

Gallery features work of Central Community grad

■ Art now on display at First Central Gallery in DeWitt

By **Kate Howes**
of The DeWitt Observer

Art lovers are invited to see the work of Low Moor native and Central Community High School graduate Craig Carlson.

Carlson's paintings and drawings are now on display in the First Central Gallery, located in the lobby of the Operahouse Theatre in downtown DeWitt. Visitors can view the exhibit 6-9 p.m., Monday-Friday, and 1:30-4 p.m., Saturdays and Sundays.

Carlson grew up in Low Moor and now lives in Eldridge with his wife, Julie, and their two children, Ben, 12, and Katie, 8.

Since he was old enough to hold a pencil, Carlson says, he always has enjoyed drawing. Growing up in rural Iowa, Carlson was inspired by the small, wild animals and birds he encountered walking the cornfields on his family's farm.

"The pheasants, rabbits, squirrels, deer and occasional red fox were among my first subjects," Carlson relates.

If he had to pick a favorite, however, it would be raptors or birds of prey.

"Nothing to me is quite as impressive as the eyes of an eagle or a hawk," Carlson shares. "Equally inspiring are the sounds of wildlife. To be outside in the fall or spring, seeing and hearing a flock of migrating geese or memories of a fishing trip to northern Minnesota and listening to the calls of a loon or bald eagle. If only I could draw with one hand while fishing with the other."

Carlson coupled his deep appreciation of wildlife with his passion for drawing and painting, and each one, he says, begins as an image he either has seen or imagined.

"I use research material taken from years of photos I have taken either in the field or my own back yard. Many times I will use several pictures in one painting. Sometimes, a painting will start with a background scene that inspired me, or I will use a subject and try to create a natural setting to capture that moment."



Area artist Craig Carlson works at one of his favorite art shows, the Severson Dells near Rockford, Ill. A graduate of Central Community High School, Carlson says he has gotten a lot of encouragement from his parents and teachers, including his high school teacher Gloria Malooly, who encouraged him to pursue his career in art — graphic arts. Contributed photo

Normally, Carlson works in a small studio in his home. In addition, he has created numerous wildlife scenes during his lunch breaks at work.

"It's pretty easy to pull out a drawing, grab a pencil and work for 10-15 minutes," Carlson notes. "It's amazing, over the course of time, how much you can actually get done."

Being asked to display his work in the First Central Gallery was exceptionally flattering to Carlson.

"I was thrilled," he shares. "I've heard how nice the gallery is, plus the opportunity to exhibit in my old hometown was appealing."

Carlson also has had work displayed at the Figge Museum as part of the "Mississippi River Flyway" exhibit; Scott County Library; Clinton's art museum; Riverssance; Beaux Arts Fair; Clinton Art in the Park, and at the Des Moines Art Festival.

His display will contain mostly wildlife acrylic paintings and graphite drawings. He also will have a few panoramic landscapes, which is something in which he is taking a serious interest.

The exhibit also will feature some nostalgic drawings from his family's farm.

"I've done several drawings of my parents'

old farm buildings and various scenes over the years. Since most of the buildings have been torn down, it helps preserve some nice memories."

One of the purposes of his paintings, Carlson explains, is to make people aware of all the colors of nature. He would like people to see a grass field is more than just green and tree bark is much more than just brown.

"There are so many more colors the average person doesn't see or take the time to notice," Carlson relates. "I hope to help people take notice of Mother Nature and all she has to offer."