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By Susan Jurgelski, New Era Staff Write

Steely resolve

Novice salvage artist creates eye-popping, one-of-a-kind metal pieces

Diane Levenson is into heavy metal — especially steel and iron.

She shapes it, welds it, drills it, grinds it and polishes it, creating one-of-a-kind outdoor art.

When she's ensconced in the workshop behind her 1800s Conestoga home, sparks really fly.

"I've always been drawn to metal, and no matter where I went, I was always picking up metal items," says the 48-year-old Willow Street native and mother of two sons, ages 15 and 23.

Her showpiece backyard garden is the perfect showroom for both her burgeoning metal-art business and the landscaping company she runs with her husband Stuart.

Pint- and life-size metal pieces — like a half-moon you can almost sit in — are nestled among a smorgasbord of bushes, trees (including a recycled Christmas fir), flowers, whimsical signs and statues.

In front of her workshop is her gargantuan molded metal chair, suitable for the Jolly Green Giant.

Even her mailbox, a welded blend of antique tools, gets into the art.

Nothing like curbside advertising.

When it comes to metal, Levenson, who calls herself a "salvage artist," is full of mettle.

Now she wants to put the pedal to the mettle and market her sculptures for anywhere from under \$100 to several thousand.

So far, she's produced about 10 pieces, and all but one, a sun goddess — her very first production — are for sale.

"So far everything I've made, I've fallen in love with, but now I'm hoping to start selling them," she says.

She already has two ardent fans — her husband and her dad, Chester Wertz, who help her find an assortment of scrap metal.

"(My dad's) really gotten into it, and my mom will call up and say, 'Wait till you see what your dad's gotten you now,'" Levenson says. "My dad always says when someone gives you something, you accept it, because you never know when you can use it."

"It's amazing to see what she comes up with," her husband says. "What we all see as junk metal, she turns into art."

Levenson wakes up at 3 a.m. with ideas for sculptures.

Anything and everything — pictures, people, places — ignites a project.



"I have a whole notebook full of ideas, and sometimes I just look at something and think how can I translate that into metal," she says.

"I have a lot of fun with it."

Levenson always wanted to learn to weld, so about a year ago, she took a class.

"The teacher was very encouraging, and I just kind of went from there," she says.

Her unique art fits well into her garden decor.

"I don't like to put things in my yard everybody else has," she says.

There's even a bowling ball, placed in the garden in honor of her father.

Although Levenson experimented with crafts and other artwork, she says that after a while, she got bored.

So far, though, she has maintained a steely resolve for metalwork.

Her artistic goal is one-of-a-kind pieces, she says, and she prefers not to make art to order.

"I go with the flow," she says. "I don't want the pressure of somebody else's vision."

She confesses it will be hard to relinquish the metal "babies" now on display in her garden, but she has a practical outlook.

"When I make something and sell it, I can always make something else for the space."

Heavy mettle.



FOR YOUR INFORMATION

WHAT:

Salvage Art by Diane Levenson

PRICES: Metal sculptures range from under \$100 to more than \$1,000.

CONTACT: To learn more, e-mail salvageartist@comcast.net.

