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Designer pendant sales benefit **Woodlands Trail**

Sunday, May 07, 2006

By Susan Langenhennig

The sterling silver pendant hanging from a green silk cord around Katie Brasted's neck on Wednesday morning is not the type of thing most people would typically wear hiking.

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But if Brasted's hopes are realized, the elegant new jewelry design, shaped like a native palmetto frond, will be the must-have accessory for the hiking-boot set, as well

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as nature lovers throughout the New Orleans area.

The jewelry is a new piece by local designer Mignon Faget to benefit the Woodlands Trail and Park Inc., a nonprofit organization working to establish hiking, biking and recreational trails along an undeveloped stretch of bottomland hardwood forest in Belle Chasse.

Brasted, the founder of Woodlands Trail, and Faget unveiled the design on Wednesday during a ceremony at the tree-lined entrance to the trailhead, located off F. Edward Hebert Boulevard in Belle Chasse.

Faget said inspiration for her jewelry has long come from the native flora and fauna of South Louisiana, so supporting the park project was a natural fit.

"I'm an old trail person; a lot of my jewelry is inspired by going into the natural area," she said. "I decided to use the Louisiana native palm, called the Sabal Minor, for this because it grows in bottomland hardwood forests. And it relates to the early culture of Louisiana. Native Americans who lived here made baskets from the Sabal Minor . . . It was part of the local economy of southeast Louisiana."

Brasted approached Faget last summer about designing a piece to benefit the park, but before the artist could respond, Hurricane Katrina hit.

Months after the storm, the connection between the women was finally made, and Faget became enthusiastic about the project.

The sterling silver pendant sells for \$70 plus tax, while the sterling palmetto pin is \$75 plus tax. The jewelry also comes in 14k gold. All proceeds from the sales benefit the Woodlands Trail, thanks to a \$5,000 donation from Conoco Phillips to underwrite the cost of producing the jewelry.

Standing at the trail entrance on Wednesday, thick green palmetto fronds could be spotted under the forest canopy, as well as around the necks of several women attending the ceremony. "I did my best to capture this," Faget said.

At the ceremony, Brasted and Plaquemines Parish President Benny Rousselle also received a plaque from the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries designating the Woodlands Trail and Bird Sanctuary as part of the Louisiana Natural Areas Registry. The program is designed to promote conservation of important wildlife areas in the state, said Patti Faulkner, a Wildlife and Fisheries ecologist.

Plaquemines Parish has dedicated more than 600 acres to the Woodlands Trial, Rousselle said. The project is important "now more than ever because we lost so much green space," Rousselle said.

Brasted said the Woodlands Trail hopefully will one day stretch into Lower Coast Algiers to meet up with a wilderness park already established in the area. "There's already bathrooms and picnic shelters there that aren't being used, because there's no public access that we can see, other than the occasional summer camp," she said.

But work on the Plaquemines side is much further along. Before Katrina, two miles of trails were open, Brasted said. Unfortunately, the hurricane knocked down many trees, which now obstruct the paths, setting the project back.

While the gate to the trailhead is open these days, Brasted cautioned would-be hikers that "only about 1½ miles is safe to be walked on right now."

Brasted and Rousselle said skilled volunteers who know how to safely operate chain saws are needed to help clear the trees from the paths.

For information on volunteering and to buy the Mignon Faget Woodlands Trail jewelry, visit www.woodlandstrail.com or call 433-4000.

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