



Felicia Gray admires art pieces at the Golden Art Guild gallery in Goldendale. She is past president of the guild, which supports the gallery and has been involved in several community beautification projects.

Keeping Art Alive

*Golden Art Guild
boosts local artists,
while striving
to better
the community*

By Jeanie Senior

The Golden Art Guild has more than 30 members, an art gallery in downtown Goldendale well-stocked with fine art and hand-crafted items—and lofty goals.

According to the nonprofit group's mission statement, the guild

was established “to promote all media, facilitate art communication, encourage art education and stimulate the community with art exhibits and shows.”

Its presence is most notable in the Golden Art Gallery and Golden Art Gallery II—Picket Fences Crafts, located in the center of downtown.

Works exhibited there include paintings, pottery, blown glass and fiber art on the art gallery side, and a variety of artisans' crafts—from weaving and jewelry to knitting, quilting, crocheting and decorative items—on the Picket Fences side.

Items on exhibit are juried before they go on display.

The gallery turns four this year.

“We're really excited to have existed that long,” says Felicia Gray, the gallery's founder and immediate past president of the Golden Art Guild.

Felicia is amazed by the variety of gallery visitors. They come from all across the United States and include tourists from India, Germany and Australia.

Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, the gallery is staffed by volunteers. More volunteers are always welcome.

Members of the Art Guild pay monthly dues: \$5 for students under 18, \$20 for members ages 18 to 65; or a family membership for \$35. The money, along with gallery earnings, goes to pay rent, utilities

and maintenance.

When an item sells, the gallery takes a 15-percent commission—a far smaller percentage than most galleries charge, says Felicia.

Some of the art on exhibit is done by professionals, other pieces by amateurs. Felicia says there is a market for all of it, and sale of the crafters' work accounts for a good share of the gallery income.

The gallery got its start after Felicia called together about two dozen local artists, asking them to bring samples of their work to the meeting. Seeing their work all in one place, she told the group, "We have too much talent. We have to do something with it!"

Glenn Taylor of Windermere Real Estate offered the building for several months for free, initially for a Christmas art show.

Eventually, the guild started renting the building and upgraded the display space.

Picket Fences originally was across the street. Now the artisans and artists split the space.

With the US 97 highway bridge between Biggs and Maryhill due to be closed for a major repair project later this year, the guild decided to cut expenses, unsure of the impact the bridge closure will have on

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Golden Art Guild**

business in Goldendale.

"Eventually our goal is to have two stores again," she says.

The major goal now is to get federally recognized nonprofit status for the organization. It has been an uphill battle—perhaps because the guild, gallery and their goals to help the community have seemed to baffle some officials examining the application, Felicia says.

As examples, Felicia says they have pointed to some of the gallery's projects—such as installing dozens of planters around town—and its efforts toward downtown redevelopment.

"I've told them everyone's helping each other to make it in this town," she says. "If you could only see what Goldendale's all about. Downtown is only two blocks long. We try to do as much as we can for each other."

Having a place where local artists

can display and sell their wares has itself been an economic booster, Felicia says, noting, "This is really a passion thing for me—to help artists."

Last year, the guild sponsored a popular Salvador Dali exhibit, drawing on a local resident's collection of the master's work.

In August, a special exhibition of paintings by comedian Red Skelton will be displayed.

Felicia is a painter and graphic artist whose career included teaching at Perry Technical Institute in Yakima and working as an art director for a Seattle firm that specializes in display products.

These days, she specializes in large-scale projects. She has painted murals in two pool houses, one in Goldendale, the other in Walla Walla—one on a building 70 feet by 80 feet, where the mural features dolphins and whales, a mermaid and merman.

A native of Yakima, Felicia moved to Goldendale after she married Scott Gray, who teaches fourth grade. They met as teenagers, then reunited and were married in 1992. They have two children: Sienna, a seventh-grader, and Skyler, a fourth-grader.

Felicia also painted a mural on a wall of Scott's pottery studio, just across the street from the gallery, which illustrates its Tongues of Fire name. Scott's pottery is for sale at the art gallery.

Felicia also coaches high school volleyball and works on community development projects. She helped start the annual Goldendale Homes Tour, which this year included visits to the senior center and the gallery.

The guild sponsors art classes and has worked to beautify downtown. Some 200 half-wine barrels around the community—planted with flowers every spring—are part of the group's community outreach.

Felicia says she thinks the gallery has helped bring merchants together, noting, "I think starting something like this has helped the community." ■



Fabric artist Janice Christiansen with some of her artwork on display.