

Art gallery seeking Milford location

By FRANK JULIANO

MILFORD – An upscale "New York-style" art gallery is negotiating to rent a downtown storefront, officials said Thursday.

The visibility of the arts is already increasing downtown, and the addition of the new gallery will help create a vibrant mix, said Robert Gregory, the city's economic development director.

Joseph Agro, who owns the plaza at 58 River St. with his brother Louis, said they are actually in talks with two different arts-related businesses that want to lease the space. "We are thrilled," he said. "It would be a great use of that space and eventually we want to upgrade the whole front of the building."

The space had been the Milford news bureau of the Connecticut Post for 17 years and before that was a liquor store. The newspaper office moved across River Street into the Yankee Professional Building last month.

Agro said that the state Office of Adult Probation, which already leases a section of the complex, had an option to take over the storefront, but officials chose not to exercise it.

"This would be high-end art, in a New York-style gallery," the landlord said. "We hope we can reach an agreement, but we have nothing yet."

Gregory noted that there are already boutiques, dance studios and craft shops downtown, along with the city-owned Center for the Arts in the former eastbound Metro-North Railroad station.

"There are arts and crafts fairs on the Green all summer," Gregory said. "And the Open Doors of Milford is coming up." The Downtown Milford Business Association will open its second annual "Open Doors" exhibit later this month. Artists will design and decorate wood panel doors in many different styles that will be displayed throughout the central business district.

When the exhibit ends, the doors will be auctioned, with half of the proceeds going to the artist and half to a charity selected by the downtown merchants group.

Among the other permanent businesses downtown that showcase art are the Gilded Lily and Artifax, both on River Street. **Manifest Beads is also set to open on the same street.**

William Meddick, executive director of the Fine Arts Council, said an art gallery would be an important addition to the city's commercial and cultural base. "It would be a great thing, an exciting thing," he said.

Gregory said he has already met with one of the people interested in opening a gallery in the Agros' building. "She talked to me about possibly offering lessons for children," the city official said.

For years the city has been nurturing an arts district at Walnut Beach; the Stowe Farm arts center that will be its centerpiece is in the design stages. But Gregory said that both the beach neighborhood and downtown can have thriving arts venues.

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