

Legion hands Red Door Gallery Dec. 31 eviction notice

By Cynthia Gamble
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Red Door Gallery will have to find a new location if it wants to continue operations, after receiving an eviction notice from the Royal Canadian Legion, Branch 120 Georgetown.

"It is hugely frustrating that we now face a move and a break in the momentum of all that has been achieved," said Red Door Gallery manager Kate McGowan in a press release issued on Thursday. "Our volunteers' hard work has built a large and loyal audience, a brand and a highly successful gallery in the downtown core. We now begin our search for a new home and we will announce any news on our website and Facebook page."

The Red Door Gallery (RDG) was founded under an umbrella group of local artists, the Halton Hills Cultural Roundtable, the Legion and the Downtown Georgetown BIA. The Legion membership had voted to let HHCR to write a grant application to the Ontario Trillium Foundation and received \$132,000 for one year to convert the Legion's unused annex into a gallery —about \$70,000 to \$80,000— and to improve the washroom facilities in the Legion.

"We remain grateful to the members of the Legion who allowed this (the Red Door Gallery) to happen. It was a brave thing to do," said Beatrice Sharkey, HHCR executive director.

The bottom line for the Legion is the club's inability to sustain the costs of subsidizing the space for the Red Door Gallery (RDG). The space was provided rent-free, except for \$350 per month for utilities. The decision was made after a Zone Legion audit of the local club's finances.

"It is a shame but we have to survive too," said Legion president Sue Thomas. "They keep saying they are non-profit and we keep saying we understand because we are one too. But we're a Legion and our priority is our commitment to our veterans, the veterans' families and to the kids."

"We did it for one year, and we paid dearly," she said, adding that it was a decision of the membership to try it for one year, and again their decision to end the deal. The Legion branch has approximately 460 active and non-active members. In October, a letter was sent to RDG requesting the rent increase and a record of insurance, asking for a reply back by Oct. 26. It did not come, so the eviction letter was sent in mid-November.

Danny Edwards, liaison for the branch, said the Legion has fulfilled its obligations under the one-year Trillium grant requirements. Sharkey stated Red Door Gallery also fulfilled its grant obligations, but it was always understood that in the signed agreement by all par-



The Red Door Gallery is looking for a new home after receiving an eviction notice from the Georgetown branch of the Royal Canadian Legion. The gallery is located in an annex of the Legion at 127 Mill St.

ties there was a business plan with a two- and three-year commitment with graduated rents.

Edwards said the club is asking market value rent of \$2,000, which includes utilities for the space.

Sharkey said their team had consulted a commercial real estate agent, who estimated a \$1,200 to \$1,500 rent range, and so were shocked and stunned by the \$2,000 rent request.

Edwards said the Legion provided to Red Door Gallery special wall paint, artist hooks, plinths and lighting for the 1,400 sq. ft. annex, plus provided \$3,000 in start-up funds. As well, the current Legion lead-

ership was frustrated that the RDG expected the Legion— a non-profit club— to continue to provide the space rent-free or low-rent, without a lease, and even asked the club to provide insurance, cleaners, security cameras, wireless, access to the Legion's garbage bins and snow clearing service.

"We can't afford to carry them and that was the recommendation from our Zone audit," said Edwards. "We do not have surplus funds."

But Sharkey says those amenities were offered to RDG by the previous Legion leadership, and that RDG had attempted to negotiate the years two and three leases when they were stunned by the \$2,000 rent demand. They had never been asked to sign a lease before, she said.

Edwards said Red Door Gallery has not approached them since the eviction notice but Sharkey again disputes that, saying that's when the Georgetown BIA and the Mayor's Office became involved in negotiations.

Red Door Gallery, which opened in Dec. 2014, has shown 15 art exhibits, a juried show with work by artists from across Halton Region, held six major events, including a mu-

sician-led fundraiser for ALS and numerous music and spoken-word evenings.

"Downtown Georgetown needs a diverse offering of businesses, and places for local residents and visitors to visit and enjoy. We will work hard to keep the great asset of Red Door Gallery in the downtown BIA if at all possible," said Wendy Farrow-Reed, Manager, Downtown Georgetown BIA in the Red Door Gallery press release.



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R.H.A.D.

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