

By Luke Hendry

THE INTELLIGENCER

REDNERSVILLE — Donnah Cameron and her friends never paid much attention to the neighbourhood painter.

Growing up in Owen Sound, they would pass by the friendly man as he painted local scenery.

"Tom only lived about four or five blocks away. We probably thought he was odd," chuckled Cameron, herself now a painter. "Nobody was carin'."

But it wouldn't be long before they and countless others would know the man's work and his name: Tom Thomson.

Schoolgirl Cameron, meanwhile, was getting good marks on her elementary school art projects. It would be her early education — not a brush with a the master artist — that lead to a long life of creating and teaching art.

"I've been an artist forever," the 90-year-old with 24 great-grandchildren said Tuesday in an interview at Cameron's Art Gallery. Her home studio and gallery is located at 1808 Rednersville Rd., 2.5 kilometres west of Rednersville and a short drive southwest of Belleville.

Today and tomorrow, she and daughters Donnah Cameron II and Mairi Redner are holding an open house at the gallery Nov. 13-14 from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

She spends three or four days a week creating watercolour paintings, painted pillowcases, and quilts.

But no matter what kind of art you intend to do, Cameron said, drawing is essential.

"It's the basis of everything," she said. "You've got to be able to draw what you see — even a cup and saucer."

She met her late husband Allan, a portrait painter in an art class.

In 1939, shortly after they were married, the couple moved to Point Anne east of Belleville. A decade later, they bought a farm outside Rednersville.

Cameron's art took a temporary back seat to farm and family life. Before getting married she'd been trained as a hairdresser, and gave haircuts to supplement the family income.

"Some people'd come off the tractor and get it done, then get back on the tractor and get it dry," she smiled.

Her brother, who was wounded during the Second World War, had been trained after the conflict to weave. He passed the skill on to his sister, who eventually started a sideline business making clothes, especially dresses.

"I have people in Belleville today say, 'Don't forget, you made my wedding suit,'" Cameron said. "My husband used to say, 'Donnah, no more people comin' here tryin' on clothes at supper time.'"

As daughters Jean, Anne, Mairi, and Donnah grew up, their mother found more time for her art.

"When my girls were going to school I used to teach summer classes," she said. "We sat out here on the lawn with a bunch of kids."

The Camerons had built a new

home, the current gallery, in 1961. An old house they'd used as a chicken coop was converted into a studio for both artists.

When Loyalist College began offering continuing education (non-credit) courses, Donnah quickly became a popular art instructor. That role continued until two years ago.

"She taught all three semesters for a lifetime," said Loyalist program

development officer Sharon Campbell. "She's an absolutely wonderful teacher."

"People were drawn to her classes," Campbell said. "She gave a lot of watercolour painters in our area their very first lessons."

Cameron organized class trips to paint on location; an annual summer excursion to the Barry's Bay area east of Algonquin Provincial Park was especially popular,