

Rollin Art Centre closed for construction

Gallery, gift shop will move to Harbour Quay in former aquarium building

SUSIE QUINN
Alberni Valley News

The Rollin Art Centre is closing to make way for construction of a new childcare centre that will eventually be attached to the centre. However, city artists will still have a place to exhibit their work, albeit temporarily.

The news was unexpected, said Melissa Martin, arts administrator for the Community Arts Council of the Alberni Valley, which oversees the gallery. She had initially been told that the centre wouldn't have to vacate the premises until 18 months into construction. However, two days before the Rollin closed for its end-of-summer break in late August she was told the trees surrounding the Children's Garden would be coming down Sept. 6, and the shed in the back needed to be emptied.

"We were supposed to be closed for two weeks—the last week of August and the first week of September," she said. "We were frantic."

Then she learned that the wheelchair ramp on the side of the building was going to be removed to accommodate construction. "That's the main reason why we have to vacate is because they have to take down our ramp to pour the foundation."

The Rollin Art Centre, at the corner of Eighth Avenue and Argyle Street, is listed as one of Canada's historic places. The two-storey house was built in 1914 as a home for Fred and Ellen Rollin. It is surrounded by landscaped gardens, one of Fred Rollin's passions. Ellen Rollin was a music teacher in town. The Rollin



Melissa Martin, administrator of the Rollin Art Centre for the Community Arts Council of the Alberni Valley, says the centre is closing and exhibits moving to a temporary location at Harbour Quay. (SUSAN QUINN/ Alberni Valley News)

Art Centre was created in the Rollin House in 1977.

The new child-care facility will feature Reggio Emilia's arts and education inspired child-care programming, an approach that emphasizes a child-centred program that uses self-directed, experiential learning with education principles focused on arts, community, outdoor exploration and multi-modal learning opportunities. The child-care centre

will also include a community kitchen, multi-purpose spaces that can be rented by the community and a children's art gallery at the Rollin Art Centre.

The province is funding 66 of the child-care spaces while the Union of B.C. Municipalities will pay for the remaining 22 spaces.

Construction is now supposed to be complete by fall of 2023, or in 12 months—shorter than the initial

timeline.

Another casualty of construction was the Children's Garden, dedicated to the children of School District 70, that once stood among the trees on the lot between the Rollin centre and Eighth Avenue Learning Centre. The garden featured a less formal display of perennials, wildflowers, decorative grasses and stands of bamboo beneath a bower of cottonwood trees.

Larry Gavelin collected all the

rocks that once graced the gardens, handpicking and transporting from a quarry every rock. Gavelin spent countless hours maintaining the Rollin Art Centre property, but his heart was with the children's garden, Martin said.

The garden lot has been cleared and digging has begun for the foundation of the new building.

Once the Rollin staff returned from their break they began to pack up all the artwork, books and other items that have collected in the arts centre throughout the years. They will be moving to their temporary location at Harbour Quay in the former site of the Alberni Aquarium.

"We're excited about that, absolutely," Martin said. "We weren't expecting to have to move so quickly. We would have scheduled the time."

They had already hung an exhibit called 'The Art of Mystery' featuring artist Mystery McCarthy, which closed Oct. 7.

"We have three days of a window and it happens to fall on Thanksgiving weekend."

Look for the Community Arts Council's new space to open sometime this week. The new space will feature gallery space, a gift shop and workshop space.

Hours of operation will be Tuesday to Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. (different hours from the Rollin Art Centre). The new address will be 7-5440 Argyle St. at Harbour Quay, around the corner from Salmonberry's Emporium.

— With files from Elena Rardon, Alberni Valley News



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