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Hillman: Art gallery fulfills dream of Hardeman Co. resident

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Belief is the better part of being, and Deborah Brasfield of Bolivar has the better part down pat.

Drive into Bolivar on Tenn. 18, and when you come to the renovated town square, on the right side, you'll see a sign for On The Square Gallery and Gifts LLC at 109 N. Main St. This is Brasfield's dream.

A Realtor and former investment broker, Brasfield has an appealing, positive personality that just reaches out to anyone she's around.

"Someone asked me just the other day if I was nuts to put an art gallery in Bolivar," Brasfield said. "I hope we're at the bottom of the market, and it's going up from here. You know, we all need day trips and destination points. I intend for On the Square Gallery and Gifts to be a place people want to visit."

Her new gallery opened Oct. 1 with about 200 attending, including guests from Germantown, Collierville and Cordova, plus local folks. The gallery features many types of art, antiques, painted furniture, vintage jewelry as well as that designed by local and regional artisans, handturned wooden bowls, handpainted fishing lures, china, crystal, vases and lamps.

"I cannot say enough about how supportive everyone has been of my getting the business started," she said. "The Chamber of Commerce has been wonderful to work with."

She was determined that the original 150-year-old ceiling in the 1903 building would be preserved, as well as the original terrazzo floor. She succeeded, but it wasn't easy.

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"For a while in 100-degree weather, we had no air conditioning," she said. "We pulled up layers of linoleum, plywood and a raised floor where the pharmacist used to stand. This was Bolivar Drug Store for many years."

But now the place is beautifully restored, with eggshell trim, a warm honey beige on the walls, and right now, the vibrant watercolors of renowned artist Mary Spellings on exhibit and for sale. Other artists are from Corinth, Miss., Memphis and the surrounding area. She has 4,100 square feet in the building, with 1,850 on the main floor, and "eventually, the upper floor will be available for event rental," she said.

She said she's been dreaming of opening a gift shop and gallery since the early 1980s in downtown Memphis, "but it just wasn't the right time for me." She's been busy with their real estate office, The Buyer's Agent, Brasfield Enterprises. Then she and her husband Allen decided to look for a weekend home and found one in Grand Valley Lakes in Hardeman County, a gated community that's only an hour from the Memphis area.

"So when we saw the renovations happening on the courthouse square in Bolivar, I knew this was it," she said. "They've done so much work downtown, using grant money to update sidewalks, lighting and preserve the facades of the historic square buildings."

The art she offers is wide-ranging. "I have a little bit of everything because everyone's tastes are so different. But it's important to have the gifts as well because sometimes it takes a little while to decide on art."

An artist herself, she plans on having art classes regularly. "I'm going to call it Ladies Night Out Art Parties," she said. "Or it could be Couples Night Out Art Parties. I'll provide the art supplies, and they bring their own drinks and snacks."

A strong believer in networking, she said there are two other antique dealers in Bolivar, so they all refer customers to each other.

She's also joined TennesseeAntiqueTrail.com. "This is an absolutely fabulous idea created by Marcia Arnold. She and her husband love to drive and visit antique shops, and she said it was hard sometimes to find out places to go to. When you got there, it might be closed for the day. So first she created the Alabama AntiqueTrail.com, now Tennessee, and she's creating Mississippi next. For \$200 a year, she lists your antique store, photos, hours, maps and other information. She's already got my store on there. She has 97 members in Tennessee right now."

Meanwhile, she's planning on her own special events: An estate sale on dolls on Dec. 2-3, and on Feb. 10, a special art show and



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reception for Jerry "The King" Lawler and his former art teacher, Helen Stahl of Hornsby.

"Not many people know he graduated with a degree in art and is a fine artist," she said. "It will be so neat to have him here with Helen Stahl, his art teacher from long ago."

Her hours at the gallery are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday, 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Friday and 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday. Other hours are set for special events, or someone can call and make an appointment at (731) 403-0002.

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