

Wilno arts landmark up for sale



Part of the rich inventory of paintings, pottery, wood, textiles and glass work to be found at the Wilno Craft Gallery, in the Madawaska Valley. SARAH VANCE Special to This Week

By Sarah Vance

The Wilno Craft Gallery has been listed on the real estate market since September, and "for sale" signs went up on the front porch of the Borutski Street business last month.

"It is truly a remarkable and warm building," said Carl Wall, a woodworker, who progressively restored the gallery with his wife Annie. "This was home to Wilno's original general store, built in 1920, and the architecture has been preserved."

The gallery's showroom, with an ambient wood fireplace, boasts a hand-crafted sales counter, built over 95 years ago, as a part of the original general store.

A separate 1200 sq. ft., apartment, above the gallery, overlooks the heart of Wilno, with a view of the Kashub Heritage Museum and the local tavern.

"This has been a wonderful venue to live and work," said Carl who has called the gallery home for eight years. "There have only been four owners since it was built and each one has been involved in the arts."

Wilno's Craft Gallery is a local fixture, like the neighbouring tavern, where the parking lot was packed with sleds over the weekend. "Wilno has been a very positive destination for us," said the Walls, who purchased the gallery in 2008.

Visitors to the Wilno Craft Gallery will find a showroom stocked with hundreds of consignment pieces, representing over 175 artisans living within a 150 mile radius of the remote community, known as Canada's first Polish settlement.

"Many artists seek out our studio because it is so established within Ontario's artisan network," said Carl, who also stocks specialty canned goods from Bancroft. "Our consignment pieces keep the overhead low."

Cottagers form an important clientele during the summer months, with a vital winter market attracting shoppers from places such as Petawawa and Barry's Bay.

"The garrison in Petawawa is very dear to our hearts," said Carl. "Many service people make day trips involving lunch at the tavern and gallery shopping."

Wilno enjoys a deep bond with other communities like Bancroft whose live music fans pack into buses to catch their locals

jamming on the Wilno Tavern stage.

?Bancroft's artists are also involved in our weaver's circuit? said Carl. ?Susan DeCiantis creates beautiful wool pieces, and I have her farm fresh eggs in my fridge upstairs.?

Annie and Carl have no plans to leave town and their positive experience at the Wilno Craft Gallery has only cultivated their love of local architecture.

?We have purchased the red-brick ecclesiastical rectory, another Wilno original,? said Carl, pulling up a screen shot of the estate on his iPhone. ?It is the oldest brick structure in town and Annie is already setting up her studio.?