

MCC brings artistic flair to downtown

By David Huck

Journal Inquirer

MANCHESTER — Manchester Community College's new cultural and education center on Main Street opened its doors Friday to several dozen supporters hoping to see downtown become a center for the arts east of the Connecticut River.

The building has a new look featuring a cool, black ceiling, white walls, gray modern floor tiles, stainless steel accents, and gallery lights after \$350,000 in renovations.

College officials called the event, which included a talk by MCC President Gena Glickman and a faculty art show, a "soft opening." A more elaborate affair is planned for Sept. 13 when student art will be shown along with a fundraising event.

The first floor of the building includes an art gallery with an area for video installations, a café with free Internet, and seminar rooms.

During July and August, the space will host music and poetry events, continuing education workshops, seminars, MCC's small business center's workshops, "urban" story telling, film showings, ballroom dancing, and even fitness classes.

The three seminar rooms, which will also serve as classrooms and contain overhead projectors and Smart Boards, will be able to accommodate upward of 100 students.

"Today is a great day," Glickman said. "It's a great day for MCC. It's a great day for Manchester. It's a great day for me to finally see it all come together."

Glickman said she has worked for years to jump-start a "college town" atmosphere in the Main Street area. Supporters of the downtown district are hoping the new visitors — and younger faces — will give a boost to area restaurants and businesses.

MCC on Main is also in talks to partner with the Real Art Ways in Hartford, as Glickman said that communities surrounding Manchester have very little access to the arts.

The art gallery will offer six shows

each year featuring Connecticut artists and one additional feature exhibit.

Calling art a "magnet for tourism" and an "economic engine," Glickman said organizations in the greater Hartford area have recently spent \$144.8 million on the arts, providing support for more than 7,381 jobs.

On a more local level, student artwork will be printed on postcards that will be sold at the gallery. The budding artists will earn a percentage of the sales, giving many their first opportunity to be paid for their efforts.

On Friday, Carrie's Creative Catering, run by a former MCC culinary student who lives in South Windsor, was offering up sandwiches, baked goods, and drinks.

A wine bar in West Hartford will be selling beverages during the Friday night music events. Tables both inside and outside invite visitors to gather and linger.

The second floor of the building includes vacant office space left behind by First Niagara Bank when it moved 94 jobs. Officials are hoping to rent the space out to help offset the costs of operating the building, which was built in 1898.

Friday evening's events were to include a performance by local folk musician Jerry "Trainwreck" O'Connor and a soul band, the Rahasaan Langley Project, along with an opening reception for an MCC faculty art show.

The building, which is located at 903 Main St., was donated by First Niagara Bank to the town in October. The bank also gave the college \$500,000 to help in renovating the building.

In the coming months Glickman said they will be rolling out ways to raise money for MCC on Main with a capital campaign, gallery sales, space rental, and possibly memberships. She said the goal is \$3 million.

Naming rights are another option. For \$500,000 a donor can have the building named after them, or lower amounts for other portions. One family has already donated \$125,000 for naming rights to the gallery.

Rudy Kissmann, a member of the

Board of Directors, said the gallery provides another learning experience for area youth and an opportunity to boost the image of Manchester.

"It's a nice addition to the town," he said, adding that he hopes to see more nightlife along the stretch. "As a life-long resident here, it's nice to see Main Street coming alive."

Joanne Britton, the assistant director for fitness and recreation at MCC, is helping to coordinate Zumba classes at MCC on Main. She, too, is a life-long Manchester resident.

"I really think it's going to be that start of having more businesses coming here," she said. "Even though it's a large town, there is still a sense of a small community."

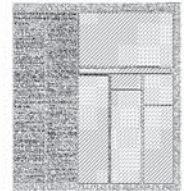
Downtown advocates said nine businesses have moved onto Main Street over the last several months.

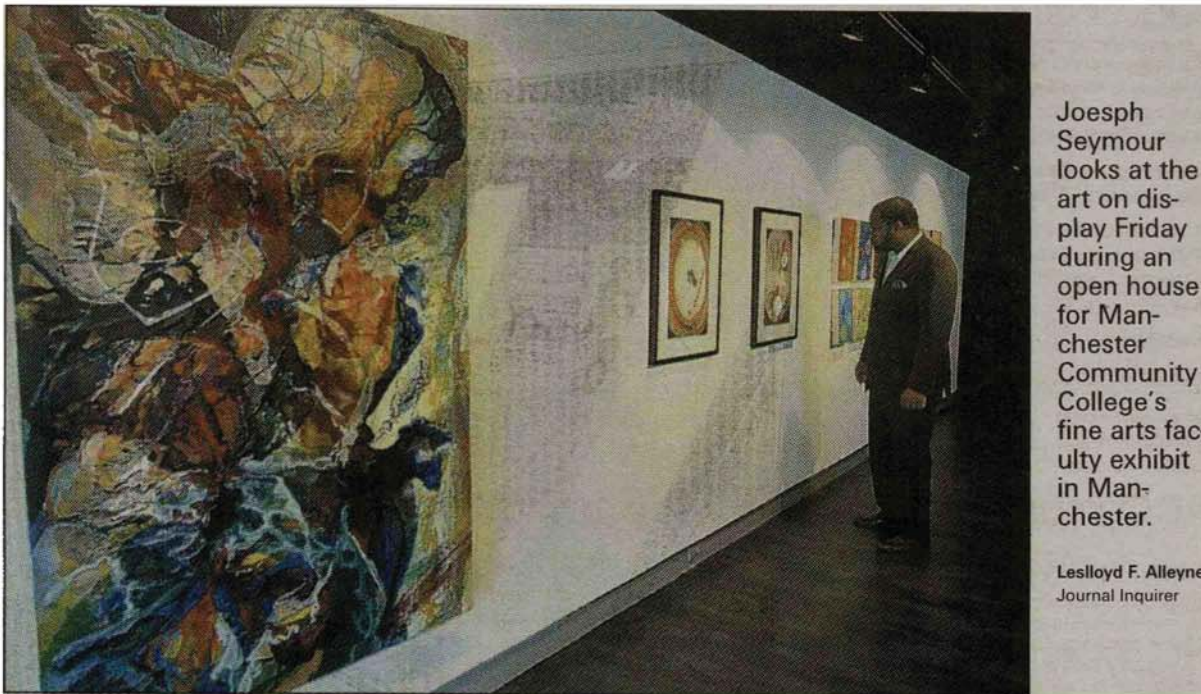
Glickman, who said she earned a bachelor's degree in sculpture, joked about her love for art.

"I keep telling people that they're going to have to hire me to run the gallery when I retire," she said.

Admission is free. The hours are Tuesday 9 a.m. to noon and 5 to 9 p.m.; Thursday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Friday, 11 a.m. to 10 p.m.; Saturday, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.; and Sunday, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.

For details on events visit mcc.comnet.edu/mcc-on-main





Joseph Seymour looks at the art on display Friday during an open house for Manchester Community College's fine arts faculty exhibit in Manchester.

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