Nurse designs an art gallery to feed some starving hearts

By JENNIFER HEATH
Special to the Rocky Mountain News

This is the way Jerry Kite explains her motivation for creating the Artes del Pueblo Gallery: “I’ve been a nurse for a long time, and I see people’s bodies hurting and miserable. There’s a wonderful poem written by women textile workers in 1919 about how hearts starve as well as bodies. With the gallery, I can reach people’s hearts — as well as my own. It’s a way to help heal my community.”

Located across the street from Su Teatro, at 1901 E. 47th St., Artes del Pueblo and the theater are the beginnings of what Kite hopes will be a “Chicano arts district in Denver — that’s the long-range plan,” she said recently. “I don’t have any presumptions that we’re there yet, but it’s a start, a place we can call our own and not be scattered throughout the city.”

Su Teatro debuted its headquarters May 11 with a play called Intro to Chicano History 101 and the next night, Kite opened Artes del Pueblo with a show of sculpture and paintings by Joan Ferris, paintings by Rosario Azios and painting and pottery by Cleo Martinez.

After tonight’s Su Teatro performance, there will be a critic’s forum at the gallery, including Kite, poet Ramon del Castillo and mime Dan Horsey.

Among other gallery activities are poetry readings every Thursday night, Kite said. “I also envision doing small, experimental one-acts, and we very much want to focus on children, to reach out to kids.”

The gallery is situated in a beautiful old Carnegie Library building, which Kite bought and began renovating in November. “It stopped being a library in the mid-’50s. One of the neighbors said there was some sort of dirty movie house here and it was a gambling establishment once, too. I got it from a photographer who had plans to open it as his gallery.”

Although she has no visual-arts background, Kite has been deeply involved for years with various area theater groups. “I have no pretensions that I know what I’m doing, but I’m learning so much, together with the artists.” The gallery is not a cooperative. Kite is the “sole proprietor,” supporting the enterprise on her salary from Globeville Health Clinic, a miniscule 20% commission from art sales and sheer gumption.

For further information about Artes del Pueblo, call 293-8251.

FABRICATIONS: On June 9, the Denver Art Museum, 100 W. 14th Ave. Parkway, will reopen its renovated third-floor Textile Galleries with a collection of 100 works, old and recently acquired. Information: 575-2794.

The University of Colorado Museum on the CU-Boulder campus is exhibiting Navajo, Hispanic and Pueblo people’s woven works from prehistoric times to 1900. Much of “Beyond the Loom: Keys to Understanding Early Southwestern Weaving” is the result of the meticulous scholarship of retired CU anthropology curator Joe Ben Wheat. Information: 492-6165 weekdays and 492-6892 on weekends.

LEARNING: Golden’s Foothills Art Center, 809 15th St., begins its “Artist Success Series” tomorrow. There will be four half-day workshops to discuss marketing, promotion and other aspects of artists’ careers. Information: 1-279-3922.

From June 26 to 30, the Denver Art Museum and the Denver Museum of Natural History will present a teacher’s institute on the life and culture of the Plains and Ute Indians, to provide, the press release says, “correct information and give teachers better materials to plan their instructional units on the subject.” Information: 575-2265 or 370-6321.

RELATED READING: Santa Fe photographer Marcia Keegan has published Mother Earth, Father Sky (Clear Light Publishers, 111 pages, $24.95), 25 years of striking color pictures of Pueblo and Navajo Indian life and land.


TENDERLOIN: Out of the idyllic Southwest to San Francisco’s ugly, impoverished urban districts documented in Tenderloin (Black Cat Press, 64 pages, $14.95). Photographer Bill Kamin has recorded the awful poverty, the flesh mongers, immigrants, prostitutes, transvestites and transients of a neighborhood named for a cut of meat. It’s a straightforward and riveting reality check.

ARTIST CALL: Ec-Lec-Tic Gallery, 6754 Lowell St., is calling all visual art media for its “Myths, Magic, Miracles and Money” show. Work is being accepted at the gallery Wednesday through June 11, from noon to 4 p.m.

