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A space where art-making flourishes

By **JOSEPH DALTON**, Special to the Times Union

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Although it keeps a rather low profile, New York Expressive Arts (formerly Glass Lake Studios) has been a continually operating arts space in the Capital Region since 1986. It has been a quiet presence for several reasons.

Its location at 4 Central Ave. is in back of the building and on the second floor, above the Center for Nia and Yoga.

And it's more in the business of creating art than showing it.

"We're about the process of art, though we do make finished art," says director Denie Whalen. "We provide an environment (in which) art-making is inevitable."

A 20-year resident of Albany, Whalen is a registered occupational therapist who received training in Intermodal Expressive Arts at the European Graduate School in Switzerland. She recently replaced founder Markus (nee Geoffrey Scott) Alexander, who moved to Canada, although he returns regularly to NYEA as a guest instructor.

"Our mission is to provide both a nurturing environment and sensitive guidance for individuals and groups who wish to explore the inherent value of the arts in their personal and professional lives. We place the power of the arts and art-making at the center of human existence," Whalen says.

A visit to NYEA is like taking a dip in a calm pool after fleeing the noise and hustle of Central Avenue. The place is decorated in soothing earth tones and two small front galleries are dedicated to showing art, most of which was created on site. The larger main room has several cushions laid about in a circle, with drums and other small percussion instruments scattered around. This is where groups usually begin a session with Whalen, before going into the back workrooms, which are filled with all manner of art supplies.

NYEA is a home for creative disciplines other than visual art, but the emphasis seems to be on painting, and usually with tempera paints -- the same kind that grade school children use, "except we buy them in big jugs," says Whalen. "It's not expensive and precious. It frees creativity, and we're always surprised by the wonderful art that arrives."

A variety of workshops are offered through NYEA, including an eight-month training program in expressive arts, as well as painting classes for adults and private coaching sessions. "Our emphasis is on low skills but high sensitivity," says Whalen. "I don't teach techniques, but I can free up people's stuckness."

Special programs are also given to clients of Next Step, a women's recovery program, and the Clearview Center for mentally challenged adults. Both facilities display artwork made by their clients at NYEA.

Since the advent of First Fridays, NYEA has been showing more of its art to the public. Look for displays in the atrium of their building as well as future openings upstairs in the gallery proper.

For more information, call 434-2412 or visit <http://www.newyorkexpressivearts.com>.

The mayor's other life

Among the 42 listings of art openings and other happenings for the most recent Troy Night Out on May 25, there was a noteworthy announcement of "art by our Mayor Harry Tutunjian" at Francesca's Cafe. The five-year-old eatery at 461 Broadway is owned and operated by Tutunjian's wife and usually only serves breakfast and lunch. A stroll to the place that Friday night led to a dark and closed facility.

Troy Night Out organizer Karen Schlesinger admits that she did not confirm the listing but decided to include it rather than risk offending City Hall. Francesca Tutunjian says she had every intention of being open, but family duties called -- her sister had just delivered a baby.

As for the mayor's art, it's on permanent display at Francesca's. If you've had a meal there, you may have even sat on some of it.

Prior to his election four years ago, Tutunjian ran an auto body repair shop. In his spare time, he made some creative furnishings out of car parts. A booth at Francesca's uses his "Cadillac Couch," in which the trunk of a vintage Caddy is replaced with two vinyl auto seats. There's also a floor lamp made of a tailpipe and an oversized desk lamp made from a fender. Hanging in one of the windows is an abstract painting on glass, also made by the mayor.

"He's very creative, but unfortunately doesn't have a lot of time for that anymore," says Troy's first lady.

The next Troy Night Out is Friday, June 30.

Washington County events

There's more than farming going on these days in Washington County. Here are a few visual art happenings to check out on your next country drive:

*The annual Open Studios Weekend runs July 21-22 and features 12 artists. The painters include Joan Duff-Bohrer, Leslie Anne Peck, and Virginia McNeice, and sculptors Serena Kovalosky and Gyula Varosy. Most of the sites are in Greenwich and Cambridge. For more information go to: <http://www.openstudioswashingtoncounty.com>.

*The North Main Gallery in Salem, formerly known as 220 Arts, has a summer-long show by Dona Ann McAdams titled "The Year of the Horse: Photographs from the Barn and the Meet." For more information visit: <http://www.artinsalem.com>.

*"What do you value in Southern Washington County" is the name of a photo exhibition, sponsored by the Greenwich Citizen's Committee, on display in the Greenwich Free Library, 148 Main St. Call 692-7157 for information.

*Salem Art Works, the former-farm-turned-artists colony, has issued a handsome catalog outlining its summer programs and reviewing some of its past activities. To request a copy, call 854-7674.

Joseph Dalton is a local freelance writer who contributes regularly to the Times Union.

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