

Artist with wildlife background creates winning print for NCF

By **KIMBERLY WARREN**
Record-Eagle staff writer

Chris Smith didn't go to art school. He loved art and wanted to be an artist since he was 6 years old, but he knew art school wasn't for him. Instead, he studied for and received a degree in Fisheries and Wildlife Management from Lake Superior State University. "I got the degree to help with the background for wildlife art," Smith said. "If you go to art school, you have to draw pretty flowers and naked people. I wanted to draw wildlife, and I hunt and fish all the time so it was a nice combination." Smith's background in wildlife has paid off. He illustrates for "The Retriever Journal," "The Pointing Dog Journal" and

"Just Labs." Smith also owns his own business where he is commissioned by people all over the country to make portraits of their pets. "People call me up and say 'Hey, I want you to paint my dog, here's the picture and the background,'" he said. Smith can now add one more page to his portfolio: artist of the 76th annual National Cherry Festival Commemorative Print. (See cover.) The print, featuring a golden lab in a cherry lug, was chosen as the grand prize winner from among entries. Entrants range in age and experience from elementary school students to professionals. There are three categories: youth, student and adult/professional. Winners are awarded prizes in each category and then go on to be judged against the other category winners to be

named the grand prize winner. The first place winners in the adult/professional and student categories are awarded \$250, and the youth winner receives a \$50 savings bond and \$25 gift certificate from a local store for art supplies. As the overall winner, Smith will receive an additional \$250. "The judges should look at this and say 'Would someone purchase this, spend a considerable amount on framing it and then hang it in their home?'" said Patti Schaap, print contest director. "They also look for something that could be used on sweat-shirts, T-shirts and for other promotional use." Three judges from the area art scene and local businesses meet at Schaap's home to judge the prints. This is Schaap's 12th year working as print contest

director for the National Cherry Festival. She said she has worked to make the print contest more of an art competition than a poster contest. "Eleven years ago, I changed it to be a piece of artwork rather than a poster concept," said Schaap. "I'm very proud of the way that it has changed." Smith said he, too, likes the new direction that the contest has taken over the years, and said he hopes it continues to showcase the talented artists in northern Michigan. "There are a lot of great artists in the area," he said. "And I hope they'll see my print and say 'hey' and see it as more prestigious than a poster contest." Ask Smith why his print was chosen as the winner, and he'll put it simply: "I'd like to think it was better than the others. I think that

it was so different that it caught everyone's eye — and it's a nice print." Smith has one piece of advice for aspiring print contest entrants: "You gotta have an angle." Smith's angle was to make the print fit into everyone's life and into everyone's home. "Some of the prints aren't going to look good over your couch," he said. "This one was something along the fine-art line so people could potentially put it anywhere in the house and not have it clash. It was also pretty generic: a lab in a cherry orchard. It might look like anybody's lab or anybody's cherry orchard." Wondering where to see Smith's print? Check out National Cherry Festival publications, T-shirts, the Web site and area telephone books.

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Cherry Memories

"The Cherry Festival was and is a very prominent summer event for my family. My late husband, Reggie Box, was involved at every level in his position as general manager for WKLT. Parades, concerts and pit spitting — we were there for it all. The second summer after Reggie's death, our son, Dylan, who was then in first grade, was the prince for Pathfinder School. I cannot describe the joy and the grief I felt on seeing him cross the stage to be announced as prince and knowing how proud Reggie would have been. It is a bittersweet memory; but as vivid as it will ever get."



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