

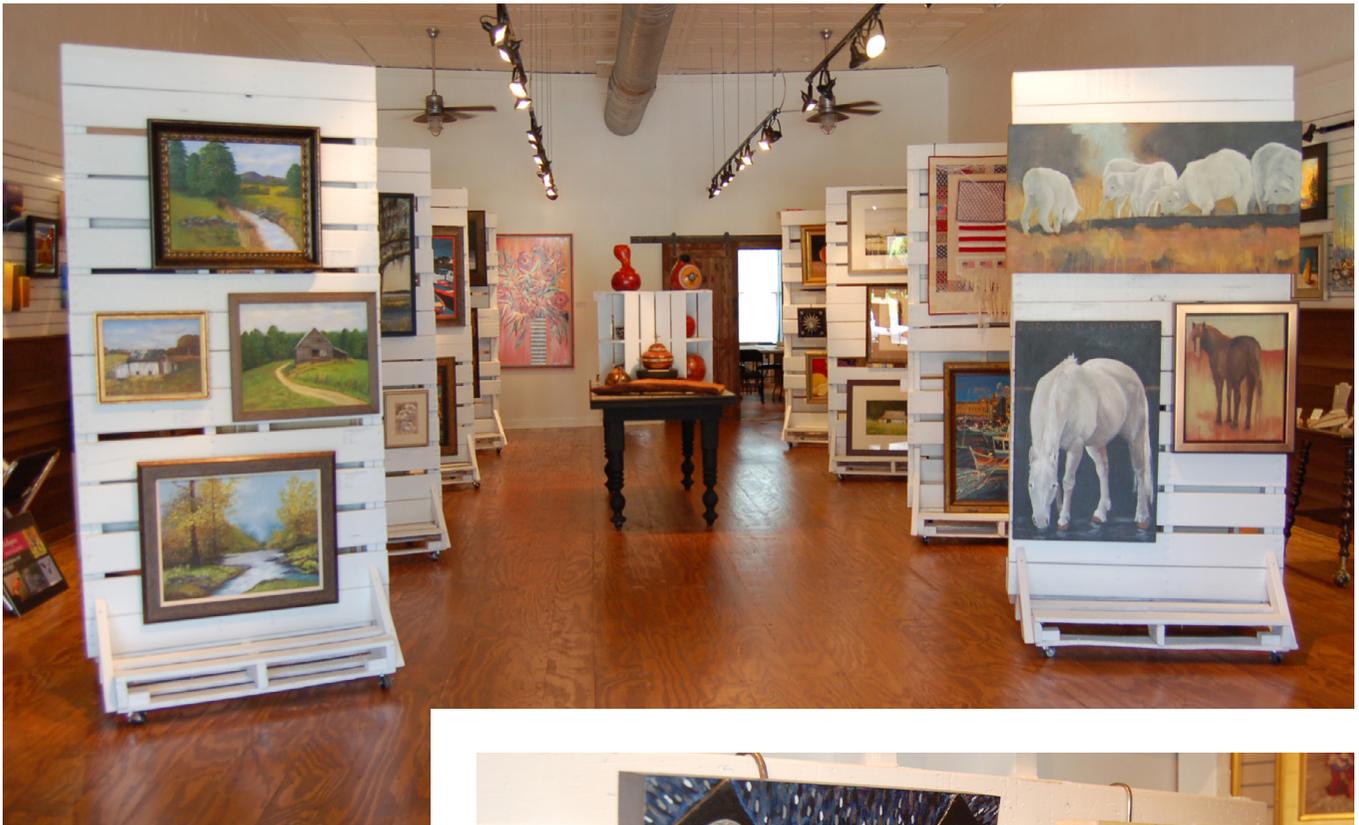


Gallery with a

GOAL

The Artisans Village Art Gallery opening is first major step toward working to make downtown Eatonton an art tourism destination

Written by and photography by BEVERLY HARVEY



FOR YEARS, KEVIN TOMSON-Hooper and his wife, Sara, worked for an international nonprofit organization. The couple traveled the world to help others. During their extensive travels, they made it a point to purchase indigenous art created by the peoples who called each faraway country home.

