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Egg-cellent art showcases Arizona

Artists decorate eggs for White House Easter contest

by Emily McCann
staff writer

How do you like your eggs? Some people like them scrambled or over easy or hard boiled, but seven Arizona women take theirs with a little extra glitz and glam.

The egg-cellent artists each decorated an eggshell for a contest last week to see who would represent the state at the White House's annual Easter festivities.



View photos by Michael Clawson

THE WINNING EGG depicts a Western scene, created by Karen Friend. (Below) Other egg entries included elements such as a coyote, an Arizona map and flag.



The competition was held Jan. 7 at Banner Estrella Medical Center, 9201 W. Thomas Road in Phoenix. It was sponsored and coordinated by Buckeye-based Hickman's Egg Ranch, which started the event five years ago.

Decorators were required to use only Hickman's large chicken eggs, with the contents removed and the small end of the egg pointed up.

The judges ranged from hospital employees to Harold Helmer, who holds the Guinness World Record for being the fastest omelet maker.

"I think that's a really cool perspective, because [Helmer] is from New York, so what says 'Arizona' to a New Yorker?" said Sharman Hickman, spokeswoman for the egg ranch.

While he's not a local, Helmer has been tapped to judge egg decorating contests for other states, and said he knew what to look for.

"I'll tell you this, I'm partial to eggs that have the flag," he said. "Even though many people wouldn't recognize the Arizona flag, I think it's the prettiest flag in the country. So if I lived in Arizona, I'd be waving my flag all the time."

Dr. Charlie Agee, Banner Estrella's chief medical officer and one of the other judges, based his decision on the intricacy of the eggs' designs.

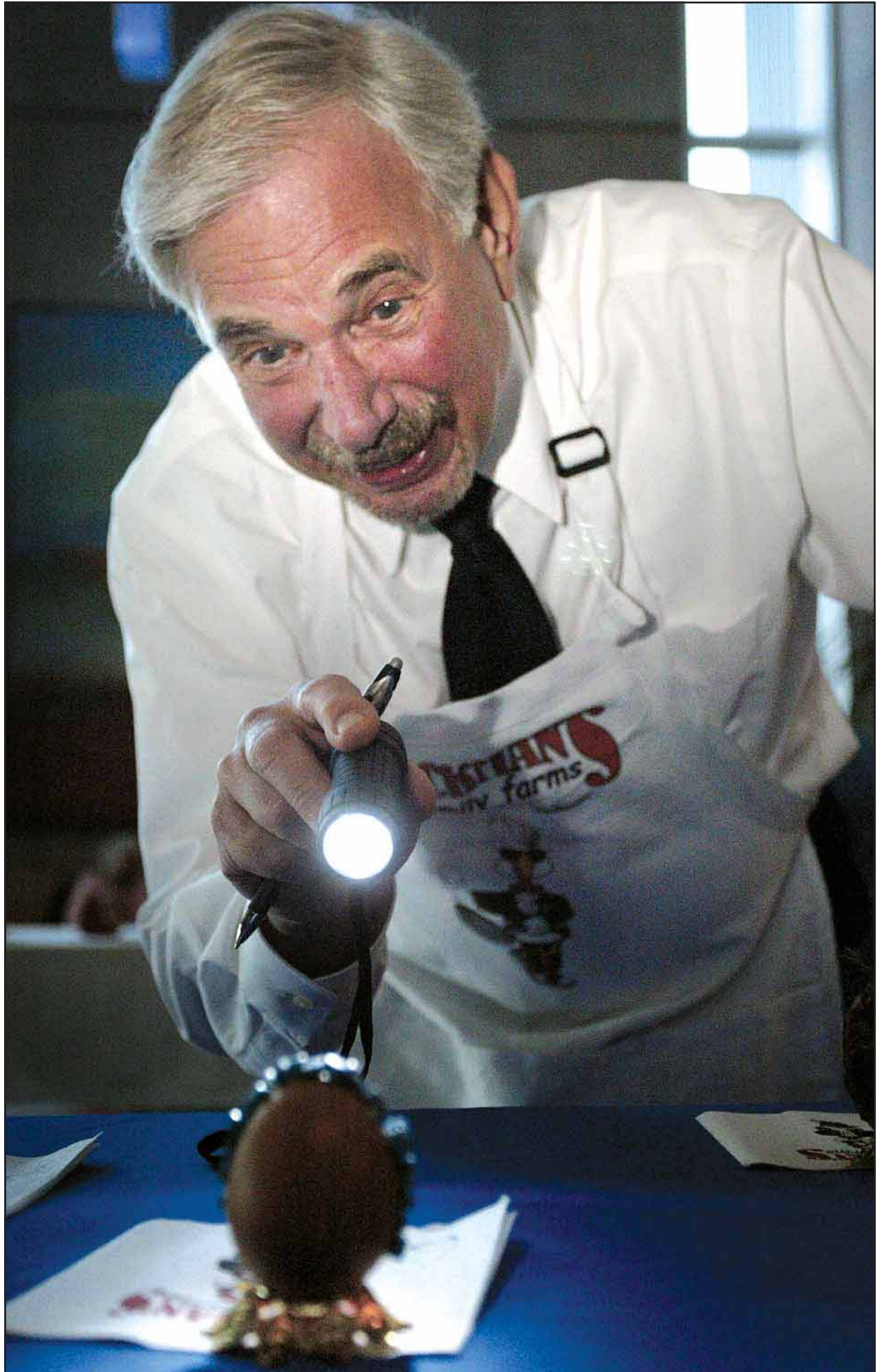
"To me as a surgeon, I'm always looking at the artistry and the fundamentals. How intricate did the fingers have to work? How much effort did they have to put in to make that design or get it perfectly symmetrical?" he said. "It's no different than when I would be looking inside a body."

Cracking the competition

Karen Friend of New River was the winner for the second year in a row, even though she had to scramble to finish her egg on time.

"I had a problem with the design because I had too many ideas," she said. "I just wanted something to typify Arizona, not one specific locale."

After flipping between Lake Powell, Hoover Dam and Havasu Falls, Friend finally landed on the theme of an old western town. She completed the egg in about eight



View photo by Michael Clawson

EGG CONTEST JUDGE Howard Helmer, who also happens to be the world's fastest omelet maker, uses a flashlight to examine carved and painted eggs Jan. 7 at Banner Estrella Medical Center in west Phoenix.

hours the day before the competition, she said.

Her cutout egg features a painted western scene on the inside, with a saloon and cactuses, and also tiny figurines.

Friend will travel to Washington, D.C., for the White House Easter celebration, where she will meet the new first lady, Michelle Obama, present the egg and see it put on prominent display along with the other 49 states' eggs for Easter week.

The program was started by Hillary Clinton in 1994, and first lady Laura Bush continued the tradition, Hickman said.

"I'm hoping that Michelle Obama will leave that as part of the Easter program," she said. "The reason why I did it is because eggs aren't just for cooking, and it's an

exposure for a very fine-tuned art. This art doesn't hang on a wall, but it's in the White House forever."

Two new artists competed this year, including Judy Welch from west Phoenix, whose egg featured turquoise beads, a cowboy on a horse, a tiny cactus and a cutout in the shape of Arizona.

"I had a horrible time finding cactus that small," she said. "It took forever to find the parts. Every time I went somewhere, I was looking to find something that represented Arizona."

The other artists were Betsy Coon of Paradise Valley, Mary Ellen Le Gendre of Glendale, Marsha Rossell of Phoenix and Darlene Pierman of Payson. The seventh artist submitted an egg anonymously.