

THE ART OF BUSINESS

by Christine Hiralal

DRIVING INTO PORT PERRY, ONTARIO feels like going back in time. Besides the gazebo in its waterfront park, downtown Port Perry boasts many Victorian-style buildings and numerous specialty boutiques, coffee houses, gift shops and art stores.

Two of those galleries – The Framer’s Gallery and Native Focus – are owned by Durham College graduates, Tracy (Elson) Strong and Jeremy LePage, respectively. Strong’s store specializes in framed and unframed prints by artists like James Lumbers, Laura Berry, Walter Campbell and Bill Saunders as well as Fimo-style works by local artist Kim Fernandez.

A 1986 graduate of Durham College’s Advertising program, Strong owns The Framer’s Gallery with her husband, Warren. While the Strong’s sell prints and photographs, they also take the time to come up with creative ways to frame work and preserve art forever. They are



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHRISTINE HIRALAL

Tracy Strong, a Durham College Advertising graduate and co-owner of The Framer’s Gallery, displays the many framing options she uses to help her customers create memories.



Jeremy LePage, a Durham College Journalism graduate and co-owner of Native Focus, creates as well as sells native-themed artwork.

both certified framers and have many new and repeat customers who trust them to take care of their family heirlooms and artwork.

“My job is most rewarding because people bring in their family treasures and trust me to come up with special ways to preserve them,” said Strong. “I feel good knowing that the projects I help create will stay in the family forever.”

She has an album of photos showing the many forms of framing the gallery has done including preserving an antique hair wreath as well as war and sports memorabilia. Strong says that she enjoys her job because every day is different and she has the opportunity to regularly meet new people. She also loves the unique projects she gets to work on because she can put her creativity to work.

A block down from The Framer’s Gallery is Native Focus, owned by Jeremy LePage, a 2002 graduate of the Journalism program, and his wife Erin. LePage spends most days at the gallery helping out customers, checking e-mails, and when he has the time, working on painting and writing of his own.

The gallery has many interesting pieces including inukshuk sculptures, wall hang-

ings, paintings and jewelry. The work is created by local artists David Johnson, Cathy Mark, Maxine Nowl as well as Jeremy’s father, Eddie LePage, who is a renowned native artist and has had a huge influence on his son. Jeremy had his first exhibition of his own paintings in 2008 and said he was proud to have his work on display.

Both father and son are painters and have their work on display and for sale at Native Focus. Their creations are mostly inspired by the natural world and they concentrate on creating wildlife portraits. Many of the paintings revolve around eagles, wolves and bears. It’s not surprising that Jeremy followed in his dad’s brush strokes.

“When I was little, I had my own easel beside my dad’s and my playpen was in his studio,” said LePage.

He still does freelance journalism when he has a chance while juggling his time between running the gallery and spending time with his wife and two-year-old son Callum. He has also worked for Port Perry This Week, a local community newspaper. When it comes to having something framed forever, he often turns to Strong’s creativity at The Framer’s Gallery.