

CHANHASSEN NEIGHBORS

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DANIELLE SWANSON PHOTOGRAPHY



Lee Newcomb: Keeping history alive through art

By Ashley Griffin | Photos by Danielle Swanson Photography

Upon meeting Lee Newcomb, 83, you instantly get a sense of kindness, passion, and curiosity. Lee has spent his retirement years exploring his interest in local Minnesota history and shares the stories he has come across through his artwork.

Lee grew up in the Lake Minnetonka community on an island that was a boat yard. He has fond memories of growing up around the lake and hearing stories of its sacred past. He spent three decades working as a tree trimmer for the local power company followed by fifteen years as a delivery truck driver. He has two children and seven grandchildren who all live in the Twin Cities area.

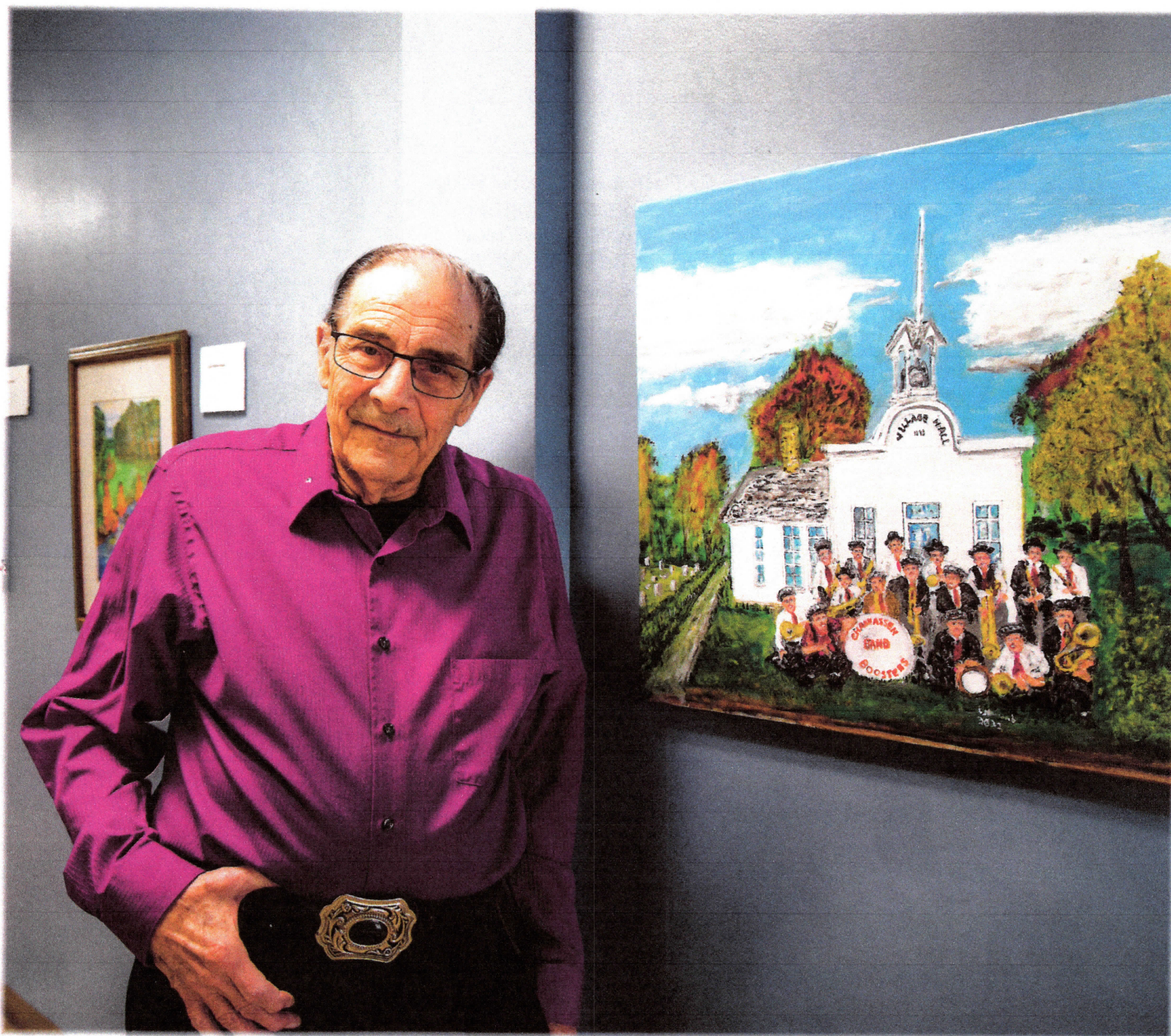
As a self-taught history buff, Lee focuses particularly on Civil War history and local Native American tribes. He has truly an invaluable wealth of knowledge on local history. Lee has a passion to share what he's learned, but discovered he does not love public speaking. Fortunately, he found an alternative way to share stories—through painting and sewing.

