

GATEWAY ATELIER OF CLASSICAL ART PUTS DOWN ROOTS IN THE CWE

BY NICKI DWYER

The Central West End is fortunate to have a concentration of art galleries and plethora of artists as part of the neighborhood mix. Unbeknownst to many, there is also a classical art academy tucked away in the Pierce Arrow Building at 4814 Washington Ave. In 2018, Co-founder and Artistic Director B. J. Parker, Ph.D., with Co-founder Ingrid Oertli, a retired physical therapist (and “perpetual art student”), together with several business partners formed a limited liability corporation and opened the Gateway Academy of Classical Art.

The 2020 pandemic made in-person classes impractical, and the academy struggled to survive by offering classes online. The pause also provided the founders time to reconsider GACA’s mission and business model. As their thinking evolved, Parker and Oertli transitioned the business from an LLC to a 501(c)3. The partners also

changed the academy’s name to Gateway Atelier of Classical Art, put together a board of directors, and, with a growing student body, expanded into a larger studio space in 2025. Atelier is from a French word meaning workshop or studio.

GACA, the only classical atelier in the area, teaches drawing and painting in the classical realist tradition. Sculpture classes were added last fall. There are classical ateliers in cities like Chicago and Minneapolis, and more on both coasts, but there are few in the Midwest. Parker said: “As part of our 10- to 20-year plan, we hope to fill that gap and put ourselves on the map.”

Last fall, Gateway Atelier started a four-year full-time or part-time certificate Program aimed at helping individuals develop the facility to become working artists. There are currently three students enrolled full-time, and 10 earning the accreditation part-time. Fifteen people are enrolled in individu-



B.J. Parker and Ingrid Oerti co-founded the Gateway Acaemy of Classical Art.

al classes offered throughout the week. GACA also has Independent Studio Hours, where students work on their own projects and receive one-on-one critiques. In the afternoons, GACA brings in a live model. Over the course of a few days, the model is in an extended

pose for about 48 hours, (20 mins. on, five off), so students really get to slow down. In most art schools poses are typically two minutes to two hours. Additionally, workshops led by nationally recognized artists bring in 10 to 15 students with one

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STRAUB’S PUTS ITS CENTRAL WEST END PROPERTY ON THE MARKET

BY ABBY WOJCIK

The Straub’s grocery store that has been on the corner of Maryland and Kingshighway since 1948 is for sale. The 22,489 square foot building that houses the CWE Straub’s is listed for \$3.2 million.

The store remains operational while the property is on the mar-



ABBY WOJCIK PHOTO

The local Straub’s grocery store has been a CWE fixture since 1948.

ket, but what will happen to the location after a sale remains unclear. Staff members do not know when their last day might be, feeling that every time they clock out could theoretically be their last day at the CWE location. They are savoring the final moments at

the store for now, while they await answers about employment status with the company.

Straub’s will continue operating its three other locations in Clayton, Town and Country and Webster Groves.

Expansions of other big brands,

such as Trader Joe’s and Whole Foods, have put more pressure on smaller, locally owned operations. With a Whole Foods located on West Pine Blvd, only two blocks from the CWE Straub’s, makes competing for visibility and customer retention even more difficult.

According to the Specialty Food Association’s 2024-25 industry report, specialty retailers struggled to grow sales since the pandemic and are growing about half as quickly as conventional options.

William A. Straub founded the first Straub’s in Webster Groves in 1901. The family tradition of serving quality products with exceptional customer service continues on with the fourth-generation owner and chief executive officer Jack W. (Trip) Straub III, along with his father Jack W. Straub Jr. and fifth-generation Ellie Straub Huff,

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Coiffures by Shawn
Hangs Up the Scissors

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Take a Hike
(map included)

GREGORY SMITH CLOSES COIFFURES BY SHAWN AFTER 58 YEARS IN THE CWE

BY NICKI DWYER

After 52 years as a hair designer, Gregory Smith, proprietor of Coiffures by Shawn, gave his final haircut and locked the door to his salon at 312A N. Euclid Ave. on June 30. During an interview in May, Smith said, “I’m extremely sad about closing, but I’m 77 and it’s time.”

