

# Elk Rapids gallery an eclectic mix



Dorothy Webster

Like many other travelers who stay on US-31 and drive through Elk Rapids, Michigan, Bill Mullaly believed the town consisted of what could be seen from the highway - a river flowing into Lake Michigan, a few businesses, a boat marina. That was a few years ago. Today, the former downstate gallery owner has transformed a one-story building in the downtown area into a two-story studio, gallery and apartment, and claims the small town is a "real sleeper".

He likes the downtown so much that he lives "above the store" in contemporary rooms that overlook the marina and Grand Traverse Bay. There's added space in the rear, a garage with a latticed deck above, studio space behind the street-facing art gallery, and a basement workspace where he builds the display units used in the sales area.

Mullaly, who previously owned Gallery North in Mt. Clemens and Mullaly-Matisse Galleries in Birmingham, was familiar with lower

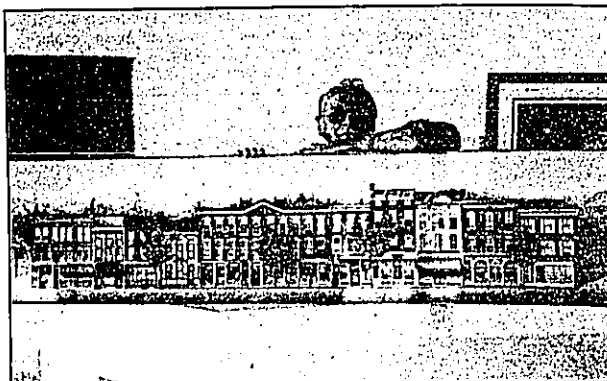
Michigan's Northwest region - or so he thought.

"I'd been to Harbor Springs, Petoskey, Charlevoix, Traverse City and the Leelanau Peninsula," he recalls, "but I didn't realize what was off the highway at Elk Rapids."

When he retired and moved north a few years ago, Mullaly sought gallery and studio space in nearly all those areas, but he didn't investigate Elk Rapids until he answered a classified ad for a building for sale in its downtown area. Summing it up, he came, he saw, he purchased - not that original building, but the one he renovated.

"I feel this town is a real sleeper," he says enthusiastically. "It has all the desirable features: a good school system, a marina, parks, beaches, plenty of water (Grand Traverse Bay, Elk Lake, Torch Lake), it's close to Traverse City, has very friendly townspeople - and the downtown is coming to life."

He believes in the downtown enough to be a member of the Downtown Development Authority, to have the main street torn up for months at the beginning of last year's autumn color season, and to firmly state, "You can't judge the gallery by its first-year business." That's



**STOREFRONT AFICIONADO**— Bill Mullaly has always been interested in downtowns. He's working on a view of a small town in upper New York state which details each individual storefront.

dedication.

The main street, River Street, today has wider sidewalks, attractive brick pavers, newly-planted trees, street lighting, and ample parking. To handle overflow parking during summer months, additional space is available behind the block of stores, near the water.

Mullaly's 128 Studio and Gallery carries an eclectic mix of fine arts and

high quality craft items - from contemporary glass and jewelry to funky metal racing cars and finely wrought metal pieces. Ceramics, ranging from functional to leading-edge art and paintings done in watercolor, tempera, oil and acrylic, round out the wares. The gallery is well-lit, has a large window on the sidewalk that invites passers-by into the store, and features decor that

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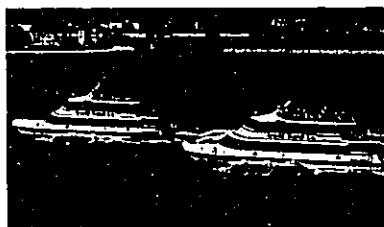


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