

Spotlight Shines on David Beale

Beale Receives Lifetime Achievement Award

Emily Gibbons said she thinks of David Beale as the George Bailey of the art scene in Cortland.

“If David never moved to Cortland, Cortland would be a different community. Cortland would be a different place,” said Gibbons, an artist and former director of the Cultural Council of Cortland County.



Basin Street Jazz

Beale, 72, of Cortlandville, was given the CULTURAL Council of Cortland County’s Lifetime Achievement Award for 2016. The honor goes to an outstanding artist who’s made significant contributions to the cultural fabric of Cortland.

Gibbons said she “invited herself” to say a few words at the Cortland First Friday gallery opening at the Center for the Arts of Homer, where the announcement was made.

Beale persuaded Gibbons, an art graduate who followed her sister to Cortland, to try watercolor painting, which she shied away from. Today, her work is stunning.

“I never had a better teacher, even out of all my teachers in college,” she said.

“Well, it’s a real honor and I feel humbled being among the recipients in the past,” Beale told the crowd.

The Cultural Council of Cortland County also purchases a painting from the artist for \$250, ensuring a collection of local work. Beale gave a watercolor painting of the Basin Street Jazz Band, a group that played at the Cortland Arts and Wine Festival, and will do so again.

Other recipients of the award include Jane Zogg, Harry Davis, Fred Zimmerman, Richard Mitchell, George Dugan, and Bob Ellis. The works are housed in The Vault, the site of the cultural council office at the Cortland Rural Cemetery in Cortland.

“This was well deserved,” said artist Richard Mitchell of Cortland. “He’s done so much for the arts in the area...he’s a pretty good painter too. In promoting the arts, he includes a lot of people. He’s made a nice volume of work on his own...He works. A lot of artists just talk.

Thena Levan, the new director of the council, said Beale has been a huge help. “He’s always willing to answer questions I may have and share his experiences with me, which I appreciate,” she said.

Beale moved to Cortland in 1995 from Ithaca, where he was a construction contractor. His wife, Kathie, now a retired art teacher, signed the two up for a lifelong learning class in watercolor painting, said Mary Coffey of Cortland, member of the council.

Beale was hooked. He started teaching watercolor painting in 1997 and in 2001, bought the Picture House frame shop on Homer Ave.

He became the director of the Cultural Council of Cortland County in 2004 and led the nonprofit group for 10 years. He remains a board member.

“He is incredibly easy going and to me, I can’t believe how he gets things done and doesn’t seem to fret over anything,” said Dorothy Troike, president of the council board. She’s known him four years.

The cultural council created the Cortland Arts and Wine Festival in Courthouse Park, hosts Cortland First Fridays, monthly art shows in downtown business, offers art bus trips, a winter sale of small works and created a film festival. It co-sponsors the Art Challenge with the Center for the Arts in Homer.

Beale teaches watercolor classes twice a week. He and Gibbons oversee watercolor workshops in Arizona, Ireland and Barcelona. Gibbons has moved to Pennsylvania, but she still works at the travel workshops.

He’s most proud of helping young people like Gibbons and Reagan Troutman, another artist and former Picture House manager, who opened an art gallery on Main St., Cortland.

“I enjoy painting,” he said. “But if I had to give up one, I would give up painting. You have a chance to meet a lot of people, if you do a good job, and I believe I do.”

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