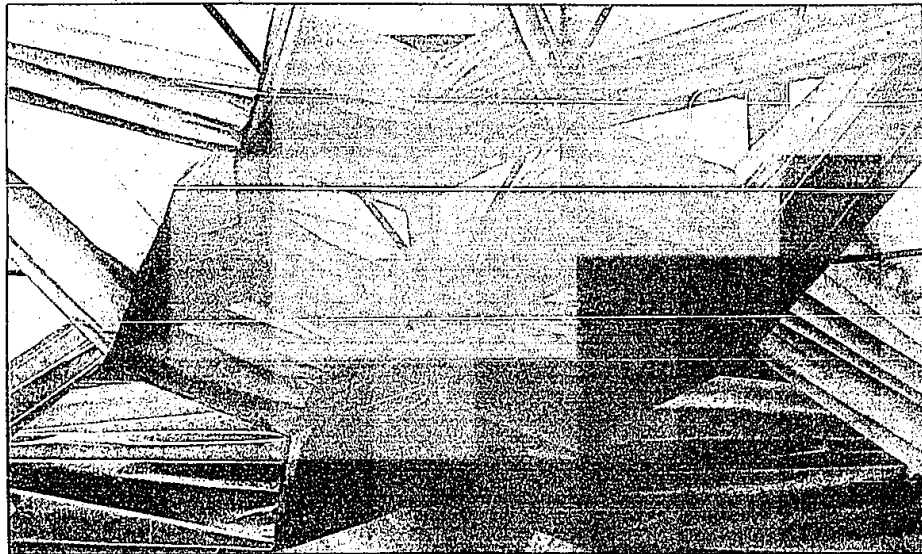
ANOTHER puppet exhibited by the Oakland Township resident is Dracula in a coffin. Done one Christmas when La Gattula wanted to give his son "something nicer than store bought," the puppet managed to give even its creator a case of the creeps.

Other puppets he's created include Superman and his archenemy, Luthor, as well as Gene Simmons of the rock group Kiss. Like his real life counterpart, this Simmons sported chains and a tongue that uncurred.

La Gattula's also made such exotic items as a birdcage and a circular staircase for his home.

The show may become an annual event, according to PCCA director John De Vroot. Even if it doesn't, it at least allows local art fans of all ages to see the playful sides of several area artists.

For further information about the gallery's summer hours, call the PCCA at 651-4110. The gallery is located at 407 Pine, Rochester.



Judi Andersen's starburst kite floats over the Paint Creek Center for the Arts toy exhibit. Visitors are afforded a view of its intricately mazed interior.

Staff photos by  
David Frank

Dracula emerges from his pine box in Steve La Gattula's version of the Bram Stoker monster. The Oakland Township resident originally carved the puppet as a Christmas present for one of his sons.



## African queen Violet connection takes root

By Diane Galt  
staff writer

**W**HEN WALT Maurus takes on a new hobby, he does it in a big way.

Most recently, the retired Livonia art teacher has filled his life and home with shelf after shelf of violets. His basement is adorned with more than 300 violet plants in 150 varieties.

He had an African violet garage sale Thursday, Friday and Saturday, and had sold 150 of the plants as of Friday afternoon, with his biggest day, Saturday, yet to come. Prices ranged from 50 cents to \$1.50.

THE MAIN REASON he had the sale is to reach other people who grow violets and who would be interested in starting a club. This area needs a club, Maurus said, because similar groups are either too far away or are filled to capacity.

He was hoping to have about 20 members, Maurus said. "We've got the nucleus of a club," he said.

The club members would hold study sessions to learn from each other and improve one's ability to raise plants," he said. "It will help people enjoy the hobby."

"A lot of people came in and saw the plants and said, 'Oh, you have African violets. I get an African violet, and it dies out.' But that's as far as it goes. They don't seem to want to know enough about them to keep them going. That's the purpose of the club. It would be a study club."

