

DREAM TO REALITY
THE STORY BEHIND-THE-SCENES OF
THE STUDIOS ON THE PARK

Speak to people who represent the local public, the Paso Robles city government, the Paso Robles Main Street Association, the local wine industry and the restaurant business and many will agree that the missing link in the North County has been the presence of the “arts”.

Speak to Paso Robles resident/artist Anne Laddon and you discover that it has been her long held dream to see an art center in Paso Robles. She explains:

“I have thought, over the last several years, that Paso Robles and the North County have an incredible number of talented, accomplished artists. It seemed to me that, with every passing year, we needed the opportunity to share our passion for the landscape, for the area, and for the arts with the larger community and we have not had that opportunity.”

As a young graphic designer living just outside of Washington, DC, she was given an opportunity that would change her life forever. Led by visionary Marian Van Landingham, she and other founding artists joined together to renovate an abandoned torpedo factory into working studio spaces for artists and in 1974, the Torpedo Factory Art Center opened to the public. Anne soon began printmaking and held a studio/gallery at the Torpedo Factory for ten years. Nurtured by the artists surrounding her and the public audience, she created hundreds of limited edition silkscreen prints, posters, and greeting cards. Her works featured bright color, bold design, and, occasionally, “pop” subjects such as cameras and typewriters. Today, more than thirty years later, the Torpedo Factory Art Center is home to over 160 professional artists who work, exhibit, and sell their art.

Anne never forgot her experience at the Torpedo Factory and the profound impact it had on her development as an artist. Indeed, her passion for sharing the creative process with others resulted from her time at the Torpedo Factory and is what motivated her to pursue the Studios on the Park project.

But it has been a long, arduous road from dream to reality.

The question of how to recreate a smaller version of a center for the visual arts had been running through Anne’s mind since 1985

when she first moved to Paso Robles, married local Rancher Jim Irving and raised two children. Painting the local landscape, barns, hayfields and downtown buildings over the years has deepened her love and respect for the North County.

In May of 2007, Anne was sitting on a bench in the downtown park in Paso Robles that is the heart of the community. Looking up she saw a "For Lease" sign in the old Pioneer Auto Parts building that faces West on the park. "That", she said to her friend, "is where the art center should be." Not knowing where this would take her, Anne made a call to Steve Encell, owner of the much sought after building at 1130 Pine Street.

For seven months the two of them batted around the idea. Anne remembers,

"It really was wonderful that two such people from totally opposing walks of life - the arts and the automotive business - could come together and reach a mutually beneficial agreement."

Anne's infectious smile and upbeat nature belie an underlying passion and steely determination that has served her and the community well as she joined with others to make that dream into a reality. The one story existing building is currently being renovated and will result in what is being called Prelude: Studios On the Park. It will open in late Spring 2009 at 1130 Pine Street. In addition to artists' workshops, it will contain classrooms and exhibits. Future plans include a complete rebuilding of the structure as a two story art center. Laddon comments further:

"This project is called Studios because that is what it is. We are in working studios, open studios, in front of the public, creating art. We are not just art galleries, which is what most people are used to seeing. We want the public to come in and see things being made, and to wonder how things are made and to ask questions. We want the public to see fiber artists weaving some fabulous new artsy shawl. We want to have the public see someone making a beautiful vase from a lump of clay. We want the public to come in and watch a sculptor create something out of a tree stump. And, of course, those of us that are painters would love to share our passion, which is to create a two dimensional, exciting painting from white canvas."

When Anne invited members of the community to sign on to the

Board of Directors, she had firm criteria in mind. She was seeking experience and knowledge across a broad range of skills that would include business, finance, real estate development, construction, public relations, community involvement, fund-raising and city government expertise. Additionally, a love of the arts was seen as a requirement.

The immediate tasks at hand for the fledgling Board included the creation of a non-profit corporation and the development of a strategic and business plan. Frequent meetings with Paso Robles city officials led to network of support. The most recent result of this collaboration is the Inaugural Festival of the Arts taking place on Memorial Day weekend. In addition, Board members had many meetings with the architect and city planners to finalize plans for the future two story building.

As Anne reached out to individuals possessing these skill sets, she felt fortunate to receive an unqualified “yes!” from those approached.

The current Board of Directors of Studios on the Park is made up of Newlin Hastings, Barbara Partridge, Deborah Baldwin, Phyllis Frank, Will Bateman, Elizabeth Hastings, Elisabeth Sarrow, Elaine Bateman, Jim Irving and Mark Sarrow. Assisting as Strategic Campaign Manager and Secretary is Sasha Irving.

The building itself has its own story as City Planner Ed Whisenand explains,

“This building was very important in early Paso Robles because it was a Packard dealership. Its location on Spring Street which was the former highway between San Francisco and Los Angeles was a prime stopping place for people along that route. The auto dealership was located there for years and was then converted to an auto parts store. The front façade, which dates from the 30s, has been deemed to be historic. It is one of the few remaining examples of this very simple, false front type facades and will remain intact, along with other architectural elements.”

With her boundless energy, Anne and her team continue to work tirelessly to create an organization that would not only be home to the visual arts in the North County but that would provide one of the few open studio environments in the country and be the premier organization of its kind in California.

In a very exciting move, Studios on the Park has partnered with the city of Paso Robles for the Inaugural Festival of the Arts which will take place over Memorial Day weekend of 2009.

Studios on the Park, Inc. is a non profit organization dedicated to providing a creative, educational and transformational experience to enhance the understanding and appreciation of the visual arts. It has a commitment to make the creative process available to the public and offers its visitors a unique open studio environment. Studios features artists working in a variety of media. It offers educational programs for children and adults and quality exhibitions by regional , national and international artists

For more information:

www.studiosonthepark

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