

Friday, March 22, 2013

GALA eyes downtown art center

Nonprofit to seek DCR partnership, use of Heritage State Park Visitor Center

BY MELISSA SANDFORD

NEWS STAFF WRITER

GARDNER — Local artists, musicians, writers and craftsman seeking a permanent place to showcase their work, take classes and meet together as a community announced Thursday they will be pursuing a partnership with the state's Department of Conservation and Recreation to reopen the Gardner Heritage State Park Visitor Center on Central Street as an art center.

"We are in the midst of negotiations with DCR to have our nonprofit, (the Gardner Area League of Artists), find a new home within the Gardner Heritage State Park Visitor Center," said Kevin Bird, GALA's chairman, during a Business After Hours event hosted by the Greater Gardner Chamber of Commerce. "What the space needs is to draw people in, not with a stagnant exhibit but with ever-changing events. It needs to be a destination, a place people are excited to go to more than once."

The center has sat dormant and in need of repairs for nearly a decade. In recent months, Mr. Bird said GALA board members have taken a tour of the facility and initiated conversations with local and state officials. The nonprofit — which this weekend is hosting its Spring Art Show at Gardner's Polish American Citizens Club — is also currently in the process of starting a letter



News photo by LATRICE COOPER

The Greater Gardner Chamber of Commerce's March Business After Hours was sponsored by the Gardner Area League of Artists at the PACC Thursday evening. Guests enjoyed a special preview of the GALA Spring Art Show. Pictured, from left, are Chamber members Jacques Archambault and Kim Morrily Rameau and local potter Steven Landry.

writing campaign, he said.

"It would be great if residents took the time to send letters of support (to DCR), showing the need we have for an art and community center," Mr. Bird

said. "They need to know that the community wants to bring something different and exciting into downtown Gardner to help revitalize the area."

Turn to GALA, Pag 4



News staff photo by MELISSA SANDFORD

Visitors get a preview of work being displayed at this weekend's Spring Art Show during a Greater Gardner Chamber of Commerce Business After Hours event sponsored by GALA at the PACC in Gardner, Thursday.

GALA plans to pursue downtown art center

From GALA, Page 1

In recent years, despite support from Mayor Mark Hawke, state Sen. Stephen Brewer, state Sen. Jennifer Flanagan, former state Rep. Rich Bastien and current state Rep. Jon Zlotnik, attempts made to obtain state funding for the repair and reopening the facility have been unsuccessful. Regardless, GALA officials say the backing of local officials will be essential going forward.

"What I really like about how this is unfolding is that the mayor and state officials are behind us," said Mr. Bird.

According to Mayor Hawke, reopening the facility as an art and community center would be a cultural boost for the city with economic benefits, bringing "needed energy" and traffic to downtown.

"I can see the art exhibits, the artists there selling their wares, the musicians playing out front in the plaza on nice spring nights," he said. "I am excited about this. GALA is excited about this. Our delegates are even on board and willing to do everything they can."

Rep. Zlotnik said he is equally optimistic about the project's viability.

"It sounds great," he said. "There is no guarantee, of course, but the one thing missing before was that we didn't really have a good answer as to what we would use the building for if we reopened it. But now, with GALA stepping up ... it increases our chances when we are trying to secure funding. All of the pieces are finally there."

msandford@thegardnernews.com