**Indiana Veterans Home resident makes high-flying splash at Indiana State Fair**

By Kirsten Clark

WEST LAFAYETTE – For Indiana Veterans Home (IVH) resident Gary Anderson, his art is his passion. The retired Navy veteran’s dedication is leading him on new adventures across Indiana where his artwork is part of a larger multimedia collection centered on four characters in a story series titled *The Ladies Flying Club*.

Anderson first entered *The Ladies Flying Club* in the IVH Craft Fair hosted by the Elks Club, earning several blue ribbons. He went on to win first place in the Open Division of the Multimedia Artwork category at this year’s Tippecanoe County Fair. He later received Honorable Mention in the same category at the 2019 Indiana State Fair.

“I first thought entering the Elks Art Show would be just a fun activity,” he said. “I did pretty well there and went on to the county and state fairs. It did so well the last two years, I started to invite my family out there so we could spend time together.”

Anderson took inspiration for his books and artwork from women pioneers in aviation like Amelia Earhart and Sharon McAuliffe. He was also motivated by someone a little closer to home.

“My mom and her sister wanted to be in aviation and my mom was actually did become a pilot,” Anderson said. “I have a photo of them standing next to a crop duster airplane some time ago.”

*The Ladies Flying Club* stories begin as sketches on a single-sheet storyboard before Anderson draws them onto individual sheets using colored pencils. The same four ladies of the flying club always begin and end their journey at COO-COO’s Beach Clothing store. His illustrations have become part of a calendar, a blanket and even a clothing line. His family has also created a book featuring his vibrant, high-flying ladies.

“I can use any materials like water colors, ink or paint, but I do use the color pencils for these drawings,” said Anderson. “*The Ladies Flying Club* is multi-media, meaning we load the pages into the computer so they become digital and then my sister uses Shutterfly to create the book.”

Anderson’s sister, Linda George, has taken an active role in promoting her brother’s artwork. She makes sure to get the stories printed from a digital format and has even sent his work to a book publisher, hoping to get the stories published in an official capacity.

“Gary’s artwork is cheerful, bright and whimsical,” she said. “The stories are fun, original, innocent and flow easily from beginning to end. Gary has always been a hard worker and busy, so he gives the same passion to his artwork now.

“From our 92-year-old aunt to his 2-year-old great nephew, the whole family is proud of his work and his accomplishments. All of us have been with him at one time or another to see how he does in contests. The state fair has even become our yearly family reunion site!”

Anderson has been working on his creative touch for many years now. After graduating high school in 1969, he got started at Jackson Grey Storey School of Commercial Art, now known as the Art Academy of Cincinnati. He attended there until 1971, when he joined the U.S. Navy during the Vietnam conflict.

“I joined the Navy, volunteered for submarine duty and submerged. I surfaced six years later and was honorably discharged,” he said. “After that, I joined the U.S. Merchant Marines, got married and became an officer. I worked in the engine room as an engineer and I got to go around the world two and a half times!”

“There’s a lot to do on the sub or on a boat, it’s very busy, and you work 12-hour days but then you get shore time off too,” said Anderson. “After I joined the Merchant Marines, I worked there for 20 years and retired as a second engineer. I’ve worked on every kind of boat except an aircraft carrier.”

Anderson says *The Ladies Flying Club* stories have revived his joy in art, given him tasks to keep him busy and reunited his family in ways he never imagined.

“These stories have been recognized enough now that I’ve been going to the Indiana State Fair for the last two years,” he said. “The books are pulling the family back together again, my sister helps me a lot. I’ve got my clothing line and blankets now too.”

Anderson’s artwork represents his pride in women aviators like his mom who paved the way for future generations of female fliers. Some of his story ideas even come from his own dreams.

“I would have a dream about something one night and then I would wake up and draw it out,” he remarked with a laugh. “You never know when creativity will strike.”

The retired sailor is used to being busy and has no plans to slow down. Anderson hopes to continue entering art shows in the future and, with his sister Linda’s help, his work may soon be published by a book publishing house and available for purchase.

He has some new ideas for future artwork, but his next project takes the Ladies to Alaska to practice landing float planes on the water.

“The Ladies land on the water during the great salmon migration and the fish are jumping onto their plane,” said Anderson. “They hold a contest and give the fish awards for their efforts.”