

# Local artist group opens new gallery space in GRC expansion

by Cheryl Brink  
Stittsville Weekender

Like proud parents, members of the Ottawa West Arts Association executive committee were bursting with enthusiasm last week as they caught their first glance of the walls that now hold their artwork.

Just one year ago, six passionate artists met to discuss the possibility of a permanent gallery in Stittsville. This Saturday, November 1, the Goulbourn Recreation Complex will unveil its expanded spaces that include two areas full of paintings, sculptures and photography by over 30 local creators.

"It's a true gift – I don't take it lightly," said Sue Perley-Robertson, committee chair and one of the original advocates for a gallery. "That's why we're going to make it the best we can."

The group first asked for their own room inside the GRC renovations, but were denied their request and instead offered 16 metres of wall space in the centre.

"It's a nice focal point for Stittsville," said Josie Braden, who is the exhibition coordinator for OWAA. "I can't believe we're lucky enough to have it. It's a gift."

Other members agreed that though private space is their long-term goal, the walls of the GRC are an ideal place to introduce the community to local art.

The introduction should be smooth; the executive committee has organized artists to be "sitters" at the gallery during busy times of the day to answer questions.

Ms. Perley-Robertson said the sitters will make the gallery much less intimidating.

"It's more accessible to the community that way," she said.

"They see how approachable art and artists can be," added Judy Dana, the sitting coordinator. "It puts a face to the gallery. It sort of connects everyone."

Aud Karin Sund, the publicity chair for the commit-



The OWAA executive committee members are ecstatic to see a dream come true as their art goes up on the walls of the expanded Goulbourn Recreation Complex. From left are: Sue Perley-Robertson, Josie Braden, John Madden, Louise Barker, Aud Karin Sund and Judy Dana. Photo by Cheryl Brink

tee, said spending time at the gallery is a small price to pay for artists to use the

space.

"It's a thank you for the opportunity to take part," she said.

More than 30 artists are participating in the first owaa gallery exhibition, which was open to the whole association. The membership tally is over 45 people and still growing; any of them will be able to submit pieces for future shows as they will be non-juried.

"It's exciting to watch it grow from a small group of six people who said 'We're going to get a gallery in Stittsville'," said Ms. Perley-Robertson about the quickly expanding association. She said getting the word out was difficult initially, but once people realized the gallery was definitely happening, they all wanted to participate.

The committee chair said while the original six artists began the process, many others have been involved in making it a success. Ms. Perley-Robertson said both Stittsville/Kanata West councillor Shad Qadri and city art programs manager Tessie Boretos were incredibly helpful.

"Everyone was very supportive from the start," she said. "(Mr. Qadri) said, 'They'll get the job done' and we did."

"It was all their doing," said the councillor. "All I did was give a little encouragement. The credit definitely has to go to the organizing

committee; I played a little bit of a role but the majority of work was done by them." All of that work was done in less than a year.

"We can hardly keep up with ourselves," said co-chair Louise Barker about how much they have accomplished so far.

Ms. Barker and Ms. Perley-Robertson spent days working on the association's bylaws and handbook, trying to include all suggestions while following guidelines. The association has met quite often for the last few months to discuss their logo, gallery name, membership fees and other issues.

Ms. Perley-Robertson added that while the executive has laid the foundation for OWAA, the entire group has voted on every decision.

"The fun part of it is meeting everyone and hearing their ideas," she said. "You can't do this by yourself; you have to have everyone's input."

John Madden, co-chair and secretary of the committee, said it has been a learning process as people from all different backgrounds and expertise have come together, including leaders from other Ottawa art clubs. He said dealing with the growing pains of a new association has been a challenge but also very exciting.

As OWAA grouped for a common goal, the executive committee said they are also

looking forward to bringing the village together in the new gallery.

"I want Stittsville to be known as an artistic community," said Ms. Perley-Robertson. "The most important thing is that it brings the community together."

The association hopes the new venue will pique the interest of young people as well – even if it's just a second glance on their way to hockey practice or swimming lessons.

"This is where it starts – it's very subliminal," said Ms. Perley-Robertson, adding that they want to foster appreciation for the arts without any pressure to buy, though the pieces will be for sale.

"In this particular venue I think the owaa gallery will get good recognition," said Coun. Qadri. "It adds colour and ambience where people will gather. It shows that city does support the arts."

Though the association has put all their energy into this opportunity, space of their own is still the long-term goal, as well as workshops and other art programs.

"I'm confident we'll progress toward a permanent gallery," said Ms. Perley-Robertson. "This is just the beginning. This isn't just it."

**The official owaa gallery opening is this Saturday, November 1, at 10 a.m.**

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