
*"I personally feel art is a powerful form of expression and I've seen it transform people's ideas and opinions."
- Mayor Jamie Snook, Happy Valley-Goose Bay.*

Hang 'em High: Art at the Town Hall Level

By Robin McGrath

It has taken more than two years, but remarks made by VANL member Mavis Penney at the provincial government's pre-budget consultations have finally born fruit. Penney attended the consultations to make an impassioned plea for more money for the visual arts community, noting among other things the need for more gallery space in the province. Her comments seemed to have fallen on deaf ears in St. John's, but Happy Valley-Goose Bay mayor Jamie Snook, who was also present, listened, remembered, and acted on her advice.

"We happened to be at the same meeting," Snook told the Labradorian newspaper, "so as a council we took it upon ourselves to budget some money and offer our town council chambers as a space." Council took advantage of renovations being planned for the Town Hall to install a proper hanging system and lighting and to line up the first two exhibits.

Mayor Snook sees art exhibitions with different themes and ideas as "an opportunity to tell a story in the council chambers and help identify who we are as a people in the community." Snook went on to say that art helps people "focus on what's important."

The first two exhibits are being organized by the Tamarack Camera Club (TCC), but the gallery will be available to all visual artists, thanks to a versatile hanging system and track lighting. Although there is currently no hanging fee being offered, TCC member John Graham says the club is working out the details related to the sale of the photos that are currently on display.

TCC is considering auctioning the photos as a fundraiser, with the proceeds to be split between the photographers and a charity to be selected by the TCC and the Town. Graham has been in touch with VANL and was supplied with CARFAC's fee schedule as well as advice on fair and equitable art auctions. "There are no hard and fast rules in place and the town is open to suggestions," said Graham.

Happy Valley-Goose Bay currently has no art gallery or dedicated museum space, and recent closures have reduced the number of commercial stores for arts and crafts, so a properly designed space for displaying art work is badly needed. Mayor Snook's initiative is greatly appreciated by artists in the area and they hope to work out a professional code of practice with the Town Council in the near future.



The September 20th launch of a public art project in the Happy Valley-Goose Bay Town Council chambers. From left to right art Aimee Chaulk, Mavis Penney, Deputy Mayor Cora Hamel-Pardy, Dr. Martha McDonald, Mayor Jamie Snook, and John Graham