

Cutting edge studio tour in the valley



Wilno artist Grant Fraser, who specializes in unique knives, was one of many artists who participated in the Madawaska Valley Studio Tour July 23. / SARAH VANCE Special to This Week

By Sarah Vance

Madawaska Valley was a cultural destination over the weekend as artists opened up their doors for the annual summer studio tour. Fifteen artists, from across the county participated in this year's event.

"My sons and I drove from Ottawa," said Rip Jones, at Grant Fraser's Knifemaking Studio in Wilno. "I actually came up to see Grant and a few other artists work and I went to the market in Combermere to buy bread this morning."

Fraser uses fine metals, carved wood and white-tail deer bones for his handles, which are attached to the steel of edgy blades with epoxy and stainless steel beveling. When it comes to [knife making steel](#) is the most commonly used metal as it's incredibly durable and can last a lifetime. Fraser markets his knives using word-of-mouth, and the occasional Facebook posting, but after 35 years in the business, customers now seek him out and he has little need for a promotional website.

"I have sold hundreds of sets to destinations all over the world. I custom design knives for 28 chefs, in 28 different countries," said Fraser. "I sell to clubs in Italy, France and I have a customer in Scandinavia who would purchase everything I make, if I let him."

A power outage on the eve of the tour, left many artists like Grant in the dark, as they prepared for patrons who began knocking on their doors, as early as nine in the morning on Saturday.

"I had to call a friend to bring a cordless drill because I didn't have electricity," said Fraser. "I made all of the sheaths for these blades last night, with leather which I pound with the side of a hammer to make the scalings."

Metal works, jewelery, pottery, tie-dye silks, textiles, weaving and soaps are just some of the other rural skills featured at studios

over the weekend. And then there are the perogies at the Wilno Tavern.

"For the county of Renfrew and the Ottawa Valley Tourist Association, the studio tour is a wonderful show case of the creative spirit which exists in the Valley, and which is also attracted to the Valley from around the world," said Alastair Baird, economic development manager for the Ottawa Valley Tourist Association in Pembroke.

He added, "While the studio tour showcases our artisans, artists and craftspeople our overall heritage, hospitality and scenic countryside are also evident to visitors as they tour the studios, galleries and communities."

In 2015, the Madawaska Valley Studio Tour received a special event award from the Ottawa Valley Tourist Association for its economic impact.

"We definitely see an increase in tourism over the studio tour weekends, both in the summer and in the fall. This is of great benefit to our local artisans and also the local retail and accommodator businesses in the Valley," said Paul Nopper, recreation and community development co-ordinator for the Township of Madawaska Valley. "When it is a multi-day event, the area and businesses see a boost in traffic which leads to increased revenue."

"Each visitor has an economic impact over the days of their visit for the studio tour and will likely be drawn back to the Valley for a return visit by the many other features, attractions and activities they discover," added Baird.

If you missed this summer event, an autumn tour will be happening on the first weekend in October. For more information visit www.madawaskastudiotour.com.