

## Staff Report

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**Report To:** Community Services Committee  
**Report From:** Aidan Ware, Director and Chief Curator – Art Gallery,  
Culture, Tourism  
**Meeting Date:** December 13, 2023  
**Report Code:** AG-23-012  
**Subject:** December Tourism and Culture Update Report

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### **Recommendations:**

THAT in consideration of Staff Report AG-23-012 respecting the December Tourism and Culture Update Report, the Community Services Committee recommends that City Council receive the report for information purposes.

### **Highlights:**

#### **Art Gallery**

- The Accessibility upgrade construction project continues with the installation of the new elevator. The City received an extension on the grant due to construction delays. Anticipated completion is now November or early December.
- The Gallery is working on a major exhibition of historical photographs by local photographer J. James illuminating the history of Owen Sound which will open in early December. The exhibition will be accompanied by a collection of personal family photographs and stories by locals related to the history of Owen Sound.

## **Tourism**

- At this time, staff are taking the opportunity to review Tourism related activities, assess what was successful, and find opportunities for new growth and change.
- Tourism has refreshed the monthly e-newsletter to make it more visual and promote and highlight events happening around the community and continue to work to refine the updated website.

## **Events**

- The Events and Activations Coordinator is currently preparing Work Plans for 2024, which incorporate some changes and new event concepts including neighbourhood movie nights, a re-vamped music in the River District series, and an expanded 3-day Waterfront Festival.
- At this time, staff are taking the opportunity to review Events related activities, assess what was successful, and find opportunities for new growth and change.

## **Strategic Plan Alignment:**

[Strategic Plan](#) Priority: This report supports the delivery of Core Service

## **Climate and Environmental Implications:**

This supports the objectives of the City's Corporate Climate Change Adaptation Plan by increasing awareness and knowledge of corporate climate change adaptation.

## **Previous Report/Authority:**

[AG-23-010](#)

## **Background:**

## **Art Gallery**

### **Current Exhibitions**

Roly Fenwick: *Lifelines in Light & Shadow* | Continues to Nov 25

A solo exhibition of paintings by Roly Fenwick that offers a survey of his career, illustrating the artist's ability to convey "internal places" through his figurative and landscape work. Fenwick states that his focus is not on scenery but on "probing to reveal the forces beneath the veneer," and his paintings reflect this intense interest in revealing the sources of nature and the inner spirit of the landscape.

Gary Blundell and Victoria Ward: *(Re)Inventing Wilderness* | Continues to Dec 2

An exhibition that examines the enduring impact and evidence of the logging industry within the post-industrial landscape. The exhibition presents a multidisciplinary project by contemporary artists Gary Blundell and Victoria Ward in conversation with paintings and photographs by Tom Thomson.

Tom Thomson: *Field of Vision* – Part Two | Continues to Dec 2

This exhibition will reconfigure aspects of Part One by pulling in the photographic reproductions previously displayed at Meaford Hall and presenting them alongside drawings, artifacts, and sketches from the Gallery's Collection.

### **Upcoming Exhibitions**

Susan Dobson (title TBD) | Dec 2, 2023 – March 2, 2024

This exhibition presents large-scale photographs of the Great Lakes from Susan Dobson's Viewfinder and Focus Finder series. Cumulatively the works explore themes of photographic materiality, photographic history and its viewing devices, voyeurism, and surveillance.

J. James: *Living Histories* | Dec 9 – Feb 24

Curated by local author and historian Richard Thomas in collaboration with the Gallery, the exhibition will feature historical photographs by local photographer J. James, illuminating the history of Owen Sound. The exhibition will be explored through a community project, talks, and other

events.

