

Local artist

Donna Burgess

by Jenny Webb Watkins

Donna Burgess' mother said that Donna was arrogant at birth. So she was hardly surprised when her daughter decided to open an art gallery in Ft. Walton after taking painting classes for only six months. Burgess didn't start painting until both of her daughters, now 25 and 27, were born. Almost immediately after beginning her artistic efforts, she quit a high-paying brokerage career of many years to pursue painting. At the time, she realized that the impulsive move could alter her quality of life. "I knew that this probably meant that I would have to start eating peanut butter," Burgess says. "But that's OK; I like the taste of peanut butter."

In school, Burgess majored in English and decided to become a journalist. However, after realizing that she could express her thoughts better in paint than in words, thanks to her mother's artistic influence, Burgess finally discovered her niche in art.

Burgess now paints in a studio surrounded by a grove of oak trees. This dream studio took a while to obtain. Burgess claims to have painted in closets, warehouses with "creepy crawlers" and "other places you wouldn't believe."

A dog lover, Burgess paints dogs as often as people. "When our kids are grown, our animals become family," she says. With a smile, she brags about how patient her husband is in their full house. "Living at home, we have three dogs, a potty-trained rabbit and a rescued duck that sits on my shoulder like a parrot." Burgess' duck pecks at her door, wanting to come inside to avoid the Florida heat, and her rabbit sleeps with her dogs at night. "Because of our wonderful magic animal family, we tend to attract other animal lovers," she adds.

In addition to dogs, Burgess paints other objects that allure her affections. Burgess' art is always changing. Not excited by sit-and-stare poses, she focuses on painting lively scenes: children running and holding hands, impressionist tin roof cottages and harbor activity, to name a few. While snorkeling near the Marine Institute, one of her favorite pastimes, Burgess had the opportunity to swim with more than 30 sea turtles. Inspired beyond measure, Burgess painted the turtles for weeks.

Her first debut was the Destin Seafood Festival poster in 1988. She presented her poster ideas to the *Chamber of Commerce* that year and continued creating the annual poster for the event until 2000. Burgess also produced the *Destin Wine Festival* posters for 20 years. As wine lovers gravitated toward Burgess' posters, she launched her *Wine Lovers Art Collector Series* this year in her gallery. Burgess pro-



Works by Donna Burgess

duced 100 posters and has nearly sold out of the series.

She also was the first artist to open a gallery in Seaside, a community that is now drenched with brilliant art galleries. Starting in a tent on the Seaside square, Burgess was exhausted with packing and unpacking art and decided to open a permanent building to show her artwork, in addition to a gallery in Destin. After selling art in Seaside for 13 years, Burgess consolidated the two galleries into one larger building in SanDestin. At her new venue, Burgess has a mat machine that tailors frame mats to suit customers' requests. The machine cuts fonts and shapes and is apparently so entertaining that Burgess claims to have customers come to the gallery just to watch.

Although Burgess owns one gallery now, other venues show and sell her work. *Lovellace Interiors* in WaterColor sells her originals and giclees, images scanned from an original onto a canvas and stretched from there, generating a less expensive piece of art with the beauty of an original. Also, *Lily Pads* in Grayton Beach offers her vintage seaside prints.

Inspired by her family, Burgess has undertaken another artistic venture aside from painting. When Chelsea and Erica, Burgess' granddaughters, were born, the family decided she needed a "grand-



mother name." Asked by family members what she wanted to be called, Burgess answered with a mischievous smile, "Queen." The family embraced the new name and both granddaughters and infant grandson, Benjamin, know her as "Queenie." Burgess and Chelsea frequently walk along the beach to collect driftwood, shells and other treasures. They use the collected keepsakes to make shell mirrors, driftwood sculptures, and other ocean-themed objects, which they now sell under the brand name *Queen of the Sea*.

Due to frequent requests, Burgess will be hosting a workshop at the San Destin Hilton in September. "We will pick up shells in the morning, paint all day long, and then look at our artwork over glasses of wine in the evenings," she says. This spunky artist guarantees wonderful artistic advice but, more importantly, assures an exquisite time.

To find out more about Burgess' art, call (850) 837-1887 or visit her Web site www.artzby-donnaburgess.com.