

BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

LibertyFest
returning to
Abingdon
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Bearcat
football
remains
undefeated
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The
BrightSide

A FEAST FOR THE EYES



CAROLYN WILSON

Tony Peren Fine Art Gallery in Damascus opened last week. His original artwork done in oil paints on canvas is a feast for the eyes, featuring paintings in vibrant colors and textures that reflect his heritage and the traditions that shaped the young artist.

Guatemalan artist Peren opens new gallery in Damascus

CAROLYN R. WILSON
Special to the Bristol Herald Courier

DAMASCUS, Va. ---Twenty-seven-year-old Tony Peren couldn't help but wipe a few tears of joy from his eyes as he welcomed nearly 50 visitors to the soft opening of his new art gallery last week.

The Guatemalan-born artist launched his first business in downtown Damascus, spotlighting a collection of his original work, much of which represent the rich history, legends and traditions of his native country.

The art gallery, located on Laurel Avenue in the former Mount Rogers Outfitters, is

a feast for the eyes, featuring paintings in vibrant colors and textures that reflect his heritage and the traditions that shaped him.

It's just another dream to come true for the young artist after moving to America four years ago to seek more artisan opportunities and to financially help his family back home in the Central American country.

Peren moved from the mountain town of San Juan Comalapa in Guatemala to the mountains of Southwest Virginia where his artistic journey began to take off---

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The Bright Side: Where good news lives.

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SACRED GROUND

In his search, Barnette teaches others to care for cemeteries, grave markers

STEPHANIE PORTER-NICHOLS
Staff

The guardian angel of this region's cemeteries: That's how Anna Leigh DeBord described Charlie Barnette to a group gathered in Marion's oldest cemetery last week.

Barnette's interest in the region's burial grounds began in 2008 when he started searching for his family member's graves.

Taking a Washington County book that details cemeteries, he began noting when he found grave markers missing. That, he said, led to also cleaning up cemeteries and then the tombstones.

In his cemetery searches, Barnette said he learned a great deal about his family and others.

He also discovered some extraordinary places. Barnette described encountering "Sacred Ground" in Russell County. There, he said, exists a "humongous pile of stones."

Barnette learned that people add to the monument by following the trail, picking up a stone along the way, praying with it in their hand, and then leaving the rock on the pile.

Barnette recalled the story of a father who learned his daughter had received a terminal diagnosis of metastasized cancer and had a short time to live. The father completed the walk and spiritual practice day after day. A decade later, the daughter gave a birthday gift to the doctor who diagnosed her.

Curious, Barnette said he wanted to see what was beyond the monument. A little way farther, he found two trees growing together at a burial site.

Today, Barnette, who works with the Washington County Historical Society, continues his search, now looking for lost and abandoned cemeteries.

He also shares his knowledge of caring for grave markers and properly cleaning them.

Last Wednesday, hosted by the Royal Oak chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, he offered a free class at Royal Oak Cemetery in Marion.

According to DeBord, a DAR and Smyth County Historical Society leader, 102 individuals are buried in the cemetery that includes the graves of multiple Revolutionary War and Civil War veterans.

Only a small percentage of the

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Washington County, Va. school system looks at combining Holston, Patrick Henry **PAGE A3**

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