

SEDONA LIFE

PAINTING WITH PURPOSE

Artist dedicates work to saving shelter animals

by Kristen Spees
Staff Writer

To some people, being called top dog may not be much of a compliment, but Sedona artist Ron Burns makes it a title worth competing for.

Burns will be the Humane Society of Sedona's Top Dog during the 1999 Paws in the Park dog walk on April 24. He will be announcing the participants and signing Humane Society posters.

Music lovers who attended the 1998 Jazz on the Rocks festival may remember the festival posters which were reproductions of one of Burns' paintings. The painting depicted a multi-colored dog sitting on a coach dreaming of himself jamming on a saxophone.

For some people, that may have been the first time they had seen Burns' distinctive art work, although he has been painting for more than 10 years.

Even now, people don't realize that Burns has been a Sedona resident since 1989 because he keeps a pretty low profile.

During the past few years, Burns has licensed images from his artwork for fund-raising programs for animal shelters and organizations across the country. Burns donates a portion of the proceeds from all of his paintings to help homeless animals of all kinds.

Before he came to Sedona, Burns had a design marketing studio in Los Angeles. The 1987 earthquake demolished the building the studio was in, forcing Burns and his staff to work out of his home.

With the increased stress of the job, Burns' sister, who lived in Phoenix, suggested he and his wife, Buff, come to Sedona. The couple traveled up to Flagstaff on I-17 and came back toward

Sedona through Oak Creek Canyon. One trip was all it took.

Ron and Buff stopped at a real estate office and inquired about buying some quiet acreage. Within three or four days, they owned a chunk of land in Sedona.

"That's how we got here, on a fluke," Ron said.

With the stress of the marketing studio, Ron painted as a release. Although he has "gotten dubbed as a dog artist," Ron started out painting businessmen then began painting his own pets for variety.

"It was a hobby," he said.

He realized people were interested in buying his art when potential buyers came to look a house he was selling and inquired about the art on the walls. He sold paintings of his pets, but Buff told him it felt like they were selling their children.

An Aspen vacation provided the perfect circumstances to help Ron find subjects to paint. He took a trip to the local animal shelter to find animals to paint.

When the paintings sold, he sent part of the proceeds to the shelter. He continued to use shelter animals as subjects for his paintings and donate

money to shelters.

"A light went off. I thought 'This is good. This is right,'" he said.

With experience from his design marketing studio, people all over the country were soon familiar with his art. In the past two years, things have really clicked.

Although Ron can't pinpoint a precise moment when things began happening so fast, it started around the time he made some contacts at a New York art show.

Universal Studios called Ron to paint Babe, Beethoven, Benji and many of the studio's other characters.

PetsMart, which owns more than 500 stores around the United States, Canada and Europe, is using Ron's art in the Just A Buck. Change Their Luck fund-raiser in May to raise more than \$1 million for shelters.

His artwork will be used to promote the program in all the stores merchandising efforts. Ron is also working with PetsMart to develop a line of products to raise money for their PetsMart Charities program.

"Whenever there's an opportunity to do something for a shelter, that's where my heart is," Ron said.

Ron's own dogs were either adopted from animal shelters or given to him by people who couldn't take care of them. His three dogs are Rufus, Jazzy and Sadie.

From the amount of dog paintings he has done, people might think he is a dog lover, but Ron also owned two cats,

Smokey and Kingsford.

Ron remembers bringing Rufus home to the cats. Since Rufus was just a puppy, the cats taught him how to behave. He would follow them around the house all the time, including up on the furniture.

Ron was especially close to Kingsford. The cat would spend most of its time with Ron. Although Smokey can still be seen around the Burns' household, Kingsford has since passed

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— Ron Burns

away. His animals have made his life so full.

Ron said he finds it hard to visit an animal shelter and not adopt every animal he sees.

"In my lifetime, I want to make a difference with animals adopted from shelters," he said.

The Humane Society of the United States, the nation's largest animal protection organization, has named Ron its

Artist in Residence. In Ron's honor, they have created the Ron Burns Little Orphan Animals Fund.

Among the planned activities are an art show in New York and Washington, D.C., programs with Saab and the Eveready bunny, a lecture series at major art colleges, visits to animal shelters and the donation of artwork to benefit the Humane Society of the United States.

Ron is interested in any way to get more information to people who might be interested in helping shelters. He makes every company which deals with his art commit to putting money toward the animals fund.

"Everything we do with organizations, we try to get them to donate to shelters. I try real hard to have everyone donate, also," he said.

He said many people may buy his paintings not knowing anything about his dedication to the cause, but whether they know it or not, they are still helping.

Galleries around the United States from Miami to Dallas, to LaJolla and Danville, Calif., carry Ron's paintings, limited-edition prints and posters including the

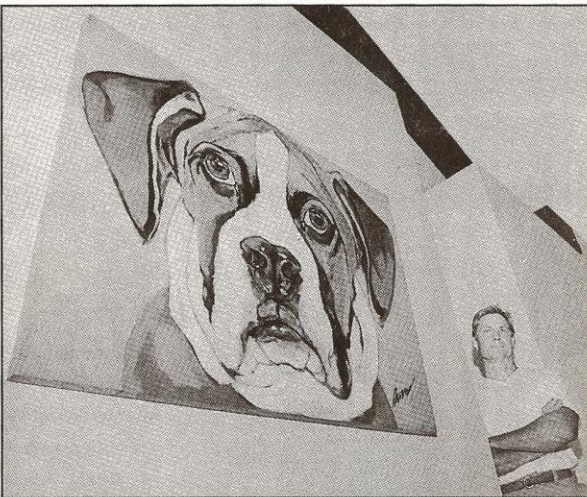
Ron's artwork can also be seen weekly on the television series *Buff, the Vampire Slayer* and will be displayed in an upcoming movie starring George Clooney.

Please see related story on Page 7A.



Jim Snyder/Staff Photographer

ARTIST RON Burns' passions include painting animals in his remote desert studio south of Sedona. Burns is pictured with his dog Rufus and an acrylic on canvas entitled *Peanut*. Burns, a staunch supporter of animal rights, has donated proceeds from the sales of his work to the Humane Society of Sedona and other shelters.



Jim Snyder/Staff Photographer

BURNS WILL be at the Humane Society of Sedona's 1999 Paws in the Park walk Saturday beginning at 7:30 a.m. at the Posse Grounds.