## **Programming**

### OPEN Team Projects

The Gallery is currently involved in two projects through the OPEN Team. *Street Views* (working title) is a project in partnership with Safe n Sound that focuses on engaging the unhoused in Owen Sound. The timing of the project is still to be determined with anticipation of it being actioned in spring 2024. The project will offer those in this situation the opportunity to share their voices, thoughts, creativity, fears, hopes, and dreams, through a variety of media, including photography, video, voice recording, and writing. The participants will be paid an artist fee for their contributions and provided with a cell phone to document their experiences and feelings. The OPEN Team will be doing a call for old cell phones (returned to factory settings) to be donated to the project with any extra phones being provided to Safe n Sound for their clients. Once the project timeframe is complete, cell phones will be handed into the OPEN Team members, who will then work with representatives from that community to curate public installations with the content provided on the phones.

The second project is being spearheaded by the Community Waterfront Heritage Centre, which focuses on the development of a Social Prescriptions program through which healthcare workers work with cultural institutions to prescribe opportunities and experiences that combat social isolation and depression. They are applying for federal funding for this program.

The OPEN Team was successful in receiving a grant from the TD Friends of the Environment Foundation in the amount of \$4600 which will go towards the implementation of pollinator gardens at the OPEN Team locations.

### Collaboration with the Reach Centre

The Gallery and the Reach Centre are teaming up to develop a collaborative installation that includes neurodivergent artists and members of the REACH Centre. Concepts for a joint fundraiser are also being explored. The Reach Centre works with adults with developmental disabilities, serving over 50 youth and adults who experience a diversity of challenges and strengths. They have participants who travel from Southampton, Wiarton, Meaford, Port Elgin, Sauble Beach, Chatsworth and beyond.

## Peninsula Shores District School Project with Nyle Johnston

Visual storyteller Nyle Miigizi Johnston from Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation, worked with students from Peninsula Shores to create a large mural project that the TOM has on display.

## Upcycling Art Show: Recreating a Tom Thomson

This is a local student-focused art initiative involving recycling, reduction of waste, and the repurposing of materials through creative exploration and innovation. This project will invite local classes from grades 4 – 8 to recreate one of Tom Thomson’s most iconic artworks, *Northern Lights*, using recycled materials such as single-use plastics, old clothing, giving materials a second life for an improved purpose, creating a collaborative work of art. In line with the Gallery’s mission to be an open landscape for exploring art and the Owen Sound Waste Watchers’ goal to educate our community on environment and sustainability, this art-fueled project will drive change towards a greener, more inspired tomorrow. By making small changes as individuals and adjusting how we consume and dispose of products in daily life, we can create a cleaner, less toxic future.

## Collaboration with Coffin Ridge Winery

A percentage of proceeds from the wine, beer, and cider sales will be donated to the Gallery. We have created and distributed a Tom Thomson tour map brochure that highlights all the key local areas of interest related to Tom, including the Tom Thomson Trail, the Winery, the gravesite, and the Art Gallery. Planning is currently in initial stages for a 2024 fundraising event.

## Gallery Night at the Movies

Gallery Night at the Movies has returned with gusto, attracting some sold out screenings and regularly high attendance.

This ongoing program, comprised of a partnership with the Toronto International Film Festival, continues to experience a high level of interest and attendance and it provides an opportunity to see films that may not otherwise be available in our region and supports the Canadian film industry

by providing filmmakers and distributors with the opportunities to extend the reach of their releases into smaller communities across the country. The Gallery is also planning a weekend documentary film festival for next spring in partnership with The Roxy Theatre.

*Upcoming film:*

November 13- PAST LIVES depicts two deeply connected childhood friends, Nora and Hae Sung, who fatefully reunite in New York City after being wrested apart 20 years ago, in this decades-spanning romance from writer-director Celine Song.

School Tours

Upon the return of the Gallery's Curator of Public Projects and Education in July, the Gallery is focusing on revitalizing and revisioning school tour programs for the fall and winter. Staff are working with the schools, teachers, and curriculum to create tour packages that are easily accessible to teachers. Staff will also work with the Library and GB Arts on collaborative tour programming.

