

## 25 years in the woods

### To the Editor,

The Bancroft and Area Studio Tour is gearing up for its 25th presentation of arts and crafts. It sets me wondering about the place of a grassroots organization like this in the economic development of our area.

Much has been said about creative class and fostering growth through the promotion of art and design. Richard Florida has been notably vocal about this. It's often associated with the construction of architecturally wondrous art galleries in large urban settings, but I recall watching the arts in Toronto move westward along Queen Street followed by solid commercial development. That was a course through abandoned and desperate areas of the city!

Here in North Hastings, the site of the studio tour on Sept. 16 and 17, and 23 and 24, economic conditions have always seemed a little marginal. Perhaps this has encouraged artists to take advantage of the moderate property values as well as the scenery and the potential of underdeveloped aspects of the area? I have witnessed a strong growth in the arts here. It has to have been influenced by 25 years of studio tours that have encouraged those presenting in it as well as those visiting the studios. There now are a number of commercial galleries in Bancroft and Maynooth, a public art gallery in and even an artist run centre in Bancroft. The Bancroft and Area Studio Tour is presenting cross collaborations between artists and free participation to student artists as well as anniversary productions for this year. This is in the spirit of broadening the base of the arts and crafts in North Hastings and fostering its growth. One of the past directors of this tour, Heather Inwood-Montrose, said, "The tie that binds has always been that an eclectic and gifted group of individuals have allowed the rugged beauty of Bancroft and the surrounding area to inspire and move through them." I think that as we make this area hospitable and vibrant for ourselves it naturally becomes more attractive for visitors as well. If you visit the area during the studio tour ask the artists you meet about the choices they have made and how their work is influenced by the social and environmental situation that they are developing here.

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