LIFE

'Storycloth' weaves story of community on Whidbey

A potter and a weaver have combined artistic forces to create a new artifact.

By Kira Erickson • February 17, 2023 1:30 am

Photo by Dennis Browne Weaver Danette Sulgrove works at the loom, creating an art piece she calls the storycloth. The project is a collaboration between Sulgrove and Charles LaFond, a potter.

A potter and a weaver have combined artistic forces to create a new artifact representative of the story of Whidbey Island's community.

The potter, Charles LaFond, met the weaver, Danette Sulgrove, through mutual friends. LaFond is the senior development director for Island Senior Resources, a vital nonprofit organization that provides a variety of services and programs for the aging population of Island County.

LaFond told Sulgrove about how he has given away a number of goblets to people as part of a gathering focused on sharing feedback about Island Senior Resources. Inspired by this, Sulgrove wanted to do something within the realm of textiles, her speciality.

"Charles and I just hit it off," Sulgrove said. "I thought that the concept he was thinking about fit how I perceive weaving and the community. We got very excited very quickly."

As a result of their collaboration, Sulgrove wove together a combination of threads in vibrant blues and greens, reminiscent of the island environment, to create what she calls a storycloth. The piece is 72 inches long, with some loose threads at the end symbolizing the ongoing weaving of the community, and the fact that the work of important organizations like Island Senior Resources is never truly finished.

Silver, metallic twine lends a pop of color to the cloth, representing the graying hair of the island's seniors.

"Probably the thing that was most challenging was playing with the silver thread and finding something that would work from a fabric standpoint, a weaving standpoint," Sulgrove said.

The art piece has been donated to Island Senior Resources, where it will be displayed in some fashion. LaFond said the plan is to rotate it around various senior centers, from Bayview to Oak Harbor to Camano Island.

"It will be the theme of Island Senior Resources for the year of 2023, the idea that we are woven together as a community," he said.

The nonprofit organization is near and dear to Sulgrove's heart. A close friend of hers who was terminally ill often relied on deliveries from the Meals on Wheels program.

"I think it's a real valuable part of our community, knowing how we have an older community," Sulgrove said. "Any of us may need it at some time."

For LaFond, knowing that several of his older family members could have benefited from an organization like Island Senior Resources inspired him to get involved as part of its staff. The nonprofit cares for thousands of people tucked down leafy lanes of the island, he said.

"They are lonely often and isolated often and weak and frightened often. We go about our merry way and we drive past their driveways every day," he said. "But back in those trees, there's a house, and in that house there's a little old man or little old lady, and they need help."

As the organization turned 50 years old, it experienced massive growth in demand during the pandemic. For example, LaFond said, meals delivered to seniors throughout the duration of one month have since doubled in numbers.

It also provides a sort of one-stop shop for those seeking resources. To illustrate this point, LaFond said someone coming into the medical lending library to pick up a walker for free might learn about a congregate meal in the dining room. At that meal, they might learn about an upcoming seminar on death, dying and grief. At the seminar, they could find out about the Meals on Wheels program, and through that, the transportation to medical appointments that volunteers provide.

"That's the tight weave of community," LaFond said. "That's the tight weave of the cloth."

Photo by Dennis Browne Vibrant blues and greens — the colors of Whidbey Island — make up the storycloth.

Photo by Dennis Browne Danette Sulgrove models the storycloth, a 72-inch-long art piece with loose, unfinished ends.
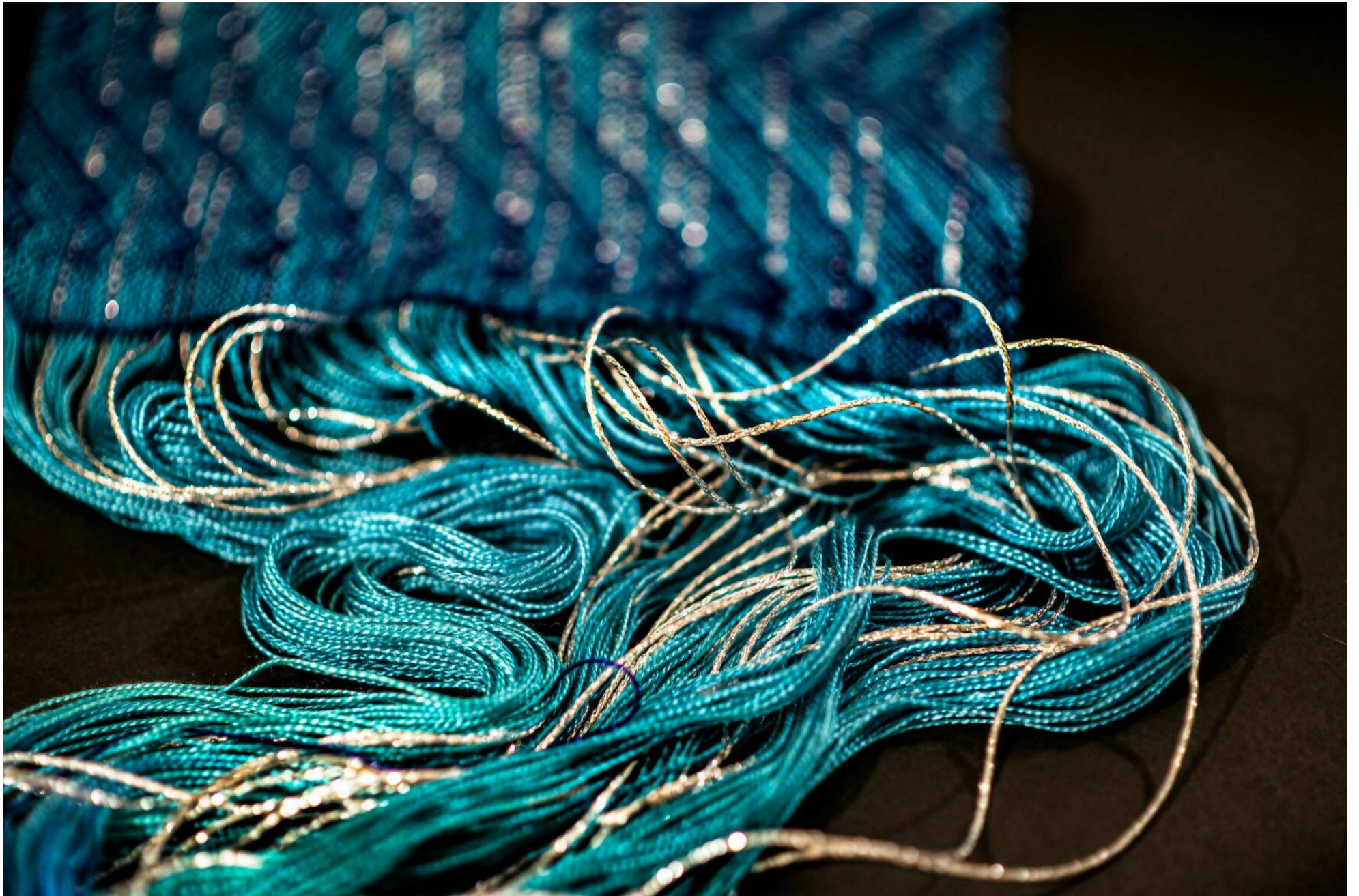
Photo by Dennis Browne Silver lends a pop of color to the storycloth, representing the graying hair of aging seniors.

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