The Tomson-Hoopers bought masks from Morocco and South Korea. Sculptures from South Africa and New Zealand. Softstone art from Kenya. They also purchased locally created art in Sri Lanka, Newfoundland, Italy, Prince Edward Island and other countries. The couple made a point to meet the artist who created each work they purchased before lovingly placing it in their home.

Now retired, the Georgia Lake Country couple has focused their mutual love for art and artists to the community-supported cultural endeavors known as The Artisans Village and its namesake art gallery – both in downtown Eatonton. There is also The Artisans Village Guild, a membership-based subsidiary of The Artisans Village.

After two of the largest employers in



Opposite: Kevin Tomson-Hooper poses behind the custom-made front counter at The Artisans Village Art Gallery. Top: Artwork is exhibited on two rows of displays on wheels that can be turned 180 degrees regularly. Above: Mixed media works by Carol Myer. Below: Small tray, pottery, Diane Davies



THE ARTISANS VILLAGE GUILD

The Artisans Village Guild meets 10 a.m. on the second Friday each month at The Peoples Bank Lake Oconee branch in Eatonton. (No meeting held in July or August.) You don't have to be an artist to be a member of the guild.

Individual, family and student guild membership options are available. Visit the guild's website at www.theartisansvillageguild.com for more information or to purchase a membership.

The Artisans Village Guild regularly sponsors art-related events, including the following:

DUAL VISION: ART THROUGH DIFFERENT EYES - EXHIBITION AND SALE SEPTEMBER 21 - OCTOBER 14

The Artisans Village Art Guild presents "Dual Vision: Art through Different Eyes Exhibition and Sale" at The Artisans Village Art Gallery. The exhibit will feature works created through a partnership with the Guild and the Associated Photographers of Lake Oconee Photo Club. Guild members choose one or more photographs to provide inspiration to create artwork. An opening reception will be held September 21 from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. The reception is free and open to the public. For more information, visit the guild's website www.theartisansvillageguild.com.

LAKE COUNTRY FINE ART SHOW EXHIBITION AND SALE • NOVEMBER 2 - 8

The Artisans Village Art Guild presents its first fine art show – "Lake Country Fine Art Show Exhibition and Sale" – at The Artisans Village Art Gallery. The show is open to all amateur and professional artists. An opening reception for the exhibit will be held November 2 from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. The reception is free and open to the public. For more information, visit the guild's website www.theartisansvillageguild.com.

EATONTON ONE DAY PAINT OUT • APRIL 28

The second annual Eatonton One Day Paint Out is a plein air event held in downtown Eatonton. More information will be provided on the guild's website www.theartisansvillageguild.com.

Eatonton closed their doors – Georgia Power and Horton Homes – members of the community began to search for other ways to stimulate the local economy and to promote tourism. A study conducted by the Bureau of Tourism and Economic Development recommended they focus on three main areas – arts, tourism and heritage.

Lake Country Arts, formerly Briar Patch Arts Council, was formed to provide direction and support to help put the Georgia Highway 44 corridor between Eatonton and Greensboro on the cultural map, so to speak. Lake Country Arts also drives the capital campaign to fund multi-phase plans to complete The Artisans Village, as well as for its sister organization and downtown Eatonton neighbor, the Georgia Writers Museum.

The Artisans Village nonprofit corporation and its supporters reached their first goal in November 2016. They raised \$135,000 – primarily through private donations – to purchase a 6,000-square-foot livery and



12-inch pecan bowl, wood, Mike Zimmer.



THE ARTISANS VILLAGE ART GALLERY

110 W. Marion St., Eatonton
706-623-7757
theartisansvillage.org

HOURS:

Thursday and Friday, 11 a.m.-5 p.m.;
Saturday, 10 a.m.-3 p.m.

