

St. Joe Valley Watercolor Society Newsletter

May 2026

May General Meeting

Sunday, May 17

1:00-1:15 pm Snacks & Social

1:15-1:30 pm Meeting & Announcements

1:30-3:00 pm Presenter

South Bend Museum of Art

Presenter: Dan Slattery

St. Joe Valley Watercolor Society Board Members

President (*Open*)

Anne Marie Peck

Vice President

Diane reader Dorn

Treasurer

Nancy Turner

Secretary

Judy Rossow

Exhibits (*Open*)

Marta Francis

Hospitality

Beverly Watkins

Historian

Renee Keller

At Large

Gina Mitchell

SBMA Liaison

Dee Thornton

Leeper Park Art Fair

Hedy DeNolf

Publications

Open

Past President

Diane reader Dorn

Dear SJVWS Members,

As we wrap up another creative season together, I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to all of you for the support, kindness, and camaraderie you've shown during my two years as President. It has been a privilege to serve this wonderful community of artists. I also want to offer special appreciation to **Gina Mitchell** for the beautifully written **history of the Watercolor Society** and the **Leeper Park Art Fair** included in this issue—her work adds so much richness to our shared story.

As we look ahead to the 2026–2027 season, we have several important **open positions** that must be filled: **President**, **Exhibits Chair**, and **Publications Coordinator** (who oversees the newsletter and social media). These roles are essential to keeping our society active and thriving, and I encourage anyone who feels called to step forward.

Finally, I invite all of you to **join or volunteer** for the **Leeper Park Art Fair**. Your involvement makes a meaningful difference.

Kind regards,
Anne Marie Peck
ampeck505@gmail.com
(505) 660-6939

May Presenter & SJVWS Announcements

May Presenter – Dan Slattery

In teaching a course on painting Weather in Watercolor, Dan Slattery came up with a process for achieving the effect of rain running down a window pane. In our meeting this Sunday, Dan will demonstrate the steps by which he arrived at this effect.



Leeper Park Art Fair 2026 Member's Booth

Leeper Park Art Fair is known as one of the premier fine art fairs in the country! This year the fair will take place on Saturday, June 20, 10am - 6pm and Sunday, June 21, 10am - 5pm.

The St. Joe Valley Watercolor Society sponsors a booth for our members. It's a great opportunity to be part of this nationally acclaimed art fair! Applications and information for this will be at our March and May general meetings and are also available on our website: stjoevalleywatercolor.com.

The deadline for applications and payments to be received is **Sunday, May 24**.

Hope to see you at the Leeper
Park Art Fair!



News & History of SJVWS and the Leeper Park Art Fair

Leeper Park Art Fair

Seeking volunteers for the Information Tent and for booth sitting.

Contact Joan Spohrer at
jfspohrer@ameritech.net



Marta Francis

Dancing Sandhill Cranes



Some history of the St. Joe Valley Watercolor Society and the Leeper Park Art Fair

Jozef Wrobel, who founded the St. Joe Valley Watercolor Society in 1959 was an artist and a teacher.

A painting by Jozef Wrobel, was donated to the South Bend Museum by Art in about 2014 by a watercolor society member, surprisingly it was an oil painting. Maybe because of the “waste not, want not” culture of that time or possibly the unavailability of watercolor paper, it appears as if at least one of Josef’s paintings was done on a piece of cardboard, the type of cardboard that comes inside of a folded men’s dress shirt when packaged for sale at a store. Below are a few of Jozef’s paintings.



The Leeper Park Art Fair, which is sponsored by the St. Joe Valley Watercolor Society, began in 1967 with artists from Chicago and Michigan, generally within about a 90 mile radius around the South Bend area. It has grown to be a national art fair. Howard Scott, who at one time also helped organize the fair said the art fair was begun by Jozef Wrobel in response to the Northern Indiana Artists having a fair at Howard Park. In the beginning artists used clotheslines strung between trees to hang their art.

History of SJVWS and the Leeper Park Art Fair (cont.)

Continued history of the St. Joe Valley Watercolor Society and the Leeper Park Art Fair

Elizabeth James was president for one year while working two other jobs. Several important organizing steps happened with her leadership. Up to this time the artists were told to set up wherever they wanted to sell their art. Elizabeth's husband, an engineer took 4 to 5 hours to create a better arrangement. It was a circle with the booths lining the outsides of the circle. Then guests could easily visit all the artists just by walking the circle. They could also have a picnic in the center area. When more artist spaces were needed an inside circle of booth space was added with those booth openings facing the outside circle of booths. Food and drink vendors were added to the center area. At the time a copy of this layout was given to the parks department. The South Bend Parks department added benches for the fair guests.

