

# Lifetime of learning

## Artists share talents at retirement home

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Hot Springs retirement community has connected the benefits of lifelong learning with the local artists' community. Each month, different artists demonstrate their skills to the retirement community's residents, not only to develop an appreciation of art, but to better stimulate social and mental health.

For local potter Tom Eastburn, it's a chance to showcase his platters and dishware to a South Dakota audience.

"It's my eighth year of working in pottery. Every day I learn so much because I've forgotten it all by that night," he quipped.

Pine Hills Retirement Community's Meet the Artist series, held the second Thursday of each month, has proven to be a favorite of its residents and area community members since its inception, according to Barry Epstein, marketing director.

"With each presentation, we continue to grow," he said of the series' audiences.

He sees the event not only as a way to provide an interesting lecture for his clients, but also as a way to generate new interests for



Eastburn shows his audience at Pine Hills Retirement Community some of his pottery pieces. Below, Eastburn bowls he cut in half to show its arc.

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### ARTISTS: Showcasing their skills has added benefit for residents.

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these lifelong learners. According to geriatric studies, even as people age, their learning capabilities remain intact and — given the opportunities to learn something — older adults are able to achieve considerable performance gains.

"It's an opportunity and the time to study how to do these things, where before their time was consumed by earning a living," Epstein said.

While residents turned out for Ginger Heinzen's silk scarf painting and Annie Toullatos Thorstenson's mosaics, even an early May snowstorm couldn't keep 60 residents and community members from making the trip out to Eastburn's demonstration at Pine Hills, a few miles west of Hot Springs on U.S. Highway 18.

Art enthusiast Ayesha Burke sees the series as a perfect mesh of introducing area people to the local art community, and also developing an appreciation of artists and their work. Burke, who will showcase her own skills as a painter and jeweler on June 6 at Pine Hills, believes that is an important step for any community.

"It lets people see the steps that an artist takes before you begin to have a finished piece," she said.

Burke was in the audience

as Eastburn set up his potter's wheel and unwrapped a lump of brownstone clay, his favorite clay out of Sioux Falls. With a large bucket of water, he began the work of creating a bowl, vase and platter. Before his actual mud slinging, he had shown a short video of his raku ware and other pottery.

"I was more interested in the color than in the form," he said of the brilliant jewel-toned vases, jars and platters in the video. "These are new techniques, but the old technique was raw. You're standing outside just throwing glazes."

Thickly encrusted in glazes and color, the object was placed into a kiln and subjected to intense heat of 1,800 degrees. As the glazes melt and the clay bisques reacts to the chemicals, the beauty of the platter reveals itself in a swirl of design and color.

"It's mostly serendipity, but sometimes it's Christmas," he said of the results.

While the fiery reactions of the jars or platters may be serendipitous, the composition of the paints, clay and glazes is all faithfully tracked and recorded by the artist for future use on other forms.

But it was his pottery wheel and the leathery clay work that drew the most interest.

The basics of his home studio include thundering loud rock music played during the initial phase of working the wheel, while classical or perhaps silence saturates the studio during the trim, he said.

The audience waited

breathlessly as Eastburn lifted a large bowl from the wheel, all the while describing the physics of how the bowl's thin walls kept from collapsing on itself and the importance of centering the clay.

"I took this course up in Alaska and for a whole semester; I didn't learn how to center. When I moved to South Dakota, I bought a tape and learned how to center my clay in about five minutes," he said.

"The wheel goes fastest when it's being centered. When it slows as you work on the clay," he added.

He likes thin walls for his dishware. Nothing aggravates him more than picking up a pitcher before the extra weight of water has been added, but which "feels like lead."

He loves working with clay and reusing clay from "mistakes," which eventually becomes better with time. It is something discovered by the Japanese as they mixed their clay with a profusion of sand, then leaving it age to perfection.

"One generation of Japanese potters mixes their clay for the next generation," he said.

Eastburn's art work is part of "Endless Imagination: South Dakota Governor's Third Biennial Art Exhibition," an art exhibit at the South Dakota Art Museum through July 22 in Brookings before it travels to the University of South Dakota Galleries in Vermillion and the South Dakota Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre.

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