

Whitney Benefits shows interest in SCSD2 Gollings paintings

BY ALISA BRANTZ
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SHERIDAN — If the Sheridan County School District 2 board of trustees does decide to sell the 10 original William Gollings paintings in its possession, officials may have found the ideal buyer.



Kinnison

During the regular meeting of the SCSD2 board Monday night, Whitney Benefits Board President Tom Kinnison and half of the total Whitney Benefits board members attended and revealed their interest in the art during the comments from the audience portion of the evening, a non-agenda item.

In December, it was announced that the district was the owner of pieces by the

Western artist who lived and worked in Sheridan in the early 1900s.

Members of the Fine Arts Committee spearheading efforts to modernize the Sue Henry Auditorium at Sheridan High School began discussions with key art stakeholders in the community regarding potentially selling the works to fund part of the project.

Concerns were expressed that the art should remain in Sheridan County and a sale could put their future in jeopardy.

However, concerns were also voiced that if the paintings were not sold they may continue to deteriorate, as they are not currently being properly cared for.

Since the early discussions began, much has been learned about the paintings.

Local historian and SHS teacher Tyson Emborg researched the history of each piece, and uncovered the works were pur-

chased in part by the Parent Teacher Association of the time and in part by the administration.

In his search, he learned more about the artist, his connection to the area and his connection to the schools.

“He was a true cowboy artist in the sense that he knew what the art should look like because he had cowboied at FUF ranch,” Emborg said. “After that, he had moved to his new permanent home at 847 S. Sheridan Ave., about one house in from where Henry A. Coffeen School sits today. His studio was in the back of his house but after his death it was moved and turned into a chicken house, so somebody in town owns a rather historic chicken coop.”

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PAINTINGS: Local treasure

Original purchase price and location of the William Gollings art owned by SCSD2:

- “The Trouble Message” \$150, John S. Taylor School
- “Hanging It To Him” and “The Trouble Hunters” \$275 total, Linden School
- “Pony Thieves” and “The Verendryes” \$450 total, the High School
- “The Trappers Return” unknown price, Coffeen School
- “The Grey Winter” unknown price, Central School
- “Father DeSmet Leaving the Headwaters” unknown price, Custer School
- “Beef Roundup” and “Cowboy Hunters” original price and location unknown

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Emborg discovered that the art was not purchased after Gollings death, but rather in most cases was painted by Gollings for the specific school that intended to house it.

In some of the schools, existing paintings were purchased, but even those were hand selected by the community for the school.

In the early 1970s it was the opening of the new Fulmer Library and a need for a secure location that prompted the district to loan the paintings to the library.

Today the collection remains the largest display of publicly owned works by Gollings in the state.

The University of Wyoming owns 110 pieces of his work, but has very few on display.

Though an updated appraisal is needed, current estimates place the collection at around \$3 million in value.

Kinnison presented the school board with a letter on behalf of Whitney Benefits stating that the foundation would pay for a certified appraisal of the art by an appraiser of the district’s choosing, and provided the district can provide proof of clear title and possession of the art they would like to facilitate discussions of a possible purchase.

“Our interest is in assisting the district’s educational pursuits while also retaining this local treasured art in Sheridan County,” the letter reads. “Whitney could purchase and hold the Gollings art work as an investment, and if such an arrangement could be finalized, our intent would be to display the art in a public secured and climate controlled venue in Sheridan County for the ongoing benefit of community members and the educational community.”

The board approved unanimously to begin preliminary discussions on the topic.

“Mr. Whitney was alive until 1917 and knew Mr. Gollings quite well,” Emborg said. “That was a lovely presentation by Whitney Benefits and I encourage the board to continue their great work in preserving this art.”