

SIPUKE'L GALLERY – October 26, 2017

Since its beginning, Sipuke'l Gallery has continued to offer itself as a venue for the expression of Mi'kmaw and other indigenous artistry, heritage, and craftsmanship. Workshops, art shows, public talks and cultural events have been held by Acadia First Nation within the Gallery space, on the lawn and in other areas of the Town Hall Arts & Cultural Centre in which it is housed.

Initially displaying art, crafted items, loaned pieces from AFN members' private collections and the Mersey River project artifact display loaned back to the region of its origin by the Nova Scotia Museum, the Gallery has continued its evolution in the last year in order to increase its appeal to Community members and the general public, and to improve its financial viability.

New display cases and shelving have been added as well as stock of native-designed and -made Gift Shop items ranging from sweetgrass-scented lotions and fragrance to mugs, magnets and scarves with a wide-ranging appeal. Matted and framed cards and prints are also now in stock, adding a supply of more affordable artwork to the inventory. New artists' original work has been added to the walls, and we continue to add to the number of items offered for sale by AFN members.

Sales figures indicate improvement and positive potential for the future. Comparison between the corresponding periods of April-to-October this year and last indicate that sales in 2017 were nearly three times what they were in 2016: \$2719.05 for that period in 2016; \$7733.55 in 2017. The Gallery staff and Committee members continue to look for and experiment with ways to increase these values.

The growth in sales is an exciting trend and the growing traffic numbers up until the Spring of 2017 were very encouraging. There was, however, a surprising and significant drop in visitation this summer compared to the previous summer, despite the increase in sales. Comparison of visitor numbers for the months of August, for example, show 119 in the Gallery's first year, 581 in its second, and 309 in its third. Highway and building signage and a greater internet presence are necessities that we know must be addressed, however a professional marketing plan would identify additional key ways to drive traffic and sales. To this end we have submitted a proposal to the ATAC Tourism Development Funding Support Program and are waiting to hear if the application is approved.

Some of the events that have taken place in the last year include basketry and moccasin workshops, Theresa Meuse's book launch, an exhibit along with print-making workshops held in cooperation with the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, participation in the South Shore Expo, National Aboriginal Day, Privateer Days, Grand Pre 2017, Canada Day at Queens Place, a Women's Power Luncheon, a youth Art & Poetry workshop and weekly Craft Days for kids in the summertime. Recently, in cooperation with the Region of Queens, White Point Beach Resort, and the South Shore Tourism Cooperative we hosted a luncheon and talk with Robert Bernard, the Chair of the Aboriginal Tourism Association of Canada.

Other notable occurrences have been:

- A successful application to Canada Summer Jobs, securing funding for a second student in 2017
- The Nova Scotia College of Art & Design brought a class of students to visit for the 3rd time
- A photography contest held in the Spring succeeded in bringing in many visitors
- A visit to the Gallery by artist Emma Fitzgerald has resulted in a sketch of one of Elder Rose Morris's baskets being included in Fitzgerald's book Sketch by Sketch Along the South Shore, with Rose's permission
- Continued liaison with Dr. Matthew Betts of the Canadian Museum of History, helping to promote related events and maintaining an open dialog concerning past and potential archaeological study on AFN lands
- The Gallery's 'Highlight of the Year' took place on October 17th when Nova Scotia Museum staff installed a selection of artifacts from the E'se'get Archaeological Project in Port Joli at the Gallery. Most notable among these is one of the five clamshell spark holders recovered during the excavation.

Looking forward:

- we have planned workshops on moccasin-making, quillwork, beaded Christmas ornaments, and another Photography Contest
- we have identified interest on the part of two, perhaps three artists for Art Shows in 2018
- we would like to encourage more AFN members and other Mi'kmaw artists and craftspeople to place their work on consignment in the Gallery.
- we will be taking part in South Shore Tourism's 'Lobster Crawl' event over two weeks in February by planning a lobster-related multi-disciplinary Group Art Show. This will include an evening Opening and we have invited Hell Bay Brewery to partner with us on this, serving craft beer samples while we plan to serve lobster snacks
- we hope to increase the Gallery's exposure, foot-traffic and sales through known strategies and others we hope to learn and employ

Respectfully submitted,

Heather Doane
Curator