Write poem about Sept. 11

The terrorist attacks of September 11 seared our hearts and memories. If you'd like to write a poem that recalls the tragedy, celebrates the heroism or honors the victims, send it to september11@news-record.com or News & Record, Attn: News Dept./Sept. 11, 200 E. Market St., Greensboro NC 27401, by Aug. 31. Include your name and daytime phone number. We'll print a selection to mark the 10th anniversary.

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COURTESY OF ALISON WARD

CARDBOARD CASTLE: Alison Ward of the New York artists collective Flux Factory makes hats during the group's residency at the flea market. She works against the backdrop of a cardboard village that Flux Factory constructed there.

A SUPER GREAT EXPERIENCE

An unusual art residency brings a spirit of creativity to a FantaCity flea market

By Dawn DeCowskie-Kane
Staff Writer

GREENSBORO — It all began with "What if ..?"

What if, Donovan McKnight and Lee Walton wondered, we rented a booth in this flea market, and each month let a few people use it free of charge and as they wish?

Who would it attract? What experiences would they create? How would it affect their lives, the lives of others? What would we learn?

These two local innovators embarked on a quest to find out.

The flea market adjoins the Super G Mart, the massive grocery at 4027 W. Market St. that anchors FantaCity International Shopping Center.

Last summer, it became the site of McKnight and Walton's artistic and social experiment, "The Super G: Experiential Residency Program."

Never could they fathom how it would play out and the national attention it would attract.

"It has been a pretty wild ride," Walton says.

Walton, 37, teaches printmaking and design at UNCG. He has exhibited in and created projects for museums and cities in the U.S. and abroad.

McKnight, 28, works for the N.C. Humanities Council. He also connects young adults through the community development group Face to Face Greensboro and organizes experimental art shows through the Space Room project.

Their Super G venture would let them explore their shared interest in the social aspects of art and community building in a new way.

For 13 months, 35 residents from as far away as California transformed the 144-square-foot flea market booth into a temporary home base.

The residents — whom Walton and McKnight selected from applications — didn't actually live there. Most came in groups of two to four; a few came alone. They stayed for as little as three days and as long as three weeks.

As word spread through Facebook and other social media, artists and other potential residents contemplated their own what-ifs.

What would they do if they had this time and space to do whatever they wanted?

McKnight and Walton offered ideas.

Use the space as a hub for exploring the inter-

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M. SCOTT MAHASKEY/News & Record

CREATIVE LOADING: Sarah Hillenbrand reads a book during her residency. Manager of the Touring Theatre of North Carolina and mother of two young daughters, she used the residency as a breather from domestic duties — reading for pleasure, knitting a hat for her daughter and befriending vendors.

WANT TO PARTICIPATE?

To learn more about The Super G: Experiential Residency Program and apply to participate, visit www.supergexperienceproject.com or email Lee Walton at leo@newsbuds.com or Donovan McKnight at mcknight.donovan@gmail.com.

JEFF MARTIN/GSO/News & Record

THE INNOVATORS: Lee Walton (left) and Donovan McKnight came up with the idea of residencies at the flea market next to Super G Mart on West Market Street.

COURTESY OF JERY SERVON

THE BAKER: Lois Servon of Ocean Grove, N.J., and daughter Jody of Greensboro made scones from a family recipe and served them with tea during her residency.

COURTESY OF RACHELLE BEAUDOIN

SKETCH ARTISTS: Margo Burge (center) and Jeanne Jo (right), members of the Scarlet Electric collective, draw portraits of visitors during their Super G experiential residency.

COURTESY OF JULIA VALLERA

ART BY THE PEOPLE: Julia Vallera of Brooklyn, N.Y., drove a van full of supplies to Greensboro for her Color Wheelz project. Shoppers used the supplies to create art to put on or in her van.

Super G

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national foods and people of Super G, a site for social engagement, a temporary resource for the public — or a place to do nothing.

"They don't have to be artists or musicians or professionals," Walton says. "They just have to be people who want to spend a few weeks creating new experiences."

Several residents created tangible objects.

A mother and daughter made scones.

A singer/songwriter made music.

A New York artist helped shoppers make art.

A duo organized a scavenger hunt.

One group recorded Super G shoppers talking about Iraqi and sending abroad and what foods they bought at Super G. They were broadcast on the store's audio system.

Four members of a New York artists collective called Flux Factory built a small village from cardboard, then set up shops where they made hats, doughnuts, even leather shoes. The opera singer of the group sang arias for vendors and shoppers.

In the process, residents became part of the flea market's family of international vendors, who sell clothing, jewelry, electronics, food and a variety of collectibles.

They shared their experiences on a blog and in public talks that conclude each residency.

"My experience at Super G was one of the best I ever had," says artist Julia Vallera, 30, of Brooklyn, N.Y., who spent June there.

She brought supplies so that shoppers and visitors could make art. Julia and a UNCG class built an installation from colorful recyclables in a UNCG gallery.

COURTESY OF JULIA VALLERA

FORMING FRIENDSHIPS: Julia Vallera (kneeling) of Brooklyn, N.Y., poses for a photo with vendors she met at the Super G flea market.

MARGARET BATES/News & Record

COURTESY OF JULIA VALLERA

THE SINGER: Adrian Owen of the Flux Factory in New York sang opera during the group's Super G residency.

COURTESY OF JERY SERVON

TEA FOR THREE: Jody Servon of Greensboro (center) meets with Donovan McKnight (left) and Lee Walton when she and her mother used the flea market booth to serve scones and tea.

