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Local artist Jo Scoby points to the men in her tribute to the leaders of Edward Jones. The painting was commissioned by Jeff Weeast Sr. for his office in Liberal. L&T photo/Rachel Coleman

Landmark Tribute

By RACHEL COLEMAN

• Leader & Times

Look on the Internet for images of Mount Rushmore, and satirical versions of the national monument fill the computer screen: Mount Rushmore with Bill Cosby. Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg. Pop star Madonna. Cartoon character Homer Simpson.

What you won't see is a recent painting by Liberal artist Jo Scoby. The painter finished a 4-foot by 6-foot version of Mount Rushmore for local businessman Jeff Weeast Sr. Instead of the busts of presidents Washington, Jefferson, Roosevelt and Lincoln, the oil painting displays the faces of eight men affiliated with investment firm Edward Jones. The work of art is a tribute to people who helped build the company in Western Kansas, and it's the brainchild of Weeast.



"I became a regional leader with Edward Jones in 2009. When preparing for my first face-to-face review, my then-area leader Kim Webb advised me to be able to explain or paint a picture of my region," recalled Weeast. As he thought about the people who had come before him, "it struck me that Region 99 has a rich and deep history and culture ... so in my review, I described the leaders that came before me as the Mt. Rushmore of Edward Jones."

Weeast's review met with such approval, the word-picture took hold. He wondered how it might work to see the image he'd imagined. Then he decided to make it happen.

"I called Jo, who's such a good artist," Weeast said. "A lot of people think of her in terms of house painting and that kind of thing. They don't even know what she can do in terms of art."

But Weeast did. When he first proposed the commission, Scoby was a bit taken aback.

"I must confess, it was a little intimidating," she said. "But I knew that I do well when I'm working with ideas that someone has brought to me. I said 'Yes,' and I got everything assembled — a very large canvas, the paint, the brushes, the photographs of these people — and then I got started."

In the end, the project took around four months to complete. Scoby worked with oil paints, which gave her time to adjust and alter images before they dried completely.

"He gave me a stack of photographs to work from, and of course they were all colored, so in my head I had to transfer them. It was supposed to look like stone. I ran them through a copier, now I'm looking at black and white," Scoby said. "I'd work, take a photo, send it to Jeff on email, and then he'd get back to me: 'yeah,' he'd say, or 'well, no.' He wasn't a tough critic, but he knew what he wanted. Off we'd go again."

Scoby didn't know it at the time, but Weeast was consulting not only his memory and perception, but that of the families involved. Some of the subjects were still alive, though two had died.

"Once the family members signed off, that was good enough for him," Scoby said.

As the project progressed, Scoby continually learned to adjust her methods.

"Holy cow," she said, "it was frustrating sometimes. But it was good for me, and it really did force me to grow." For example, in previous works — smaller scale ones — Scoby was able to use fine brushes to add considerable detail to the images.

"The biggest brush I'd ever used was a quarter-inch diameter and now I was using a half, now we're up to one-and-a-half-inch brushes," she said. Scoby's previous work painting large-scale murals came in handy.

"I've painted on walls, on barns, and I drew on that," she said. "You have to work in sections, block all the rest out and work on this one little area, then step back, take a picture, see if it still looks believable to you."

In the past, Scoby painted cartoon characters on barns, jungle scenes for wildlife pens, and, moving indoors, Mediterranean landscapes and children's storybook scenery.

"It's always been someone else's idea," Scoby said. "I wasn't smart enough to say 'no.' If they think I can do it, let's see if I can."

As the Mt. Rushmore painting progressed, Scoby found herself marveling at the project.

"I couldn't believe I was doing it," she said. "I'd tell people, 'You won't believe it, the size of it,' and that wasn't even touching the portraits in the picture."

For Weeast, though, the portraits were the main thing. The ultimate test was what happened after Scoby completed the work. Weeast asked a professional photographer to capture images of the painting, which he then reproduced and framed for each of the men depicted. He also presented a copy of the work to Scoby herself. Weeast said the artwork was well-received.

"I personally took it to each of them," he said. "Ted Jones has passed away, but his wife is still living on a farm in Missouri along the Katy Trail," which Jones helped establish as a state park and preferred hiking and bike trail.

"She liked it and knew all the people in the picture. She enjoyed seeing it," Weeast said.

Scoby, too, treasures her copy of the picture she painted. Most of her commissioned work "doesn't belong to me once it's finished," she said. "I let it go." For a few of the large-scale

installations, that means landscapes have been painted over as homes change owners.

This painting, though, will stay with Scoby in photographic form. And she's hopeful to see the original original — Mount Rushmore itself — sometime in the future.

“Now that I've painted this version,” she said. “I'd like to go see the real thing someday.”

The Story Behind the Mt. Rushmore Picture

In his presentation at a company review, Jeff Weeast Sr. describe the leaders that came before him as “the Mt. Rushmore of Edward Jones.” Beginning at the left,

Doug Hill was a financial advisor in Dodge City for many years and served as regional manager. He is now at the company's home office in St. Louis, where he is a managing partner.

Ron Larimore was a financial advisor in Liberal for 17 years before he moved to the St. Louis home office and became one of the top three general partners who run Edward Jones.

Tom Miltenberger was a financial advisor in Liberal for several years before he moved to St. Louis to run the mutual fund division.

Darrell Seibel has served Edward Jones in Hays for more than 50 years and was also regional leader.

Jim Armatys has worked for many years in Great Bend, and also served as regional leader.

Dan Power has served Edward Jones clients in Hutchinson for many years and served as regional leader for more than 10 years.

Jeff Weeast, pictured at far right, is an Edward Jones representative in Liberal and is currently regional leader.

Pictured in the sky, Ted Jones created the wire line from Pueblo, Colo., and set up offices in Liberal, Dodge City and Hays.

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