

Member-run Fifth Avenue Art Gallery has been serving the community for four decades, sells a wide range of quality art and sculpture; event set for March 5

By Ken Datzman

If you have ever considered doing more to support local artists, now is the perfect time.

Arts organizations stimulate business and economic growth in a community.

"We're open for business and for browsing. We want the community to know that," said Renee Decator, president of the Fifth Avenue Art Gallery on Highland Avenue in the Eau Gallie Arts District of Melbourne.

She said the Fifth Avenue Art Gallery is a "safe environment, not crowded," and follows the safety protocols for social-distancing, mask-wearing, and other guidelines.

The Fifth Avenue Art Gallery hosts a themed exhibition each month, with a wide range of artwork including digital technology.

The member-owned and operated Fifth Avenue Art Gallery is one of the oldest organizations of its kind in the region. It was established in 1974.

Membership is open to professional artists and fine craftspeople residing and working in Melbourne and the surrounding areas.

"The Fifth Avenue Art Gallery was well-organized and structured in the beginning and that foresight has benefited its members through the years," said Decator, who attended the Artquest School of Art & Design in Ormond Beach and did continuing education at the Sarasota-based Ringling College of Art and Design.

"We are a co-op. Our members do all the work of operating this business on a day-to-day basis. We are a small business so we have to be creative in marketing and publicizing the Fifth Avenue Art Gallery."

An artist cooperative is an autonomous visual arts organization or association jointly owned and democratically controlled by its members.

Member Barbara Desrosiers handles publicity and marketing. "She is doing a great job on that front. We are very happy with the way the neighborhood and the community have responded," said Decator.

Two founding members of the Fifth Avenue Art Gallery — Nancy Crawford and Ellen Pavlakos — are still active in the organization, said Decator. Many of the members are nationally recognized for their work.

In addition to Decator, Crawford, Pavlakos, and Desrosiers, the Fifth Avenue Art Gallery members include: Michiel Bullock, Vicki Busby, Kenneth Castoro, Judy Edwards, Tricia Eisen,



BBN photo — Adrienne B. Roth

The Fifth Avenue Art Gallery, a member-owned and operated co-op on Highland Avenue in the Eau Gallie Arts District of Melbourne, is in its 47th year. The members, whose work is showcased in the gallery, all have different responsibilities running the business. Many of the members are nationally recognized for their artwork. From left, the members are: Barbara Desrosiers, publicity and marketing; Lori Pitten Jenkins, first vice president; and Renee Decator, president. They will host a First Friday Opening Reception from 5:30–8:30 p.m. on March 5 for the '100% Pure Florida' juried exhibition. The event is free and open to the public.

Lori Pitten Jenkins, Jim Kalupa, Witha Lacuesta, Mark Mittleman, Marlis Newman, Sue Tully, and Helen Wheatley. Each member has an equal vote in how the business is operated.

The Fifth Avenue Art Gallery was originally located on Fifth Avenue in Indialantic. It moved to its current site at 1470 Highland Ave. in the mid-1980s. The Fifth Avenue Art Gallery built its facility at that location as membership grew.

"The new location in the Eau Gallie Arts District has really expanded our horizon, especially when EGAD became a Florida Main Street program," said watercolorist Jenkins, Fifth Avenue Art Gallery's first vice president.

EGAD is entering its 11th year as a Florida Main Street program. These types of programs, of which there are more than 50 in the Sunshine State, have proven to be an effective economic

development tool for downtown business districts.

"The Main Street program has uplifted EGAD, that's when things started taking off and new businesses came here," said Jenkins, a graduate of Florida State University with a studio art degree. "That momentum continues today. An example is the new Pineapples (a multi-level dining and entertainment complex on West Eau Gallie Boulevard). And there are plans for a new boutique hotel in EGAD (to be developed by Northboro Builders). The Fifth Avenue Art Gallery is positioned to grow in the years ahead. We see big things coming in the future for EGAD."

Her paintings have been featured in a range of shows and publications. "A Tale of Two Tails," for instance, was published in "Splash 21, The Best of Water-

color in 2020." Also, "The World is Your Oyster" was featured in Florida Watercolor Society's 48th annual Juried Show. The Society has almost 1,000 members.

Jenkins is a signature member of the Florida Watercolor Society and the Southern Watercolor Society. Jenkins says it wasn't until 2005 that she "revisited the fact that she actually had some artistic talent. "I took a watercolor class at the Brevard Art Museum in 2005 and was hooked."

