



Portrait artist Simmie Knox.

client chooses one for the portrait. Knox has assembled photos of his finished work, which he displays each Saturday. Prices for a Knox portrait range from around \$10,000 for a 30- by 40-inch painting, to as much as \$30,000 for a life size portrait.

Knox's pictorial line-up is impressive to say the least, a veritable

"Who's Who" in African-American history: Frederick Douglass, Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, Mohammed Ali, Bill Cosby, former Rep. William Gray (now president of the United Negro College Fund), Civil Rights leader and educator Dorothy Height, actor Paul Robeson and Bishop John Walker. Plus Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader



"Wired" Dillon Markey.

Ginsberg and restaurateur Henry "Mr. Henry" Yaffee, well known on Capitol Hill as the founder of the Mr. Henry's restaurant group (one of his original establishments was the venerable Mr. Henry's at 601 Pennsylvania Avenue SE, where songstress Roberta Flack reportedly launched her career. Someone else owns the restaurant now, and Yaffee is pretty much retired).

Another eye-catcher among Knox's extensive photo display is an image of baseball Hall of Famer Hank Aaron, who surpassed Babe Ruth's record of 714 career home runs with 755 (as Aaron crept toward the home run record in 1973, he received racist hate letters, which are depicted in Knox's montage). We learned that Knox, now 66, grew up with Aaron in segregated Alabama. During the 1940s, the two attended Central High in Mobile, and after school the youngsters played stickball in the streets with broom handles and bottle caps (just try hitting a hard-thrown bottle cap with a broom handle!).

Knox also remembers how young Aaron, normally a serious and well-behaved student, used to play hooky: "Playing hooky was serious back then," says Knox. "Your teacher, then your mother, then your father....they all spanked you. But Hank used to skip school and go to the pool hall, not to play pool, but to listen to baseball games on the radio there."

Aaron, of course, went on to base-

ball stardom, but Knox's destiny lay elsewhere. "When I got hit in the eye, I never was the same when playing baseball," recalls Knox, "and that changed my entire direction."

And how. Knox studied art at Temple University's Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia and has been painting professionally for 30 years. For some time, Knox had been trying to interest then-President Clinton in having a portrait done. Finally, in the fall of 2000, according to a Newsweek article published in February 2001, Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg was raving to Senator Hillary Clinton (D-NY) about Knox's work. Shortly thereafter, Knox was invited to the White House and eventually showed the president his portfolio. Clinton liked what he saw and commented, "You've painted a lot of people here who are my friends." Then Knox took photographs, and Clinton chose the one he wanted for the portrait. "Getting a Presidential commission is my personal Super Bowl," Knox said. Getting Clinton to sit still long enough for the painting was a challenge, but somehow they managed, and the portrait has been completed. It's been delivered to the White House, and sometime in the future there will be an official unveiling.

Meanwhile, Knox welcomes his many fans at Eastern Market. "I like showing my portraits here," says Knox as he carefully lines up some

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glossies for curious passersby. "John Harrod has always given me an opportunity to show my work. The market is unique...there's no place like it on the East Coast!"

Wired for Success

A totally different kind of creativity is in evidence across the aisle as "Bender Vender" custom wire sculptor Dillon Markey is modeling a mobile wire sculpture on his face. You have to see it to believe it.

Markey, a recent graduate of Hampshire college in Amherst, Mass., bends and twists wire into every conceivable shape to come up with such items as place card holders, Rube Goldberg-like gizmos which defy description, amusing caricatures, and even model airplanes. A resident of Chevy Chase, Markey purchases his wire from a hardware store in Bethesda and creates his artwork in his basement. And here's a fascinating sidelight: At Hampshire College, Markey majored in animation, and has made several short films. But today, Markey is wired. With a small pair of jewelry pliers, the young man is deftly fashioning yet another creation. His prices range from \$1 for a place card holder to \$50 or more for an elabo-

rate mask or model. He calls his artistry inspWIRED.

The Heartbeat of the Hill

Market 5's three decades have not been without controversy, and debates over the future of the North Hall—and the future of Eastern Market itself—drone on and on. One aspect has not changed, however; Eastern Market and Gallery 5 comprise the heartbeat of Capitol Hill. "I used to live on the Hill," says customer Lee Sanders as she fingers a soft, luxurious Afghan rug. "I now live in Alexandria, but it's still fun to come to the Market for lunch."

"A few years ago, my wife and I thought about moving off the Hill," muses one longtime Hill resident. "Houses were cheaper elsewhere, and we were offered a good deal in Brookland. Then we tried to picture our lives without Eastern Market, and we decided to stay here. We couldn't imagine our Saturdays without the Market."

Hill resident Celeste McCall is a frequent contributor to the pages of The Voice of the Hill. Special thanks to Celeste and husband Peter for taking the photographs which accompany this article.

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Telephone: (202) 547-2100 • Fax: (202) 547-3145
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