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FAYETTE COUNTY TOWN CELEBRATES ART GALLERY OPENING

Uniontown, PA – At first glance, Dunbar may not seem like an art hub. But the small, unassuming town in Fayette County celebrated the grand opening Saturday of a new gallery showcasing the work of artist Suzanne Pascal, further solidifying its ties to the Montana-born painter and sculptor.

The Dunbar Historical Society cut the ribbon on the Alice and John Tyler Gallery, located on the second floor of the society's building and named for longtime patrons of Pascal.

Gallery manager and historical society Vice President Theodore Speeney said among his many duties was the placement of every piece of art in the new gallery. Those duties also extended to master of ceremonies, as Speeney began the grand opening celebration with welcoming remarks and introduced local dignitaries and members of Pascal's family.

Dunbar Borough Council President Jason Bartholomai said the town, though small, has a wide reach.

"We are a small town, but we have roots that extend everywhere," he said. "These roots continue to bring people to our town."

Fayette County Commissioner Chair Scott Dunn, a former borough councilman, said he is pleased his hometown has a part in continuing the artist's legacy.

"The two words that come to mind for me are 'proud' and 'thankful.' This is like the little historical society that could," he said.

Commissioner Harry Kaufman said the gallery is a feather in Dunbar's cap.

"I think this is something worthwhile that's going to be great for the Dunbar area for a long time," he said. "And with the Sheepskin Trail nearby, this is going to be a destination stop for tourists and, of course, for the people of Fayette County."

Commissioner Vince Vicites agreed.

"The Dunbar Historical Society is a big part of the community in Dunbar Borough," he said. "Pascal's work will definitely enhance the community."

Sen. Pat Stefano, whose family is originally from Dunbar, stressed the importance of the arts and noted that the journeys of some of Pascal's most noted pieces began in Dunbar and included stops all across

the country before returning to Fayette County.

“We’re completing the circle,” Stefano said.

The gallery was created as an addition to the historical society’s Pascal Annex, which was completed in 2015, and which features a piece the artist referred to as her “tour de force” – a large sculpture titled Seated Torso, carved from one, single piece of blue glass that originated at Dunbar’s own Pennsylvania Wire Glass Company.

Pascal had been searching for a way to carve glass with a hammer and chisel, a difficult feat when working with such a delicate medium. In the early 1960s, she heard about an abundance of glass at the closed factory – glass that was strong because it had been tempered over time. She purchased all of the glass remaining in the plant, including the 4,000-pound monolith she would use to carve one of her most famous pieces.

Dunbar Historical Society secretary Donna Myers stumbled on the artist’s connection to the town thanks to an old issue of People magazine, brought to her attention in 2011 by another society member. It was through her efforts that Seated Torso came to be donated to the historical society, and the annex was constructed to hold it.

Over the years, Myers and the historical society built a relationship with the artist and her family, receiving dozens of pieces of Pascal’s art, including a substantial number from the Alice and John Tyler Trust.

Pascal passed away in 2021. In addition to a new gallery dedicated to her work, she received a posthumous Women in History award from the Fort Necessity Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

“Dunbar is a really special homecoming for Pascal’s collection,” the artist’s daughter, Jill Petty, said. “My mother Pascal spent a great many hours at the Pennsylvania Wire Glass Company. She wanted to see if the glass really could be carved with a hammer and chisel.”

Petty attended the event with her husband, Stephen; daughter and son-in-law, Lisa and Mark Seigle; and grandchildren, Alexandra and Jack Seigle, all of whom flew in from the west coast. Petty said her mother would be “humbled and honored” by the gallery.

“The legacies of these two extraordinary women – the philanthropist (Alice Tyler) and the artist – has shown what dedication and determination can achieve to make the world a better place,” Petty said.

To learn more about the Dunbar Historical Society, visit www.dunbarhistoricalsociety.org. To learn more about Fayette County, visit www.fayettecountypa.org.

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For more information, contact Kristi Kassimer Harper, Public Relations Specialist, at 724-437-4571, kkassimer@fayettecountypa.info or Jamie Rankin, Journalist, at 724-437-4571, jamierankin13@gmail.com.