As a naturally curious and active person, Lee found himself with a lot of time on his hands during the COVID shutdowns. He used his extra time at home to dive into new projects and soon found a love for painting. He is self-taught and focuses on telling Civil War and Native American stories through beautiful, brightly-colored

the University of Minnesota, he enrolled in a couple art classes and recently he started taking drawing classes again at the Chanhassen Senior Center, but his skills have primarily developed through practice and dedication.

Lee works freehand from memories and stories, occasionally using photos to help with details. When you walk into the Chanhassen Senior Center, you will find a wall of Lee's artwork proudly displayed. His paintings throughout the Senior Center include retrospectives of local indigenous groups, stories of friendship at the Senior Center, and tributes to Chanhassen's history. The paintings add a personal touch to the Center with stories of friends playing mahjong, the Chan-o-laires Choir (who practice weekly there), and a group of regulars in the woodworking studio.

One of Lee's proudest paintings is a large-scale story montage of his church's annual rummage sale. The Excelsior United Methodist Church's rummage sale started in 1934 and grew to become one of the largest rummage sales in the state. In one corner of the painting is a personal story of Lee as a four-year-old buying a toy car that he adored. His family lost track of the car over the years, but somehow the toy showed up at the rummage sale again four years ago, this time being sold as an antique. Lee instantly recognized it for its broken headlight. The painting, featuring



In addition to painting, Lee is a talented craftsman who uses his sewing and woodworking skills to create authentic Native American regalia and Civil War period clothing. He finds fabric scraps at thrift stores and through other local historians. He uses sewing machines for his larger pieces, but hand sews many small details. Lee is very thorough at researching details in his art, including using authentic buttons from the Civil War he found along the riverbanks in Carver. He also sewed a typical Civil War-era ladies dress. His recent focus has been making bow and arrows that are beautifully crafted with natural materials. They are a particular hit with his grandchildren.

Lee is an associate of the Mendota Tribal Community. His interest in Native American stories is a focal point of much of his artwork. He shared, "There is a lot of Native history in our area. History should be remembered and not forgotten." As a member of the tribe, he particularly enjoys partaking in the pow-wows, where he helps set up the tents and displays his artwork. Recently the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux community purchased several of his paintings to resell and display at their Hokokata Ti Cultural Center.

Lee's artwork is proudly displayed around Chanhassen and local communities. Recently, the Chanhassen Historical Society turned one of his paintings of their Old City Hall building on 78th Street into a puzzle. Lee generously donates 100% of the money he makes on his artwork to the Senior Center and Mendota tribe. His donations to the Senior Center are used to help cover a portion of the costs for participants who have limited resources and to help keep the overall programming fees lower for all participants. Lee is actively looking for more outlets for selling his artwork and postcards with the hope of giving back even more to the community.

History will only be remembered if we take the time to stop, listen, and share. Thank you, Lee, for keeping history alive in a truly inspirational way.

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