

HELEN McKENNEY FEATURED ARTIST

Artist Helen McKenney has lived in the north, south, east, and west — even China — but has called North Augusta home for almost 40 years. And it is during those years that her art blossomed and grew.

Like most children, she enjoyed drawing; and she continued drawing in pen-and-ink as she grew up. It wasn't until she moved to North Augusta in 1984 that she began taking lessons, learning to paint in acrylics under the tutelage of local artist Ruth Bridges. Over the next 15 years, she worked at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church and raised a family, then moved to China when her husband Hank's job took him there. Work and family left her little time for painting, and no time to pursue regular lessons. But she did participate in two summer workshops at the Chautaugua Institute in New York where she went with some friends.

She has no art degree but continues to actively learn her craft. Eight years ago she began taking lessons from local artist/teacher Thomas Needham and still meets with him weekly to hone her skills in watercolor and acrylic. Having lived in Florida, California, Delaware, Louisiana, South Carolina, and China, and having traveled extensively with her husband, Helen has many photographs to use for inspiration in her paintings. Photos taken on those trips are a mainstay of inspiration for her paintings. Her subjects are usually landscapes, people, or animals, usually dogs. She firmly believes that art can help us see others in a broader experience. Art makes us "able to see the world through the eyes of others. Sometimes their interpretation is different from ours and causes us to think and broaden our outlook. Other times their interpretation enhances our own outlook."

Helen is proud of her family, both close and extended. Her husband Hank was employed by Columbia Nitrogen, and later DSM, as Vice President of Manufacturing. He was a Georgia Tech graduate. During their years in North Augusta, he served on the City Council in North Augusta and was the mayor from 1975 until 1981. Together they have a large and international family. Helen says, "I have three sons — Mike, Keith and Sam; two grandsons: Donovan and Anderson, and two great-grandchildren, Marshall and Morgan." Their son Mike lives in Decatur, GA with his Chinese wife, Spring. They met while the McKenneys were living in Nanjing. Keith's wife, Alba, is from San Salvador, and they live in Augusta. "We seem to continue the international influence within our family!" Besides blood- and marriage- related family members, the McKenneys also claim several "children" from their days in China. And with Helen's husband being an active member of the Rotary Club, the family also hosted several exchange students over the years, three of whom they are still particularly close to — Wilma from Austria, Bernard from Belgium, and Estelle from France. She considers them her "adopted" children. These three continue to stay in touch with the McKenneys and have even visited them here.

In 2014, Helen joined the North Augusta Artists Guild (<https://northaugustaartistsguild.com>) and gained a whole new family of artist friends. Displaying her paintings at Guild shows, she has won several awards in their competitions, including a People's Choice Award and a Director's Choice Award. The Guild's wide variety of artists is attractive to her. As she says, "Our enjoyment of art — whatever the medium such as painting, photography, sculpture, needlework or so many other artistic abilities — helps us to enjoy the world around us." Helen's thoughts on art can be summed up in these words: "I think art, music, photography and other abilities are God-given and made to be utilized in a way that brings the artist fulfillment, brings enjoyment to others, and gives God glory for giving us these gifts that enhance our world."

