

Cartoonist draws it green

BY TERRY OPARKA
C & G Staff Writer

While Troy resident Birgit Keil worked through "crazy" deadlines and clocked long hours as an art director for automotive accounts at local advertising agencies, she still somehow made time to pursue her dream of being a cartoonist.

"When I had a little time late at night to work on my illustrations, I felt like a kid again," she said. "So I kept at it. My friends encouraged me, and from there, I started my own greeting card line."

Keil also designed art and wrote for other greeting card companies, and did award-winning pro-bono work for charities, including the Michigan Humane Society, the AIDS Interfaith Network and the Statue of Liberty Ellis Island Foundation.

When she lost her job, she turned her full creative gifts into creating "Just Bea," a comic strip that aims to raise awareness of environmental issues. She works in her home studio, with her two Scottish terriers, Angus and Piper, for support.

"Along with so many others in this economy, I found myself suddenly unemployed," she said. "So I thought to myself, what a perfect time to bring my learnings and experiences together to help realize my dream of becoming a cartoonist. I always loved cartooning."

Keil said that for her, the strip symbolizes "trying to make a difference with what you've got."

"Just Bea" is featured online at www.greeningdetroit.com.

Greening Detroit founder John



Troy resident Birgit Keil draws inspiration from environmental issues for "Just Bea."

Carlos said that www.greeningdetroit.com is the largest green website in metro Detroit. It features green products and services, sustainable options and green news.

Keil said she finds inspiration for "Just Bea" everywhere.

She recently animated five hand-drawn illustrations into videos with the assistance of Digital Image Studios in Farmington Hills and hopes to animate "Just Bea."

"I want to take 'Just Bea' to another level," she said.

She's also testing her cartoon mettle in an online contest, in which the winner lands a development contract with Creators Syndicate.

The Cartoonist Studio, which includes cartoonists Jeff Keane, Dan Reynolds, Jan Eliot and Bill Hinds, sponsors the online contest.

People can visit www.thecartoonist

studio.com to vote for contestants' cartoons up to four times a day because, according to the website, "enthusiasm counts."

"Cartoon fans are an enthusiastic group of people," the site states. "Voting is like cheering your favorite cartoonist along. The more enthusiastic fans will show their support through multiple votes. It's our way of recognizing the special group of people who love and support cartooning."

"The way I see it, it's like 'American Idol' meets cartoonists," Keil said. "Good thing they won't ask me to sing."

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