Former Lassen students gains national attention

A former Lassen College student, one who has welded rock to metal in an artistic expression of her experience with cancer, is gaining national attention for both her art and her rural lifestyle.

Kay Minto, who served as the inspiration for Lassen College's Welding for Artists Course, was recently named to the National Board of Directors of the Breast Cancer Action Group (BCAG) and will attend her first meeting next month in Columbus, Ohio.

In addition, her work, entitled "Nike of the Mastectomy," was selected for participation in the Oct. 8-23 juried exhibit sponsored by the Arthur James Cancer Hospital and Research Institute in Columbus.

The institute is one of only 27 centers designated by the National Cancer Institute as a comprehensive cancer center and is the only free-standing cancer hospital in the Midwest.

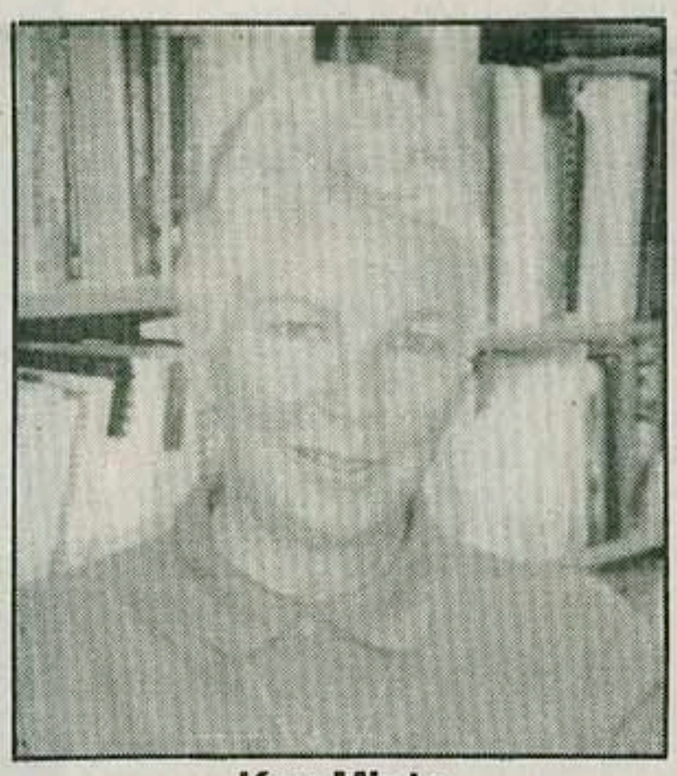
The massive piece, which combines lava rock with metal, was also featured in the 1993 "Healing Legacies" National Exhibit. The exhibit was a collection of art and writing by women with breast cancer. It was displayed in the rotunda of the U.S. House of Representatives in Washington, D.C.

"At first I could not understand why I was selected (for the board). I don't live in a big city," Minto said. "But they said they needed someone who represented an under-served area."

Minto explained that she will bring the interests and perspectives of rural women to the board. "I'm probably the only one on the board who does not have insurance or has cleaned a deer or herded cattle," she said.

She takes her board role seriously and is educating herself through contact with women who live in rural areas. "I want to locate any woman who has a journal, art work or a poem created while dealing with the breast cancer," she said.

Minto's personal struggle with cancer began on Mother's Day 1991 when she discovered a lump in her



Kay Minto

left breast. A mammogram was ordered and disclosed a suspicious spot. She was diagnosed with cancer and underwent a modified radical mastectomy.

Like others in the action group, she found a way to express herself through art. While in the hospital, she recalled the green stone carving, the Nike of Samothrace, the winged victory and designed a creation of her own out of lava and aluminum.

Her methods of combining rock with metal came about through another struggle; this one more frustrating than life-threatening. Available casting opportunities closed, so Minto asked college welding instructor John Mulcahy about combining art and welding techniques.

"Kay brought new awareness of the arts to my students. We were able to meet her needs in learning how to weld rock and metals and she was able to infuse art into the welding program. Ideas just exploded from there," explained Mulcahy.

Minto, who is listed in the Who's Who in American Junior Colleges, has received numerous art awards and her work has been exhibited throughout Northern California, Nevada, Oregon, Oklahoma and Washington, D.C.

A picture of her "Nike" was published in the book "The Journey Beyond Breast Cancer," by Virginia Soffa, who is one of the founders of BCAG.

She holds a bachelor's degree in fine arts in sculpture from the University of Oklahoma and has studied ceramic shell casting at California State University, Long Beach; gas tungsten arc welding at Lassen College, and international sculpture in metal fabrication at the California College of Arts and Crafts.

She became involved with the BCAG when they called for entries for the "Healing Legacies" exhibit. The action group began in Vermont with the commitment to eradicate breast cancer through education, legislation, networking and public awareness campaigns. A slide registry of work created by breast cancer survivors was initiated.

The group joined with the Women's Caucus for Art (WCA), a national organization of women artists, to create the "Healing Legacies" exhibit.

The display allowed access to the normally private dimensions of breast cancer by observing the artistic works of women who conquered the disease.