

Artisans' Atelier celebrates first year

The Artisans' Atelier in Punta Gorda recently held a first anniversary celebration, and to the delight of the many volunteers responsible for making the atelier concept a reality, the facility is fully occupied.

"We are way ahead of the curve," said Jerry Presseller, president of the Punta Gorda Downtown Merchants Association, which is responsible for the atelier's operation. "We thought it would take perhaps three years to fully rent the space and here we are completely full."

The concept of the atelier affords artists spaces in which to create art — space that's open to the public. The Artisans' Atelier consists of studios and workshops of artisans and designers who operate in what had been previously designated as display space only in the Herald Court Centre in Punta Gorda. The 2,490-square-foot portion of the structure is on the south side of the building and can be accessed from Olympia Avenue and from the Herald Court breezeway.

Two years ago, city of Punta Gorda officials approached TEAM Punta Gorda for advice in determining an appropriate use of the Herald Court Centre space, which could not be leased traditionally.

Volunteers from TEAM Punta Gorda developed the atelier concept, which was embraced and financially supported by the Community Redevelopment Agency, the Charlotte Community Foundation, the Punta Gorda and Charlotte County chambers of commerce, the Downtown Merchants Association, TEAM Punta Gorda, Mainstreet Punta Gorda, the Arts and Humanities Council of Charlotte



Lucas Faria's studio is in the atelier.

County and the Visual Arts Center.

"What has really been cool about this project is how so many people and groups worked together to make it happen," said Clarissa Parodi, chairwoman of the TEAM Punta Gorda Artisans' Atelier Committee. "In addition to the many groups who provided funding, we are grateful to Owen, Ames & Kimball as well as TLC Engineering and Alliance Design Group who donated countless hours to assure the success of the project."

The 15 spaces at the atelier are currently occupied by a variety of artists representing various art mediums, including writer and book broker James Abraham, two-dimensional artists Mark Preuss, Luke Faria and Diane Hayes Mayer and three-dimensional artist John "Dedo" Christina. Other artists, represented in the atelier include fiber artists from Knitwit Studios, G&S Jewelry Boutique and Whispering Angels Nursery, creators of true-to-life "babies."

The Artisans' Atelier is located on the ground floor at 117 Herald Court Centre, Unit 113, Punta Gorda. ■