

A chance to let her art flower

Aptos artist wins \$40K grant to create botanical exhibit

By JORY JOHN

newsroom@santacruzsentinel.com

APTOS — Aptos artist Claudia Stevens has recently realized every artist's dream: the time to think and create without having to worry about paying the bills.

Stevens, a botanical artist who specializes in paintings of native plants, has received a \$40,000 grant from the Creative Work Fund, a San Francisco-based nonprofit that fosters collaborations between Northern California artists and nonprofits. Stevens, who will take a break from teaching art to Rio del Mar Elementary School students, is the first visual artist recognized by the foundation in Santa Cruz County.

"Artists usually have to steal time to get their work together," Stevens said. "This is just an amazing opportunity to seize the moment and try and put my next body of work together. My first body of work has taken my whole life."

Stevens will be recognized for her work at an exclusive San Francisco banquet on Sept. 13, with other Northern California winners present. Overall, \$650,000 in grant money is being distributed.

Stevens submitted a letter of inquiry to the Creative Work Fund in November 2009. Hers was one of 266 inquiries from performance or visual artists. In February, Stevens was notified that she'd made a short list of 63 artists invited to submit full proposals. Seventeen winners in 14 counties were announced July 30, including Stevens. It's the third grant of her career, she said, and "certainly the big-



JULIA MOORE/SENTINEL

Artist Claudia Stevens works on a painting in her studio behind her home in Aptos on Tuesday. Stevens received a \$40,000 grant from Creative Work Fund to create paintings based on real-life specimens.

ON THE NET

To see more of Stevens' work, visit cstevensstudios.com

gest."

The grant will fund the artist's collaboration with the UC Santa Cruz Arboretum Foundation for the "Mutsun Relearning Project," Stevens said. The project is about a sub-group of the Ohlone people and the plants they used. The Arboretum will receive a portion of the funds from the grant.

"The project is a botanical collaboration of visual arts, botanical science and cultural anthropology," said Stevens, adding that much of the cultural knowledge about the plants and the indigenous people who used them have been lost.

Stevens' new body of paint-

ings, along with "ethnobotanical explanations of how the ancient Mutsun people used the plants for food, fiber, medicinal and tools," will be in a traveling show by 2012, which will include Stanford University and the Monterey Historical Museum, before being added to a permanent exhibit at UCSC, she said.

The Santa Cruz-based exhibit will feature a garden honoring indigenous people, she said.

"I've worked with the Arboretum before and they were just great," she said. "Before they even knew I was getting the grant, they were willing to sit down with me and talk about it. They thought what I was doing was great and that our work would be mutually beneficial."

Creative Work Fund Program Director Frances Phillips said the selection process is intense and that Stevens impressed the judg-

es repeatedly.

"Her work contains an acute attention to detail, a realism that differentiated her from the other artists," Phillips said. "Another thing that impressed us about Claudia was the strong collaboration between the Arboretum and the artist. The specific skills were a perfect match for one another. The Creative Work Fund focuses on meaningful collaborations."

Phillips said Stevens paintings would have a long life and that the foundation is happy that Stevens' work will be seen in a traveling show and permanent exhibit.

Stevens said while the application process for the grant was "a tremendous amount of work," she's been giddy about the grant since it was announced.

"What a fantastic opportunity this is," she said. "I'm giggling about it every single day."