

Retired Aptos man relishes tough job at the easel

By CANDACE ATKINS
STAFF WRITER

HERB LEIPPE spent most of his math lesson in the one-room Aptos schoolhouse drawing little pictures of barns and old cars. More often than not, the first-grader was caught and his hand was soundly smacked. It scared him, but not enough to make him give up his doodles.

"I thought my teacher was this big ol' lady," Leippe, now 57, said. "She was only about five feet tall. But when she was coming at me, she looked huge."

Leippe continued to draw on the sly throughout his elementary years. When he started at Watsonville High School in 1944, he enrolled in an art class where he could legitimately create his precisely detailed portrayals of weather-beaten buildings and abandoned autos.

"I do very few people and animals," Leippe said. "I prefer buildings. They have perspective, a vanishing point. I love that kind of stuff."

Leippe learned to work in oils and accent his pen-and-ink drawings with watercolors. He also worked in metal sculpture.

He dreamed of entire days behind an easel, but his practical side steered him into various jobs, including in auto parts, in heating supplies and most recently, operating P&L Brakes in Watsonville. He sold the business at the end of April and planned to find another job right away. He had several

promising leads and one offer.

"My wife, Roz, told me, 'You're not going to work anywhere. You're going to paint,'" he said. "Roz — she keeps me straightened out."

Leippe already had a following. He'd painted as a hobby and his works are in collections throughout California and in three other states.

Most of his clients are people he met at street rod clubs and at antique-auto-

stretched out in the weeds; other times chickens will roost near the splintered walls. Rarely does he intrude a human figure in the work.

Leippe works from photographs and from memory. He said it's hard to find junky buildings and crummy cars in California, so he relies on his childhood images and places he's seen in the eastern United States where zoning laws aren't in the local vocabulary.

"I'm fortunate I remember

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—Herb Leippe

club functions. He owned a Model A for 20 years and for the past 14 years, has owned a fully restored 1935 Ford.

That's the sort of thing Leippe loves to paint — old cars — but not in the immaculate condition of his Ford. He prefers sagging tires under a tired old body, chipped paint and missing headlights. Most of his vehicles look like they wheezed their last breath a hundred years ago.

Barns — the more ramshackle the better — are also a favorite.

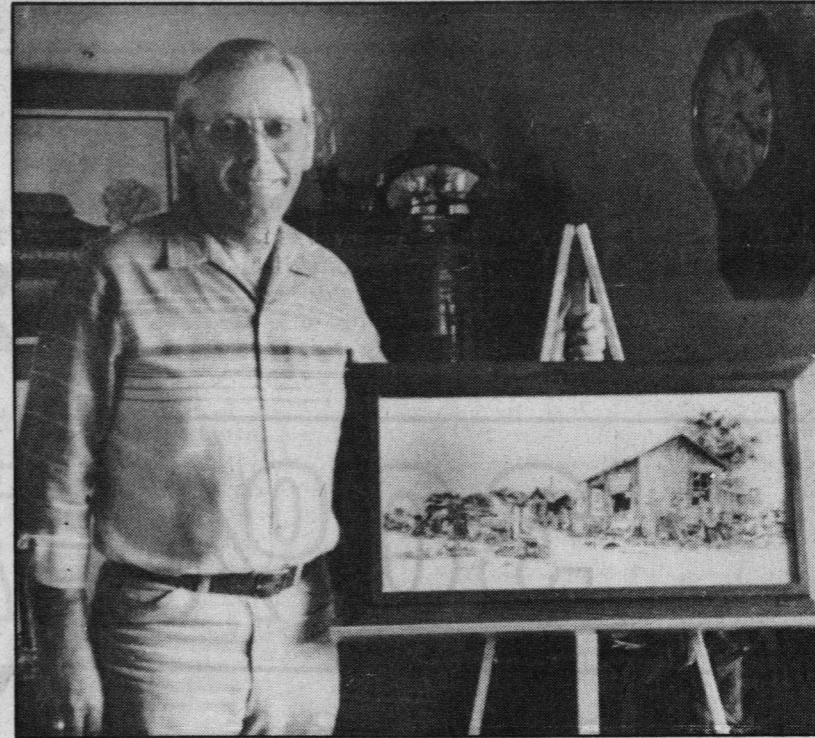
Leippe draws from numerous vantage points, changing the character with each new perspective. Sometimes he'll put a sleepy hound dog

things and can put them on paper so people can see them," Leippe said.

All his clients are nostalgic pushovers who gladly pay his asking price, often telling him he doesn't charge enough for his art. Many of them commission special works. They'll see one of Leippe's drawings of an old gas station, and order their own vintage car parked at the pump.

Leippe gladly obliges, except he still has a hard time accepting payment. For years, he gave his works away, but the cost of materials and framing became too great.

"The first time I sold a painting, it was hard to take



Candace Atkins

Herb Leippe in his Aptos home with one of his framed pen-and-ink drawings. Leippe draws in the morning and paints in the afternoon.

the money," he said. "I felt like it wasn't right. Today, the most gratifying, the most important thing is their (customers') approval of my work."

