



BY: YOZETTE “YOGI” COLLINS

As much as I love art and artsy things, there’s a certain discomfort I feel going into art galleries. Whether it’s a combination of expected sticker shock and the fear that gallery-types may look down their noses at me, I don’t know, but the owners of Kalā (ka-lay) Gallery in Lenoir are out to prove that art of all types is indeed within reach of the masses.

Fransien (pronounced “Francine”) Schuller and Terry Brown opened Kalā Gallery two years ago to not only surround themselves with things they love, but to fulfill a dream. “We’d always wanted to start a small business and we’d been gallery crawlers for a long, long time,” says Fransien.

Kalā Gallery, named after the Sanskrit word meaning art, offers jewelry, pottery, ornaments and paintings from 120 artists around the country (35 – 40% of those artists are based in North Carolina) and with a variety of price points. In fact, one of Terry and Fransien’s goals is to sell beautiful, affordable art.

But, affordable is a relative term, especially in the art world, so Fransien explains, “You can find little pocket tokens for \$2.50. We have a lot of things in the fifteen to twenty dollar range like ornaments out of Easley, South Carolina that are very popular and sell for \$14 all the way up to \$500 for paintings or a piece of furniture.”

“We work really hard,” adds Terry, “to have high-quality arts and crafts here, but we price to our market. So, you’ll find a lot of the art you’ll see in Boone or Blowing Rock, but the price is lower. We have lots of people who come in and comment over and over about what a steal.”

As local business owners the couple have become very attune to the role small businesses play in the health and wealth of communi-

ties across the United States. “Our hearts are in supporting local and trying to keep things local,” says Terry. “The heart and soul of your community is small businesses.” (see inset)

Adds Fransien, “Small businesses helped start this country; the country is going through a challenging time. We need to reinvent how this country works and we need to support all of us. With “big box” stores only 43% [of the money spent] stays in the local community, but when you shop at a local independent retailer, a larger percentage will stay in the local community.”

While promoting art as a viable economic contribution and artists as small business owners is a fresh, out-of-the-box approach, it’s one that Caldwell County is taking to heart. On October 16th, Caldwell County will hold its first “Art Around Caldwell: Gallery & Studio Tour” where artists’ and art galleries will open their doors as visitors learn about 30-plus local artists’ styles and get up-close views of their work. It is an excellent way to make art approachable to everyone.

“We saw a need for this sort of thing,” says Terry. “This is an economic issue as well. In these times we want to encourage people to buy

American-made. The arts represent a huge part of America. Artist’s that we represent do this for a living, so showcasing their art and selling their art supports employment as well as the local community.”

The 3/50 Project

In a nutshell, the 3/50 Project aims to save independent businesses in the U.S. by suggesting:

- Pick 3 independently owned businesses in your community you would miss if they disappeared. Purchasing from these businesses keeps them around.
- If half the employed population spent \$50 per month at local, independent businesses the impact would be more than \$42 billion in revenue.
- For every \$100 spent in local, independent stores, \$68 stays in the community while of \$100 spent in a national chain only \$43 stays in the local community. The difference adds up!

For more information on the 3/50 Project, log onto www.the350project.net.



Located in Lenoir, Kalā Gallery is open Tuesdays through Saturdays. For more information, call (828) 758-5959 or visit www.kalagallery.com. For more information on Art Around Caldwell, log onto www.caldwellarts.com.