



*Sammamish artist "captures Gov. Locke at his best"*

## Portrait colorful tribute to former state leader



ELLEN M. BANNER / THE SEATTLE TIMES

Michele Rushworth sits in front of some of her work in her studio. Rushworth, who tries to paint six hours a day, seven days a week, was chosen by former Gov. Gary Locke to do his official portrait, which will be unveiled today.

BY SHERRY GRINDELAND  
Seattle Times Eastside bureau

**M**ichele Rushworth is excited about today's unveiling of her official portrait of former Gov. Gary Locke but doesn't expect it to be as emotional as some she has experienced in recent years.

She volunteered in 2002 to paint a memorial portrait of a firefighter killed in the 9/11 attacks, and was on CBS' "The Early Show" when Doug Oelschlager's widow and children first saw the picture.

Then there was the 2004 retirement celebration for Edgar Martinez. The Seattle Mariners commissioned Rushworth to paint the popular baseball player's portrait as a surprise gift. She was at Safeco Field when it was unveiled.

Locke was there, too, and saw the painting. When Rushworth's name appeared on the list of recommend-

ed artists to do his own portrait, Locke and his wife, Mona, chose the Sammamish artist.

The portrait will be unveiled at 1 p.m. today in the Legislative Building in Olympia.

The picture will be No. 24 in Washington's collection that includes paintings of every state governor and a couple of territorial governors. By tradition, the entire collection hangs in the Governor's Office in the Capitol throughout the legislative session. The paintings then are moved to the State Capital Museum but are not always on public display.

The Washington State Historical Society oversees the collection.

Derek Valley, director of the State Capital Museum, will hang the portrait early this morning.

"Some of the portraits in the collection don't have the quality you  
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Locke's portrait is 24th in a collection of all the state's governors and a couple of territorial governors.

## < Artist

FROM B1

### SAMMAMISH ARTIST TAPPED TO PAINT LOCKE'S PORTRAIT

#### The painting will be unveiled at Capitol

would like," Valley said. "But this is a classic portrait and captures Gov. Locke at his best."

Most of Rushworth's portraits hang in private homes. When she delivers the pictures, her thanks are often tears.

"If the mother cries, then I know I've captured the child," she said.

The Locke portrait, like the children, families, pets and executives she has painted, started with meeting the subject. She went to the Lockes' home to talk with the couple. She took numerous photographs. She made preliminary sketches. And as she does with all her portraits, she chose a few words to describe what the painting should convey.

With Locke, it was warmth, confidence and integrity.

"In a photo you capture the moment," Rushworth said. "A painting is more about feeling."

She paints in her home studio, an upstairs room where the family cats are often her only company all day.

During her post-college career in graphic illustration and other arts jobs, painting was a spare-time activity. When she and her husband, Tim Jones, adopted their two daughters from China, she had little time to paint until they were in school.

Then she set priorities.



ELLEN M. BANNER / THE SEATTLE TIMES

*Michele Rushworth works on a portrait for a client of himself and his son in her studio at her Sammamish home. Rushworth has been an artist as long as she can remember.*

"If it isn't family or painting, it doesn't get done," she said. "I don't volunteer at school as much as I would like. I thought about taking piano lessons but didn't. I decided I can't do these other things and improve as a painter and an artist."

When she goes to bed at night, she can't wait until morning to pick up her brushes again. She tries to paint six hours a day, seven days a week.

"Household things I ignore," she said. "Every time I got to an art museum, it always sets my bar higher. I'm always learning."

Rushworth has been an artist as long as she can remember. When she was 3 and her tonsils were removed, her parents asked what toy she wanted for her hospital stay. Pencils and paper, she said, so she could draw.

By the time she finished high school in Ontario, Canada, the school board hired her to paint

a mural of the students and teachers in her class.

Her skills were honed in a summer job doing chalk portraits at a place similar to Seattle Center.

"I did 500 pictures that summer. It was intense; the subjects were usually wiggling

## A look at Locke

**Unveiling of former Gov. Gary Locke's portrait: 1 p.m. today in the State Reception Room in the Legislative Building/Capitol. The collection of Washington governors' portraits will be on display in the Governor's Office and reception area throughout the legislative session, at 416 14th Ave. S.W. Olympia. The building is open 7:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily. Guided tours available hourly from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.**

**Artist Michele Rushworth: [www.MicheleRushworth.com](http://www.MicheleRushworth.com)**

children and I had to satisfy the customer on the spot," Rushworth said. "It was good training."

Oil portraits take considerably longer, weeks instead of minutes. She averages 10 to 12 a year, depending upon how many subjects are included.

A painting is only finished, said the 47-year-old, when the customer is satisfied that it reflects an expression of the subject's life.

Rushworth's waiting list is nearly a year. She is so busy she no longer enters competitions or displays in galleries the way she did 15 years ago when she lived on the East Coast.

A portrait of a single person starts at \$4,000.

But unlike the personal paintings that hang throughout her house and studio, the commissioned portraits stay finished.

"I'm always taking paintings off my own wall and making changes years later," she said.

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