

# SEWE kickoff: Gala features wildlife-themed works from array of artists

BY DENISE K. JAMES *Special to The Post and Courier* Friday, February 18, 2011

There's something about seeing a painting of an exotic animal that makes the world seem much larger and more amazing. Now imagine sharing a cocktail with the talented artist who managed to capture the beast on a canvas. Thursday evening's preview gala for the Southeastern Wildlife Exposition, held in the Charleston Place ballroom, was packed with amazing artwork, food and laughter.



Sue Adair, a native of New York, is here for her third year of the festival, and paints only animals she has seen in person. 'Those are my sheepdogs in that painting,' she said, affectionately pointing at the art display. 'We brought one of them down here with us for the event, but the other one doesn't like to travel as much.' Even the impressive elephant and zebra paintings are part of Adair's actual experiences.

'I've traveled to Tanzania and I took photos there, and later painted these,' she said. 'I'm mainly into birds, as you can tell from my body of work, but I try to keep things interesting.'

This year's featured artist, Eldridge Hardie, said he is excited and honored to participate in SEWE for his first time. 'I could not be happier,' he said. 'I've actually been painting for about 42 years, and yet this marks my first year at SEWE. I was actually invited to be the feature.'

Hardie, from Denver, enjoys the hospitality of SEWE, and said that he visits Charleston on a regular basis for the 'wonderful food, history, and friendly folks.'

The artists who have been featured at SEWE in years past insisted that, although this year's pleasant weather is certainly an improvement, last year's snowstorm didn't deter the magic of the event. 'This is my third year being in the show,' said painter Jon Ren. 'I've been painting wildlife for about 10 years. I had a great experience in 2010, even though it was quite a bit colder.'

**Local artist and gallery owner Karen Hewitt Hagan also had work showing Thursday evening. 'It's such an amazing event to be a part of,' she said. 'Working outside in nature is my first love. Most of my work is based on smaller images that I witness in real life and then I turn them into larger works. I believe that nature truly has the answers to everything we need to know.'**

Gov. Nikki Haley arrived at the gala dressed in a stunning, mint-green gown, to be greeted by a throng of enthusiastic fans. 'The energy in this room and at this event is what South Carolina is all about,' Haley said. 'I have always loved Charleston and I'm thrilled that this is my first time experiencing SEWE. We need to bring people to our state, and celebrate the goodness that South Carolina has to offer.'

Visit the Charleston Place hotel throughout SEWE to view the featured painting, sculpting and carving, plus prints.

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