The Artisans Village Art Gallery is always looking for new and different art mediums. To inquire about submitting work, stop by The Artisans Village Art Gallery in downtown Eatonton or visit the gallery's website.



Clockwise from top left: A display of wood and gourd artwork; Napkin rings, pottery, Diane Davies; The Artisans Village Art Gallery is located on the square in downtown Eatonton; "Petroglyph," gourd, Holly Parker; "Autumn Goldfinches II," oil painting, Cathy McIntire; Handcrafted jewelry by Andrea Harrison Designs; a display of paintings at Artisans Village; A butterfly painting hangs in the gallery.





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a 13,000-square-foot cotton warehouse located on East Marion Street just off the square in downtown Eatonton. The funds also included a \$20,000 grant from Community Foundation of Central Georgia.

The livery will be the creative home to artisans who work in the hot arts and high-noise arts, which include metalworkers, glass blowers, pottery, chainsaw carvers and, just as it did more than a hundred years ago – blacksmiths. Renovations to the livery will, hopefully, begin in 2018, says Kevin, who serves as president for The Artisans Village Board of Directors.

Just steps away from the livery, the cotton warehouse will house artisans who work in the clean arts, such as painters, quilters, textiles artists, basket weavers and jewelry makers. The warehouse will also include a marketplace gallery, café and an outdoor patio space that will provide prime seating for the nearby city events stage.

Once renovated, the historic livery and warehouse will lease studio space to the various artisans, who, in turn, will be out in an open area that allows visitors to watch as they work. Like Kevin and Sara did for years during their international travels, visitors to The Artisans Village can get to know each artist and craftsperson – and purchase those same artisans' creations at the marketplace gallery.

While The Artisans Village awaits the start of renovations to the livery and warehouse buildings, one structure has already begun to showcase local, area and Atlanta artists and to sell their various works – The Artisans Village Art Gallery. The gallery is located in a 2,400-square-foot commercial building that has been on the Eatonton square since 1864. It was privately purchased and took 10 months to renovate. More than 250 people attended The Artisans Village Art Gallery grand opening reception in April 2017

"We tweaked it as we went along a little bit," Kevin says, referring to The Artisans Village Art Gallery's overall look and design. Ideas for everything from front counter design to artists' commissions at the gallery were gathered from visits Kevin and



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other board members made to forty art galleries and guilds. They spoke to the people who worked at and ran those galleries to form what has become the artistic and administrative basis for The Artisans Village Art Gallery.

“We want artists to make money,” Kevin says, noting that all profits made from sales at The Artisans Village Art Gallery go toward renovating the livery and the cotton warehouse. Once those are completed, gallery profits will fund the maintenance and operation of The Artisans Village facilities.

Four months after The Artisans Village Art Gallery first opened its doors, it exhibits, displays and sells works created by more than fifty artists. Eighty percent of the artists are from Georgia’s Lake Country and Athens, with Covington, Atlanta and St. Simons Island, as well as South Carolina rounding out the list.

Inside The Artisans Village Art Gallery are works created from a variety of mediums, including acrylic paintings, wood carvings, pottery, photography, watercolors, jewelry, fabrics – even gourds. At the center of the gallery are rows of vertical displays built from wood pallets and placed on wheels. The wheels allow the art to be moved around 180 degrees for display. Every four months, the gallery replaces everything on display with all-new works, keeping The Artisans Village Art Gallery’s pieces dynamic and fresh.

A little over a year before the gallery opened, The Artisans Village Guild was established. It now has more than 60 members and holds monthly meetings. Meetings include either a guest artist speaker or an artistic activity. “We’re very fortunate to have a great, deep talent ... of people who are willing to share what they do,” says Linda Foster, vice president of The Artisans Village Guild, who is also a painter. You don’t have to be an artist, however, to join the guild.

Kevin doesn’t call himself an artist. Neither does Sara. But they love and support art and artists. And the way Kevin sees it, “I don’t think you can have too much art in town.” And if that art also benefits Georgia’s Lake Country, economically speaking – that’s even better. ★

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