

Photos are a study in contrasts

By Barbara Greenberg
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DANVILLE— What do wedding pictures, senior class photos and family portraits have in common besides the smiles?

Many are now shot in black and white, a photographic form that's experienced a recent rebirth.

But one local photographer always preferred black and white.

Danville native Les Woodrum's subjects don't get a say on the type of film he uses to shoot them. He shoots primarily landscapes — human figures in his work are incidental.

"I've had mentors over the years, like Orvil Stokes, who were terrific black-and-white photographers," Woodrum said.

"My photographic inspiration comes from photographers like him, Ansel Adams and Edward Weston." Enthusiasts of fine photographs, whether black-and-white or color, will have an opportunity to see Woodrum's work starting Monday when his photos are featured at downtown Danville's The Alley Gallery.

The show will continue through Aug. 24 during gallery hours. Although the artist prefers black and white for much of his work, the exhibit also includes color photos.

"I try to be straightforward with my photographs but, like Adams, I pre-visualize the final results. It helps me choose a certain filter, especially when I'm shooting in black and white," Woodrum said. "I've been to numerous workshops in the course of my career, but experience is always the best teacher."

That career began when the artist was still in high school. Art teacher



Les Woodrum cuts mats for his photos that will be displayed at downtown Danville's Alley Gallery. The exhibit begins Monday and runs through Aug. 24.

Matt Huber/Commercial-News

Francine Sinsabaugh suggested photography might appeal to him.

"I was always striving for realism in my paintings," Woodrum recalled. Since that time, he's stayed involved with photography in one way or another.

Woodrum has worked for local photographic studios and had his own at one time. He and his wife Jane worked together there, and she saw her husband actually have less time for photography while operating the business.

She's happy for her husband's job now as CRIS' director of transportation.

"When he was the one taking and developing the photos, he didn't have time (for his own work)," Jane said. "What Les enjoys is art for art's sake."

The couple's house serves as a testimony to that creative urge. Instead of paintings or other objets d'art, every room's walls feature photographs, most in black and white but some in color. And all bear Woodrum's signature.

"Our house is like a gallery," Woodrum said. "We rotate the photographs, get others' opinions and then make a decision about which ones will be mounted and framed."

This month's exhibit will be a step toward a dream come true for the artist.

"There's never been a gallery in Danville before," he said. "I applaud Jim Crose for setting this one up." The photographer feels the visual arts have good community support in Danville.

"Just look at all the people who come to Arts in the Park and the (Danville) Art League's Town and Country show," he said.

"Most photographers don't become famous until they die. I'd like to change that.

"Anytime you can say you had a one-man show, it's a step in that direction. My ultimate goal is to have a national exhibit. The Art Institute would be ideal."

IF YOU GO

The Alley Gallery presents an exhibition of the photography of Les Woodrum from Monday through Aug. 24. A reception for the artist will be held from 7-9 p.m. Friday. Gallery hours are 1-4 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays or by appointment. For further information, contact curator David Nolan at 492-2286.

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