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Artist Virgil Beck poses with one of his favorite paintings. The painting is owned by Everett Trummer, of Wausau.

—Herald photo by Bob Radwan

## To paint wildlife is goal of Virgil Beck

By JIM LEE  
Outdoor Editor

Drawing wildlife always seemed natural to Virgil Beck. Looking back, he can remember returning from ice fishing trips when he was about four years old — and then getting out paper and sketching his impressions of the piles of fish on the ice.

The 24-year-old artist still enjoys painting fish, a field that few wildlife artists seem to pursue, and has become increasingly skilled in drawing other forms of animal and bird life.

In fact, this past year may prove to be a turning point in his career.

During 1978, he was commissioned by the state Department of Natural Resources to produce color paintings of the state's game fish for use in a special pamphlet entitled "Wisconsin Fishing" that has just been made available for distribution to the general public.

Apparently pleased with the results, the DNR is considering another pamphlet on the state's rough fish and muskox species, again with Beck as the artist.

At the same time, he began seriously painting waterfowl and discovered a good local market for his work. As of this date, he has several commissions for paintings from area duck hunters.

"Art has been an extension of my interest in hunting and fishing," he says. "It is something that I have always enjoyed doing."

"I started doing some taxidermy work when I

was in junior high school, but I don't do that anymore, except for some of my own stuff that I want mounted.

"But that was a good field for me to have experience in. It gives you a feel for working with the anatomy of a fish or animal, which is really necessary for a wildlife artist because you have to recreate the shape of that animal."

His ability to paint fish has been aided by diving excursions on northern lakes, where he has observed game fish in their natural habitat.

Though still a student at the University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point, Beck has had his work featured on the covers or inside pages of several outdoor magazines, including Wisconsin Sportsman, Midwest Outdoors, Fur, Fish & Game, and Fishing Facts, in addition to some free lance work for sporting goods firms.

His works have been on display in Wausau, Madison and Milwaukee and one of his paintings also was chosen for display at an Abercrombie & Fitch Co. outlet in New York City.

He has won several art awards including a first place in the Milwaukee Journal student art calendar contest in 1973 and a first place in the 1978 Midwest Wildlife Conclave.

A 1972 graduate of Wausau East High School, he completed work for a bachelor's degree in art at the University of Wisconsin, but has returned to the university at Stevens Point to pick up a complementary degree in natural resource management.

Surprisingly, he feels the latter courses may

improve his artistic talents more than the art curriculum.

"The courses in the natural resource fields have sharpened my appreciation for background details in my paintings," he explained.

"Now, when I paint a scene, I know what rocks belong and the foliage cover that should accompany the trees. I didn't feel I learned much from my art degree."

He served briefly for a commercial art studio in Madison, but didn't care for the "factory" atmosphere. A later summer stint as an artist painting background scenes for a Great Lakes nautical museum in Algona was more suited to his taste.

Though his immediate goal is to find work with a museum or a state or federal wildlife agency, the long range target is to become a self-supporting free lance wildlife artist.

For now, he is living in Room 126 of South Hall at UW-Stevens Point.

"I'd like to have an opportunity to paint other animals," he says. "But that means travel and you have build up a reputation as an artist before you can do that."

"I have done sketches of other animals in zoos, but there is not much demand for that type of painting in this area and right now I have to paint what people want to buy."

The youthful artist apparently is on the right track.

"I have more commissions right now than I can handle," he admits.

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