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Staying Above the Recession With Art Under Glass

By Anna Sanders

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In order to resist the crippling economy – which has left many storefronts dismally vacant – the Arts and Business Committee of the Evanston Arts Council, continues to put Art Under Glass, expanding to a new location at 500 Davis St. and adding six windows to the project.

Art Under Glass was launched by the Arts and Business Committee last June. Now in its fourth cycle, the project displays work by local artists in otherwise empty store windows, uniting the business and art communities of Evanston.

"We wanted to make the City look better," said Penny Rotheiser, co-chair of the committee. "We've had a tremendous response."

During the first three cycles, art was exhibited in the Farnsworth-Hill Inc.-owned 708 Church St. building, the 1600 block of Orrington Avenue, the 700 block of Church Street and the 1500 block of Maple Avenue. Ms. Rotheiser explained, "Beautifying the streets with art attracts people to the windows." The goal, she said, is to get the vacant stores leased.

The project's philosophy seems to be paying off. "Three separate stores – totaling 11 windows that had been filled with art – have been rented since the Art Under Glass project started last June," Ms. Rotheiser said.

Chair of the Evanston Arts Council Jill Brazel said Art Under Glass gives Evanston artists a chance to show their work. "We primarily wanted to showcase local artists' work," she said, adding, "We've been able to start leasing businesses."

"We'd love to have every empty store in Evanston filled [with art]," Ms. Rotheiser said. "It really cheers up the streets."

Ms. Rotheiser said they were pleased to expand the project to 500 Davis St. Richard Similio, assistant property manager for Circle Realty Advisors, which manages the new location, said that teaming up with Art Under Glass made sense. "The space has been vacant for a while," he explained, "and I wanted to bring



Jill Brazel, president of the Evanston Arts Council, chats with Dave Galloway at the reception for the third installment of Art Under Glass.

life to it."

"Art Under Glass is a fabulous answer to a lousy recession," said Mayor Elizabeth Tisdahl.

On June 23, artists and locals gathered for a reception at 500 Davis St. to celebrate the beginning of the new cycle of artists' work. Along with Ms. Brazel, Ms. Rotheiser and Mr. Similio, Mayor Tisdahl spoke at the event, jokingly asking the audience for an answer to the City's economic problems. "In case anyone didn't know ... we have absolutely fabulous artists," she said.

After applying to be in Art Under Glass, artists' works are judged by a panel. The artists are then given free windows based on their ranked points. "We try to keep it really professional," Ms. Rotheiser said. She added that for every cycle, the judges are switched around in order to give every artist a chance. So far, she said, the "response has been wonderful,"

Jill King, director and founder of the Artist Seeds Organization, which gives adults the opportunity to create art, has both her work and those of her students displayed on Maple Avenue. She said that she "just wanted to get word out. ... [I] wanted to showcase my students' work."

Metal sculptor Martha Ruschman, whose work is displayed at 500 Davis St., said she was very excited about Art Under Glass and getting to know other artists. "I think it's great to be part of Evanston art," she said.

Ms. Brazel explained that, for her, "the best feeling is coming together."

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