**Art Collection**

The Art Collection Team met on October 12 to discuss the second draft of the Collection Policy based on the team's suggestions that came out of their discussion at the June meeting. The draft policy includes an introduction to the collection and outlines Gallery policy on care and conservation, acquisitions, deaccessioning, loans, exhibitions, and reproduction of collection works.

Ongoing Projects

A volunteer assisting staff in researching past ownership and exhibition history of various works in the collection has found numerous facts that were not previously known about some important pieces in the collection, discovering creation dates, refining titles, and establishing provenance (ownership trail), which all increases the artworks' research importance to art historians.

Another volunteer who has been assisting in collection over the last year with inventory and documentation has left to begin a museum studies program.

## Collection on Tour

*A Deux, Chez Moi* by Frances-Anne Johnston is at the Judith & Norman Alix Art Gallery (Sarnia, ON) for exhibition until March 2024.

7 Tom Thomson paintings are at the McMichael Canadian Art Collection as part of the *Tom Thomson: North Star* exhibition. The exhibition continues until January 24, 2024, then travels to two galleries in western Canada during 2024.

6 Tim Whiten sculptures are now at the Art Gallery of York University (Toronto) for *Tim Whiten: Elemental Fire*, an exhibition that runs until December 3, 2023.

## **Fundraising**

### Calendar Project

The 2024 calendar, featuring Icons from the Collection, is currently underway, having launched in June. Since the 2020 inaugural edition of the TOM's fundraising calendar, we have raised \$73,000. The 2024 calendar is on sale at the Gallery and in 20+ summer locations, with 20+ more retail locations added the week before Thanksgiving. The Gallery is building strong relationships with these supportive retailers, which broadens our profile regionally.

For the last 2 years, we have donated leftover calendars to Seniors' Homes in communities where calendars were sold, as well as two copies to each secondary school art teacher in Grey Bruce Schools. These outreach initiatives showcase the depth of our permanent collection while creating new community connections.

### Gallery Events

As previously noted, the Fundraising Team decided that the Gallery would focus on creating a set of smaller fundraising events that offer people unique experiences rather than trying to undertake a major gala. Factors that went into this decision include industry trends, staff time, and volunteer resources.

The first of 4 events took place on April 14, featuring an evening at the Gallery with food by renowned local Indigenous chef Zach Keeshig paired with wine and cider by Coffin Ridge. The tickets for this event were sold out with 110

people attending this wonderful event. This event raised \$4332.10 net proceeds for the Gallery.

The second event was *Dinner with an Art Collector*, which took place at the home of Advisory Committee Chair Peter Tovell on Thursday, July 6 and featured an outstanding 3-course dinner by Bruce Wine Bar paired with boutique vintage wines, music, and the chance to learn about Tovell's passion for collecting and his rich family history in the arts. Tickets were limited to 24 for this event, and they sold out. This event raised \$3,284.77 net proceeds for the Gallery but most importantly, was also a key opportunity to reconnect with past donors. The feedback from this dinner was outstanding.

The third was the largest in the series - A Deadly Pairing took place at Coffin Ridge Winery on Friday, September 8, from 5 p.m. to 11 p.m with a sold-out crowd. The evening included 10 tasting stations that featured wine, cider, and beer paired with chef (Jason Merton) and sommelier curated food. There was also live music by Higher Funktion, dancing, pizza oven, and the launch of the Tom Thomson-inspired bourbon barreled Marquette wine Night Spirit. The feedback from this event was glowing with many people asking when the next one will take place. The total net proceeds from this event were \$8,336.52.

The Gallery's fourth and final fundraising event of the year will take place on Saturday, December 1. The event will be a one-of-a-kind festive Merry Mingle at the home of local art patrons Mary Anne Alton and Andy McKee. Decked out for the holidays, their home will be the backdrop for a wonderful evening of custom hors d'oeuvres with wine and beer, tarot readings, billiards tournament, silent auction, mystery wine wall, festive sing along accompanied by Jayden Grahlman and a special art salon featuring two local artists who will be there to meet and greet. Only 50 (\$125) tickets will be available.

