

MidCoast Readies New Rock Island Gallery

Written by Jeff Ignatius

Tuesday, 05 March 2002 18:00

MidCoast Fine Arts will be celebrating the opening of its new gallery this Friday, and it's meant to be part of the continued growth of Rock Island's downtown. The MidCoast Gallery West, at the corner of 2nd Avenue and 16 ½ Street, will be opening its doors on March 8, sharing its space with ArtFX, a commercial gallery run by artist Donna Lee.

Dean Schroeder, the executive director of MidCoast Fine Arts, said the idea of a new gallery in downtown Rock Island came up two years ago, as available storefront window space for the Art Works Window Walks project diminished.

But initially it looked like funding would be a problem. MidCoast applied for a grant from the State of Illinois and was turned down. Then the City of Rock Island and the Development Association of Rock Island (DARI) stepped up and provided funds to renovate the first floor of the building. The city provided an \$80,000 grant and a \$30,000 loan, while DARI gave a grant of \$145,000, according to Dan Carmody, DARI's executive director. The first floor also includes an office for a consumer-credit-counseling office and a 700-square-foot office or retail space.

Schroeder said the gallery is meant to be part of a "living arts-center concept." The upper floors of the building have been renovated for loft-style apartments, and the basement will probably be used for artist studios.

DARI was finishing up construction on the first floor this week, and MidCoast was ready to begin moving in on Wednesday, Schroeder said. The gallery is hosting an opening reception on Friday from 7 to 9 p.m. The gallery's first display will feature watercolors by Ralph Iaccarino and wood sculpture by Jay Stratton.

Schroeder said the gallery will have about the same visibility as the MidCoast Fine Arts Gallery at the Mississippi Valley Welcome Center in LeClaire and the Art at the Airport space – with one crucial difference. "It is not a public space," he said.

The distinction is that many visitors to those galleries are travelers there for other reasons, and artists and organizers need to be sensitive to the type of artwork that's displayed. MidCoast Gallery West, Schroeder said, "allows the artist a little more range of what can be exhibited."

The building is owned by DARI, and MidCoast has an arrangement through which it will get the space rent-free for three years. For the three years after that, rent will be half-price, Schroeder said, and that will allow MidCoast to establish the new gallery.

Schroeder said the gallery will cost MidCoast approximately \$19,000 to run in its first year.

MidCoast Gallery West will host an opening reception for Iaccarino and Stratton on Friday, March 8, from 7 to 9 p.m., with music by Noble Spirit. The gallery is located in The District of Rock Island at the corner of 2nd Avenue and 16 ½ Street.