

## **Shangri-La Springs opens gates: Historic hotel hosts art days for public**

By TRACY X. MIGUEL-NAVARRO

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**BONITA SPRINGS** — The public can take a sneak peek of the wonders of the beautiful garden and the historic site behind the walls of Shangri-La in Bonita Springs.

The Shangri-La Springs recently opened to the public for a day of art and nature on Wednesday, March 19, and will continue to do so with five additional series for the year.

Attendees can enter the historic hotel grounds to see how featured works of internationally-renowned artists blend and add color to the 8-acre landmark on the 27000 block of Old 41 Road in Bonita Springs, while enjoying the scenic views of a spacious tree-filled site. The Oak Creek runs across the entire property.

"It's really surreal as far as peacefulness here," said Marcia Dupoise, 60, while strolling through the gardens. "You can feel it when you come through the door."

Shangri-La Springs is celebrating "spirit" through the works of local, internationally-renowned artist Bonny Hawley and award-winning, European-exhibited local artist Levi Hayes.

The "Spirit Art Show" will be on display on Wednesdays at Shangri-La Springs now through May 14. The grounds will be open for the public to explore from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. for the cost of \$10.

The historic resort in downtown Bonita Springs opened in 1924, but later closed. It was then purchased by the Lama Hanna trust in 1998. The certified organic property was purchased by Heather Burch and Addison Fischer in 1998, as the Lama Hana Trust, to protect and preserve the land that houses the original Bonita Spring.

It had remained closed to the public except for an organic food seminar held at the property in 2003.

Then in December 2011, the Shangri-La Springs Inn Resort and Spa reopened as the Shangri-La Springs, for private events, corporate conferences and weekend events. The Shangri-La has been available for private events such as weddings, business functions, art shows and wellness teachings. All events are organic and use green energy sources as much as possible.

Now the historic resort is inviting the public to explore art and nature with a series of art shows on its premises throughout the year.

"We love it. We are looking to share it," said Ron Tennant, Shangri-La's project manager.

The next phase will be opening the hotel guest rooms for individuals who visit the site for workshops, retreats or other private events, said Burch. "We are very excited to be able to open it up for folks who want to do week-long workshops."

Burch added that she didn't have an exact opening date since they are still working on renovations.

During the past decade, the Lama Hana Trust has been working to maintain the integrity of the property as they prepare to open as an entirely organic resort. Ultimately, guests would not stay overnight at the main hotel, instead Burch said the guests rooms would be at either Villa Asconia or Villa Bonita on site.

"I would love to see it reopen," said Dupoise, a Cape Coral seasonal resident of Vermont. "This is a gem."

The property was opened in the 1920s and is said to have been the first healing spring in

North America.

Part of the "Spirit Art Show" on site also includes opening its doors for painters, including the Plein Air Group of Bonita Springs and the Southwest Florida Pastel Society.

During the opening day on March 19, more than 20 painters scattered all over the property, painting in a mix of watercolor, pastel and oil paints.

Bonita Springs resident Joan Moran said being able to spend a morning outside at the historic grounds of the Shangri-La was wonderful.

"It's a gift to me to have two hours to get in nature and to be quietly surrounded by beautiful nature," said Moran, who runs the Plein Air Group of Bonita Springs and has been painting for about 10 years.

She toted a portable box filled with art supplies and painted a scene of the mermaid foundation of the spring in the garden. The natural spring, which bubbles up out of the ground and flows into the Oak Creek and from which Bonita Springs bequeathed its name, is said to have been used by humans for healing and restoration since the time of the Calusa Indians.

Sitting under the morning sunlight in the gardens looking over a large fig tree, artist Carol McArdle painted part of the long house, the original water tower and trees.

"To come here today and paint is a real treat," said McArdle, of San Carlos Park, who

has been painting professionally for seven years. It was her first time visiting the hotel, which she had learned about 20 years ago before moving the United States.

Nearby, Cape Coral and Vermont resident Linda Verba strolled through the site for the first time admiring the art, historic buildings and natural beauty of the property along with some friends. Patrons even got a chance to see what two hotel rooms used to look like in the main hotel.

Verba, 66, said Shangri-La is doing the right thing by restoring the site so that it can be used for the public's enjoyment.

"It's gorgeous," said Dupoise.

Information: 239-949-0749 or visit <http://shangrilareretreat.com>.

If you go

The Spirit Art Show is slated to be on display from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. through May 14, at Shangri-La Springs, 27750 Old 41 Road, Bonita Springs. Admission fee is \$10 per adult (18 or older).

Shangri-La Spring will host an open house and artist reception for local artist Levi Hayes from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. on April 15. The free event will feature drumming circles under the trees led by Jeanie Williamson and Sayer Ji.



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