Vallera also wanted to explore how changing the colors of foods affects sight, smell and taste. She organized a potluck of dishes such as green home fries, red applesauce and blue scones.

And she made friends with vendors and their children.

"Usually artist residencies are isolated — you are among other artists like yourself who do the same thing," Vallera says.

"The Super G residency was completely opposite. You are taken out of your comfort zone and work in a place that is public and among people who are not artists. It challenged me to see what I had there — which was people, lots of culture, lots of different languages — and turn that into something useful for that community.

"A lot of the time, they didn't understand what I was there for," Vallera says, "but that didn't prevent them from welcoming me and conversing with me."

Flea market proprietor Harold Walls, who leases the space from Super G under the name West Market Flea, has watched with curiosity and fascination.

He doesn't mind the residency a bit because it attracts new visitors and sales.

"I am always surprised what they do bring in, from people doing artistic sketches to a rockabilly band," Walls says.

Vendor Jane Coffey says: "I look forward to each month, seeing what's different."

So does Andrea Eden, curator of exhibitions at UNCG's Weatherspoon Art Museum, who has watched the residency evolve.

"It is completely unique in terms of location, format and substance," Eden says.

She views it as part of a trend of interactivity and audience participation in the arts, where artists ask audiences to join in the creative process.

"It reminds me that life and living are creative processes that each one of us participates in shaping," Eden says.

Art and activism experts beyond Greensboro have taken note.

Cuelbus, an annual New York festival on psychogeography, invited McKnight and Walton to speak. Psychogeography is the study of how geographical environment affects behavior and emotions.

The School for Creative Activism, run by a Boston artist and a New York professor, invited them to a workshop. They spoke at the Design, Art & Technology Symposium in Winston-Salem about food as a community builder.

It has all created a whirlwind of a year for McKnight and Walton, who run the residency outside their jobs and other activities.

"It seemed like we were just trying to get from one resident to the next," McKnight says.

"It never occurred to me to think, 'A year from now, will this still be going?'"

They and residents finance it out of their own pockets and from donations. But they couldn't have made it work without friends, family, UNCG art department interns and flea market vendors.

Vendors supplied furniture and equipment. Interns and friends aided and entertained out-of-state guests. McKnight's parents even hosted one group in their home.

Although McKnight and Walton are taking a breather this month, they plan to seek more applicants and keep the residency going. Their next resident will create table war games.

"We have met tons of people," Walton says. "We have become close to residents, and to vendors in a way that wouldn't have happened. The Super G has a different meaning to us and to a lot of people."

Contact Dawn DeCowskie-Kane at 373-7206 or dawn.kane@news-record.com.

MEET SOME PARTICIPANTS OF THE SUPER G: EXPERIENTIAL RESIDENCY PROGRAM

Shane Alan Swaim

McLeansville musician Shane Alan Swaim called it "the perfect opportunity at the right time."

A professional in transition who plays guitar and sings at open-mike nights, he pursued the Super G residency to focus on music.

Last September, Swaim visited for a few hours each week, performing country, bluegrass, inspirational, rock 'n' roll and children's music.

He drew on his passion for music history to create videos on each genre, viewable online on Ustream. Super G vendor All Wireless provided space for live Webcasts.

He wrote songs.

"It was the best musical experience I have ever had, because of the autonomy, the support from Lee and Donovan and the environment to enhance my artistic vision," says Swaim, 46.

The residency opened another door: Walton arranged a weekly gig for Swaim at The Purple Yam, a Filipino restaurant in the FantaCity food court.

Swaim leads the Purple Yam Good Time Hour on Thursday nights.

COURTESY OF SHANE ALAN SWAIM

THE SINGER: Shane Alan Swaim, a resident of McLeansville, performs for shoppers during his Super G residency.

Up next: Arthur Erickson

Arthur Erickson, a reference librarian for Greensboro Public Library, has a fascination for elaborate tabletop war games and Soviet military strategy of the Cold War.

His residency, expected to start in late September, will give him the structure to create a new series of war games and find others who share his interest.

It starts with a fictional scenario: During the Cold War, Soviet forces have launched an attack against NATO forces in Germany.

Erickson has created a large tabletop map, miniature terrain and tanks. Players will employ these and a rule book to fight a series of strategic battles, the outcome of each setting the stage for the next. He will write a fictional history based on the results.

"If I can find one or two people or six people who get a kick out of it the way that I do," Erickson says, "that would be neat."

THE MODEL: Jane Coffey, a flea market vendor, looks over portraits that the Scarlet Electric collective drew of her.

COURTESY OF RACHELLE BEAUDOIN

Scarlet Electric

They call their collective Scarlet Electric, a moniker found through an online rock band name generator.

All graduates of the Rhode Island School of Design with master's degrees in digital media, the three women in their late 20s and early 30s reunited on Super G residents for a week in May.

Rachelle Beaudoin came from New Hampshire, Jeanne Jo from Los Angeles, Mary Burge from Mississippi.

Their proposal? Do something different every day, make it up as they go and focus on giving gifts or doing things for free.

They wrote letters for shoppers. They drew portraits of vendors. They set up a photo studio and offered free family portraits to food shoppers. They concluded with a daytime sleepover for daughters of vendors and friends.

"There's a little bit of fear you have to get over when you are standing outside with a sign saying 'free photos' and approaching people you don't know," Beaudoin says.

"But we liked the challenge from day to day: How are we going to make this day awesome? It ended up being really fun."