

Beacon features the "remarkable"

◆ BY KEN MUNSON

The Beacon Theatre hosted an art show last weekend, and the featured artist, Hopewell native Marcus Thomas, is proud to be returning to the area and helping with the fundraising. His artwork is most remarkable, considering that he paints without the use of his hands.

Thomas has been paralyzed from the shoulders down since 1986, when he broke his neck in a skiing accident. Thomas, who describes himself as having been an athletic type, turned to painting as a way to pass the time.

"I was really active outdoors," said Thomas of his life before the accident. "I never really spent anytime doing art-

work."

Thomas, who now lives in Weaverville, N.C., took to painting so much that it eventually became his full-time job; he spends six to eight hours a day painting when he's not going to art shows.

"After the accident, we moved back in with my parents in Hopewell, just to get our feet back on the ground and rethink our lives," says Thomas. "My wife bought me some watercolors about a year after I had the accident. Six months after I began painting, we got the idea to publish a calendar. So we did, and of course, we had to sell the calendars. That's when we started selling the artwork, and just one thing led to another."

Painting has also helped him to stay in touch with the outdoors; his paintings are of natural wildlife and landscapes.

"It's been a great way to stay active outdoors, mentally if not physically," said Thomas. "It's been a wonderful gift, it helped to make my life complete."

Thomas uses a mouth stick, a paintbrush designed to be held in the mouth, to paint, mostly with oils and watercolors. A single painting can take anywhere from two weeks to several months to complete, depending on the size.

"I'm thrilled to be a small part of the fundraising effort," says Thomas. "I'm going to get a chance to see a lot of old friends and help with such a worthy cause. I feel honored."

Visit Marcus Thomas' Web site: <http://web.mac.com/annithomas2/iWeb/marcusthomas-conservationseries/Marcus%20Artwork.html>

