



Artisan Village

TERRY DICKINSON SEES GRAYLING MAIN STREET AS THE KEY TO THE COMMUNITY'S DEVELOPMENT

Photos and Story by Phil Eich, Storyville Social, as part of the Michigan Main Street Story Series

Artisan Village opened its doors in 2011. We began as an arts organization, but I knew we would also need to pay the bills. I have a retail background, so I thought, 'Let's get art we can sell in here and let those sales cover our basic operational expenses,' but the first three years were thin enough that we ran out of funds and had to do a little borrowing.

It became absolutely clear to me that an art gallery is not a stand-alone business: we needed other businesses surrounding us to survive. That's when one of my artists asked if I had ever heard of the Michigan Main Street program. She had moved to Grayling from a community with the program and understood the kind of transformation it could bring. I did some research,

went to the city manager, proposed we do it, and asked whether our organization could get it started.

We officially became part of Main Street about a decade ago. Main Street became a vehicle for this organization and other businesses to access resources they otherwise couldn't. So much of the development came from the business community itself, with Main Street helping them move forward.

Today, Artisan Village is thriving. We have an annual competition show featuring local and international artists. This year's show has art from 35 communities in Michigan, 16 states, Canada and Hungary and draws about 2,000 to 3,000 people over two weeks. We give away \$11,000, the

second most valuable purse in the state, and that's all supported by local business people. Local support makes it happen: we get a \$5,000 gift from the owner of the Taco Bell franchise in this region, Kirtland Community College gives \$2,000, and Paddle Hard Brewing gives \$1,000. To have a gift of \$11,000 from a community this size for an international art exhibition is amazing.

We also rent out space for different uses, like a wine tasting room and a coffee shop, and those rentals take care of our mortgage. The other synergy is that when we do a concert or community theater, many of the patrons will have dinner and drinks before and then stop by for another drink after, and when they have their tables full, the art gallery becomes their waiting room. It has really blossomed nicely!

One of our local teachers who is involved in the performing arts offered to do improv comedy here, and he packs this place full. It is so much fun, and his shows support the animal shelter, the food pantry, and other causes. They've raised over \$10,000 by passing the hat after his improv shows.

If I could tap into unlimited resources, I would love to see a whole new structure downtown. Some buildings would need to be torn down and rebuilt into a really high-end, respected arts center. With Grayling being located at the apex of 127 and 75, it's not hard to get to Grayling. The intermediary step is to see if we can buy and rehab another building specifically for the performing arts. If we could put in a performing arts center with retail on the street, we'd

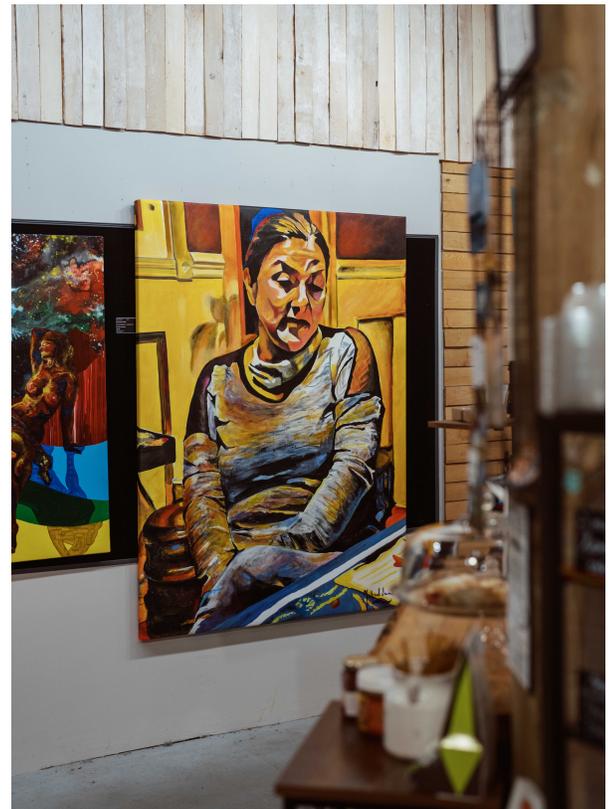


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be drawing traffic, which would benefit the other businesses, as well.

I feel good about what's happened here and I feel good about the role I played. But I also know that I didn't do any of this alone—the community did it.

—Terry Dickinson, Artisan Village





Michigan Main Street Story Series



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