The year of Elizabeth's presidency was the first year the fair was advertised on TV, channel 16, WNDU.

Over the years we've had quite a few watercolor society members who've volunteered their time to make this a successful weekend. However, it hasn't always been easy. About 35 years ago, the current chairman of the fair used Leeper Park Art Fair money to pay his personal bills. When he realized he couldn't repay the money, he quit, refused to release any financial reports and said he was sick. When another person took over the chairman's responsibilities they discovered about \$8000 was missing. For the fair to continue the watercolor society took money from their savings and paid the bills. When it was possible the art fair repaid the watercolor society. (Coincidentally, the same year, the Director of another major art fair absconded with over \$20,000 and fled the state). Some of our members wanted to call the police to report what had happened, but most members felt sorry for the chairman. He later died without repaying what he stole.

Even small organizations must have financial transparency, and our requirements were changed to protect us in the future.

Judy Ladd took over management of the fair along with several other watercolor society members. Each were responsible for accomplishing certain tasks and performed them for 23 years until 2017. This was the 50 th anniversary of the Leeper Park Art Fair. A Friday evening celebration and reception was held to honor this accomplishment. The South Bend Tribune (June 15, 2017) interviewed the fairs coordinators; here are a few of their quotes.

"I think the quality of the artwork now is excellent," Ladd says. "Not that it wasn't before, but I think it's grown. I think the artists have grown. I really believe we've made it a larger show and better show. Every year it gets better."

She's overseen the fair's growth into perhaps the most well-known art show in the area and one of the most respected in the country. Sunshine Artist Magazine has rated it one of the Top 200 art shows in the country.

Howard Scott, a Watercolor Society member and longtime entrant, compares Leeper Park Art Fair favorably to those he's done in bigger cities such as Chicago, Indianapolis and Detroit.

History of SJVWS and the Leeper Park Art Fair (cont.)

“It’s grown, it’s strengthened,” he says. “It’s a little jewel for South Bend. The way it’s run, it’s artist-run and not as a business. We tend to pick the best artists and balance it, so it’s not all jewelry or not all photography. We have a pretty good pool from the country to choose from.”

During the anniversary ceremony Friday evening a bench was dedicated. It had been donated by the St. Joe Valley Watercolor Society, engraved to commemorate the fair’s 50th anniversary and permanently installed facing the river for fair-goers and local residents to enjoy.

While an original logo, designed by Jack Appleton was used on all promotional materials in 2017 to commemorate the 50 th anniversary, for many years the watercolor society invited its own artists to enter their paintings in a competition. The painting chosen was used for that years promotions. Posters and t-shirts were also made; some fair guests even began to collect the yearly art promotional pieces.

The painting used in the 2019 promotions won a third place award in the Sunshine Artists Annual Show Poster Contest as the most inviting and readable! Now, to make our fair more recognizable from year to year, we use the same image for promotions.

In 2019 while the west side of Leeper Park was being renovated the art fair was moved to the east side of Michigan Street which is a part of the Park but hadn’t been used for artist booths. The refurbishment on the west side of the park included removing the duck pond, installing walking paths and placing the historic Studebaker Fountain once again in the park. This fountain was originally commissioned by John Studebaker and installed in Howard Park in 1906. It was an elaborate cast-iron fountain standing 28 feet high and 34 feet wide with illuminated cherubs, dolphins and turtles. By 1941 the fountain had deteriorated, was removed and the pieces scattered. Years later as many pieces of the original fountain as possible were found, missing pieces were recast using the original molds and color-changing LED lights were added. It was rebuilt and now stands in the center of our art fair.

With the parks entirely new look, we also created a new arrangement for our guests to walk as they visit the approximately 90 artist booths. Many areas have cemented walking paths and tree canopies, there are benches to rest, food and drink vendors and a large covered space with tables and chairs to enjoy the refreshments. And, of course there’s the historic water fountain!

Since 1967, the only year the art fair wasn’t able to happen was 2020, as you know that was because of Co-Vid.

In 2021 when we were able to have the art fair again there were a surprisingly large number of guests that weekend! They were happy to see the art and artists once again! Since then we’ve continued our tradition of a relaxing weekend in a beautiful tree-filled park with music, food, refreshments and artists from across the United States displaying their fine art!

History of SJVWS and the Leeper Park Art Fair (cont.)



Josef Wrobel #1



Josef Wrobel #2



Leeper Park Art Fair Logo 2017



Leeper Park Art Fair 2025