

Local artist honours Spruce Meadows milestone

By Roxanne Blackwell
Staff Reporter

A world-class facility in the Foothills celebrated a milestone last week, and an Okotoks artist's work has been selected to help commemorate the event.

Spruce Meadows, the prestigious international show jumping grounds, held an event on April 1 to recognize its 40th anniversary and to honour local founders Ron and Marg Southern.

In honour of the anniversary, Spruce Meadows put out an open invitation for artists around the world to submit their work in a contest to be selected for its 40th anniversary commemorative poster. Of the two-dozen entries that came in throughout North America, Okotoks artist Michelle Pilon's painting *Dedicated Dreams* was selected as the winner.

"I kind of jumped on it, thought what a great opportunity, I'm going to take a crack at it," she said. "It just had to portray in the best way that you could what they were about, and a bit of their history."

The painting, which was on display for the more than 500 guests who attended the anniversary luncheon, illustrates a collection of everything that makes up Spruce



ROXANNE BLACKWELL/OWW

Michelle Pilon stands with her painting *Dedicated Dreams* selected for Spruce Meadows' 40th anniversary poster.

Meadows, from an image of the original homestead and lit Christmas trees, to the athletes and horses from around the world who compete there.

"I knew they are very family oriented and obviously the top in the world for jumping so I just wanted to show all of that," Pilon said. "They have their Christmas festival so I wanted to make sure that was in there and also this old photo of this property

when they first got it to where it is today."

Pilon said she was determined to make it all work and incorporate all of the different elements to capture the essence of what Spruce Meadows is.

"I had all these ideas, I just had to figure out how to put it all together and make it work in a painting," she said. "It was challenging but it was something that just got me so motivated, I was determined to

come up with something that I thought was going to have a good run anyway. I had so much fun doing it."

Pilon only recently decided to go full time with her art, and said the acrylic painting was quite different than the pastel pet portraits she was used to doing.

"I always did the art too on the side, it's only been quite recently that I've wanted to start to focus more on my art," she said. "And changing my style a

little bit with introducing the acrylic paint and experimenting with that."

In addition to the \$5,000 cash prize that Pilon received for winning the contest, the painting will be permanently displayed at Spruce Meadows and the posters will be available for sale throughout the rest of the 40th anniversary season.

Spruce Meadows vice-president Ian Allison said it was the first time they've

ever put out a call for submissions to create a commemorative poster, and he said they were all thrilled with the results.

"Michelle's work really captured in a very concise artistic creative way, everything about Spruce Meadows and everything about the 40 years, from the start with the original homestead through the international aspect," Allison said. "Of course Spruce is always centered on the horse and her piece had the horse centered on it, and it's interesting because... hers is presented as a generic, it could be a man, it could be a woman, it could be who ever you wanted to be so it really represented the broad spectrum of our sport that men and women compete on an equal playing field."

In terms of the significance of the 40th anniversary milestone, Allison said the event on April 1 was a great opportunity to reflect on how far the facility has come, and was just the kick off to the rest of the exciting season they have planned.

"Spruce Meadows founders Ron and Marg Southern are getting on a little bit and as Mr. Southern says 'the shadow's growing longer,'" Allison said. "It was a very good time to do it and we couldn't have been happier with the result."