

Annie Smith Art Center at Sunny Point

Artists are innately drawn to the natural beauty of the Finger Lakes region. It is an area that stimulates creativity and has led to the creation of thousands of images of sailboats and sunshine, clusters of grapes hanging on gnarled vines, and waterfalls and gorges that cut through a patchwork quilt of farmlands and vineyards. Now, thanks to a generous donation to the Yates County Arts Center from the estate of Dr. Annie Smith, artists will have an additional opportunity to fully experience the inspirational impact of the Finger Lakes.

On June 28, 2008, Yates County Arts Center received a gift of property that it plans to use for artist gatherings and workshops. The property had been a second home for Dr. Annie Smith, a well-known artist, author, and a professor of art history for more than 30 years at the University of Toronto at Mississauga/Sheridan College. Dr. Annie Smith was the founder of the art history and art program at Sheridan College, which was the "first of its kind to link a fine art university program with a college of art and technology". Professor John Armstrong wrote of Annie's contributions, "She worked collaboratively with students and faculty to build an ever-evolving curriculum response to the theoretical and practical nature of contemporary art practices". As an artist, Annie initiated, designed and created three murals for the Princess Margaret Hospital in Toronto. She was well known for her landscapes, working in oil on canvas and in watercolor and pastels. However, her most familiar creation was a little cartoon bear, that became part of her signature. Annie completed every personal note, hand-designed Christmas ornament or book she signed with this little bear that would later become the central character of her last book.

Art educators may be familiar with her classroom art projects book, *Getting into Art History*, published in 1992 by Barn Press. But her writing took another turn when she was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1986 and ovarian cancer in 1999. This led to the creation of *Bearing Up With Cancer*, which was published in 2004 by Second Story Press. The book, featuring her familiar cartoon bear battling ovarian cancer led to numerous Canadian, American and other international speaking engagements aiding cancer research.

All through her long battle with cancer, Annie kept returning to Sunny Point. She saw it as a place of dreams, of friendship, of creativity, of healing, music and laughter. It was a place that presented nature at its finest. Her work in education, her interest in art as a healing medium, and her love of art and for the natural beauty of the area prompted her to donate Sunny Point to the Yates County Arts Center. Sandy Murrin, Annie's friend and neighbor and a member of the YCAC Board of Directors, noted that Annie wanted everyone to enjoy it and hoped its

personality would endure. Fran Blied, Executive Director of YCAC, stated that the facility will continue Annie's legacy and be used as a place for artists and others to gather, to be inspired, to learn, to contemplate, and to share ideas.

With the acquisition, the Dr. Annie Smith Art Center at Sunny Point becomes Yates County's newest art facility. It is located at 868 East Lake Road just eight miles south of Penn Yan. There are two residences on the property, a small cottage and the Red Barn, where Annie resided when she stayed in the area. In addition, there is also a boat house which will be used by the Arts Center.

The White Cottage provides an idyllic setting for artist gatherings. Sheltered and secluded, it is nestled within the gentle curve of a small cove. It overlooks the Point which is covered by the canopy of an ancient willow. Huge branches arch out and taper gracefully down to touch the shale-covered shore and dip leaves into the softly lapping water. YCAC plans to use this tranquil spot to house artists and students of art and/or art therapy and to provide a haven where they can experience the beauty of the area and find inspiration while they work and learn.

Situated more closely to the Point, is the Red Barn. This building, with its expansive windows and lighthouse-style addition has dramatic views to the north, south and west. YCAC plans to use this building as an educational facility for workshops in many media, including painting, photography and weaving. This is the first building at Sunny Point that has been used for artistic endeavors by YCAC. The first workshop, Solarplate Printmaking, was held in the Barn on June 30-July 2, 2008 by artist-in-residence, Roger Hyndman. In August, Dick Kane held a four-day Plein Air Painting workshop there that included painting the beautiful views from the property at Sunny Point. In October, The Barn was also used to host a well-received Opening Reception that featured the work of local artists. YCAC plans to expand the use of this building to offer small classes, workshops, exhibits, and artist receptions.

The immaculately kept grounds and two main residences offer ideal settings to foster creativity, but perhaps the most innovative concept is using the boathouse to accommodate the "messier arts", such as pottery, sculpture, and soapstone carving. Presenting workshops in this building will provide artists with a carefree and relaxed environment to practice their skills.

The possibilities for this new facility are endless and people in the community are continuing to share their ideas on ways that this new facility can be used to benefit all. Yates County Arts

Center's main facility at 119 East Elm Street in Penn Yan continues to offer a wide array of programming in downtown Penn Yan but the donation of this property will allow them to expand and offer even more programs at the Annie Smith Arts Center at Sunny Point.

Annie left behind a very large imprint. She continues to touch the lives of people and enrich their lives beyond measure. Sunny Point will continue to be a place of dreams, of friendship, of creativity, of healing, of music and laughter, of wind and water, and nature at its very best. In 1965, Annie Smith wrote a poem titled *The 29th Year of a Dream of Love* which sums up her gift of her property at Sunny Point to the Yates County Arts Center. Her dreams for Sunny Point will live on and continually honor this outstanding woman.

The 29th Year of a Dream of Love

Dreams live forever – they are gold,

A fire's warmth when it is cold.

Dreams live forever – colors change,

Happiness dances with yellow flames.

Dreams live forever – keeping sight

Of falling rays, the setting light.

And though a dream may come and pass,

The fact it came is what will last;

And neither time nor wear will sever

Me from my dream that lives forever.