Bank Branches Out to Art Community

Community Bank of the Chesapeake Partners with Local Art Groups
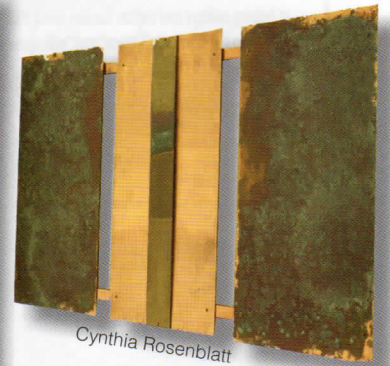
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Without looking too far, you can see and enjoy area residents' artistic contributions to Southern Maryland coursing through the area, much as the various rivers, creeks and streams do. They provide a perspective on life as it has been and is now.

The Community Bank of the Chesapeake (which was started by Leo Middleton in 1950 as Tri-County Building and Loan) has made local art even more accessible by featuring a new exhibit in four Southern Maryland branches (and one branch in Virginia) every quarter. Started in 2014, the program showcases art chosen by the Mattawoman Creek Art Center, Charles County Arts Alliance, Calvert County Arts Council, St. Mary's County Arts Council and Fredericksburg (Virginia) Center for Creative Arts. Exhibits are displayed at the bank's home office in Waldorf, as well as branches in La Plata, Prince Frederick, Charlotte Hall and Lexington Park. Nell Elder, director of the St. Mary's County Arts Council, notes that her group partnered with the bank in 2014 at the Charlotte Hall branch. The Color & Light Society of Southern Maryland has since taken over the management of that branch under the sponsorship of the Arts Council. "We now manage the newly designed branch in Lexington Park," says Elder.

According to Diane Hicks, assistant vice president and marketing manager for Community Bank, the idea of featuring local artists started when they remodeled the La Plata branch. "Our new design provided a lot of open wall space and great lighting. As we pondered what to do with that space, we came up with the idea of displaying local art. As a community bank we liked the idea of featuring community pieces," says Hicks.

Hicks explains, "Each show opens with a two-hour reception with the artists (and friends and family), members of the specific arts organization, bank officials (and maybe some clients), and others who are instrumental in helping hang the show. They mingle over little finger foods, with the banking and arts community learning more about each other and what they have in common. Usually, the reception is in the evening," says Hicks, but the bank is planning to open it to the community, and may change the event to a Saturday afternoon or some other time that will be convenient to area residents. The shows run for about twelve weeks, with a new show starting each quarter. Prices range from $50 to several thousand dollars per piece.

Each branch has a list of pieces in the current exhibit, including the artist's name, price and contact information. Several pieces have been sold, and the bank bought a photo of shore birds by Priscilla Catterton that's now hanging in their Annapolis lending office.

Gale Kladitis, vice president of the

Local artist Christina Allen reads from her two illustrated books, "Momma Tree" and "A Micro-Chip on my Shoulder: A True Story of a Little Poult," at Community Bank.

Artists and bank employees gather at a reception in the newly redesigned Lexington Park branch.

Charles County Arts Alliance, an organization with as many as 200 members, says the partnership with the bank has proven beneficial to everyone. They may choose three dozen works of art from two dozen artists. A side of the exhibit that's not seen by the public is the submission process (via digital files) and paperwork involved in such shows.

"Some artists are artists," says Kladitis, but they don't know how to do this "business" side of the business. The Alliance posts all the works on their website, so if you see a piece you like, then decide to buy it but it's no longer on display at the bank, you can still find it. Similarly, if you like the style and medium an artist uses and you want something a little different, you have a way to contact the artist.

"It's a wonderful collaboration with the bank," says Bob Carpenter, executive director of the Arts Council of Calvert County. "It's an opportunity for our artists to have a place to showcase their art. Community Bank is wonderful to deal with." Carpenter requests submissions, and it's first come, first selected. "They don't have to belong to the Arts Council to be included."

Nia Olabesi, a musician, songwriter and visual artist working in mixed media acrylic whose work was recently included in a Calvert County show, says, "It's wonderful to see the pieces and it's really wonderful that they let us put our art there."

She notes that she isn't a bank customer, but she's thinking about opening an account there.•