### Facility Expansion Planning

The facility expansion planning team continues to work to support the establishment of a plan for raising funds to support an expansion of the Gallery at its present location, inclusive of Rice House. The team has created a preliminary plan to enter the first phase of expansion planning, focused on achieving the required professional studies to enable the team to move into the fundraising phase by 2024. The objective is to achieve a practical addition to the building to solve critical collection storage and space issues.

The Gallery is undertaking a feasibility study that will provide a market analysis as well as an unbiased look at challenges and opportunities for expansion. The

study was funded through private donations, as well as an allocation from the Tom Thomson Art Foundation money, which was provided to the City in December 2022. The Request for Proposals (RFP) has been awarded to the highest-scoring proponent, Diamond Schmitt.

Their specialized team has been working with Gallery and Planning staff to prepare the architectural modelling and market analysis. They have presented draft massing designs, research, preliminary program of spaces and market analysis and continue to work towards completion by early 2024.

Following the completion of the feasibility study, the Gallery will need to undertake a fundraising feasibility study to ascertain the amount of money that can be raised for this project.

These studies will provide Council with a full account of the benefits and opportunities (including economic), as well as the resource requirements for undertaking this expansion.

## **Tourism**

Staff are working on work plans for 2024 which will present some changes and the introduction of the story app which will offer opportunities for interactive self-guided tours, walks, and custom audio guides. This app enables us to use images, audio, text, maps, and custom information to create experiences that are accessible and engaging. It has powerful mapping capabilities and geo-fencing technology that is built into the app that can provide people with local-specific content and notifications. This app has been implemented by several other cities, including:

City of Whistler - <https://stqry.app/projects/2828>

Explore Morgan City - <https://stqry.app/projects/5246>

Downtown Rutland - <https://stqry.app/projects/2248>

Visit West Seattle - <https://stqry.app/projects/5465>

Kennebec Valley Explorer - <https://stqry.app/projects/5966>

## **Events**

A comprehensive wrap-up report was provided by the Events and Activations Coordinator on 2023 activities to the Community Development, Culture and Tourism Committee in November. Presently, staff are engaged with completing Work Plans for 2024 that will test out new initiatives including

neighbourhood movie nights, music in the downtown, and an expanded 3-day Waterfront Festival.

### **Analysis:**

The Art Gallery, Tourism/Culture, and Events have had a thriving and busy year, moving forward with popular returning events and inspiring new projects. Staff continue to seek impact through partnerships and collaborations to create experiences that resonate with the community and attract visitors to the region. The staff on these teams are working interconnectedly and seeking ways in which to achieve growth through shared resources, ideas, and support.

### **Financial Implications:**

The Art Gallery, Tourism, and Events staff continue to work within their approved budgets to achieve these programs or to seek grant support for new projects where opportunities arise.

### **Communication Strategy:**

The Director and Chief Curator continues to work with the staff to ensure that public communication of programming, events, activations, and exhibitions are broadly transmitted and easily accessed. Exhibitions and events will be announced in a media release, promoted through social media channels, highlighted on the TOM and Tourism websites, and listed on regional events calendars. Throughout the summer, programming is also promoted at the market and harbour concerts series' during intermission.

### **Consultation:**

The Director of Community Services and City Manager have reviewed these programming plans.

### **Attachments:**

None.

### **Recommended by:**

Aidan Ware, Director and Chief Curator – Art Gallery, Culture Tourism

### **Reviewed by:**

Pam Coulter, Director of Community Services

**Submission approved by:**

Tim Simmonds, City Manager

For more information on this report, please contact Aidan Ware, Director and Chief Curator at [aware@tomthomson.org](mailto:aware@tomthomson.org) or 519-376-1932 ext. 5001.