

Art gallery celebrates local talent and history

By Amy Cavalier

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Rochester, N.Y. — A sculptor and professor at Monroe Community College, Susan Ferrari Rowley has no problems finding venues for her work in big cities like New York City. Rochester is a different story.

"This is where I live and work and teach sculpture," said the Scottsville resident. "I don't need a gallery, just a place to show the work to the city I live in."

So, when the owners of the Renaissance Art Gallery on St. Paul Street in downtown Rochester contacted Ferrari Rowley about showing her work there, she took one look at the space and jumped at the opportunity.

Described as "abstract minimalism" by Carol DiMarzo, business director of the Renaissance Art Gallery, Ferrari Rowley's work will be on display in the gallery, located at 74 St. Paul Street, from Sept. 14 through Oct. 23.

The Renaissance Art Gallery is the brain child of Reva Riley of Penfield and Carol DiMarzo of Pittsford.

"I think what they're doing is very brave," Ferrari Rowley said. "They went into one of the most difficult fields. Whether you're going to make art or sell it, it's not for the timid."

Exhibiting the work of Ferrari Rowley is just one of the ways the women are trying to attract more attention to their gallery and the artists work that they have on display. The gallery celebrates its one-year anniversary with music and refreshments from 6 to 9 p.m. Friday, Sept. 14.

Riley and DiMarzo met one another through their husbands and quickly discovered they both had a love for art. Neither knew much about it, though, other than what they learned purchasing artwork for their own homes. DiMarzo was formerly a school teacher. Riley worked in human resources. Both are now retired and running the art gallery full-time.

Over dinner one evening more than a year ago, Riley told DiMarzo that she had a business plan for an art gallery.

DiMarzo's husband, Anthony DiMarzo, owned the building at 74 St. Paul Street. Although there are plans to turn the former H.H. Warner building into lofts in the future, up until a year ago, the space was empty. The DiMarzo's were looking for a high-end use for the building.

Circa 1884, it is one of the premiere cast iron buildings in the country, said DiMarzo.

H.H. Warner sold Mosler safes and the building housed his medical laboratory in the 19th century. With about 2,500 to 3,000-square feet of space, the ground floor of the Warner building was a perfect canvas on which to paint the women's vision.

Next up was finding the artwork. The women began contacting artists and visiting their studios and homes to hand-select the art for their gallery.

"The surprising thing we found going into these people's homes and studios was that they had no place to really show case their work locally," said DiMarzo.

Most of the artists featured at the Renaissance Art Gallery are from the greater Rochester area and all the work is original. You name it, they've got it — oils, watercolor, acrylic, pastels, ceramics, blown glass, pen and ink and more, with over 300 pieces of artwork on display.

"We tried to pick pieces that would appeal to the general Rochester population," said Riley. "We have a good mix from contemporary to traditional."

The women say they've learned a lot about running an art gallery by just doing it. "It isn't like going to work," said DiMarzo. "It's like an adventure everyday."

They've also had to get creative when it comes to drawing in an audience. From June through May, they offer noontime lectures, featuring a demonstration and lecture by a local artist, plus a box lunch. They've also had fund-raisers, wine tastings and a Christmas market.

In 2008, the rest of the space in the building will be converted into 60 lofts. With it, they hope, will come more traffic to the gallery.

"That's 60 people who need artwork," said Riley.

"Please Lord," said DiMarzo, "let it happen."

Fast facts:

- Who: The Renaissance Art Gallery
- What: presents the work of Susan Ferrari Rowley, a professor at Monroe Community College and Scottsville resident
- When: The exhibit runs Sept. 14 through Oct. 23. Gallery hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday. The exhibit opens with an anniversary celebration from 6 to 9 p.m. Friday, Sept. 14
- Where: 74 St. Paul Street
- For more information: call (585) 423-8235 or visit www.rochesterrenaissanceartgallery.com

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