

Boosting art and heart

Stamford woman uses daily walks to collect material for her collages

By **Eve Sullivan**

STAMFORD — Her art show in Greenwich last year was called “A Walk with Wendy,” and there’s good reason why.

That’s because Wendy Brest uses her daily walk in the Roxbury section to get her heart rate going and her inspiration flowing. She picks up various items along the way and puts them in her colorful, semi-abstract collages.

“This is Wendy’s art, these are prize winners,” her husband Joel Brest said, pointing to framed pictures in the kitchen of their Den Road home. “She started out doing sculpture and found it was too tiring.”

So, Joel said, now she finds things either around the house or on the street and blends them into her artwork. For instance, he showed one collage filled with items she took from their daughter’s wedding.

“She has been doing it for years,” Joel said. “She’s had many shows. I’m her publicist.”

On a recent afternoon, Wendy was returning from her walk, which is usually about 4 or 5 miles long. She removed the orange safety vest she wears, then changed out of her workout clothes.

“She looks like a crossing guard,” her husband joked.

In the entry room of the house, there’s a large poster from the Greenwich Art Society for “A Walk with Wendy,” in which she had 38 pieces exhibited. Her artwork is also on permanent display around the residence.

Sitting at the kitchen table, Wendy and Joel said they met while he was a student at Brown University and have been married 53 years. The family has a long history with Brown and affiliated schools.

After receiving a degree in the classics, Wendy worked for the Girl Scouts and Gladdings Department Store in Providence, R.I. Joel received a doctorate in economics, eventually taking a position at IBM and remaining there for 27 years.

In 1967, the couple purchased their Den Road home, where they raised their three children (fraternal twins — a boy and a girl — and another son), became active in the community and enjoyed the peaceful atmosphere of the area.

“Next door used to be a farm,” Wendy recalled. “It was all a horse farm.”

Through the years, the Brests remained active with Brown University, fundraising for the Ivy League school and attending events. They recalled seeing fellow alumnus John F. Kennedy Jr. at a reunion weekend back in the 1990s.

“He was strutting his stuff,” Joel said.

“He was wearing shorts,” Wendy added. “He was with Daryl Hannah.”

They were also active members of the Temple Beth El congregation, the Jewish Community Endowment Foundation and Joel is a member of the Senior Men’s Association of Stamford.

While Joel supported the family, Wendy stayed true to her artistic passion, expressing herself through sculpture, drawings and collages. She’s had exhibitions with the New Haven Paint and Clay Club, the Mamaroneck Artists Guild, Stamford Art Association, the Carriage Barn Art Center in New Canaan, Ethel Walker School in Avon and the Discovery Museum in Bridgeport. She also has a piece of artwork displayed at the New Haven Department of Motor Vehicles.

Wendy’s resume says many of her drawings and collages are inspired by the “open architecture” of her house. It also says, as a daily walker, she stares at the ground, hoping to find castoffs. She says nothing is dismissed and leaves are a favorite.

“The incongruity of materials adds a critical dimension,” her resume states. “I also love working with the grid and with text. It’s the complexity I’m seeking. I want the viewer to move close to the work, to see what’s hiding in plain sight.”

In her downstairs studio, Wendy has several different items lying on the tables, including egg crates, newspapers and crossword puzzles. She does her artwork periodically, depending on how busy her life gets.

“I was using egg crates, then I took this from a woman who was recycling,” she said, picking up a similar paper container.

Wendy said she started picking up leaves and moved on to cigarette packs, bits of rubber, pieces of car

taillights and more. Her husband and family provide inspiration for her work as well.

In the living room, two of Wendy's sculptures are on display, including one of Joel's head. Analyzing a picture in the kitchen, she said, "Joel's economic journal is in there, his Styrofoam coffee filter, a picture of the deck outside, stuff from the telephone book, clay that I made."

THE DART

- The Dart is a weekly feature in which reporters throw a dart at a map of Stamford and then go out in search of a story. This week the dart landed on the Roxbury neighborhood in the city's northwestern region.



Dru Nadler/For The Advocate

Wendy and Joel Brest stand outside their Den Road home in Stamford.



Wendy Brest works on her art in the studio at the family's home in Stamford on April 14. She uses found objects to create collages.



Joel Brest in his home office at the family's home in Stamford.
Dru Nadler/For The Advocate



Joel and Wendy Brest in their Den Road home in Stamford.



Wendy Brest stands in the hallway of her Stamford home on April 14 next to family photos and a portrait of her at 16.