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Braithwaite Fine Arts Gallery to feature first American Indian Artist-in-Residence

CEDAR CITY — When regionally acclaimed artist Sandra Pubigee Heaton begins demonstrating and teaching the fine art of beadwork at Southern Utah University's Braithwaite Fine Arts Gallery in July, she will become SUU's first-ever American Indian Artist-in-Residence.

Heaton, who specializes in the delicate art of beading, will offer master classes and will spend several hours each day working on crafts during the week of July 11-15, said Leslie Forrester, associate director of the Braithwaite Fine Arts Gallery and an SUU master of fine arts student.

The American Indian Artist-in-Residence program is patterned after the Braithwaite Gallery's similarly successful program at Zion National Park.

During Heaton's five-day residency at the gallery, the public will be invited to stop in and visit with Heaton as she works. A small exhibition at the end of the week will feature work by Heaton and students who participate in the master classes. All events are free and open to the public.

Ferron Kanosh, an SUU art student and Braithwaite Gallery intern, headed the search committee that selected Heaton as the first American Indian Artist-in-Residence in February.

Kanosh said the talents Heaton will display are "handed down from generation to generation among our people. Sandra and her sisters learned their craft from their mother, who learned it from her mother. It's been going on for generations."

Heaton's intricate beadwork is part of their culture that Native Americans identify with, Kanosh said.

"This is an important part of who we are and what we do," he said. "It's part of our means of self-expression."

When talking about her work, Heaton calls it is a "representation of the past as well as the present."

Her craft allows her to "leave something worthwhile for her children and grandchildren that will last for as long as they have a desire to learn the trade," she added.

A native of Fort Hall, Idaho, Heaton is a member of the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation. She moved to Cedar City in 1995 with her husband. Together, they have five children and 11 grandchildren, all of whom are members of the Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah from the Shivwits and Indian Peaks bands.

Heaton has practiced her craft for more than 40 years. Although beadwork is Heaton's primary art form, she also tans leather and works with willow. Her final work includes moccasins, regalia, and beadwork both on a loom and directly on leather.

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In part because of her close affiliation with the Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah, Heaton is well-known in the region for her moccasins, vests, shirts, belts, purses, pouches and medallions. Her work is sold at powwows and gatherings throughout Utah, Idaho, Nevada and Arizona.

“The beads she uses are very small and require a fine needle,” Kanosh said. “Not many people can do this fine beadwork without breaking the beads.”

“It’s a delicate process,” Forrester added.

When the Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah was re-instated as a federally recognized tribe in 1980, Heaton made the ceremonial headdress and the sash for the tribal princess.

Seed funding for the American Indian Artist-in-Residence program was provided by a Community Engagement Fund grant from the SUU Office of Government Relations & Regional Services, Forrester said.

“We have already started the process of researching and writing the grant that will sustain the program into the future,” she said.

Noting that the gallery will soon morph in the Southern Utah Museum of Art, Forrester said the Artist-in-Residence program reflects an important part of the museum’s mission.

“One of our aims is to collect, preserve and exhibit art that represents the culture of the interior American West,” she said. “We are honored and excited to start this program and hope to expand it in the coming years. We want to get to the point where we can feature and promote the artwork of our Native American community.”

Braithwaite Gallery Director Reece Summers said he hopes to highlight artists representing the Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah in future years as the Artist-in-Residence program develops.

Forrester said the schedule for Heaton’s campus visit will be posted on the Braithwaite Fine Art’s Gallery webpage at www.suu.edu/pva/artgallery. The schedule will include dates and times of master classes and demonstrations.

The Community Engagement Fund consists of \$10,000 provided annually by SUU Government Relations & Regional Services to “encourage and enhance community-engagement activities,” said Brian Cottam, interim director of SUU Regional Services.

SUU faculty and staff who create or sponsor community-minded activities may find financial support from the fund, Cottam said.

“We screen and approve applications and allocate the funding,” he said.

Cottam said funding makes all the difference in some cases.

“The money can make the project more meaningful, cost less to students and the community, and make it more vibrant,” he said. “The Braithwaite Gallery’s Zion National Park and American Indian Artist-in-Residence programs are great examples of SUU’s creative community engagement.”