

DINING AROUND

Restaurant owner paints faces of health care

Regina Young

Whether sweeping changes will improve or doom health care in the United States is a hot topic this summer.

And as the debate rages on in Washington, one Buckingham restaurant owner is using her passion for art to initiate a dialogue about the subject.

Hanging on the walls of her restaurant are paintings by Theresa BrownGold, who paints portraits of "real people who live the social issues of the day" for her project called Art as a Social Inquiry. Having initially tackled immigration, BrownGold has now shifted her attention to the series, "Health Care Insurance in the United States," which chronicles the American system through the faces of it citizens.

As an employer, her own experiences with the health care system inspired BrownGold, who along with her husband, Marc, owns JustEat by BrownGold in the Buckingham Green shopping center, to examine the subject.

"The thing that strikes me the most is how complicated this is for

every individual," BrownGold said. "How many personal decisions are made about work based on health insurance? Where we live, what we do – the whole course of our lives is affected based on health insurance."

The series is intended to be inclusive, depicting what's good (a person with excellence insurance coverage for example) and bad (the consequences of not having health insurance) about the current health care system.

It pushes no agenda. Whether you're for health care reform or happy with the system as is, makes no difference to the artist, whose goal is to "encourage people to explore the topic freely, without fear that their opinions fall on the right or wrong side of the issue.

"I'm not advocating anything," BrownGold said. "I think the solution will come if we look at what real people are experiencing. That's what my project is all about ... let's just look."

BrownGold includes a small summary of the person's health insurance status, but keeps names of portrait subjects anonymous.

She has painted a handful of portraits so far, with subjects' health

care stories running the gamut. One is an insured waiter whose monthly coverage payment (\$505) is slightly lower than his mortgage payment (\$643). Another is an insured college student on his parent's plan. Other portraits tell the story of an uninsured waiter, an uninsured 23-year-old recent college graduate, a retired Catholic school teacher who is pays for coverage through the self-insured Archdiocese of Philadelphia and a business owner who attempts to alleviate health care costs by not hiring full-time employees.

"I'll paint someone who is on Medicare. I hope to paint people from prison. I hope to paint a heroine addict. I hope to paint everyone," BrownGold said. "I want to tell as many health insurance stories or lack of health insurance stories."

BrownGold hopes to produce 20 portraits by year's end, providing the public ample health care experiences as the debate grows.

"I'd like people to come away with more information about American's grappling with this issue," she said. "That's all I want, is for them to have more information and draw their own conclusions."

For information on participating in the project as a subject, visit artassocialinquiry.org.

JustEat by BrownGold recently started serving lunch. Call 215-794-1818.



Artist Theresa BrownGold stands next to her paintings, which aim to depict the face of health care in America.