

## STEELE GIFTS ART WORK TO ROCKY MOUNTAIN COLLEGE

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Courtesy photos attached: Dave M. Shumway, RMC

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

BILLINGS – One of Montana’s most beloved artists who is famous for his work depicting the Bataan Death March and life in Japanese prison camps during World War II has presented a unique collection of his work to Rocky Mountain College.

Ben Steele, who endured nearly four years in Japanese POW camps, presented RMC with six large human figure studies done in charcoal and pencil, and with a sketchbook of his studies of cowboys, horses, nudes, and faces.

“It is a gift of consequence from a great and much loved regional artist and it greatly honors Rocky by having these special and artistically significant pieces delivered into its stewardship,” said Obert Udem, RMC director of planned giving. “The gift evidences the regard held by this fine artist and long time institutional friend for Rocky Mountain College.”

Steele offered the gift to Rocky after attending a class taught by Elizabeth McNamer, RMC assistant professor of religious thought, which included Jim Baken, RMC professor of fine art and his students. Inspired by Steele’s story and a feeling of patriotism, the professors lead their students in a spontaneous singing of “America, the Beautiful.”

Following the class, Steele, professor emeritus of art at MSU-Billings, invited McNamer and Baken to stop by his house.

“What a wonderful surprise when he told us he had some drawings he wanted to give us,” Baken said. “He wanted to have some of his work remain in Billings and hoped it would prove instructional to Rocky students.”

Steele, who is 93 years old, said he is trying to transfer his work out of storage and into the inventories of appreciative and worthy institutional recipients.

“Drawing helped save my life. If you took art away from me I’d be lost,” Steele said.

Sharing his art has enriched the lives of others, McNamer said.

“Here is a man who learned to draw by watching Will James draw when he was just a boy,” she added. “To have that legacy of Western style art passed down to us is humbling.”

Baken said the collection given to Rocky is unique because it features life drawings, and not the more recognized WWII themes.

“These are treasures, to see how he worked problems out in his sketchbook, how he added an extra jerk to get more twist in a bucking bronco or worked to get just the right facial expression in sketches of a cowboy,” Baken said.

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2/16/2011