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Business of the Week

Station Gallery

By Chet Greason

When the town stepped in to save the local train station from demolition after VIA made it evident its future was on the chopping block, they saved a much-beloved structure nestled in an ideal location; and although the station has seen reduced service in subsequent years, it remains a staffed station in a system rife with automated kiosks.

But a little more than a year ago, the town began actively courting ideas to better utilize the space. Reed Needles leased the northern portion of the building for his antique repair business, Wheelwright. Artist Charles Sharun was occupying the southernmost office as his studio, and tapped fellow artist Cameron Porteous to lease the office next to his for a similar workspace.

The three put their heads together and considered what might be a good use for the rest of the space. Their idea? An art gallery. One that highlights the artists and craftspeople who live in St. Marys and the surrounding area.

The three got permission from the town for a pilot project that was funded out of pocket by the organizers. Blank free-standing exhibition walls were installed in front of the building's brickwork interior so as not to undermine the sensitive historic nature of the structure. Proper lighting was installed and exhibitors were contacted. The first show dealt with the reason the building was there in the first place: trains.

"People from all over came out," says Porteous. "We had models and photos, and giant locomotives from the model train club."

Fast forward a year and the gallery has helped to draw a number of tourists to the area. Sharun has since left the project, and Porteous and Needles have become co-curators, taking turns booking exhibits for the space.

Currently, the space is showcasing Click, an exhibition of some of the snaps produced by the local photo club known as the St. Marys Clicks. Prior exhibitions have included Stratford-based scratch-board artist Scott McKowen, nature photographer Herman Veenendaal, and water colourist Lisa Gerber-Plancke.



St. Marys Station Gallery co-curator Cameron Porteous leads a tour through the gallery's current exhibition, Click, which features photos taken by members of the St. Marys Clicks photography club.

Porteous tells the story of two women from Chicago who read about the McKowen exhibit and drove to St. Marys, staying at local B&Bs and catching a play at the theatre in Stratford while they were here. After they had left, Porteous says McKowen called him and asked him if he knew who they were.

"I said no," recalls Porteous. "Scott said that one of them was the former curator of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in Chicago."

That's when Porteous knew they had a real destination on their hands.

The Click show will remain open until Feb. 17. The next show will feature the work of Anna Koot, who uses wax to create her encaustic paintings. That show will run Feb. 23 – Mar. 26.

The St. Marys Station Gallery may also be gaining more floor space. Currently, the train ticket desk occupies a large space in one corner of the gallery. Porteous says plans are to move that desk into a booth that currently exists within the space that was specifically constructed to sell train tickets out of.

The gallery will then expand into the corner where the current desk is located.



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