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Larabee captures stretch of Hwy. E-17 on canvass

By KELLY GERLACH

The 67-mile stretch of Highway E-17 can be unimaginative and mundane some days, especially for those who routinely drive on it. But in her new art exhibit at the Ohnward Fine Arts Center, Laura Larabee captures beautiful scenes from that stretch of scenic byway.

Larabee's exhibit, "Scotch Grove to Springbrook: Paintings and Drawings of E-17," is now on display at the Ohnward Fine Arts Center in Maquoketa. Meet the artist during a special reception at the center on Saturday afternoon, Oct. 2.

Larabee described her newest exhibit as a "travel journey" as she arranged her paintings on the wall of the Drew Art Gallery Monday morning, Sept. 27. The paintings are arranged in the order they'd be seen driving from Scotch Grove to Sabula. Larabee will have narratives guiding viewers along the way, explaining what they are seeing as they "drive" across Jones and Jackson counties.

Larabee, who was born and raised on a farm near Sabula, devised this project over the course of seven years. After her father's death, Larabee became a co-partner in the family business, Gravert's Apple Basket Orchard.

"I found the easiest, most direct route from Monticello (where she lives with her husband and two daughters) to Sabula was E-17," Larabee said.



Cornelius Seed Corn is one of the most locally recognizable scenes in Laura Larabee's "Scotch Grove to Springbrook: Paintings and Drawings of E-17." The exhibit, now on display at Ohnward, depicts extraordinary visions of the sometimes ordinary sights along E-17 in Jones and Jackson counties.



MSP photos by Kelly Gerlach

Laura Larabee, left, positions her painting of a dilapidated one-room schoolhouse. The painting is one from her "Scotch Grove to Springbrook: Paintings and Drawings of E-17" collection, which will be on display now through Nov. 30 at the Ohnward Fine Arts Center in Maquoketa.

"I'm always watching, looking at what's around me. I always have a camera in my car in case I see that perfect shot. And the changes along the route can be so different at certain times of the year and with certain lighting.

"As I'm traveling along, I'll see something and think, 'That's so neat.' Of course I stop and take photos. I have all these boxes and boxes of photos that just sit, and sit, and sit because it takes me a long time to see a painting from those photos," she continued.

So over the course of her trips back and forth along E-17, Larabee snapped random photos of sights that caught her interest.

"They are very much just moments in time. You see it every day, and finally

one day, one certain point in time, one certain light - just makes you stop," Larabee explained.

Such was the case with the familiar white buildings of Cornelius Seed Corn in rural Andrew.

"There was just no good sunlight there, no play of the shadows, nothing remarkable to make me stop. But one (winter) day, the three wagons were placed just right, and the corncob chaff had turned the snow pink, and I had to stop," she said.

A similar thing happened with an old one-room schoolhouse along the way. It was just standing there, like so many abandoned schoolhouses, surrounded by tall oak trees. "There was not really anything interesting about it," she said.

But one day, a storm knocked an oak onto the corner of the schoolhouse. Larabee said the owners tried keeping the schoolhouse intact. However, on her next drive past the spot, all the trees had been cut down and the schoolhouse had a "broken back," crumbling as if being reclaimed by the earth.

■ **LARABEE,**
 Please turn to page 12

City funding for YMCA discussed

By DOUGLAS MELVOLD

Two Maquoketa city councilmen exchanged sharp words last week during a discussion about settling debt from construction of the Maquoketa Area YMCA facility.

As part of the financing package for the facility, the city provided a \$1 million loan, which was borrowed from the city's cash reserves.

The loan was in addition to a \$1 million cash gift and the property on which the YMCA building was built, for which the city paid approximately \$30,000. The YMCA facility opened in October of 2007.

At the council's Sept. 20 meeting, Councilman Neil Morehead raised the issue of the city repaying itself the loan.

Morehead noted that several projects that were financed in part by tax increment financing were due to be paid off and the TIF districts were set to expire in the next two to six years.

Morehead proposed that after the debt on those projects is repaid, the tax increment financing arrangement be extended and that the city continue to collect the property tax revenue generated until the \$1 million loan is repaid.

He proposed that the council direct the city staff to schedule a meeting with the Jackson County Board of Supervisors and Maquoketa Community School District officials to inform them of the city's plan for repaying the loan.

Morehead's motion to that effect passed on a 6-1 vote, with Councilman Ed Turney dissenting.

The plan would affect the county, school district and other taxing entities because, under the TIF district, the city would capture tax revenue they otherwise would receive.

State law allows cities to establish TIF districts without needing approval of the other taxing entities affected.

Turney accused Morehead of renegeing on statements Morehead made repeatedly during the planning of the YMCA facility that local property tax funds would not be used to finance the facility, which at the time was called the Area Recreation Center, or ARC.

Turney said Morehead's plan would "go against" what he said were 650 signatures on a petition asking the council not to use tax funds to build the ARC.

"You even agreed to that and you went around them 650 signatures that said no tax money would be used. And now you're going to take TIF money, tax money?"

"That's what we're talking about," Morehead replied.

"You know, you're going to have 650 people down your neck," Turney told Morehead.

When Morehead started to explain that he was presenting a plan to repay the city's loan, Turney interrupted to say, "You're using (property) tax money, Neil. That's what I'm trying to tell you."

Morehead interrupted to say he wanted to explain his plan, after which Turney could speak.

Morehead said the city had \$3 million in cash reserves a few years ago. After making the \$1 million loan and spending additional amounts, the reserve fund now has a balance of about \$240,000, he said.

■ **FUNDING,** Please turn to page 2