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Tualatin Valley Academy student Melinda Swanson paints a yellow-headed parrot, using acrylic gel that creates a three-dimensional effect and adds texture.

PHIL KAHLER
SPECIAL TO
THE OREGONIAN

Art, science meet in bird paintings

19 works by Tualatin Valley Academy students are for sale at Cornell University

By **TARYN LUNA**
THE OREGONIAN

When art teacher Toni Kahler envisioned the next big project for her students at Tualatin Valley Academy, birds, large canvases and gel paints came to mind.

"When I think about what I want to plan, I want it to be something with pizzazz," Kahler said.

Two years later, 19 paintings with pizzazz hang in the Cornell Lab of Ornithology gallery at Cornell University in Ithaca, N.Y. The paintings, on exhibit until mid-December, are priced from

\$350 to \$650. If all sell, the school will earn more than \$10,000 toward science and art programs. Three have sold, as well as a \$1,200 textured quilt.

Kahler's husband, Phil, who teaches science at the private Hillsboro school serving preschool through 10th grade, has been using Cornell's BirdSleuth program for the past 15 years. BirdSleuth provides teachers lesson plans that combine indoor and outdoor activities with the dual aim of helping students observe birds and sparking a curiosity about the natural world.

Phil Kahler and his students have been collecting data about bird behavior for the past 12 years

and submitting their findings for publication in Classroom Birdscope, a collection of work by students nationwide who participate in BirdSleuth.

Jennifer Fee of the BirdSleuth program stopped by Tualatin Valley Academy last year and checked out the school's bird blind at nearby Downy Creek. The system of bird feeders attracts birds — sometimes hundreds at a time — for student observation. Walking through the campus, Fee came across a set of bird paintings done the previous year by Toni Kahler's students and was blown away.

Please see **BIRDS**, Page B10

Online: To see, or purchase, the paintings by Tualatin Valley Academy students, go to tinyurl.com/birdsart



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COMMUNITYFOCUS

"We looked at them and thought, 'Wow, I wonder if we can do that?'"

Karissa Ing, Tualatin Valley Academy student and artist, on being inspired by the work of a previous class



PHIL KAHLER/SPECIAL TO THE OREGONIAN

Kasiha Pattee works on her painting of an acorn woodpecker.

Birds: Teachers are amazed by opportunity

Continued from Page B1

"She just couldn't believe it," Phil Kahler said. "And that's when she started scheming."

Fee approached Toni Kahler with a proposition. She wanted to commission Kahler's current class to paint species that scientists at Cornell's Lab of Ornithology were studying. The completed paintings would be displayed and sold at the lab, with the majority of the profit returning to the school.

The Kahlers were amazed by the opportunity. Phil Kahler said it was the first time BirdSleuth had done anything like this.

His wife gladly welcomed the challenge, and the couple tailored their programs to incorporate art and science.

Over 18 weeks, 19 students in seventh through 10th grade used acrylic gel paint and pal-



TONI KAHLER/SPECIAL TO THE OREGONIAN

Karissa Ing, 14, a student at Tualatin Valley Academy, made a painting of a Hudsonian godwit that sold for \$650 at an exhibition in the Cornell Lab of Ornithology gallery.

ette brushes to portray different birds. Karissa Ing, 14, remembers looking at the examples from the previous class and feeling intimidated.

"We looked at them and thought, 'Wow, I wonder if we can do that?'" she said. Her painting of a Hudsonian godwit sold for \$650.

While the students admit they often considered throwing in the towel, the finished products were worth the work.

"After I was finished with all of

my hard work, I just liked sitting and looking at it," Oscar Lopez-Bucio, 15, said of his white-rumped vulture. Toni Kahler said the opportunity gave students a chance to excel in ways they never knew they were capable of.

"When some kids struggle with academics," she said, "they can just come into the art room and really shine."

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