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Carrollton/Farmers Branch

Carrollton photographer uses exhibit to get over the rainbow

Carrollton: Photographer finds catharsis in exhibit of silo shots when it was bright, not white

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By LYNDA STRINGER / Special Contributor to The Dallas Morning News

You might call it an obsession, but Vickie Belt's passion for the facade of Carrollton's grain silo is bringing back some fond and some not-so-fond memories of its colored past.

"The rainbow was sentimental for a lot of us. You either hated it or you loved it," said the 54-year-old Carrollton photographer who has captured the silo's evolution through her camera lens.

She began snapping shots of the grain silo in 1989, when it bore the message "Jesus is Lord" over bold rainbow-colored stripes on one side and an invitation to visit Robert Tilton's Word of Faith church on the other. After the scandal and fall of Mr. Tilton's ministry, the words were painted over in 1996, leaving the colorful rainbow to hover over the downtown area like God's promised rainbow after a storm.

After much debate, city officials voted to paint over the rainbow. It was replaced this year with a stark white coat and a mural depicting the downtown gazebo and a message to "Visit Historic Downtown Carrollton." It also heralds the arrival of the new downtown Dallas Area Rapid Transit station.

"It has all the charm of a water tower," Ms. Belt said of the modern new paint job.

Mourning the loss of the nostalgic rainbow, she pored over the old photographs she'd taken. Adding digital touches here and there and combining the collection with photos of its final makeover, she's created an exhibit of her work called "Over the Rainbow."

"Because the rainbow is over," she said.

Her work is on display in the lobby of Valwood Park Federal Credit Union at the south end of the downtown square. Her photography studio, Digital Doo Da, is on the top floor of the building, where she teaches digital photography.

Why take pictures of a grain elevator and its multicolored religious message?



JUAN GARCIA/DMN
For Carrollton photographer Vickie Belt, the painting over of the rainbow on the grain silo was cause for sadness and an exhibition of her photos of the landmark.

"It represented my home, and it was an oddity," she said. "It was unusual, and I always knew someday I would do this. I would have an exhibit. I have other art, but this is so nostalgic to people. This will be my first step out there."

Her first print sold to Tom Pierson Jr., who owns the Stoneworks Rock Climbing Gym inside the old silo, said to be the tallest indoor climbing gym in the world at 121 feet.

He bought the \$450 print of the 1980s silo for his wife, Dana, for their 10th wedding anniversary last month.

"That's when me and my wife grew up together," said Mr. Pierson, 30. "I remember climbing there when I was 13. It's got a deep place in my heart."

Ms. Belt said the reaction she's getting from exhibit visitors is an emotional one.

"They always smile. Everybody has a memory in their past. It's like listening to a favorite old song, and all of a sudden you're back there again," she said.

Mr. Pierson commiserates with the photographer over the end of the rainbow, but they're also looking toward the future's pot of gold: the new DART rail station, which breaks ground today.

Mr. Pierson, who also owns Broadway Bistro on the downtown square and a technology business, invested in downtown because of the rail expansion, which will be completed by 2010.

"I didn't think it would happen in my lifetime," Mr. Pierson said. "We really think this is going to be an economic superstar and revitalize what I would call classic Main Street USA."

Lynda Stringer is a North Richland Hills freelance writer.