



MICHELLE (MICKELSON) WEBER COMPLETED 21 paintings for a new children's book called "Levi's Lost Calf." She will be signing books at River City Eatery on the Square this Saturday.

Windom grad to appear on Square for book signing

■ The power of Facebook helped launch Michelle (Mickelson) Weber's career in art.

Michelle Weber chuckles now as she talks about art class during her senior year in Windom Area High School.

"I hated it," said Weber, a 2006 Windom graduate, whose lastname was Mickelson at the time. "But Mark Nass, my art teacher, saw the potential that I did not see.

"He was the one who pushed me and challenged me and made me realize how much I enjoyed it. He was obviously an inspiration."

Today, Michelle and her husband, Jesse Weber, live on a cattle farm near Lake Benton. She loves working with their cattle and, at the same time, is taking her love of art to a new level.

In fact, this Saturday marks Michelle's first-ever book signing. It will be held as part of a preview event at River City Eatery, located on the north side of the Square.

Naturally, the event is sure to attract countless friends and family, including Michelle's parents, Jay and Lori Mickelson of rural Windom.

The book signing is for a new children's book called "Levi's Lost Calf." It was written by Amanda Radke. Michelle provided 21 illustrations for the book.

Michelle is still amazed that she is now carving a career through her love of art.

"When I went to college at South Dakota State University, I started out as an art major, but I thought that I could never live on that and that I needed something more stable for a regular paycheck," Michelle recalled. "But I was still hoping that I could stay with it and eventually use art to benefit me in some way. It is just now starting to fall into place a little bit."

College was busy for Michelle, who was an advertising major. She didn't get many opportunities to dabble in art. She didn't paint much until her senior year, when she finally took a college painting class.

"At that point, I realized how much I had missed it,"

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MICHELLE WEBER
Windom native and artist

Michelle said. "I wished I had stuck with it a little more. All day, for hours on end, I was in the art room and loving every minute of it.

"After graduation, I decided that I would not let myself go into a slump again. I kept painting."

A lot of Michelle's inspiration comes from farms and ranches. She takes countless photographs and likes to use cattle as the subject matter. Many of her paintings are based on photos she has taken.

Still, it was just a hobby for Michelle, who worked as a graphic designer for Pipestone Publishing. It was then that she learned about the power of the Internet, particularly the power of Facebook.

"People were contacting me and wondering if they could have their cattle painted. There was a champion horse from 1970 in South Dakota and then a bull that had been a champion and then another and another," Michelle recalled.

"I built my business through interest in Facebook and my connections with agriculture."

Michelle's connection with agriculture stretches all the way back to her childhood at her parents' farm.

"Growing up, you couldn't pull me from the farm," Michelle said. "When I met my husband, I realized how much I enjoyed the cattle and livestock part of it. Through my husband, I met so many people who are passionate about the cattle industry and it broadened my knowledge.

It is really through Jesse that I met so many people who have that common bond and camaraderie. It is hard not to be drawn to it."

Those connections played a key role in Michelle getting involved with the new book.

"I started networking and following beef blogs," Michelle said. "I followed the blog of a gal that I had met while at SDSU, Amanda Radke. Through a chain of events I ended up contacting her randomly. She took more of an interest in my Facebook page and noticed my paintings."

Eventually, Radke contacted Michelle about doing illustrations for her new book.

"On Wednesday of the next week, she contacted me and said, 'Can you have the first painting done by Friday?' That was when she was to have a meeting with her publisher. I went home Wednesday night and, in a panic, started painting off a photo she had sent me.

"I struggled and I said, 'I can't do this. I am not qualified to do this. I don't know what I am doing.' I went home with a stack of children's books and after looking at them I realized that I was digging too deep and was trying to take it too far."

After that, Michelle was more relaxed and fully prepared to complete the difficult task of finishing 21 paintings in a month.

"Amanda has been a blessing," Michelle said. "She is someone to strive to be like, an inspiration."

Michelle added that the book has been a huge boost for her career. It has helped draw more work. She is currently working on eight different custom art pieces.

She looks forward to being home this weekend for the book signing.

"It is an exciting event for (River City Eatery owner) Mari Harries and me," Michelle said. "Doing this book has been a whirlwind, but it has been an awesome experience."

The book is available at Amazon.com. Those wanting signed copies can contact Amanda Radke on Facebook.