

# Green Bay artist paints “Jake’s Story” for Nicolet Bank headquarters

*By Kathleen Maci and Mary Marik*

It’s important to tell an interesting story and bring it to life. And that is exactly what Green Bay artist Amy Eliason did when she painted the “Jake’s Story” series that was recently unveiled at Nicolet Bank in Green Bay.

The chairman and chief executive officer of Nicolet Bank, Bob Atwell, had been vacationing on Washington Island for about five summers before he bought a house on Hemlock Drive

in 2013. That’s when he decided he wanted a painting for the bank’s wall that captured the “place” of Washington Island.

“Who made the rule that art in a business setting has to be nonrepresentational?” Atwell asked during an interview at his office in late April. “I wanted to show the beauty of northeastern Wisconsin and Washington Island.”

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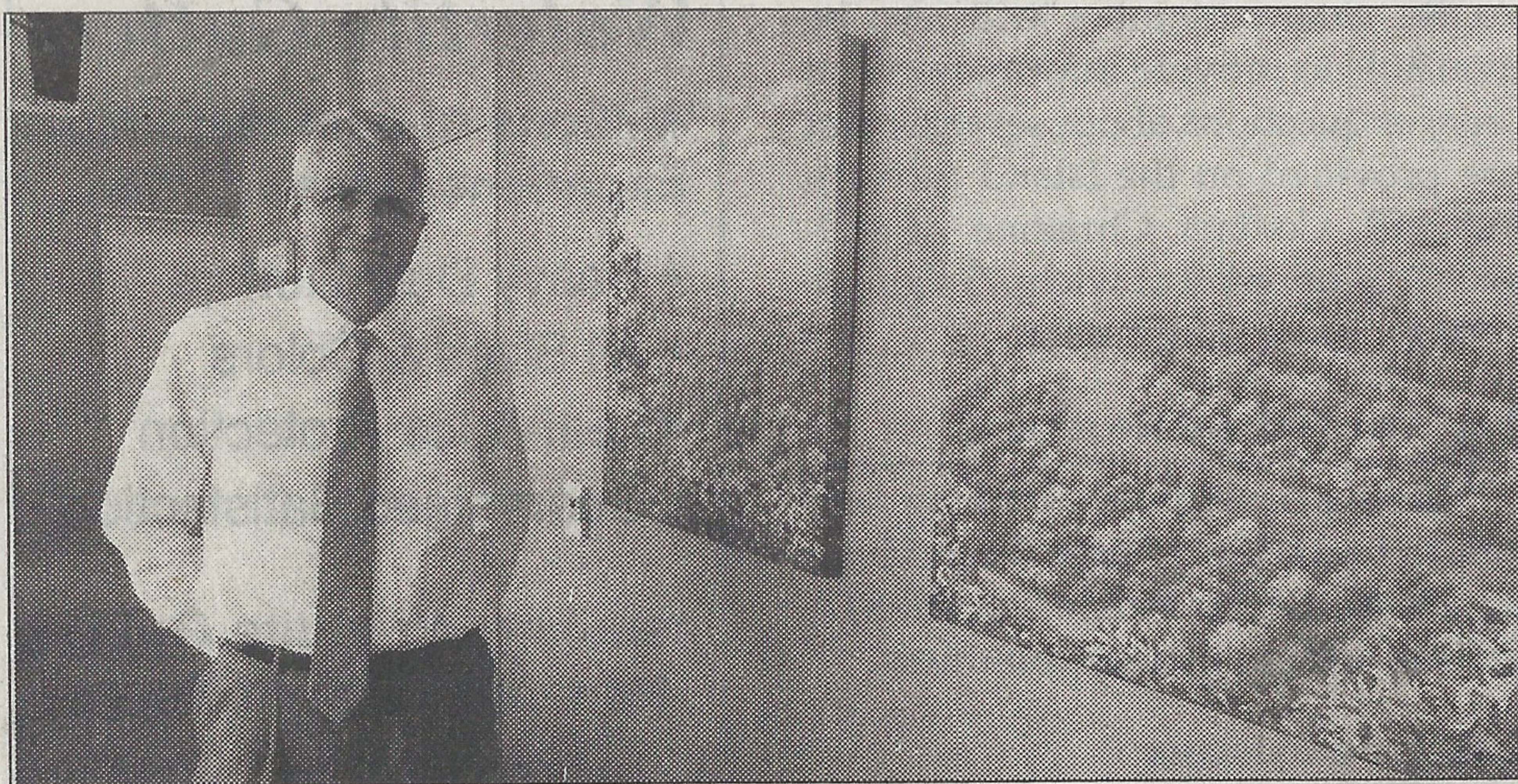