Smith, who grew up in Webster Groves, always knew he was destined to be a hair designer, but his parents wanted him to finish college first. He graduated from Texas Christian University where he studied business and psychology, which he said with a chuckle, “came in handy given his career choice. My customers walk out of here happy with their hair, and happy that they got their problems off their shoulders talking to someone who is neutral.”

After graduation, Smith moved to Chicago because “St. Louis was too conservative, mentioning Sunday Blue Laws as an example. He worked as a purchasing agent for the Lake Shore Club until he said he couldn’t stand it and quit. He enrolled in beauty school and

to cover the tuition he worked as a cab driver, a waiter and a maître d’. When he completed the training, he worked for several salons and eventually opened his own shop, Thomas Gregory Hair Design, at Elm and Dearborn.

When his dad passed away at age 57, Smith returned to St. Louis on July 4, 1982 to be close to his mother. The following day he went to work in his friends’ Shawn and Sylvia Salih’s salon, the original Coiffures by Shawn at 312 N. Euclid Ave., which the couple opened in 1968. (By the time Coiffures by Shawn closed in June after 58 years, it was the oldest retail business on Euclid.)

It took a couple of years for Smith to build up a clientele in the CWE, so he worked a second job as maître d’ at Ces & Judy’s at 21 Maryland Plaza. He lived in the Landesman Building just north of the salon on Euclid, and later moved to a carriage house on Pershing Place. About 20 years ago Smith and his partner Jimmy Porter moved to Compton Heights.

Smith explained that beauty

salons’ “bread and butter” clients would come in once a week for a shampoo and set, and a color every 4 weeks. When styles changed with the advent of the blow dryer, women were styling their own hair, and, “we lost half our clientele. So we had to find new customers.”

Shawn Salih passed away in 1990, and 3 years later his wife, Sylvia, sold the business to Smith. He kept the name Coiffures by Shawn because: “It was a good name and besides “why fix it if it’s not broken.”

In 2011, Derek and Luke Gamlin, who operated the former SubZero Vodka Bar at 308 N. Euclid, planned to expand into Smith’s salon space on the first floor. “I wasn’t happy about it as I had just turned the front into a beauty supply store. But I moved upstairs to 312A and about 50 customers followed me. I wasn’t taking new clients anyway, so ‘walk ins’ didn’t matter. Luckily the beauty suppliers took the products back.”

In the early days, Smith took an active role in the CWE business community, too. He served as president of the Central West End Business Association and helped start the Taste of the CWE, an event that no longer exists. “The business association members were all small business owners, and we watched out for each other.” One particular neighborhood event Smith remembers vividly is the 1982 Halloween Party on Maryland Plaza that got out of hand, which led to



NICKY DWYER PHOTO

Hairdresser Gregory Smith

the cancellation of that signature event for a couple of years. By 1984, Smith said, Balaban’s at Euclid and McPherson was the “place to be” on Halloween, so he and other association members moved the festivities to McPherson and Euclid, where it remained for several years until it moved back to Maryland Plaza.

“I’ll miss this space so much,” Smith said. “I even stopped by on my days off just to putter around.” But he isn’t letting go of his longtime clients who have become his dear friends. He’ll continue styling their hair at his home in Compton Heights. Some, including former Mayor Lyda Krewson and Jill McGuire, former executive director of Regional Arts Commission, have been customers for years. While Smith said he dreaded walking out of 312A N. Euclid for the last time, he still plans to return to the neighborhood often. You might see him at Dressel’s, which is one his favorite spots, in part because the late Barbara Dressel also was a client.



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who joined the team in 2021.

“This location has been an important part of Staub’s history for nearly eight decades, and we remain proud to serve the Central West End community,” Trip Straub, President & CEO of Straub’s, said in a statement. “Listing the property allows us to better understand the market and evaluate the level of interest in this unique and highly visible site.”



After nearly 80 years, the CWE Straub’s building is up for sale.



ABBY WOJCIK PHOTOS

Customers are still able to shop inside Straub’s CWE location while the building is listed for sale.