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# Artist's work is not just for show

By KELLY GERLACH

The array of beautiful jewelry lining the cases inside the Ohnward Fine Arts Center's Drew Art Gallery aren't just for show. Local residents design and create the pieces to benefit themselves and the center.

Some people might get the wrong impression that the glass cases and wooden shelves inside the Ohnward lobby merely exhibit various forms of artwork. But the majority of that work is created by everyday people - neighbors, business-people, residents or former residents.

Take the newest exhibitor in the jewelry cases at Ohnward - Barb Schmidt. She's lived in Maquoketa "forever," she emphasized, but she only recently took up jewelry design. She's been an artist for as long as she can remember, experimenting with watercolor, oil paintings, calligraphy and framing.

Her cheerfully colored pendants, necklaces and earrings have become a sensation among her friends and family. Her pendants first became the rage last winter when she and Silvia Engel (whose Mi Tierra Designs jewelry pieces are also available for sale at Ohnward) designed a Christmas tree decorated with all handmade ornaments.

"I made pendants that said 'Merry Christmas' and people told me they'd take (the letters) off the tree and wear them as pendants. So I started making letter pendants with unleaded solder," Schmidt said.

She created other small pendants and exhib-



MSP photo by Kelly Gerlach

**Mandi Toutsch**, California born and Iowa raised, shows some of her handmade jewelry and printed cards. Toutsch's items are on sale in the Ohnward Fine Center Gift Shop. The center receives a portion of income from the sale of gift shop items. Sales help Ohnward continue offering quality arts and entertainment while supporting local artists.

ited them in an art gallery in Bellevue, which soon asked her if she could make some stained glass pendants. Those, too, became popular.

"Once I started with my jewelry, people started noticing everything else I do," Schmidt said, noting an increased interest in her oil paintings.

She began creating necklaces and stained glass pendants for herself and family.

"I started wearing them to my women's prayer group in the Quad Cities and (the women) started buying them off me."

A friend held a garden party for her in which interested attendees purchases her necklaces, earrings, watercolors and oil pastels - all that only about six weeks ago. It's been a whirlwind and now she's exhibiting and selling some of her original jewelry in the Ohnward gift shop.

Schmidt said each piece of jewelry is unique. "Some might be similar but none are exactly alike."

She made a few necklaces with the Clinton Engines logo for the historical society to sell. There's a simple piece with a pendant fashioned from a section of a tape measurer. Many necklaces are byproducts of her various other artistic pursuits. She uses shells, wires, beads, chain, stained glass.

■ **ARTWORK**, Please turn to page 28

# Engineering firm hired for cleanup project

By DOUGLAS MELVOLD

The Maquoketa City Council has hired a Cedar Rapids engineering firm to oversee the process of cleaning up the downtown fire debris.

The council on Sept. 8 awarded a \$50,650 contract to the Howard R. Green Co. to handle the bidding and oversee the project.

The company was the unanimously preferred firm from among three engineering companies interviewed by the council's Finance Committee, consisting of Neil Morehead, Galen Saunders and Jason Hute. Mayor Tom Messerli and City Manager Brian Wagner also participated in the interviews.

The council ratified the Finance Committee's recommendation on a 6-0 vote.

The other engineering firms interviewed were Stanley Consultants of Muscatine and Terracon of Bettendorf.

The Finance Committee interviewed the firms separately on three consecutive days earlier this month.

A contract between the city and the Green firm will be drawn up for council action.

"We came up with a firm that we thought would do an excellent job for us," Mayor Tom Messerli said.

He said officials of the firm told Finance Committee members that if they were awarded the contract, they would immediately begin work on what's called the "community involvement" portion of the process.

Hute called the Green firm "top-notch. They seem highly qualified."

The Green firm will draw up specifications and handle the bidding process to hire the contractor that will clean up and dispose of the debris that has sat at the South Main Street site for more than 20 months, since the January 2008 fire.

Hiring of the engineering firm was a condition of the city receiving a \$200,000 grant from the

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, which is the largest amount in the financing package that will pay for the clean-up.

"Following the rules of this project makes it a very, very slow project," Messerli said.

He said the city "has worked really, really, really hard" to keep local tax money from helping pay for the clean-up. The project is being paid for by a combination of state and federal grants, insurance proceeds and donations.

Although the cost of the clean-up won't be known until the contracts are awarded, Messerli said the engineering firms that were interviewed felt that the approximately \$418,250 that the city raised for the project will cover the cost.

Messerli said no date has been set for the bidding process for a clean-up contractor to begin. He noted that the engineering firm and the city must comply with the requirements of the grants.

The mayor also expressed appreciation to U.S. Rep. Bruce Braley for providing assistance in obtaining funding.

In an apparent response to residents who feel the city hasn't acted quickly enough, Messerli said the city has owned the three downtown properties involved only since June.

The property owners agreed to transfer ownership of the properties to the city at no cost and to assign to the city the portion of their insurance proceeds earmarked for clean-up of the site.

In return, the property owners were absolved of the responsibility of cleaning up the site. All three parties said they couldn't afford to do the clean-up, with the additional cost of handling the asbestos that was determined to be in the debris.

In addition to the \$200,000 grant, the city has received an \$85,000 forgivable loan from the Iowa Department of Economic Development, a \$25,000 grant from the DNR, \$103,250 in property insurance proceeds and \$5,000 in private

donations held by the Maquoketa Area Chamber of Commerce.

In other business, the council approved first reading of a proposed ordinance that would prohibit the ground floors of commercial buildings in a six-block area of downtown from being converted into apartments.

The first reading was approved on a 5-1 vote with Morehead casting the dissenting vote.

The ordinance would apply to commercial buildings fronting on both sides of Main Street between Maple and Quarry streets and on both sides of Platt Street between Niagara and Olive streets.

Wagner said the proposed ordinance is designed to "stem the tide" of having commercial buildings converted for residential use. The ordinance would not apply to properties in which the residential conversion already has been made.

It also would not apply to the second and third floors of commercial properties.

Currently, residences are permitted in areas zoned B-2, general business, such as the downtown area.

Wagner said the ordinance was prompted by a request made by a downtown property owner earlier this summer to construct an apartment on the first floor of his building.

On another matter, the council approved a proposed design for paving of a parking lot for semi tractor-trailers at the Timber City Travel Plaza at the south edge of the city.

The council's approval is subject to the approval of IIW Engineers and Surveyors of Dubuque, the city's engineering firm.

The council has been pressing Robert Rehm of Carlisle Real Estate Group of Lake Mills, Wis., developer of Prairie Creek Center, where the travel plaza is located, to have the parking lot paved as required by the development agreement between the city and the developer.