

The Wildewood 'torch' gets passed on



By Bill Kilpatrick

On May 28 the Wildewood Art gallery in Maynooth held its final showing that featured all new work from 17 different artists. Over 50 people came to enjoy the art, but they also came to reminisce about the last 10 years that Wildewood has been showcasing some of the area's most talented artists, which makes the title of the final show *The Best of a Decade* very apt indeed. One of the owners of the gallery, Joey Shulman, explained that the choice to leave the gallery and move out of Maynooth has been an emotional roller coaster of bittersweet feelings. Shulman stated that his time in Maynooth, has reared him as an adult by giving him a garden to plant seeds with other people of like minds and those seeds have grown into a legacy that future generations can enjoy.

Shulman spoke with a mix of happiness, pride and sadness about some of those legacies that he will leave behind such as Maynooth's *'Brighten the Night'* Christmas parade, an event that he hopes members of the community will revive this year. Shulman added about how sweet it was for him to see Maynooth Madness reach its 30 anniversary and how the art that was created during the event is now hanging in the Maynooth Library for public viewing. Shulman expressed a deep sense of satisfaction about the partnerships that went into the creation of the sign that currently hangs at the Maynooth Post office commemorating Maynooth's 150 anniversary. Shulman also highlighted the grove of mixed trees that he and his partner Barry Siegrist planted in commemoration of Maynooth's 150 as well, naming it *'The Joey Shulman and Barry Siegrist memorial garden,'* which is loved by both people and dogs. One of the artists that not only helped hang the show but whose work was featured in the show, Ken Fraser, described both Shulman and Siegrist as *'pillars of the community'* adding that *'they will be missed.'*

Wildewood gallery will not be closing entirely however, Shulman stated that he and Siegrist instead are passing the torch to some

younger artists who will be keeping the name Wildewood and keeping the gallery open. The new owners, Michelle Irving and Loree Lawrence, are very excited about taking over the gallery and bring with them a wealth of experience and knowledge not only regarding art, but community building as well. Irving, who is a sound designer and mixer has been coming to the area with her partner since 2008 and plans on converting the upstairs of the gallery into a sound studio. Lawrence, has run a theater program for at risk youth in Toronto called the Kensington Youth Theater Employment Services. The program brought at-risk youth together to develop and produce a play once a year. Lawrence also has experience working with community art projects in Toronto at a place called Jumbies who, according to their website, "engages in collaborations between professional artists and diverse people and communities, and mentors and supports others to do so." Lawrence has also worked at the Gathering Place in the Junction in Toronto where she worked on community engagement/employment projects in collaboration with professional artists. Lawrence, artists, and local business owners helped create art that focused on the connection between art and place in communities that were being gentrified. Lawrence also brings 15 years experience working at the Ontario Arts Council.

Irving stated that they want to "continue with the spirit of Wildewood by continuing to feature local artists with a few new additions." Irving and Lawrence are looking at adding a ceramic studio in the back yard, and they are looking at having artist residencies with more of a focus on ceramics. Another new addition is a name for the building. While Lawrence and Irving plan on keeping the studio name of Wildewood they plan on renaming the building to better reflect the variety of projects that will be running there including talks on specific topics so they decided on the name "The Rumour Mill Arts Center." Shulman and Siegrist may be heart-broken to be leaving the area but both are confident that the new owners, Lawrence and Irving, will carry on their legacy by making a "lasting impact" in the community moving forward.

It has been said that a wise person plants seeds that they will never see come to fruition, but it could also be said that a wiser person plants both seeds that they can see grow and some that they may never see grow. In the case of Shulman and Siegrist they have planted multiple seeds within the community of Maynooth, some that they have seen grow and others have yet to sprout. Whether by supporting and encouraging local artists, installing art projects, or supporting and sustaining community events, one thing seems certain, that with the loss of Shulman and Siegrist the Maynooth community has lost two important community pillars.