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SSA president Jim Bostick hangs art in the new space.

ARTS ON THE MOVE

The Salem Arts Association has a new home.

BY DINAH CARDIN

➤ **When describing his playful multimedia art pieces, artist Paul Nathan says, “There’s a certain...happiness.”** A dynamic collage features a parade more suited for New Orleans passing in front of the Salem Custom House. “They are light and joyous, but not simple,” says Nathan. This could be a good description for Salem itself at times.

A story full of serendipity has been unfolding on Derby Street in Salem. It started when Nathan retired from his work as a lawyer a couple years ago and turned his law office (an 18th-century yellow clapboard building near the water) into the Paul Nathan Gallery and Museum, where he could sell his original artworks and greeting cards stamped with his work. But he wasn’t seeing enough foot traffic. Then one day, when Salem Arts Association (SAA) president Jim Bostick wandered in, a friendly conversation sparked a historic moment for the arts in Salem. Fast-forward

to April of this year and the SAA has a new 2,600-square-foot home across the street from the Salem Maritime National Historic Site and near landmarks like the House of the Seven Gables and Mercy Tavern.

In contrast with the Rockport Art Association, which began in 1921, Salem’s is the youngest on the North Shore, formed in 2007 by a group on Artists’ Row. The Salem Film Fest and Salem Jazz and Soul Festival were starting up at the same time. The SAA now has a membership of more than 300, representing artists living all over the North Shore.

The organization has been housed in several locations, the most recent being a former Universalist church on Bridge Street. “Our openings were incredibly well attended. It was a really good feeling. But after the opening, nothing,” says the organization’s vice president and exhibition curator, Heather Stewart, who lives in Lynn and focuses on Realist paintings.

Stewart is thrilled to have a more permanent home with 11 galleries, space for classes and workshops, and maybe even an artist-in-residence program.

“I consider this a story of growth,” says Bostick, who works as a photographer and designer. One common goal is to bring back the community “clubhouse” feel that existed on Artists’ Row, when musicians would just turn up on a Friday, says Bostick. The new location includes a patio filled with potential on Kosciusko Street. Sunlit galleries are named after a few of the 50 wharves where goods were offloaded from Salem ships traveling all over the world. A first-floor gallery is named in memory of active Salem artist Ellen Hardy, considered the driving force behind the association. Bostick credits Hardy with saying “The word arts has an s for a reason.” Keeping this in mind, the association is looking into expanding their offerings, even turning their basement into a black box theatre. “Ellen is smiling down on us,” says Bostick of his friend, who died in 2017. “None of this would have happened without her.”

The SAA has gained traction with a busy calendar of events, like their annual show inspired by a chosen exhibition at PEM. In October, there is a fitting Dark Arts exhibit. And in the spring is the playful Salon des Refuses, a tradition that started last year, featuring works turned down by the Salem Arts Festival. Now, when an artist’s work is rejected, the city hands them a flyer for the SAA show, says Bostick, adding that this opportunity is a tradition going back to the French Academy.

On April 3, the public can attend the first member showcase in the new location. “I feel really strongly about letting people show their work,” says Stewart, who has acted as juror, curator, and critic for exhibitions at prominent galleries in the region.

Bostick is coming to the end of his three-year term as president and is happy to hand off the SAA stronger than he found it. Some of that is due to hard work and some to the magic of Salem. In the meantime, the building also houses a small gallery just for Paul Nathan’s work. “I think it’s a win-win all around,” says Nathan. “I see this as an adventure. The more people you have, the more energy.” ♦

➤ **CONTACT** salearts.org