

Artistree Gallery Cooperative and Land O'Lakes Area Artisans, Inc.

Land O' Lakes, WI

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In 2007, the Land O'Lakes Chamber of Commerce Community Development Committee participated in the University of Wisconsin-Extension's (UWEX) First Impressions community exchange program with the town of Phelps. First Impressions is a program that provides a real-time assessment of a community's strengths and weaknesses through the exchange of visits and evaluations by members of a peer community. As a result of the First Impressions report, the Land O'Lakes community development committee decided to focus the next initiative on downtown development, beginning with offering training opportunities on marketing to downtown store owners. The committee requested UWEX Community Economic Development Educator for Vilas County, Kelley Haverkampf, to assist in the development of the educational programming.

The process resulted in a downtown development plan that included three components: a physical, economic and implementation plan. The study was funded with a community development block grant. In 2008, USDA specialist, Margaret Bau, and University of Wisconsin-Extension Educator for Vilas County, Kelly Haverkampf, teamed up to do a joint presentation to Land O' Lakes area artists to identify the best business model for a for-profit art gallery and non-profit community art center. This wasn't the first time USDA Rural Development and UWEX have collaborated with one another. Other projects

include The Wisconsin Food Hub Cooperative, The Fifth Season Cooperative, Cooperative Care, Q Artist Gallery Cooperative, Slo Farmers Co-op, and Farm Market Kitchen.

After months of meetings with the artist community and local decision-makers, it was agreed that the best business model would be a cooperative artist gallery. Land O'Lakes Area Artisans, Inc. and Artistree are "two separate art entities with the single focus of enriching the lives of area residents and visitors through art, which benefits the whole community." Visitors and return customers to the gallery often state that LOLA and Artistree are "destination places" in town. Other comments to the gallery are "so unexpected" and the "quality is so good" or "we didn't know there were so many artists here." The high percentage of repeat customers continue to bring new visitors as a "place you must see."



Above: Miss Olivia teaching the young, and the young at heart. Photo provided by Wendy Powalisz.

As a cooperative, customers have direct contact with artists, what they do, how they do it, where their inspiration comes from, and the added value to the art. This interaction between the public and the artist leads to increased sales. With better sales, artists are encouraged to continue to pursue their artistic potential. The artist's confidence in their work

grows through cooperative selling of their work and their collaboration with their peers. The rewards of this business venture have been bringing arts related education and events that enrich the community at large that had not previously been there, as well as providing some economic stimulus to the area. When people attend a LOLA function, it is most likely they will buy gas, shop or eat in town as well.



Above: Ms. Kelly teaching three-year-olds dance. Photo provided by Wendy Powalisz.

Not only has LOLA become the focal point of the downtown with on-going activities for all types of people, it now serves as a creative community space. The art room is being used (free of charge) by several groups: knitters, a rug hooking guild, meeting place for an art league and weavers guild and has a free open-studio paint time each week. This has given our senior population a place to meet, share and learn from one another. Other businesses in the area are feeling the economic impact as well. If LOLA is having an event, visitors will go to the gas station, the local coffee shop or another shop in town. We continue to hear comments like "LOLA is what's happening in town." LOLA had launched a summer program called *100 Days of Art* in 2013 that featured the creative or arty offerings of all the shops and other artists in town. Artists demonstrated at shops, artisan made goods being sold were highlighted or owners brought out their art collections or sang or preformed in some

way. This program is now being continued by the Land O' Lakes Chamber and has become a popular summer tourist event. LOLA hopes to enhance what is already going on in town and bring unique creative opportunities to the community and expose children to more types of art.



Above: Chihuly Challenge participants from left to right – Addison Holland, Maddie Moyer, and Kyle Struble displaying their chandeliers inspired by blown glass artist, Dale Chihuly. Photo provided by Wendy Powalisz.

LOLA must continue to prosper, remain adaptable to any growth, and continue to obtain on-going donations and grants. Finding the right board members and enough volunteers to see the organization into the future will also be a challenge as well as seeking out the right co-op members for future growth. Not only does the art need to fit the market, the artist needs to fit the cooperative business as well. The co-op needs members that are able to work in the gallery. If not enough members can work, employees must be considered and paying a wage may be challenging. Another challenge will be getting better at 21st Century marketing with web pages and social media.

The building that Artistree Gallery Cooperative and LOLA now occupy had sat vacant for two and a half years. LOLA then rented the space for five years before acquiring it in September 2014. Artistree would love to see more empty buildings taken up by the other artists for studios or other galleries to really make this

town a destination place for creativity. People are traveling farther to attend sold out classes at LOLA and Artistree has added 19 more artists to the cooperative family.



Above: Artistree/LOLA facility off of CR-B. Photo provided by Wendy Powalisz.

The full-time resident population of Land O' Lakes is small, with some young families, but the major demographic population is retirees (average age in the county is 54 years of age). Second home owners, their children and grandchildren and a tourist population populate the area most heavily in the summer months and long weekends year round for recreational opportunities. The majority of customers to Artistree Gallery are repeats (from generations of family land/cabin ownership) and a growing number of new visitors. Customers tend to be well educated and have a well-established income, however, price points for artwork sold at Artistree come in a full range of affordability for anyone who enters. Land O'Lakes Area Artisans, Inc., (LOLA) offers a variety of affordable classes. Fees may be waived for those who cannot afford to take classes or scholarships are given. LOLA also offers free events year round for community members and children.



Top: Guests of Land O'Lakes Area Artisan's, Inc. fundraiser "Art of Cheese."

Bottom: Artisans serving at "Art of Cheese" fundraiser.

Photos provided by Wendy Powalisz.