The Denver Art Museum is now accepting entries from Colorado artists for “Colorado 1990,” to be juried by New Museum of Contemporary Art director Marcia Tucker, sculptor Deborah Butterfield and Newsweek art critic Peter Plagens. Entry forms are available at the museum information desk or by writing the museum’s contemporary art department, 100 W. 14th Ave. Parkway, Denver, 80204. Deadline is 5 p.m., Sept. 5.
Pair of storytellers to spin bilingual folktales

By DONNA JACKSON
Tribune Staff Writer

Once upon a time — long before the printing press was invented — people talked. They shared their hopes, fears, laughter and customs through animated stories and songs.

Next week, two Colorado storytellers — Jerry Kite of Denver and Pam Faro of Lafayette — will revive the oral tradition, as they present a series of bilingual Hispanic folktales to Greeley area students as part of this year’s Cinco de Mayo celebration.

On Tuesday, Kite will entertain Greeley Central, Franklin Middle School and Rocky Mountain Service, Employment and Redevelopment pupils with stories based on Chicoano and Mexicano traditions.

"Some of the stories I write myself," Kite says. "Some are old traditional stories I make adaptations to. For example, a lot of traditional (Hispanic) stories do not depict women in strong roles. And while I don’t necessarily make women the heroes in my story, I do not allow them to be the only ones to suffer the consequences."

Kite, a full-time nursing administrator at the Globeville Health Clinic and the owner of Artes del Pueblo gallery in Denver, says all of the stories she tells are bilingual — narrated primarily in English with Spanish phrases sprinkled throughout.

"There’s Spanish in the stories because that’s the language they all come from," the Texas native explains.

The tales also are fully animated.

"My tool is my body," says the mother of two grown daughters. "When I’m telling a story, I need to move."

Kite began telling stories a few years ago, with 15 years of Chicano theater work listed in her credits.

"I started storytelling as an outlet for myself," she says. "It fits in with my roots." Today, with the help of a grant speaking their language. They also enjoy getting the meaning in a story first (when she speaks Spanish), because that doesn’t happen often. It’s a real self-esteem thing for kids and for others who understand Spanish," she says.

Faro initially became enchanted with storytelling after hearing Boulder storyteller Kay Negash. Faro’s research spans three years. Soon after, she took a class with her mentor and began telling tales of her own. To date, one of her favorite places to practice is in her children’s elementary school classes.

A theater junkie and voice major in college, Faro incorporates music and drama into her performances. "It’s been wonderful pulling together all my likes and inclinations," she says.

Most of Faro’s stories are based on tales she finds in folklore collections.

"Other stories come from true life experiences, events in history and children’s literature," she says. "A couple are based on dreams I’ve had."

For each performance, Faro puts together a "menu of stories" she plans to tell. Once the program gets rolling, she modifies the menu according to the "audience vibes."

"I look at the faces in the audience and see their responses," she says.

For the Greeley story hour, Faro plans to tell a few Mexican tales, including a folktales about why the cuckoo bird has gray feathers. Faro’s advice for storytellers-to-be? "Listen and listen and listen to as many storytellers as you can, so you hear all the different styles. Also, find people willing to listen to you, such as those in (storytelling) support groups."
Denver Chicana committed to Chicano Art

Jerry Lawson, originally from Texas and a 23-year Denver resident, is an Administrator of the Globeville Health Care Clinic, and a patron of Chicano art. She is a nurse by profession, and she is also the owner and runs “Artes del Pueblo,” a cultural center that started as an art gallery for “Chicanos who could not find the space to exhibit their work,” she states.

Her gallery “focuses on contemporary Chicano visual artists, but for the past 5 years, the space brought on literary artists. “We have poetry readings, performance pieces, and cuentos,” Lawson says. “We also have music and film,” continues this extraordinary woman who was committed to Chicano art so thoroughly that managed to put together such an enterprise.

A couple of years ago they had a mini-film festival, which included the film and the person of a Mexican woman filmmaker and her production of a strike by textiles workers in Mexico, and another film by women coal miners from Appalachia, depicting their struggle.

