

Alley Gallery reveals new exhibit

BY BARBARA GREENBERG

Commercial-News

Published: September 17, 2008

DANVILLE — The Alley Gallery, located in the rear of Crose Insurance on North Vermilion Street, can't seem to find its patrons.

Or maybe, those patrons can't find the gallery.

The alley it's named after features a weathered brick wall that faces the gallery and almost looks like a work of art itself. But that alley is far from a thoroughfare — few people see the gallery from the back of the building.

What's visible of the building's interior from the sidewalk on Vermilion Street is Crose Insurance which houses the gallery. The gallery sits at the very rear of a long line of desks and cubicles. It's difficult to see it from the front door.

Yet the David Nolan, gallery curator, continues to find new artists willing to display their work.

The Alley Gallery opens today a show of drawings, most by local artists. Two of the featured artists, Jane Starbody and Ken Erskine enjoyed long careers in Danville.

Erskine accidentally discovered his talent for drawing.

"I signed up for a pen and ink drawing class in (Danville) high school," he said. "I wasn't really interested in learning how to draw. I just wanted to get the credit."

When Erskine returned from the service after World War II, an old Army buddy suggested that Erskine apply for a job with the friend's father's architectural firm, Blackman & Strader.

"There used to be five architectural firms here," Erskine recalled. "I worked on everything from the old city hall to the new post office.

"Now, the closest one is Riverbend in Covington (Ind.)."

Erskine retired as an architectural draftsman after 50 years with various firms. He spends his time drawing buildings someone else designed, primarily old barns, grain elevators and covered bridges. But he still uses his architectural skills.

"I research the height and width," he said. "That helps with



Former fashion illustrator Jane Starbody shows some of her designs that are on display during the exhibit of drawings. Matt Huber / Commercial-News

IF YOU GO

An exhibit of drawings begins today at The Alley Gallery, 113 ½ N. Vermilion St. Gallery hours are 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Wednesdays and Thursdays or by appointment by calling 497-2286. The show runs through Oct. 9.

An artists' reception will be 2-4 p.m. Saturday. This chance to meet the artists is free and open to the public. Refreshments will be served.

the scale. The length is always given."

He estimates that he's drawn about "300 of these rascals" from photographs he's taken during the years. He has yet to sell one of his highly detailed pen and ink drawings.

"If I priced them out for the time I spend on them, they'd be too expensive," he said. "Each one takes about 35-40 hours to draw.

"Everything I draw is buildings," Erskine said. "It's all I know."

Another artist with a large volume of work will exhibit in the show. Jane Starbody earned her associate of fine arts degree from St. Louis's Washington University School of the Arts. She went right to work from there at the city's premier department store, then called Famous and Barr.

"I was hired on the spot," Starbody said about the response to her portfolio.

She met her husband-to-be, Bill, who sold advertising. They moved to Danville and found work in their related fields — Bill went with Dan Pipkin's advertising agency on Walnut Street and Jane worked as a fashion illustrator for Deutsch Brothers, Kay's, Parisian and, her biggest account, Meis Brothers.

"At that time, fashion drawing was exaggerated," Starbody said. "The torso was elongated, with a nipped-in waist. My trademark was leaving out the chin. It made my drawings unique.

"People think I was a designer, but I was an illustrator," she said. "My job was to make the clothes look good."

Today, Starbody concentrates on specialty lettering, especially an elaborate form called round hand script. She also keeps busy with knitting and counted cross stitch.

Other artists who will exhibit at the all drawing show include brother and sister, Carly and Jake Lockhart, Sabrina Donnelly, Covington's John Satterfield and Jacob Crose of Chicago.

Gallery curator and artist David Nolan said, "We encourage people to come and take a look at what we have on exhibit. People shouldn't feel afraid or intimidated — in fact, their lives will be enriched.

"We'd like to get the average, everyday Joe in here," he said. "We'd also like to see some of the people stop in who say they're advocates of Danville as an art center."