

LIVING WELL IN WATERLOO REGION

GRAND

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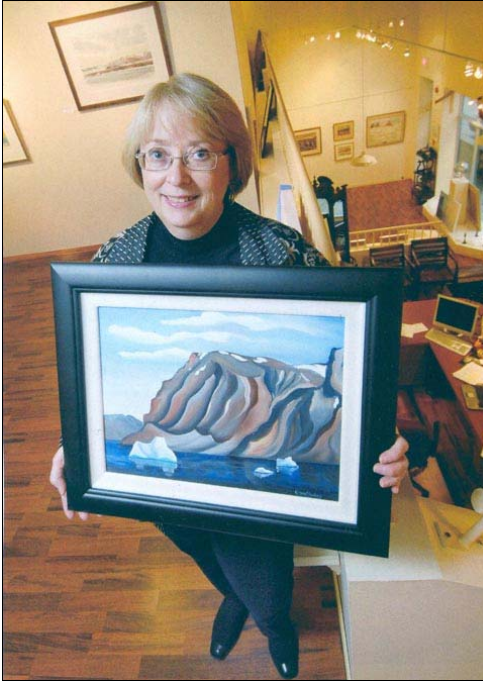
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ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT ISSUE

Finding a fit in the gallery business



Alison and David Burkett worked as management consultants before opening Gallery on the Grand in a small plaza which runs between King Street North and Regina Street North. During their business travels, they had the opportunity to visit many art galleries and saw a need for another in Waterloo Region.

They chose the name Gallery on the Grand because they own property on the Grand River on which they originally planned to build the gallery. But in spring 2001, when they were ready to establish a gallery, they decided the economy wouldn't support their building plans and looked for an alternative.

They envisioned a space which was open and inviting, where people could walk in and take their time looking around; a space big enough for people to see the art well. A space which had been a laundromat met their needs and the gallery, opened in the fall of 2001, is spacious and welcoming, with multiple levels leading to an open mezzanine.

In keeping with their vision, the space is also large enough to host events. "Part of what we do is hold functions that are not exhibitions," Alison explains. "People come in to rent the gallery to hold a party. It's a good way for us to promote art and to get people not to feel intimidated by art, to enjoy it."

Although the space proved to be good, Alison says they have been challenged by the lack of visibility from the street due to signage clutter on King Street North.

"Our ideal location is to move to the river," she says. "We are planning, if all goes well, to be there next summer." Since opening Gallery on the Grand, the Burketts have learned which artists sell and which subject matter their clients prefer. Although they represent artists from Toronto, Montreal and other countries, "we have a collection of local artists that we really like. People in Waterloo Region like local art."

GALLERY ON THE GRAND

Co-owner Alison Burkett found area residents prefer local artists, though Gallery on the Grand represents others, too. The Burketts have a site on the Grand River where they hope to build later this year.

Photography · Matthew McCarthy

Finding a fit in the gallery business

"We learned that Waterloo Region is a little more traditional and conservative than we had thought when we started."

As well, the Burketts have decided that specific artists' shows that open and close in a matter of weeks don't work for them, because clients seem to need months to reach a decision about purchasing art.

Consequently, Gallery on the Grand holds just a few shows a year, including exhibitions to introduce new artists a few months after they start showing in the gallery, and occasional larger, general exhibitions.

For instance, in November, Gallery on the Grand hosted the fourth stop on a cross-Canada tour of an exhibition called Arctic Quest.

In addition to revenue from art sales and framing, Gallery on the Grand recently entered the corporate market, leasing and renting art. After starting a program themselves in 2006, they recently teamed with the Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery, offering short-term art rentals or lease-to-own options.

"They have pieces that have been donated to them and we are going to promote and administer a rental program for

them," Alison explains.

The Kitchener Waterloo Art Gallery had its collection indexed a few years ago, and the Burketts can now access that database to draft proposals for corporate clients or individuals interested in renting art.

"If you haven't been in retail, it's amazing how (the business) goes up and down," Alison says. The influences of weather that is "too nice or too lousy" and fluctuations in the economy bring quiet times, which research for the leasing program helps fill.

In addition to selling art, Gallery on the Grand offers to hang their clients' purchases, whether they are new acquisitions or reframed works.

"I love going to people's homes," Alison says. "We've gotten into helping people rearrange some of the things they have. "(Running a gallery) is more fun than I had imagined. It's more of a community involvement. We get to meet different people in the community We get to know people more than I thought."

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