

“First Fridays Artswalk” will Commence in Pittsfield on May 4

[Pittsfield, MA] --- Followers of the Pittsfield cultural scene will have a regular opportunity to see works from visual artists in the newly announced “First Fridays Artswalk”. Starting in May and running year-round, the mostly indoors art displays will be in more than 20 venues, including galleries, retail establishments, and hospitality businesses along the North and South Street arts corridor.

First Fridays Artswalk will occur in the immediate downtown area of Pittsfield commencing on May 4 and will run from 5 – 8 PM; a reception for the exhibiting artists will take place in most of the venues displaying art.

The driving forces behind this new program are Mary McGinnis, proprietor of Mary's Carrot Cake shop, and Pittsfield artist, Leo Mazzeo. Last November, while visiting two well-attended gallery openings on the same evening in close proximity on North Street, the two came up with the idea of making this type of "arts social" a regular activity. They did some grass-roots research and quickly determined that there was significant interest in participation from retailers along North Street and the artist community in general. Thus, the concept of First Fridays Artswalk was born. A committee, which also includes Megan Whilden, Director of Cultural Development, City of Pittsfield, and Mary Rentz, President, Berkshire Art Association, as well as artists and representatives from the arts and business venues, has been set up to act as a coordinating body. The City of Pittsfield's Office of Cultural Development and the Berkshire Art Association are major sponsors of the First Fridays Artswalk. Downtown Pittsfield Inc. will act as the non-profit fiscal agent for the FFA program.

“Approximately 20 different venues have already signed up, with sites ranging from galleries and established art venues, to barber shops, furniture and clothing stores, frame shops, a multitude of restaurants and many more,” states Leo Mazzeo, Lead Coordinator of the project. “The Artswalk team will work directly with venues that are new to the arts-hosting scene, sharing their knowledge and experience about displaying art. In this way, the initiative can accommodate organizations and businesses with varying degrees of expertise in displaying and promoting art.” Those requiring additional assistance will be assigned a volunteer “mentor” who will provide guidance in artist selection and the monthly displays of artwork.

"Small cities and towns around the country have long been involved in supporting the arts and the local economy with regularly scheduled events, which encourage more people to visit the downtown district while promoting the local art scene. Pittsfield has now joined this energetic effort with the introduction of 'First Fridays Artswalk', a visual arts-focused program unifying many of downtown Pittsfield's visual arts and retail establishments, providing a full evening for the art appreciator," according to Mary McGinnis, chair of FFA and a retailer in the downtown district.

For the past 6 years, the City of Pittsfield has run a very successful 3rd Thursdays program which focuses on all the arts, entertainment, food, and music. First Friday Artswalk is an exciting addition to

the already vibrant cultural scene downtown by focusing on the visual arts and the local artists of Pittsfield.

"The City of Pittsfield is thrilled to support this new initiative designed to support local artists and businesses and bring more people downtown to enjoy our city. It's a perfect complement to 3rd Thursdays and other downtown events. Kudos to Mary McGinnis and Leo Mazzeo for bringing First Fridays Artwalks to life!" states Megan Whilden.

"When Leo Mazzeo and Mary McGinnis presented First Fridays Artwalk to the BAA, we saw it as the next huge step in making downtown Pittsfield a thriving arts destination. With the merchants joining artists as stakeholders, the FFA builds on both the PAS and the 3rd Thursdays experiences and solidifies the work that so many organizations have put into this goal," states Mary Rentz, past chair of the Pittsfield Art Show, president of the Berkshire Art Association (BAA) and advisor to the FFA.

Artists and potential art venues along and near the downtown district interested in participating in this program are encouraged to contact Lead Coordinator, Leo Mazzeo at: [info@firstfridaysartswalk.com](mailto:info@firstfridaysartswalk.com), for details and a prospectus. Information is also available at the Lichtenstein Center for the Arts, 28 Renne Avenue, Pittsfield, MA.

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