

# LOCAL SHUTTERBUG OPENS NEW SPACE



Smith Warren, Photo by Sarah Smith Warren Photography

## By Allison Lindgren

Sarah Smith Warren, a local artist and community advocate, has recently purchased and renovated a portion of the former American Legion building on Central Avenue in New Rockford. Smith Warren is using the space for her newly relocated photography studio. While the exterior updates have been very visible for some time, the interior improvements have happened behind the curtains this winter. As shown in the photo below, the space is bright and beautiful, befitting of an artist. On Saturday, May 19 from 9 a.m. to noon, Smith Warren will host the Grand Opening of the new photography studio. She invites

the community to see the new building and, after all the work she has put into it, Smith Warren says it's a good excuse to have a party! There will be junberry muffins and scones, along with coffee and juice. She will have drawings for certificates and everyone who comes will get a coupon for a discounted photo session.

Smith Warren's photo studio was previously housed in the Open Seasons Lodge in Sheyenne, but this winter, the lodge started having issues with heating. They were working to find a solution, but knew they would need to close for the winter, with the hopes of re-opening in the spring. For Smith Warren, this complicated one of

her busiest times of year. In November and December many families schedule photo shoots for their Christmas pictures. In addition, she also needed to find a warm and comfortable place to take her favorite kinds of photos-- those of babies and small children.

For awhile, she continued to work from her studio with the help of portable heat sources, but she soon realized that she needed to look for another location. Initially, she thought she would look for a place to rent for the winter and then move back to Sheyenne in the summer.

"I was sad, actually, when I found out that I might have to look at relocating the studio," she related. "I wasn't looking for a place to buy when the opportunity for the new studio came up, but it definitely got the creative wheels turning when we saw the space."

Opening the door to the new studio reveals a bright, spacious building with several areas to be used in photo shoots. The building gives Smith Warren a great amount of space to work with. The excitement about this space is evident in Smith Warren's face as she talks about the kitchen, two bathrooms, an office area, and especially the storage area, where she will be able to store her larger prop items. Overall, she envisions a space that is open and uncluttered, a space where families feel like they can relax and let their kids run while other family members have their pictures taken, without the worry that they are going to knock something over.

When they first started looking at redesigning the exterior of the building, she said they had no clue

what they were going to find when they took the tin off the face of the building. When they looked above the ceiling tiles, they discovered the block lights, but had no clue what else was going to be underneath the tin. The brick she expected to be there wasn't, but said they ended up having a blank canvas to work with and the windows they were able to install made such a difference in the space, opening it up and making a bright, cheerful space.

Smith-Warren says the community support for the project has been awesome, as have been the local professionals who helped make it happen. Jared Kolles with Kolles Creative Customs and Viking Electric have worked on both the interior and the exterior of the building. Supplies were found right here at Cash and Carry and Do It Best. She has been so appreciative of the American Legion and the help she has received from them and she can hardly wait for the metal sign made by Brenda Bachmeier to go up as soon as they are finished painting outside.

Smith Warren worked with her aunt, who she says is a brilliant graphic designer and artist, and helped with the exterior design. Then, she and her husband, Jake spent many hours painting the entire space. Her goals for the project have always been two-fold: to update the space and still hang on to the integrity and history of the building.

"When I realized I was losing my studio in Sheyenne, although I absolutely loved being in Sheyenne, we kind of took it as a sign for a next chapter," Smith Warren said. "We live here now, and the business is here now, and

it really made me excited to put down family and business roots in this community."

Her studio allows her to do the portrait photography she loves. Family pictures, senior pictures, lots of kids and baby pictures, passport photos and headshots for business photography. She loves to do family reunion pictures and large family pictures, knowing how hard it is to organize and get everyone in the same place at the same time. With all this in mind, Smith Warren designed the layout of the studio so that she could work seamlessly with clients by moving from one photo set to another.

Smith Warren says a highlight to her photography is working with the clients. She says she is fortunate to work with all her clients, in whatever stage of life they're in. She sees all different types of clients, from young mothers and their children to a couple celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary. She loves working with people from different cultures and different communities all of whom are marking special moments in their lives.

"I love this part of my job--I love people! My brother always used to say that I was nosey, but I just really love people and I really love to know their stories and I want to know them," Smith Warren relates. "I develop an attachment to my clients, for sure. They come in when they get engaged. Then I might get them later, to do a maternity photo shoot. Then, they bring their newborn in, along with photo shoots throughout the year. Then, I get to do their first birthday photos, and in a way, I get to be a part of telling their story."