Maurus, who has been raising violets on a large scale for the past five years, said, "There won't be a book a third-place winner in the African violet society if I don't raise them."

Learning from "other violet lovers" is something Maurus took forward to 1983. Yet Maurus still considers himself an amateur, because of what he's seen other people do, he said.

There are 15,000 different varieties of violets, and all of them have originated from the wild blue plant that grew in Africa, he said. The colors vary in hues of blue, white or pink, and the blooms are usually single, double or triple rows of petals, he said.

But each one has its own characteristics, he said.

Maurus noticed an improvement in his plants after he learned to anchor in "Maurus said. "That's why I've been able to raise them so well."

It's a tricky craft, but the plant has become a hobby for many people, he said. "It's a really nice thing to have in your home."

Growing the plants is expensive in terms of electricity as 60-watt fluorescent-light bulbs are needed, he said. Maurus waters the plants by using the "touch method" to determine if they need moisture, and he never waters the plant's tray rather than directly on the leaves.

"I don't have enough hours in the week to do a variety of hobbies," Maurus said, "so I've concentrated on this one."

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Raising flowers, Maurus said, is the most recent of a variety of hobbies. Maurus has transferred himself to Detroit to start this club, because it will be mutually stimulating.

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## Lifestyle determines health says Botsford team of experts

Botsford General Hospital's Department of Health Promotion has a team of experts who have planned programs from now through October to assist in changing unhealthy habits to fulfill a positive health lifestyle.

"Our ancestors believed that their health and longevity were matters of fate, not personal choice. Good health was considered something you were born with, not something you could achieve through a healthy lifestyle. Even as late as the 1950s habits such as smoking, eating sugary and fatty foods, and exercising were not considered meaningful in determining health and disease," said Tarynn Huyser, a health services representative. "Today we

know better. In recent years, health research points out significantly that most of the factors that determine health and disease are based on the way we live. Our lives are in our own hands."

"A healthy lifestyle can help you prevent the ills of modern life, ranging from heart disease to a anxiety, depression and alcoholism. If you exercise regularly, don't smoke, eat a healthy diet and get proper medical care you enhance your chances to live longer and be more productive than most Americans," she said.

A CLASS called "CPR Heartwave" begins Thursday, July 12, and "Diabetes Management" begins Wednesday, Aug. 1.

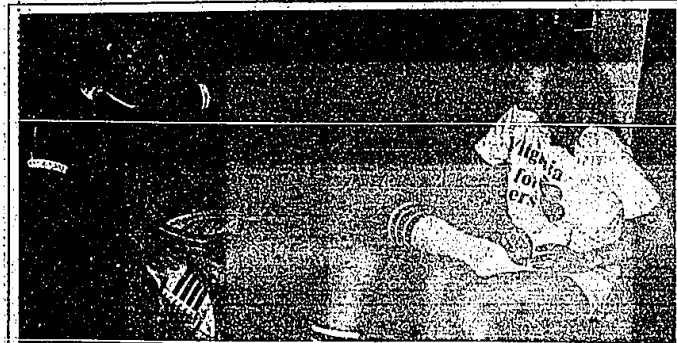
Prenatal and postnatal fitness sessions begin Monday, Aug. 13.

Aerobics sessions begin Tuesday, Sept. 4, and "The Smokeless System" returns for sessions to begin both Monday and Tuesday, Sept. 17 and 18.

"Stress: A Personal Growth Experience" returns for another session Tuesday, Oct. 16.

Being lined up now for the fall are classes in cardiac management, back care and baby-sitting.

Registrations are under way now for all of the summer sessions. Inquiries are taken at the hospital's health promotion department, 471-8090.



### 'Chapter Two'

Ed Summers and Linda Finder are two of the lead players in Farmington Players production of "Chapter Two," opening Friday in the Players barn on 12 West Road, east of Farmington Road.

The Noll Simon comedy continues for two weeks through Saturday, July 21. Ticket information is given by visiting the Players box office, 692-5041.