

Left Bank at Black Hawk State Park

Written by Mike Schulz

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When searching for a new necklace or a piece to hang in the living room, a state park might not be the first place you'd think to shop. Yet the Black Hawk State Historical Site will soon be teeming with artwork, as the Left Bank Art League presents its 49th annual Fine Art Fair from 10 a. m. to 5 p.m. on Saturday, June 11, and Sunday, June 12.

This marks the first year that the organization will be utilizing Rock Island's state park for its widely attended artists' showcase. After conducting the art fair at Moline's Coolidge Junior High School for the past several years, Left Bank Art League members were searching for a venue away from noise and congestion – and parking problems – which led to the idea of Black Hawk State Park.

“When [league members] got there to look at the site,” says Left Bank Art League President Jerri Crabtree, “we couldn't get over it. We all kept saying, ‘It's so quiet and shaded!’ It's just perfect.”

Over the course of the two-day event, artists will present works in nearly every artistic medium imaginable: acrylic, oil, watercolor, metal, wood, ceramics, glass, leather, photography, and more. And the list of items available for purchase includes paintings, furniture, pottery, jewelry, sculpture, photographs, baskets, and even artfully designed computer mouse pads.

It is estimated that the league's fair welcomes between 6,000 and 8,000 visitors annually, and this year's attendees will be treated to the works of 69 artists both local and national; artists will travel from as far as Arizona, Oklahoma, and Florida to be part of the Left Bank Art League's annual event.

Even if you're not looking to purchase, however, the Fine Art Fair welcomes those who merely want to appreciate the artists' works, and attendees will also be treated to music, food, and children's art activities. Of course, there's the woodland beauty of the park itself to consider, with its numerous hiking trails, playgrounds, and picnic areas.

All of which couldn't please Crabtree more. A self-taught painter of portraits and landscapes in oil and oil pastels, Crabtree since 1995 has served as president of the Left Bank Art League, which has grown exponentially since its inception in East Moline in 1956. “It started as a small group of six to eight people dedicated to the arts,” Crabtree says, “and we have 124 members now.”

Crabtree is understandably proud of the opportunities her organization provides to local talent. “We offer seminars, we have monthly meetings, do fund-raising projects ... ,” she lists, adding that the Left Bank Art League also awards yearly scholarships, as it has for decades. “Proceeds from the fair go to five high-schoolers and two college students annually,” she says. “The league is a good place for emerging artists. No one here is expected to re-invent the wheel.”

With plans already underway for 2005's 50th-anniversary fair – though no details are close to final, Crabtree admits that “we're already writing down ideas for next year” – those involved with the Left Bank Art League, and its 49th annual fair, are thrilled with the attention this year's event has already received. “Everyone has cooperated so much to get the word out,” Crabtree says,

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“and we’re so excited about having the fair at Black Hawk.”