

Linda Sorensen hosts paint party at the Ash Grove Inn



It was a full house at the Fireside Lounge of the Ash Grove Inn in Barry's Bay as Ottawa Valley artist Linda Sorensen welcomed adult learners to Paint Parties over the weekend, complete with aperitifs and wine. SARAH VANCE Special to This Week

By Sarah Vance

Last weekend, the Ash Grove Inn in Barry's Bay hosted an innovative party that saw guests painting watercolours while sipping fine wines and enjoying aperitifs with local artist Linda Sorensen. It was a creative strategy to entice people to enjoy a social and artistic afternoon amongst friends, while also enjoying the tastes of the Ash Grove Inn.

Linda Sorensen, who apprenticed under Canadian legend Robert Bateman, is known for her vibrant landscape paintings.

"Linda's Bateman background has created a great ability to capture the beauty of our wilderness in the Madawaska Valley," said Carl Bromwich, councillor in Barry's Bay. "It is artists like Linda who have defined what our little corner of the world looks like to the thousands of travellers who love to tour our unique and unspoiled wilderness."

In fact, Robert Bateman has described Linda as one of the most talented and dedicated students he has taught. He characterizes her paintings as strong and bold.

Paint parties are a new winter marketing strategy being explored by the Ash Grove Inn, which is also a popular destination for sledders on the local snowmobile trails.

"I was in Montreal and saw a similar idea advertised and have seen it online and thought it was a great concept," said Rose Schulist. "Then a friend mentioned we should try it at The Ash Grove. With it being winter in a quiet town, there's no better time to try something like this."

The response by the community has been overwhelmingly positive. Each of the two back-to-back paint parties, hosted last Friday and Saturday, were filled with more than 20 participants each, and had people on waiting lists.

"We are definitely tapping into a different market. We have men, women, young adults and seniors. It's a diverse market, which is great," said Rose. "Anyone over the age of 19 can come relax with a glass of wine and paint!"

Students who joined Sorensen over the weekend found that sunsets and wind-swept pines were the theme. To facilitate the learning, all of the arts supplies were provided, including brushes and paints.

"I have worked with the canvases to prepare them for the participants," said Sorensen. "I guide them through a few key strategies and we all create the same style of painting."

"I would really like to continue to work with Linda on having more parties," said Rose. "If it continues to be successful, over time I would love to host other artists."

"Linda has developed a unique interpretation of what the Valley is like. She has been able to transfer her vision of what she sees to a canvas that speaks volumes on the scenes that define our culture and heritage," said Bromwich. "We are blessed to have so many talented people here."

Arts tourism continues to be identified as a vital part of Ontario's economy. It is estimated that the average arts and culture tourist spends \$667 per trip, which is twice as much per trip as does a typical tourist. Arts and culture tourists are also estimated to have spent \$1.1 billion on lodging, \$1.1 billion on food and beverages, \$600 million on retail and \$500 million on entertainment and

recreation in 2010, in Ontario.