

Confidence, emotion-building art to be showcased in new downtown art gallery



By Brock Weir

You can't draw a straight line? Big deal. That's why God invented rulers.

That is the relaxed approach Susan Stortini takes to life ? and art.

Everyone at their most basic level wants to create, she says. But, no matter how strong that desire might be, there is always that nagging feeling in the back of your mind that creating even something as simple as a doodle might be frivolous. There is nothing frivolous, in her view, of ?zentangle?, an art form people will have a chance to see in action at the Aurora Street Festival on Sunday, June 1.

Zentangle will take pride of place in a new art gallery set to open inside the old Aurora Post Office/Clock Tower building in conjunction with Eating Disorders of York Region's Riverwalk Wellness Centres and Addiction Services of York Region.

The art space, which will be open to visitors for the duration of the sale, has been a long-held dream of Riverwalk whose clients have longed for a creative outlet.

?I have always thought it would be wonderful to have space where there is an activity that is healthy and helpful, but didn't involve talking if you didn't want to talk,? says Janice Morgante, Executive Director of Riverwalk. ?We have movement with yoga and Tai Chi, we have walked in nature as a group when the weather is lovely, and I thought art would be another form of movement.?

With an eye to create a ?really robust art program?, they secured extensive space in the upper floor of the clock tower building and are putting the finishing touches on the space to make it ready for the public.

The black and white art pieces visitors will see on the wall are examples of zentangle. They may look like intricate doodles, but they are so much more, according to Ms. Sortini. For her, it is not just a form of relaxation to clear the mind, but it is an art form that comes with its own health and emotional benefits that can also build confidence all based on an activity done by everyone ?basically since the beginning of time.?

?It changes you in a really unique and positive way,? she explains, noting each pattern she teaches people to draw in a program has an unusual and unrelated name so people don't have preconceived ideas of what they are supposed to create. ?There is no risk-taking and people can do it instantly. People feel so satisfied because they can finish a whole tile in 15 or 20 minutes and it opens up a lot of aspects of your life.

?If you never finish a project, this you can finish. It organizes your thoughts. You work on breathing and dropping your shoulders

and it is really good. It is a deliberate shift of focus away from your issues. As you start to do this, it becomes really comforting and meditative. It becomes a nice, safe place to go where there is no anxiety.?

For Ms. Morgante, she has seen firsthand someone she describes as ?self-critical, judgemental and anxious? in one session, emerge ?joyful, singing and excited? about her art in the next session. One of the values of the program is it is effective, accessible, portable and affordable. Using good quality paper and pens, each person is required to sign their work to take ownership and pride in what they have completed.

?At the end it builds your skills and confidence like scaffolding and you start to realise you can cope because you can be flexible when unforeseen things happen,? says Ms. Sortini. ?When unforeseen things happen on the paper, you can just move in another direction and that is a very transferrable skill to learn.

?When they are finished, part of the experience is initialling it, signing it and honouring your work, and taking the time to appreciate it. What surprises them is negative self-thought disappears.?

For more on the Art Gallery's open house and upcoming Zentangle sessions, visit www.edoyr.com.