PHOTO BY MARY MARIK

*Amy Eliason also painted a triptych of the view from Mountain Tower. These three paintings (only two are shown in this photo) are on display in a large conference room at the headquarters of Nicolet Bank in Green Bay. Bob Atwell, the chairman and CEO of the bank who owns a house on Washington Island, commissioned the paintings.*



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Atwell commissioned Eliason to go to Washington Island and see what resonated with her artistic spirit.

Earlier in 2014 Eliason had taken the leap of leaving her full-time job in the financial sector so she could pursue her passion of painting full time. Most of her art is commissioned or presold.

Depending on the subject, she uses either acrylics or oils and paints portraits, animals, nature scenes and, yes, Jake Ellefson of Washington Island.

Sketchbook in hand, she goes out searching for something that touches her heart, something that captures the essence of a place or person.

"I grew up in Green Bay," Eliason said with a smile in her voice, "and the farthest I'd been in Door County

was Ephraim."

So on a sunny September morning in 2014 Eliason set out to visit Washington Island to make some sketches and see what she might paint.

She explains: "One of my days on the Island I climbed to the top of Mountain Tower to take some photos, and I met another person at the top. I asked him what might be paint-worthy on Washington Island. He asked if I'd been to Jackson Harbor. I hadn't, so he said to follow him. And that's when I saw Jake, sitting in the shadows of the building, mending a fishing net."

It was from that moment that she knew the scenes she would paint. Ellefson, a retired commercial fisherman, captures the essence of Washington Island in many respects, said Eliason.

Jake Ellefson's father came from Norway in 1902 and started his fishing business on the Island in 1907.

Jake, who will turn 89 this summer, learned from his father how to fish when he was a boy. After serving in the Navy at the end of World War II, he went into partnership with his brothers and together they entered the commercial fishing business on Washington Island.

"The fishing was probably best back in the 1930s," remembers Ellefson. "Beginning in the 1950s, invasive species entered Lake Michigan, so now it's difficult to tell if commercial fishing will ever come back. It's a disaster."

Ellefson describes a series of "negative things" that have happened to Lake Michigan, beginning with the introduction of smelt, which he says was the first invasive species. Because smelt eat minnows, they impacted all fisheries, Ellefson explained.

Smelt were followed by the lamprey eel, zebra mussels and quagga

mussels, among others. Invasives have now made Lake Michigan water so clear that algae blooms like never before and fishing nets are coming up full of algae, said Ellefson.

Ellefson, who sold the last of his businesses in the late 1990s, now enjoys visiting the Jackson Harbor dock that his father bought in 1907, and, he says, he "does a few nets in the spring and fall."

That's what Amy Eliason found him doing, and that's what led to "Jake's Story."

## How to visit Nicolet Bank to see "Jake's Story"

Nicolet Bank welcomes visitors from Washington Island who would like to see "Jake's Story."

The bank is at 111 N. Washington Street, in Green Bay, between Cherry Street and Walnut Street. Street parking is easy to find, and the bank also has underground parking accessible from Washington Street.

Regular lobby hours are 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. on weekdays.

The paintings are on the second floor of the bank, so if you visit, please stop at the reception desk at the entrance for directions to the second floor.