



HEROES - Over the Latcham Gallery's 25 years, hundreds of volunteers have contributed their time and ideas. Representing these art heroes are Bud Sanderson (left), Jim Sanders (right), and Jane Warren, who graces the "Meditation Throne" created by Ron Baird, the Gallery's first director in 1979. The sculpture is featured in the Gallery's 25th anniversary exhibition.

Volunteers are heroes

The lifeblood of the Latcham Gallery, as with any arts organization or any non-profit group for that matter, is its volunteers. We gathered three of them together to talk about what the Gallery means to this community.

They call Bud Sanderson "the happy hanger". For the Latcham's quarter-century, he has always been there to help the curator mount the exhibits.

"I was on the library board in 1979 when we created this place," he says. "I was just retiring after 32 years of teaching, and it was an opportunity to keep making a good contribution to the community. Over the years, I've met so many wonderful, talented people through the Gallery, and lots of them are good friends. We're very lucky to have this place."

Jane Warren is also an ex-teacher, for years the head of the art department at Stouffville Secondary. Every year the Gallery would mount an exhibit of her students' best art.

"What an invaluable resource, what an incredible experience for those kids," says Jayne, now a member of the Gallery board who "sits" the exhibitions almost every week.

"Some of those students went on to fine arts programs at university, and they were the only ones who knew how to put

together a show, how to hang it, how to promote it. They were teaching the other kids!"

Jim Sanders was also a teacher (contrary to appearances, the Latcham's volunteers do come from many other walks of life). Over the years, he's seen how vital the Gallery is to the town's intellectual life.

"Art is how new ideas get communicated," he says. "It's so important to have a place where people are stimulated to think about their world. It challenges the community."

"If the Gallery wasn't here, there wouldn't be nearly as much art on people's walls in this community, and that's a fact," says Bud. "People learn to love art here, and they learn to appreciate so many different styles and media."

"The gallery is maybe better known beyond the boundaries of Whitchurch-Stouffville than it is here," says Jane. "It's well respected across Ontario."

The Latcham Gallery didn't exist 25 years ago. Now, thanks to the hundreds of volunteers who have poured their energy and creativity through its doors over the years, it's hard to imagine Stouffville without it.

Latcham: a brief history

Twenty-five years ago, the space presently occupied by the Latcham Gallery was a community room attached to the Whitchurch-Stouffville Public Library.

"It was used for a lot of things," recalls artist Lynda Baird, "but occasionally artists would rent it to hang exhibitions, and that's what we did early in 1979."

By "we" Lynda refers to her husband and frequent artistic collaborator Ron Baird, whose large sculptures created with Lynda enjoy an international reputation.

"The exhibit drew a lot of people, and it gave some members of the library board a great idea," says Lynda. "Ron agreed to be the first director, and he virtually gave up a year of his career to do it. We nearly starved to death!"

An art committee of the library board was formed, grants were obtained from the Town and the Ontario Arts Council, and the Gallery opened its first exhibition on Sept. 12, 1979. It was named for local businessman and philanthropist Art Latcham, who

donated the library building and others to the Town, including the Latcham Hall on Park Drive.

For almost 20 years the Gallery thrived under the aegis of the library, with a large volunteer base and a growing reputation among artists and aficionados.

Then, in 1998, the library saw a need to expand, and the Gallery was suddenly closed to make room. Supporters in the community determined to keep the Gallery alive, and within six months, it had reopened further east on Main Street in a storefront location, and became an independent non-profit organization. It secured a multi-year Trillium grant in 2000 to keep it thriving.

Life comes full circle. After the library moved to its new location in 2001, the Gallery was invited by the Town (still owner of the building) to return to its original home. It gladly did so.

For 25 years the Latcham Gallery has been at the centre of cultural life in our town. With your support, it will continue to be so for decades to come.

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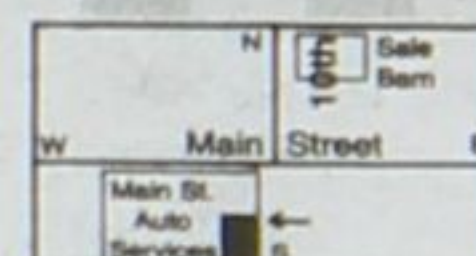
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