Lawson bought the building for Artes del Pueblo because “I saw the need to create to create a space for Chicano artists. I have involved in Chicano art for 23 years: teatro, poetry, visual arts, it was a vision that some day we would not have to beg, borrow or steal for space, ending up in basements, school basements or church basements. When the opportunity came I grabbed it, so Chicano artists could have a place where we could share our work.”

But Lawson is not only an organizer, a sponsor. She is an artist herself. “I write my cuentos, I am also a cuentista. I did teatro in the past, and came back to an area where I could personally express myself. But I had to stop, it was difficult to continue for lack of money, time and effort in organizing a larger group and at the same time, be a nurse, and take care of my own family. (Lawson’s family is grown now, she has two daughters, 27 and 23, who live in Texas).

“Now I am a cuentista, and I have been doing it professionally for five years. I write my own cuentos, under the name of “Cuentos de Lupe la Loca.” They are cuentos I learned from her. Lupe la Loca. When I was growing up in Laredo, and I was little, about five years old, I heard that name, and for some reason, it stayed with me. Later, when I wrote the cuentos, I had to find a pen name, and Lupe la Loca, came to me, Lupe la Loca is my “alter ego,” my other self. When there are difficult things to say as Jerry, I can say them as Lupe. Although she is imaginary, she is very real, because she is part of me,” Lawson continues.

She says “I write first the basic stories, and then I develop the details, some of them are videotaped, some day I expect to compile them and put them in print.”

Lawson adds the net exhibit at Artes the Pueblo opens May 13, it will be called “Our Landscapes, with Carifó,” and it will be “a view, from the chicano perspective, of our landscapes, with all their beauty and their destructiveness, the destruction and preservation of our barrios. There are 20 committed Denver artists, so far, such as Robert López, Tony Ortega, Carlos Frésquez, Meggan DeAnza Rodríguez, and others.”

Lawson invites everybody to “come and support the Chicano community and its artists. Her plans also include more cuentos. In July, Boulder cuentista Christina Parafax and Lawson will put a story telling workshop for children of the neighborhood. It will be for 4 Saturdays, at Artes del Pueblo.
Jerry Lawson harvests their respect

Globeville nurse takes health of the neighborhood as her personal responsibility

By L. WAYNE HICKS
Business Journal Health-Care Editor

When Jerry Lawson heard Denver Health and Hospitals had an opening for someone to run its clinic at Globeville, she jumped at the chance to be that someone.

At first, the job was simply a vehicle to get Lawson back into community health after a brief foray into another aspect of health care. Soon, though, the community opened itself to Lawson, and she responded in kind.

"They treated me like a neighbor," said Lawson, 50, who became administrator of the Globeville Community Health Clinic eight years ago.

"People here cared about me, and I got to caring about them."

She moved out of her Congress Park condominium and to Globeville, into a building that once housed the community's library.

Lawson lives in part of the space. In the rest, she's opened a gallery, Artes del pueblo — Art of the people.

"I think she's done a far better job than anybody has in the past," said Lawson's boss, Dr. Paul Melinkovich, associate director for community health and Denver Health and Hospitals. "She's really tied into the community."

Several years ago, when the clinic moved to its current location, one of its licensed practical nurses, Julie Herrera, asked Lawson's permission to let families from the area grow food on the plot adjacent to the building.

Lawson gave her OK.

Today, what originally was intended as a parking lot is home to 15 gardens that produce a crop of neighborhood interaction — and vegetables — every year.

Neighborhood families grow corn, tomatoes, watermelon, green beans and other produce there.

A registered nurse, Lawson earned her degree from the University of Texas. Lawson, born in Laredo, Texas, moved to Denver 23 years ago.

For the past 15 years, she's worked at Denver Health and Hospitals, and all but one of those years was spent in community health.

Globeville Community Health Clinic sees an average of 7,500 people a year, who pay what they can afford for medical care.

The clinic is staffed by 11 people, including one physician and one physician's assistant.

Lawson has become more involved in Globeville than just overseeing the community clinic.