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On Campus, Page F01

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Picturing Peace: UW-EC grad exhibiting award-winning photography

By UW-Eau Claire News Bureau

UW-Eau Claire will host an exhibit by an award-winning graduate of the university's journalism program.

The exhibit, "A Peace of My Mind," created by John Noltner, a 1990 UW-Eau Claire graduate, will be on display from Monday through May 12 in Davies Center.

"A Peace of My Mind' feels like the highest use of my training and experience as a photographer to date," said Noltner, an award-winning photographer and author. "It makes perfect sense to bring the project back to UW-Eau Claire where my photographic and journalistic interests were nurtured and developed."

Noltner is a freelance photographer based in Minneapolis specializing in images of people, lifestyle and travel. He has been capturing images from around the world for 20 years, working on projects in settings such as corporate boardrooms as well as developing nations.

Noltner's photos have been published in numerous regional and national magazines, including Forbes, Health, Midwest Living, National Geographic Traveler, World Traveler, Reader's Digest and Smithsonian. His fine art photographs have been exhibited nationally and are included in corporate and private collections as well as the permanent collections of the University of Minnesota and the Minnesota History Center.

Peace project

In 2009 Noltner began working on "A Peace of My Mind," a documentary project exploring the meaning of peace by asking ordinary people the question, "What does peace mean to you?"

The exhibit contains portraits and personal stories of 52 diverse subjects. The subjects are each showcased on a 24-by-36-inch canvas gallery wrap that includes their name, a short biography, a portrait and a 250-word excerpt from their interview about what peace means to them.

The people profiled include Holocaust survivors and a homeless man, a Somali refugee and a military chaplain, a pottery instructor and an oil company executive.

In 2010 "A Peace of my Mind" was produced as a traveling exhibit, in part through funding from the Minnesota State Arts Board, and has been hosted nationally by colleges, libraries, galleries and community groups. The project grew into a website, a series of podcasts and ultimately a book with a foreword written by Ela Gandhi, granddaughter of Mahatma Gandhi. "A Peace of My Mind" received a 2011 Midwest Book Award gold medallion and was a silver medalist in the 2012 Independent Publishers Book Awards.

Gandhi, in her forward to "A Peace of My Mind," writes, "We need to appreciate the richness of our diverse heritage and begin to see the value of global citizenship, so that peace and social and political justice may prevail in the world. Perhaps it will inspire us to become peacemakers."

Gandhi is scheduled to present a Forum Special presentation as the culmination of the "A Peace of My Mind" exhibit at 7:30 p.m. May 7 in Schofield Auditorium.

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"The project has grown from a small personal interest into a national art project," Noltner said. "Part documentary, part social activism and part personal encouragement, 'A Peace of My Mind' has grown to have an impact greater than I could have imagined. The wisdom of the project comes from others and the stories people have graciously shared."

Eau Claire ties

As a student at UW-Eau Claire, Noltner worked closely with Rick Mickelson, administrative program manager in the learning and technology services unit and returned to campus in December 2012 to work with current art students on additions to the exhibit, which will be featured during an opening reception, sponsored by the UW-Eau Claire Foundation and Alumni Association, at 7 p.m. April 9 in the Alumni Room of Davies Center.

Students Phillip Schladweiler, Alison Wheeler and Drew Hagen worked with Noltner to learn his process for taking portraits and interviewing local residents about what peace means to them. This local part of the "A Peace of My Mind" project is sponsored by the UW-Eau Claire Foundation, with the results becoming part of the university collection.

Mickelson said he is thrilled about Noltner returning to campus with the exhibit and about his involvement with current art students.

"I love his current project, and I'm happy that UW-Eau Claire will have the opportunity to engage with the simple, important question, 'What does peace mean to you?'" Mickelson said. "It was so exciting for me to watch John work with students on his project. It took me back to the time when he was a student here working in the photo lab. Now to see him come back and share his experience and expertise with students just starting their careers is very rewarding."

Noltner said he was impressed by how seriously the students took their task and how interested they became in the process by embracing their role, asking questions and pushing through some difficult situations to produce stories and images that will be a strong voice for the UW-Eau Claire community.

"It was clear to me that UW-Eau Claire has done well to provide an environment where students feel empowered to dig deep for the education they desire," Noltner said. "I am excited and proud that my son has selected UW-Eau Claire as the college he will attend in the fall."

In addition to the exhibit, Noltner will be on campus participating in events including classroom discussions on diversity, public lectures and an exhibit talk.

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Above: UW-Eau Claire alumnus John Noltner visited Eau Claire in December to work with UW-Eau Claire art students on local additions to his traveling exhibit, "A Peace of My Mind." Here he interviews one of the local residents whose portraits will be part of the exhibit, which runs April 1-May 12 in UW-Eau Claire's Davies Center. **Below:** Noltner works with UW-Eau Claire senior Alison Wheeler as she prepares to photograph a local resident as part of the local addition to Noltner's traveling exhibit.



UW-Eau Claire photos

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