

Dorchester Reporter

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Reporter's Notebook

Artists Connect with Fields Corner Treatment House

By BILL FORRY

About a month ago, a group of recovering addicts and alcoholics assembled in the living room of their recovery house two blocks away from Fields Corner-T station. Along with Angela Fonseca, the woman who runs the "treatment facility," the men sat through a slideshow presentation and then proceeded to have a group discussion with their counselors about what they'd just seen.

Sounds routine, but the evening session was truly unlike any other they'd ever had at Interim House, the sprawling Victorian home on Waldeck Street that's been "home" to 18 men at any given time since the 1970s. When it was all over, the men had chosen a dozen pieces of artwork - water colors, still-lives and photographs - that will soon adorn the walls of their temporary home.

Best of all, they're all free.

The unique donation is coming via the Art Connection, a Cambridge-based non-profit group that links local artists up with non-profits that are looking to display art in their buildings. Since 1995, the program has connected 1,600 pieces of art by 116 artists into 134 agencies in and around Boston.

They'd be hard pressed to find a better canvass than the sprawling Victorian on Waldeck, one of many that line this beautiful residential street a couple blocks from Town Field. Founded in 1972 by feisty Dot native Yvonne Linehan, the Interim House is one of the neighborhood's hidden-but sorely needed- resources. The house has helped out thousands of men stricken with substance abuse problems since the mid-'70s, when Linehan bought the house for a song and relocated the program from an arson-ravaged Capen Street. Yvonne's since passed away, but the work she began here goes on under the watchful eye of her protegee, Fonseca, who first climbed the front-porch stairs at 62 Waldeck a mere 18 years ago.

Today, as Fonseca and her staff are being forced to absorb state budget cuts in the ballpark of 30 percent, the donation of artwork may seem like a mere distraction. But, Fonseca swears that the infusion of creativity will do wonders for her guests and staff.

"The artwork does help," says Angie. "You want a home-like environment for the guys. Some of them are going to be returning to wives and, more and more often, to mom and dad."

"It may seem like a little thing, but it helps our residents through what is a difficult time in their lives," Fonseca



Paintings and photographs by 12 Boston-area artists, including Fay Chandler's (above), will be installed this spring at the Interim House.

says. "The nice thing about art is that it helps to control the space a little bit, get them to relax and get their brains working a bit."

Jay Knox, the director of the Art Connection, says that's exactly what his program was intended to do. Like at Interim House, another remarkable woman has been the driving force behind the Art Connection. Eighty-one year-old artist Fay Chandler started the clearinghouse in her native Cambridge by donating some of her own work to a local firehouse. The gesture spawned a program that now involves more than a hundred volunteer artists, some who've donated works worth upwards of \$5,000. Chandler herself remains an active donor and, in a nice bit of coincidence, the guys at Interim House picked two of her original paintings as part of their 12 selections.

The Art Connection has also made donations to several other Dorchester agencies, including the Dorchester House Multi-Service Center and, most recently, the Bradshaw ABCD Head Start on Geneva Avenue.

"We tell them all the basics about the artists and the work," Knox says of the selection process. "But we don't tell them the value of the work."

Artists do have a rarely-exercised veto right over where their creations end up, but, according to Knox, "almost every time they've just been thrilled" by their destination.

"It's really like an art competition," Knox says. "It's really quite an honor to have your piece chosen."