The Fifth Avenue Art Gallery is a venue that showcases and sells the members' work.

"Each member artist is given four panels in the gallery to display their work," said Decator. "All of our members are 2-D artists, with one exception. Ellen Pavlakos creates sculptures. The gallery art rotates every three months.

Please see Fifth Avenue Art Gallery, page 21

Fifth Avenue Art Gallery

Continued from page 13

Each artist uses a different medium — watercolor, oil, acrylic, photography, mixed medium. We have a little bit of everything here.”

Desrosiers, for example, produces art from her vast collection of photographs. Desrosiers, who holds a bachelor’s of fine arts degree from the University of Rhode Island, says her work has recently evolved. Her creations have transitioned from realistic watercolor to digital work.

“The introduction of the iPad has fulfilled a vision I had years ago of painting in the ‘air.’ I create images on my iPad, refine them on my computer, and then print them on a specific film.”

Desrosiers combines iPad painting with photography or creates images by hand that are then worked into a digital format to be finished in various mediums or transferred imaginary.

“I work with photographs I have taken over the years. I have thousands of photographs in my collection. First, I draw the image on my iPad. I modify it in Photoshop. I print it on film. Then I chemically transfer it from the film onto watercolor paper. It’s an interesting process,” she said.

Desrosiers has traveled the world — camera in hand — with her husband, now a retired military chaplain. She was able to travel afar, “courtesy of the

U.S. Air Force.”

She has been a member of the Fifth Avenue Art Gallery for about seven years. “I worked with the Air Force in publicity. So that is the type of experience I bring to this organization.”

Recently, the Fifth Avenue Art Gallery introduced the concept of the “pop-up exhibit,” said Decator. “We decided to open up space in the gallery for a guest artist of the month. Their artwork is displayed on six panels. These are walls. Beth Fairchild, a former member of the Fifth Avenue Art Gallery for many years who relocated to Vero Beach, is the guest artist for February.”

Decator said the Fifth Avenue Art Gallery also “engages with the community through different shows during the year. And we have hosted some artistically creative fundraisers to help different organizations. We like to bring in artists from outside our membership to participate in those fundraisers. We want to be a place where all artists can come and enjoy themselves.”

Decator, Jenkins and Desrosiers are winding down an exhibition at the Fifth Avenue Art Gallery titled “Open for Interpretation.” It closes Feb. 27. The exhibit, up front in the gallery, gives three distinctly different views of the same subject.

Decator, who grew up in Daytona Beach, utilizes collage elements in vibrant and striking colors “to fire up the viewer’s imagination.” Jenkins, a Florida native who grew up in Indialantic, is an internationally known watercolorist with a sharp sense of irony. Her watercolors can best be described as “intense.” And Desrosiers approaches her work from a technical point of view.

Each month throughout 2021 the Fifth Avenue Art Gallery will host an exhibition in the front section of its facility. Each month there is a First Friday Opening Reception before each exhibition. The reception is free of charge and open to the public.

From March 1 to March 27, the Fifth Avenue Art Gallery will be showing the juried exhibit “100% Pure Florida.” The show highlights the varied talents of local, regional, and statewide artists. “Pure Florida” refers to the artists’ residence.

The First Friday Opening Reception will be hosted from 5:30–8:30 p.m. on March 5. “We usually have musical entertainment as part of the reception,” said Jenkins.

The full-year’s schedule of exhibitions is posted at FifthAvenueArtGallery.com, or call (321) 259–8261.

One of the most interesting creations

a member of the Fifth Avenue Art Gallery has taken on recently is Decator’s “Stars & Stripes” flag project.

Every November, Decator participates in a local art festival and show called “Artworks.” It is unique in that it requires the artists to share their art medium techniques.

Decator decided to demonstrate her mixed media collage by inviting show visitors to participate by painting, collaging, or stenciling one of the pre-cut sections she had prepared, and create the American flag.

Veterans Day was two weeks before this art show and many of her family members and friends had served in the military.

Fifty to 60 visitors of all ages collaborated to create the elements of the collage. Some of the visitors were veterans. Some were children or grandchildren of veterans.

“After the art show, I took the flag back to my studio to finish filling in all the blanks. I created the stars using paper maché and found some very cool old stamps from the 1950s and 1960s that brought some historical markers to the piece.”

Desrosiers said “artists are some of the most passionate people you’ll ever meet. We love what we do.”



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