

Art in the Heart beats again

By Jamesin Rossborough

Muskoka artists will bare their creative souls again this summer by displaying their work along Bracebridge's main street for all to see.

Art in the Heart premiered in 2008 to give new artists the opportunity to show their work and to create an attraction in downtown Bracebridge. It was a tremendous success, so this summer it will return with the addition of music and other performing arts for a bigger and more inclusive round two.

The addition of performing arts this year will "expand the experience," says Jill Harris, economic development assistant for

the town of Bracebridge. But not only is the event expanding from visual arts to include performing arts, the time frame is expanding from two weekends last summer to seven in 2009. Harris also hopes to have more artists taking advantage of the event.

Of the 14 artists that took part last year, 11 made sales of their work, one of them being photographer Shannan Boothby.

"It was just my hobby until I applied for Art in the Heart last year and got in," says Boothby, who also owns a business in web design.

Painter Colleen Mitchell, who had just moved to the area in June of 2008, sold pieces of her work as well and says the event was a great way to meet other

artists. "It really adds to a sense of community," says Mitchell.

Artists who did not make sales made connections to show their work on consignment, and some were commissioned to create new pieces.

"It's all about making contacts and networking," says Harris.

Downtown businesses in Bracebridge are also looking forward to the event, hoping it will increase traffic in their establishments.

"It enhances the street," says Jenny Specht, who with her husband owns the Gingerbread House Gift Shop and Café on Manitoba Street. "Hopefully we will continue to grow."

With artists free to choose any or all of the seven weekends to show their work, spectators and buyers will have something new to see every week, whether it is new artwork or a new artist.

Mitchell says spectators should plan to have time to wander around, and recommends buying what you love, and what speaks to you.

A second call for artists worried Specht, who says she is



IT'S BACK: The successful Art in the Heart event which ran for two weekends last summer in downtown Bracebridge has expanded to seven weekends this summer. (Photo by Matthew Chaloux)

hoping it doesn't mean there is a lack of artists showing interest. However, according to Harris, the first application process brought in about the same numbers as last year, and the second was to bring more. New artists often need encouragement, she says, and many emerging artists are working in other jobs and don't know if they can fit it into their schedule or are deterred because they aren't sure that they are true artists.

To help increase confidence, and to give tips for making the most of the event and their portfolios, the Muskoka Small Business Centre will be offering two free workshops for the artists, on May 22 or 30. (See

muskokaenterprise.com for details.) For many, Art in the Heart will be introducing them to the business side of their hobby for the first time.

"It is a great opportunity," says Deena Brock, managing consultant at the Muskoka Small Business Centre. "Artists meet people that they may not otherwise be able to meet face-to-face."

Boothby agrees, saying she met a lot of people last year. Busy with both of her businesses, she won't be entering again in 2009, but for other artists she offered a piece of advice: "Don't be shy."

The event begins on the weekend of July 11 and 12, and runs until Aug 23.



MAN IN GRASSLANDS: Photographer Karen Longwell is just one of the many talented artists whose work you can expect to see at this year's Art in the Heart in downtown Bracebridge, on weekends beginning July 11.

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