'Bringing arts to the people, people to the arts'

Blue Ridge Arts Center ready to go in different direction

BY MONICA KREBER
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SENECA — The Blue Ridge Arts Center (BRAC) has a vision.

This fiscal year, the center is going in a different direction — more arts and crafts and more public art.

In March, Suzette Cross, vice president of BRAC, took a jumpstart in beautifying downtown Seneca by enlisting the help of Seneca High School art students to hang their silhouettes in the windows of the abandoned Kimbrell's building on E. North 1st St.

Those colorful silhouettes still sit in the windows of the abandoned building. Meanwhile, Cross and BRAC President Emilie Sons have been brainstorming more art projects.

BRAC plans to incorporate more classes, including basketry, woodcarving,

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Emilie Sons, left, and Suzette Cross will be talking to Seneca council members on Tuesday about possible places to display public art in downtown Seneca.

ARTS CENTER: 'It's branding for your town'

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fiber arts, knitting, quilting, sewing, needlepoint, pottery, watercolor and basic painting and drawing. They also plan on square dances, adult ballet and possibly yoga.

"We're going in a whole different direction, and we're trying to let people know at this time and let them sign up for some classes," Cross said. "The other thing we're doing, which I have been very passionate about, is to have more public art."

Cross visited different towns over the past two summers and noticed things Seneca seems to lack — murals that draw people to and brighten up the city. BRAC hopes to be involved in the revitalization of the downtown Seneca area in order to bring "great value" to downtown merchants and new businesses coming to Oconee County, and attract more visitors and citizens to the downtown area.

Cross and Sons envision murals on buildings and walkways, and (Ram) Cat-themed sculptures created by local students, hidden around the city. They also have a vision for an "all-aboard" theme for decorative historical train benches to be sponsored by local businesses and created by local artists.

"We're really excited," Sons said. "Our focus is bringing arts to the people, and people to the arts."

Sons hopes revitalizing downtown will help create a sense of place for residents.

"It's branding for your town," she said. "Something that says, in an image, what we're all about."

However, in order to accomplish these goals, the center needs community and financial support. Nothing is set in stone yet, but Cross will be addressing City Council members at Tuesday night's meeting to discuss possible places for public art.

"Some towns have an identity," Cross said. "That's my hope for Seneca. It's a source of pride for all the people in Seneca."

BRAC is open for getting ideas and feedback from the public.

"If people want murals on their buildings, we'd love to hear from them, as well," Sons said. "The city is very receptive, but we want more than reception. We need support."

BRAC kicks off its year with an Arty Party on Sept. 6 at 6 p.m. For information call (864) 719-9059. To sign up for classes, visit www.blueridgeartscenter.com.

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