

Tracy Teeter – The Main ARTery

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

The main artery is vitally important in the circulatory system of every person. It carries nutrients and life-giving oxygen that is vital to the human body. Today we'll learn about a different type of artery. This one is literally about Art. The Main ARTery is a catchy name for a remarkable art gallery in a rural region of Kansas. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Tracy Teeter is owner of The Main ARTery in Ulysses, Kansas. She grew up at Ulysses and studied commercial art at Garden City Community College and Emporia State before working in the restaurant business at various locations around the country. In 1995, she returned to Ulysses and went to work for an attorney. She also met and married her husband, Lynn Teeter.

Tracy practiced painting pastels on the side. In 2005, she befriended a local frame shop owner and fellow artist named Jeani Gustafson. After seeing her friend's artwork, Tracy said, "Let's do a show together." The two joined with other artists to plan and produce an art show in Ulysses.

In the end, there were 11 artists who participated. They called it "Rendezvous with the Arts" and they held it at the local museum.

"It was a great night," Tracy said. In fact, it was so successful that Rendezvous with the Arts has been held annually ever since.

The only problem with the first show was that it was so crowded with people. While it was nice to have an overflow crowd, more space was needed.

Meanwhile, there was a need for a clothing store in Ulysses. No local sources for clothing were available. Tracy and Jeani and five other women got together and sold shares to the community for a community-owned clothing store. They ultimately opened a store called Trendsetters on the main street downtown.

They recognized that the 3,000 square foot space next to Trendsetters on main street would be just right for an art gallery, so these women got together and organized it. Jeani Gustafson owned the business but they all pitched in. They named the business The Main ARTery.

On January 1, 2015, Tracy and Lynn Teeter bought The Main ARTery from Jeani. Her husband was promoted to be CEO of his company and they relocated to Nebraska. The Teeters also rented the other half of the building which had housed Trendsetters. That is now a home décor, antique, and furniture store named Main ARTery Plus. Together, that makes a 7,000 square foot space for art and furnishings.

From that original group of 11, the Main ARTery has now grown to include 26 fine artists and 20 vendors from across the nation. These artists create works of art in watercolor, oils, pastels, sculpture, photography, jewelry, clay, collage, wood, crochet and more. Vendors within the gallery offer antiques, home decor, sports merchandise, candles, hand crafts, and lots of ideas to share in decorating. Framing is available in the store. The Main ARTery offers art classes, receptions, and other activities on a regular basis.

One sculptor lives in New York. It turns out that his aunt and uncle live here in Ulysses. Other artists come from small and large communities around Kansas. One lives at the rural community of Cunningham, population 504 people. Now, that's rural.

The Main ARTery has become a popular place for buying gifts. "We've been compared favorably to Santa Fe," Tracy said. "We offer items in all price ranges."

Customers have visited the store from coast to coast and as far away as Germany and Norway. Wow. Here, even people from around the globe can have a Rendezvous with the Arts. For more information, see www.mainarterykansas.com.

The main artery. It's vitally important in the circulatory system of each person, and this ARTery is important in the life and culture of southwest Kansas. We salute Tracy and Lynn Teeter and all those involved with the Main ARTery for making a difference with creativity and entrepreneurship. It's like a beautiful work of art.

And there's more. The cousin of Tracy's husband Lynn owns a company which is selling innovative water-conserving equipment across the nation. We'll learn about that next week.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.