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BEDFORD'S "MORE THAN A MOUNTAIN" ART EXHIBIT TO CELEBRATE BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY'S 75th BIRTHDAY

A juried art exhibition, "More Than A Mountain" of artworks inspired by the Peaks of Otter, will be on display at various locations throughout Bedford from May 29 through July 11, 2010 in celebration of the 75th anniversary of the Blue Ridge Parkway. Co-sponsored by The Bower Center for the Arts and the Bedford Welcome Center, the exhibit is designed to call attention to both the Blue Ridge Parkway and to Bedford's rapidly developing art community.

Bedford's location along Route 460 equidistance from both Roanoke and Lynchburg is becoming more than simply the home of the National D-Day Memorial and Thomas Jefferson's Poplar Forest. With the synergy of Mitchell Bond and Patrick Ellis' expanded Goose Creek Studio Gallery and Frame Shop, new artist's studios and an art supply shop at Art on Depo and the maturing of the non-profit Bower Center for the Arts, Bedford is becoming an arts center that is concentrated in Historic Centertown with numerous places to view and purchase original artwork within easy walking distance.

The exhibit's co-hosts, The Bower Center for the Arts and the Bedford Welcome Center, decided to offer artists a chance to create a lasting work of art, delving into the very soul of these locally revered mountains. "We sought more than a figurative rendition of its landscapes, wanting the heart and soul, presented in almost any medium" noted Bower Center Director

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Sara Braaten. According to Director of Bedford Tourism Sergei Troubetzkoy, “ we wanted to do something special since the legendary Peaks of Otter are not only Bedford icons, but they are probably the most famous natural landmarks along the Blue Ridge Mountains in Virginia.”

Close to 200 pieces are expected to be included in the exhibition and they vary in scope and mediums including stone sculpture, wood carvings, photographs, representative quilting, stained glass, ceramics, mixed media and paintings of all types. The inspiration of the Peaks by such as those by James Underwood, a local artist of note, are realistic; while those by some others such as Sandee Johnson, an international artist who has returned to find her roots in Bedford, are abstract and conceptual.

The five founding members of the Blue Ridge Plein Painters -- Lois Virginia Babb, Charles Turner, David Heath, Kathy Seek and Rodney Laughon have all entered works. These painters discovered a mutual love of painting in the great outdoors, a love of Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains and the joy of capturing that beauty on canvas. Their hope is to capture their impressions of the landscape at that moment in time. "En plein air" is a French expression that means "in the open air". Monet, Renoir and other impressionist painters preferred this method. Babb has a studio in the Wharton Cottage in Bedford where she is able to simply walk out her door and paint in an historic garden.

Bedford area School children and their art teachers are participating in the *More Than a Mountain* exhibit. Many elementary and middle school students created postcards depicting the mountains and the surrounding community of Bedford. These postcards are displayed at the Bower Center and the Bedford Library.

The exhibition was judged by two nationally known artists. **David Dodge Lewis** is the William W. Elliott Professor of Fine Arts at Hampden-Sydney College in south-central Virginia. His work has been in over 100 national juried exhibitions and solo shows, winning many awards, including five "Best in Show" awards in national juried competitions since 1990. The second judge -- **Robert Sulkin** is Professor of Art and Art Department Chair at Hollins

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University in Roanoke. His photographs have been exhibited in more than 100 solo and group shows in the mid-Atlantic region including the Chrysler Museum in Norfolk and the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.’

On Memorial Day Weekend, the Bedford community will put on a festive air to celebrate the opening of *More than a Mountain*. On Saturday evening, May 29, the Bower Center will host its second Louisiana Crawfish Festival. Just as last year, Dr. Bower will bring 1200 pounds of crawfish to steam, gumbo, red beans and rice and eutoffee to savor and a wonderful Cajun Zydeco band to provide music for dancing and listening in the lovely Wharton Garden.

On Sunday evening, May 30, The Bedford Welcome Center will host an opening reception for the artists, their friends and the community from 5:00 PM to 7:00 PM. Representatives of the Blue Ridge Parkway 75th Anniversary will be on hand to meet the guests and artists. Music will be provided by local artist Jim Jones on a mountain dulcimer which he has crafted. After the opening reception, guests and Bedford residents will be able to see the exhibit in all of the venues located in Centertown Bedford including Art on Depo, Goose Creek Studio, the Bedford Central Library, Art Upstairs Gallery at Bedford Hardware and the Bower Center for the Arts. These sites are within walking distance of each other and to encourage guests to see the entire exhibit, a punch card showing each venue will be distributed. Once the card is fully punched, a drawing will take place and a \$100 prize given to the person holding the winning card.

Additional information about the “More Than A Mountain” exhibit may be obtained from the Bedford Welcome Center, 540-587-5681 or www.visitbedford.com.