

Mountains inspire in North Cascades art courses

North Cascades Institute courses offer arts and outdoors

By SHANNON DININNY
The Associated Press

DIABLO, WA— For their 10th wedding anniversary, Kori Crane's husband handed her a check and told her she could only spend it on an art class.

Not just any art class.

Crane designed and painted silk scarves in the remote wilderness of North Cascades National Park, drawing on the majestic mountains and towering pines for inspiration.

Nestled at the foot of Sourdough Mountain and on the shore of Diablo Lake, the North Cascades Environmental Learning Center is home to fine arts, writing, cultural and natural history courses, as well as family weekends that include kayaking, hiking, boating and fun.

Front and center, though, is the wilderness. One of the most remote national parks in the U.S., North Cascades offers miles of hiking trails, abundant wildlife and panoramic views of rugged peaks and glacier-fed lakes far from an urban center.

Crane, 39, of Mount Vernon, Wash., had visited the lodge once before for a hiking day. Already an active quilter and fiber artist but recovering from a recent shoulder injury, she made the trip to the North Cascades last year aiming to try something new.

"I enjoy color a lot, so really being able to play with color on a grand scale is wonderful," she said. "The atmosphere is inspiring for art."

Seattle City Light built the five-acre facility as part of its Skagit River dam license for hydropower. The nonprofit North Cascades Institute manages the 16-building campus, which opened in 2005, and its adult course offerings help finance youth education programs.

Molly Hashimoto has traveled to the lodge for six years to teach watercolor classes, and the getaway hasn't lost its magic.

"For me, it's the ease of getting outdoors, and the beauty is unparalleled. The scale — it's awesome," she said. "You wouldn't find that many places in



the country where you can see from sea level to a mountain peak, almost a vertical mile. It's awe-inspiring."

The center's wood floors and cedar walls are warm, earthy and inviting, with buildings named after trees found in the nearby woods: pine, maple, cedar, fir. The dining room overlooks the lake, where boat tours glide by. Meals are included and feature local, often organic, ingredients.

It's already drawn visitors from across the country.

Donna Woodland, 49, of Montoursville, Pa., traveled with a friend from Oregon to work on watercolor landscapes, a progression from her nature journals and sketches at home.

"If I don't draw for a few days or weeks, I find it affects my mood," she said. "This forces me to draw around other people. Otherwise this is a solitary thing, and everyone sees things differently. You get feedback."

Gazing across Diablo Lake at Colonial and Pyramid peaks, Hashimoto said she'd like to see more young people sign up for art courses. People with young families tend toward the family getaway weekends, she said, and people without families "are just working too hard."

"Art is one of those things people should splurge on for themselves," she said.

One of her regular students, Len Eisenhood of Seattle, also made the trip with his wife for their 40th wedding anniversary. She took a journaling course, while he focused on his watercolors.

"We love the Northwest, and to have this time dedicated to being in this gorgeous setting dawn to dusk was something to say yes to," he said. "It's a privilege to be here and have this time."

