

# ‘Better ourselves’

## Art contest gives Mesa County jail inmates a chance to show their creative side

By SAM KLOMHAUS  
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For inmates at the Mesa County Detention Facility, art is a means of escape everyone can agree with.

The jail hosted an art contest as part of its Substance Use Disorder program, and the winning pieces of art are currently on display in the lobby.

Victor Jackson, whose sketch of an old truck took first place, said he was confident in entering the art competition because that’s one area in which he excels.

Michele Wilkie, the program director for the Mesa County Detention Facility’s Jail Based Behavioral health Substance Use Disorder Program, said the program is voluntary for people who have diagnosable substance abuse issues.

“I was interested in trying something new, trying to better myself in a bad situation,” Jackson said. “I mean, we can all either sit in our cell and eat a bunch of hot pots and honey buns or we can try to better ourselves.”

The art contest is part of a unit in the substance use curriculum focused on coping skills, Wilkie said. The art can be a distraction or a way for the inmates to get their emotions out.



LARRY ROBINSON/The Daily Sentinel

Employees with the Mesa County Detention Facility on Wednesday look at drawings by inmates currently held inside the jail. The drawings were made as part of an art competition with the facility's 12-week Substance Use Disorder program inside the facility.



LARRY ROBINSON/The Daily Sentinel

Victor Jackson, an inmate currently held inside the Mesa County Detention Facility, holds up a copy on Wednesday of his first-place drawing made for an art competition part of the facility's 12-week Substance Use Disorder program. Jackson's and other winning artworks are available for viewing inside the lobby of the Mesa County Detention Facility until Dec. 19.

“A lot of them are able to express their feelings and their emotions through their art,” Wilkie said. “They’re able to look at those demons and look at possibilities.”

Wilkie said when you take an addiction away, you have to replace it with something positive to take up that time, and being balanced in that is important.

“If we have a healthy

hobby, that’s just another spoke in our wheel that we need to keep balanced,” Jackson said. “If we neglect hobbies, it’s the same as neglecting self-worth and I feel like my wheel’s going to be kind of flat, and so I have to maintain a productive, healthy habit, and I think that this is a productive healthy habit to maintain.”

Jackson said he got into drawing about 10 years ago, drawing pictures of his family. He got away from it for a while but recently dove back in at the behest of his daughter, and has been drawing different scenes for his family.

“I like being able to take something that you don’t know if you can really do and feeling the sense of accomplishment of ‘it looks better than the original picture,’” Jackson said.

For the contest, Jackson said he was inspired by fall.

“I just kept thinking ‘fall theme,’ and I wanted to capture the essence



LARRY ROBINSON/The Daily Sentinel

Victor Jackson, an inmate at the Mesa County Detention Facility, won first place for this drawing of a truck with pumpkins in the bed. The art contest is part of the facility's 12-week Substance Use Disorder program.

of America harvest, so I liked the idea of: old school truck, bed full of pumpkins, in front of a barn, just chilling out in the fall scenery,” Jackson said.

Jackson said he didn’t want to invoke a particular holiday, but wanted people who saw the drawing to think about the basics of fall.

“You see a bed full of pumpkins, you’re like ‘I want that one,’” he said.

Jackson said drawing the grass was the hardest part.

“I can capture the metal, I can capture the different tones and values of wood is easy, grain and stuff like that is easy,” he said.

Jackson’s drawing, as well as several others from the competition, are available for viewing in the lobby of the Mesa County Detention Facility until Dec. 19.

# Train derails into Gunnison River on Tuesday night

By DAN WEST  
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Around 11 p.m. on Tuesday evening, a train derailed into the Gunnison River between Colorado Highway 141 in White-water and the Bridgeport access to the Gunnison River near the Mesa-Delta County line.

A multi-agency response was launched with a “high level of resources” including Grand Junction Fire Department for EMS and hazmat, Mesa County Fire Authority and the private company SUN-COR, which provided additional absorbent booms for leaking diesel, according to a Grand Junction Fire Department press release.

A spokesperson for Union Pacific Railroad confirmed to other media outlets that a rockslide caused the derailment.

Mesa County Sheriff

Public Information Officer Molly Casey said two engineers were onboard the derailed train that entered the river and flooded with water. They did not sustain injuries and were rescued from the river by 1:30 a.m. on Wednesday morning.

“They were just extremely cold,” Casey said. “I think there was probably some concern for hypothermia given that it was snowing and in the water; obviously.”

Access to the derailment location was limited due to the remote area with no direct road access, according to the release. The Mesa County Sheriff’s Office launched a drone to try to locate the train and Union Pacific assisted in the response

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COURTESY OF GRAND JUNCTION FIRE DEPARTMENT

First responders working to rescue two engineers that were aboard the locomotive that derailed into the Gunnison River on Tuesday evening. The two engineers who were aboard the train when it derailed were safely rescued early Wednesday morning.

# How a Nevada fir became the U.S. Capitol Christmas tree

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

As a tiny seedling began sprouting in the forest along Mount Rose Highway west of Reno, the Vietnam War was ending under President Gerald Ford, the price of gas was 53 cents per gallon and the Kool-Aid man made his first television commercial appearance.

Today, 50 years later, that seedling has grown into Silver Belle, a 53-foot-tall red fir from the Carson Ranger District and the first Capitol Christmas tree to be harvested from Nevada.

Silver Belle will be on display on the West Lawn of the Capitol through the holiday season, and the official lighting took place on Tuesday.

The U.S. Forest Service has provided a Christmas tree for display at the Capitol since 1970, but no tree has ever been harvested from the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest. Spanning 5.6 million acres in Nevada and almost 700,000 acres in California, it is the largest forest in the lower 48 states.

Ahead of 2025, Humboldt-Toiyabe’s supervisor opted into the Forest Service’s annual competition and won the honor of providing the tree.

When standing, Silver Belle was perfectly conical and tall enough to impress.

“This tree was just a blessing,” Republican U.S. Rep. Mark Amodei of Nevada, who represents the Carson Ranger District, told The Nevada Independent.

Harvested from near the Mount Rose summit in late October, the tree arrived in Washington, on Nov. 21 after a more than 3,000-mile journey on a flatbed trailer.

The honor of providing the nation’s Christmas tree rotates from forest to forest, said Chris Buckley, public affairs specialist for the Forest Service.

With more than 150 national forests in the nation, “If you do the math, this is probably the only time we’ll see this in our lifetime,” she said.

**THE SEARCH BEGINS**

Nevada foresters began searching for the perfect tree more than a year ago.

Selection criteria was provided by the Architect of the Capitol’s office, but “a lot of it was really intuitive,” said Duncan Leao, forester for the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest.

The tree needed to measure between 50 and 80 feet tall and no more than 30 feet wide.

It needed to be pointy, conical-shaped and free of insects or disease, growing in an open area so that its limbs weren’t crowded by other trees.

And it needed to be accessible, with a road close enough to transport heavy equipment in for its removal.

Trees from across the state — the Jarbidge and

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