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Artists pitch in to preserve natural wonders across state

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Vivid and crisp, Mark Olencki's seasonal art prints of trees in Hatcher Garden present a compelling argument for the strong connection between art and nature. They speak equally well to the need for conservation, to ensure nature's glorious details continue serving as artistic inspiration in the future.

Olencki, owner of Olencki Graphics, is one of 34 artists from the Upstate whose works will be sold to benefit the conservation agency Upstate Forever at the First Annual Art and Conservation Celebration from 6-10 p.m. Saturday at Saffron's Sidewalk Café at 1 Augusta St., Greenville.

Membership and Development Director Ralph Settle said the unique connection between art and conservation made the fundraiser a natural choice. He said from photography to painting and pottery, all of the art illustrates the beauty of

South Carolina and the need for continued efforts to preserve green space.

"The art is showcasing areas in the Upstate that are particularly important to the artist, from the Reedy River to the Blue Ridge Escarpment, and even some of the areas where we have conservation easements on right now," Settle said. "Art is such a compelling way to tell our story; it's a natural fit for us."

Another local artist, Dorothy Josey, said she painted a scene of mountains off of Highway 11 specifically for the event.

"It's a very pretty scene of the mountains right off the road and shows one of the few open spaces left," Josey said. "I was born and raised here in Spartanburg County when it was a very rural community with a lot of farm land and beautiful, natural resources, and I just feel like they are getting paved over at an alarming rate."

Josey said groups such as Upstate Forever and Spartanburg Area Conservancy were doing great things trying to save special places and improve the quality of life for South Carolina residents.

Settle said local artists are excited about the show. They have contributed more than 50 pieces to sell, with 50 percent of the proceeds going to Upstate Forever.

"A lot of artists in the area feel good connection with what we're doing, going out and trying to preserve because its hard to paint a beautiful landscape when you have a seven-story condo in the middle it," Settle

said.

The response also has been overwhelming from the public, with more than 160 people signed up to attend. Space is limited, but tickets can be obtained by calling the Upstate Forever office at 250-0500.

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