

Festive air marks Our Town opening

BY GRETCHEN HITCH
Special Writer

Julie Dawson, Bev Hoglund and Pat Mayhew conceived of Our Town 10 years ago as a fundraiser for The Community House showcasing Michigan artists.

On Oct. 18, the gala opening night of the five-day exhibition and sale, Julie Dawson was still handling decorations with the help of husband Peter.

General co-chairwomen Sally Gerak of Birmingham and Judy Istock of Bloomfield Hills warmly greeted more than 300 benefactors and guests arriving at the whimsically garlanded Community House in Birmingham. Multi-colored lamps and beaded streamers wafting in the breeze embellished the building inside and outside, lending a festive air.

Gala evening chairwomen Marge Gormley and Rita Buschmann, both of Bloomfield Hills, were delighted with the surge of art lovers and Community House supporters arriving for the pre-view party. They smiled happily, chatting with Franklin Bank chairman David Simon and his wife Lorie of Birmingham. Artist Joe Maniscalco and juror Sam Sachs, director of the Detroit Institute of Arts, joined them.

More than 300 benefactors attended the opening.

Benefactor Chris Strumbos of Bloomfield Hills said, "Sam Sachs made a good juror. It was smaller and the best show ever." Another benefactor, Margaret Berker, also of Bloomfield Hills, noted, "I am impressed. It is very professional, so many things, so easy to like." But she added, "At the reception you can't really see it all. We have to come back."

Julie Dawson's decorations are impressive and the food stations strategically placed throughout," said Barbara Erb later in the evening. Ponytail Norm LeParg, who donated the food station serving Cajun shrimp, admired Tom Hale's "1957 Chevrolet," a canvas acrylic priced at \$24,000. Joyce Brown and Jeanne Tenent, both of Bloomfield Hills, applauded "A New World," a good they thought was in the classical tradition.

A young Bloomfield couple, Edward Shehab and Virginia Detone, poured over Carol Chisholm's "Monet's Giverny." Chisholm, who had three paintings in the tightly juried exhibition, attended with her husband and children.

Barbara Denomme received kudos from chairwomen Istock and Gerak for her stellar list of 322 benefactors at \$175 per person, resulting from a letter mailed last June. More than 300 benefactors attended the opening. Twenty-five artworks boasted the orange-circle sticker designating "sold," on opening night.

On the 10th anniversary honorary committee, Our Town founder Pat Mayhew and former Our Town chairwoman Sue Donnelly flew in from Europe. Bill Hoglund winged up from Naples, Fla., for the milestone event. Former chairwoman Libby Dickinson was on hand, as was Lunn Battenburg. It was a not-to-be-missed 10th opening of Our Town filled with esprit.



Welcome Wagon: Juror and DIA director Sam Sachs (left), Rosalind and sculptor Marshall Fredericks, artist Joe Maniscalco and co-chairwoman Sally Gerak welcome arrivals for the 10th anniversary Our Town art exhibition gala.



Decorations: Artist Julie Dawson and husband Peter work on finishing touches for art show.



In the show: Bloomfield Hills artist Carol Chisholm and son Tom show her oil painting.



Opening: Our Town sponsor David Simon (left) chats with chairwomen Marge Gormley and Rita Buschmann.

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