

## New Main St. gallery to feature works of 6 artists

*Galactic's grand opening June 17*

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For six years, Milton residents have been driving past a red and black sign on Main Street that reads 'Galactic Art Glass Studio' and wondering what's inside.

And with its 'open by appointment or by chance' hours, finding out hasn't been the easiest thing to do.

It wasn't that husband and wife owners Virginia Wilson Toccalino and Tony Toccalino wanted to be secretive, but rather that it wasn't possible for the couple to tend to their craft and serve the public at the same time.

Now all that's about to change. On June 17, the public's invited to stop by between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. for the grand opening of The Artisans Gallery, a new artists' co-operative.

Although the location will continue to be home to the glass studio, the front of the store will house an artisans' gallery featuring the works of six local artists.

### Variety of mediums

Residents will be able to browse wildlife paintings, pottery, stained glass, specialty bath products, blown glass collectibles and leather products for horses and pets.

"With all the growth in town and the changing face of Milton, we became aware there was a good opportunity to have an artists' co-op," Wilson Toccalino said. "I think it's something Milton is ready for."

She added they wanted a wide range of artisans so shoppers would have a wide variety of items from which to choose.

And if the couple happens to be working their magic blowing glass when visitors stop



**GROUPING THEIR TALENTS:** These artists eagerly await the opening of Main Street's Galactic Art Glass Studio.

by, they're more than welcome to watch from an observation area, Wilson Toccalino said.

Visiting the store provides a chance to purchase something that's truly unique, Wilson Toccalino said.

There's something exciting about the words 'one of a kind'. But, in a day and age when cheap, mass-produced merchandise is the norm, it's not unusual for people to balk at the prices of original art.

"Handmade artwork is more expensive than what the average person is used to paying," Wilson Toccalino explained.

She said she hopes the Artisans Gallery will succeed in informing people how much time and effort goes into hand-made pieces.

The artists joining the Toccalinos are Barb VanSickle, Annkristine Hedlund, Suzanne LaSalle, Laura Kingsbury and Jennifer Smith.

Barb VanSickle has worked as a ceramic

artist since 1998. Her work includes functional pottery, garden ceramics and raku murals, which draw from traditional techniques.

Annkristine Hedlund's love of horses has transformed into a career creating unique leather goods for horses, dogs, cats and their owners such as collars, leashes, belts and bracelets. The pieces feature semiprecious stones and crystals, and most are crafted of bridal leather.

Hedlund said she's excited about working together with other artisans.

"Most of us would (otherwise) have to do small shows," she said. "This way it gives you a home."

Suzanne LaSalle creates stained glass pieces ranging from large wall hangings to small tea light holders to butterflies for the garden.

She specializes in the copper foil technique, in which she melds together pieces she's cut from large sheets of decorative glass.

Something LaSalle said she enjoys about her craft is the fact each piece looks different depending on the way the light hits it.

### Commissioned work available

Customers can choose from the pieces she's already created or bring a photo of their favourite car, house or pet and let her turn it into something that'll brighten up any home.

Wildlife biologist Laura Kingsbury has been painting professionally for more than 20 years, working mostly in watercolours, but also in acrylics and pastels.

She's become well known for her sensitive portrayals of native wildlife, especially songbirds, and has been an avid birdwatcher for three decades.

"I know my subjects really well," Kingsbury said.

Her limited edition prints have been presented by the Canadian government to the president of Zambia, Kenneth Kuanda, and Boris Yeltsin, president of the Russian Federation.

Jennifer Smith founded Tree of Life herbal bath and beauty products 10 years ago, offering decorative soaps that use herbs, clays, essential oils and other natural additives. These products are now available at Artisans Gallery individually or in gift baskets.

As for the Toccalinos, Virginia and Tony use centuries-old techniques to create Filigrana-style hand blown glass. Jewelry, paperweights, blown glass balls and icicle ornaments are among the items for sale.

The Artisans Gallery is located at 781 Main St. E., units 26 and 27. For more information, visit [www.galacticglass.ca/artisans-gallery.html](http://www.galacticglass.ca/artisans-gallery.html).

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