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February 4, 2003

Community focus

Niles exhibit features area photographer

HOMETOWN

By DORI CLEMINS
Tribune Staff Writer

His first camera was a Polaroid Land, the folding, instant type that a teen graduating from junior high school in 1964 went crazy over.

D. Brent Miller of Granger recently found that camera hidden away in the basement. He opened a box and out came the memories.

Now 52, the Pekin, Ill., native remembered being an excited boy who immediately sat down and wrote National Geographic to let them know of his availability as a photographer. To his surprise, an editor wrote back advising Miller to keep practicing and get an education.

Miller's trusty Polaroid came along when he was drafted into the Vietnam War in 1970. For one dollar, he took pictures of soldiers to send home to their families.

"I started to buy more equipment when I was in the military," said Miller. "I bought my stuff at the PX because it was cheaper than off base."



D. Brent Miller, of Granger, is currently displaying photographs from his "Fairs and Festivals" series at the Niles Community Library.

Tribune Photo/DORI CLEMINS

By the end of the 1980s, Miller was teaching journalism at Loras College in Dubuque, Iowa, and the Polaroid was packed away in a box. Miller also worked as a writer and photographer for a local newspaper during summer break.

He covered county fairs and festivals and became intrigued after he got past the elephant ears and traveling vendors.

"I noticed that every fair has something unique that provides flavor of community," Miller said. "At the same time, I saw them changing from a celebration of community to a carnival."

By the early '90s, Miller decided that fairs and festivals could be the subject of documentary photography, as he calls it.

Miller continued with the project by photographing Michiana fairs when he moved to Granger in 1993.

In addition to documentary photography, Miller, formerly the executive director of the Buchanan Area Chamber of Commerce, specializes in portrait and commercial photography. His commercial clients include the South Bend Silver Hawks.

Photographs from his "Fairs and Festivals" series will be exhibited through March 22 in the Niles Community Library gallery. Miller will talk about his work at 7 p.m. Thursday in the gallery.

"The gallery is new to the library," said Mickey Spencer, gallery coordinator at the Niles library. "We are proud to have a good local photographer that focuses on the community."

Miller hopes that his photographs and observations on fairs and festivals will one day make it into a book. But he adds that he is proud that people have found the subject interesting and have supported him with the project.

Miller is also working on a documentary of the Oliver Plow Works. The Northern Indiana Center for History in South Bend plans to showcase pictures from the Oliver Plow Works throughout the



D. Brent Miller's black and white, 1995 photograph of the Etna Green Lions Club lunch counter at the Kosciusko County Fair in Warsaw is among those on display at the Niles Community Library.

Photo provided



D. Brent Miller shot this photograph of bats and helmets in the South Bend Silver Hawks dugout.

Photo Provided

Photo display at Niles library

Photographs from D. Brent Miller's "Fairs and Festivals" series are on display through March 22 in the gallery at the Niles Community Library. The gallery is open to the public Monday through Thursday from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m., and Friday through Saturday from 9 a.m. to 5

summer of 2003.

"His photographs are not just looking at a documentary," said Cheryl Taylor, executive director of the Northern Indiana Center for History.

"Each one is a stunning work of art."

Although Miller saved his camera all of these years, he regrets not saving the letter from National Geographic.

"It's not like I hung my cap on that letter," Miller said. "But if they called today, I'd be on the first plane wherever they wanted me to go."

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Miller will give an informal talk at 7 p.m. Thursday in the gallery.

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