Leippe spends five days a week, about nine hours a day, doing his artwork in his Aptos home. He does the tedious work — pen-and-ink drawing — in the morning, and works on his paintings in the afternoon. Some days, he takes his 1987 calendars to local stores, hoping they'll put it in stock. He said he gets about one acceptance for every three tries. Rejection never bothers him.

He doesn't have bad days because he can tell within minutes if he's "off." He

never pushes to the point of frustration.

"I'm like this — m-m-m-m-m," Leippe said, drawing his hands in an even gesture in front of him. "I'm sort of passive. I don't have an artist's temperament."

Leippe does come from an artistic family. His brother, an accomplished sculptor, heads the art department at Highlands University in Las Vegas, N.M. Leippe said both his parents could "do anything with their hands."

They may have come by their talent honestly. Leippe's aunt researched their family history and found the Leippe name was originally spelled Lippi, and the Leippe's are descendants of the Florentine painters Fra Filippo Lippi

(1406-69) and his son Filippino Lippi (1457-1504), who were contemporaries of da Vinci.

"I don't know for sure if that's true," he said.

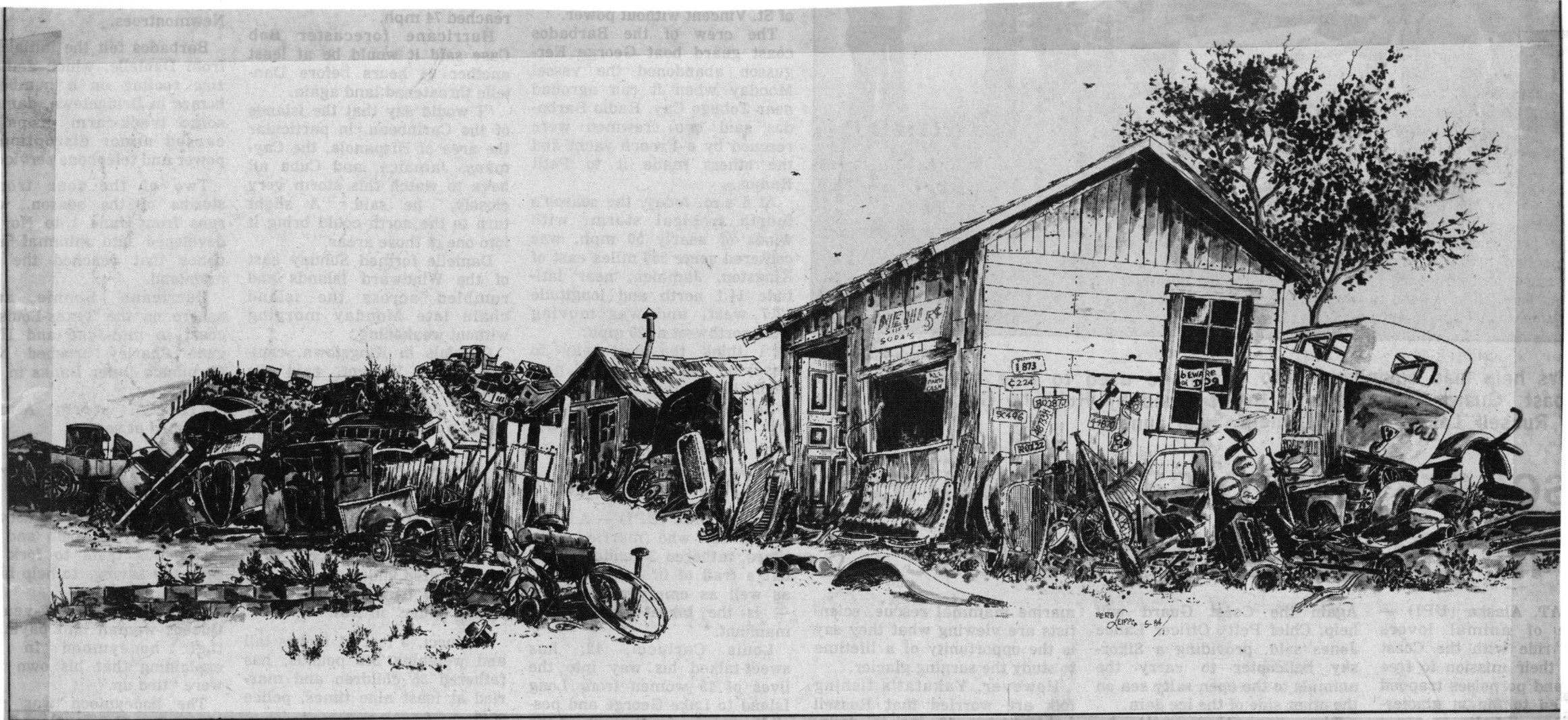
Leippe doesn't have his ancestors' bent of painting chapel ceilings. He'll be happy to have his work in a couple of local galleries, and to get jobs designing postcards and greeting cards. On Sept. 20 and 21, he'll have a booth at the Capitola Art and Wine Festival. He'll also continue to sell his art at auto club events and to accept individual commissions.

"People ask me, 'How's the man of leisure?'" Leippe said. "What a crock. I work all day every day."

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REFERENCE

WATSONVILLE
REGISTRAR-pa Jaronjan
September 9, 1986



Herb Lieppe sold his business and ended up a fulltime artist. Above, an example of his work featuring the old cars and buildings he loves to paint.