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Artists meet to share their visions

By Linda Pharr / for South County News
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Photo Linda Pharr / for South County News

Collette Edmunds shows Katie Berggren and Pix Basso, Kalama Art Association members, some of her artwork during a demonstration at her Kalama home last week.

KALAMA --- The very air was charged with enthusiasm as the women shared ideas and sources, suppliers and philosophies last week at a local restaurant. It was all about art.

The once-a-month gatherings of the Kalama Art Association bond a small group of women whose zeal for art drives them to network passionately.

"Our group is informal and has an interest in supporting local artists (and) sharing info that we can each use," said Katie Berggren, president of the association. "Some of us are working on getting our art into the market, into shows. Others are just getting started and would like to learn and share about art media and techniques."

She was joined by Marie Wise, Pix Basso and Collette Edmunds, all Kalama artists.

The get-together underscored how much the women enjoy meeting and sharing ideas. Topics like marketing and creative means for displaying paintings were discussed enthusiastically around the table.

"One of the great things is sharing techniques and (art) secrets," Berggren said of the meetings. "It can be a vacuum at home" she said, and the association provides a

place to network, to share successes and "things you discover" about art.

Nestled among the networking talk were morsels about where to buy expensive art supplies inexpensively (Home Depot), where to find well-made art frames (Craig's List,) and innovative places to show one's art. Artists need to "think outside the box" when it comes to showcasing their art for sale, the members said. An artist today not only considers a gallery for her art, but also a café, or a baby boutique or a florist shop, Berggren said. Places to display art have expanded beyond the traditional sites, she said. "It is a combination of networking and being creative" about finding places to show art, the artist said.

The group also had a philosophical discussion on pricing their art, how to determine cost and how much to charge and why, whether to mark up the price or to price to "try to meet the bills that are coming in," Edmunds said.

The association began meeting at the Kalama Odd Fellows Hall around 2004 with about 12 members, Berggren said. She was elected president right off the bat.

The meetings focused around a topic at first but that seemed to scare attendees away, she said. The association finally petered out for lack of support. Now Berggren and Wise arrange monthly dinner meetings and encourage others to join them. "We're still trying to pull in interest," Wise said.

Interested in joining supportive art enthusiasts, Edmunds is considering the association. "I want to get together to have fun and to promote art," she said. "Everybody needs a group to hang out with."

Edmunds initially organized the Kalama Art Walk several years ago after volunteering in the Kalama Elementary School art program. She arranges for art to be shown at the Cowlitz Bank in Kalama.

Berggren and Wise have continued to meet to "support each other's art endeavors, and to share information about art," Wise said. "We always invite other artists to join us, because we'd like our group to grow and because we believe it is important for artists to support each other. We also believe that art is important economically, because it has the potential to help business and tourism."

Finding places to display art in a small community can be hard, Wise noted. "Artists in small communities often struggle to gain recognition and find niches where they can show their work," she explained.

An art association can make businesses aware of how much impact art can have in a community, Wise said. "Business owners are sometimes unaware of how powerful art can be in the business world. Our group has the potential to share information

and opportunities that local artists and businesses might otherwise never know about.

"Also, sometimes it's hard for new artists to find courage to show strangers their work," she added. "But when they do, they gain confidence and get encouragement. This helps them grow as artists."

Encouraged by a visitor, Basso and Berggren agreed to meet at Edmunds' home the next day to try out a new art technique. They oohed and aahed over various pieces of art in the family home. In the shop, they used wax crayons to draw figures on a small piece of copper sheeting. Then they fired the panels using a propane torch and rinsed away the crayon remnants. The resulting oxidized copper panel shone with burnished colors, the drawings now a faint silhouette.

Basso then brought out a couple paintings from her car to share with the others. Everyone crowded around to view them.

Networking, sharing, encouraging — the Kalama Art Association at work.

Berggren has shown her art at the Kalama Cowlitz Bank, the Kalama Art Walk, the Broadway Gallery in Longview and in Vancouver and Portland. For Kalama Art Association information, contact her at (360) 261-0874.

Wise has shown her art at the Kalama Art Walk, the Kalama Cowlitz Bank, Lower Columbia College, the Longview Library, Broadway Gallery in Longview, On the Mark Consulting and Lillevold Design and Illustration in Longview and also in Vancouver and Portland.

Edmunds has shown her art at the Kalama Cowlitz Bank, the Kalama Art Walk, Lower Columbia College and the Broadway Gallery in Longview and in Portland.

Basso has shown her art at the Kalama Art Walk and also at the Kalama Library.