

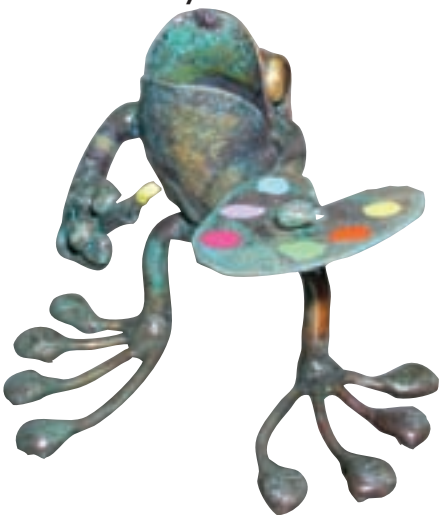
A Creative Community



Lush landscaping and outdoor sculptures fill the grounds of the Towles Court Arts District.

Gallery hopping at Sarasota's Towles Court Arts District

Ed Sharp's playful metal sculptures can be found at the Sharp Stevens Gallery.



by Beth Luberecki

In her second-floor studio space, artist Karin Riccardi has opened all of her windows to take advantage of the day's pleasant temperature and gentle breezes. Tubes of oil paints lie on a table, waiting to be squeezed, mixed, and applied to a canvas. In one corner of the room, Riccardi has gathered some everyday objects to form a ready subject for a future still life. Seemingly finished paintings hang on the walls, but Riccardi is often inspired to grab a brush and make adjustments. On this day, she tweaks the color of the water in one of her seascapes. "I'm constantly working on them until someone buys them," she says of her paintings.

Riccardi is just one of the many artists who create and display their artwork at Sarasota's Towles Court Arts District. A little piece of the past in the center of a city that's enthusiastically marching toward the future, the eclectic enclave serves as a place where creative types can enjoy the camaraderie and inspiration that comes from working in close proximity to other artists, and where art lovers can find everything from colorful beaded jewelry and whimsical metal sculptures to Raku pottery and fine-art photographs.

Back in 1905, Sarasota's first mayor, John Gillespie, built a house and a nine-hole golf course (the city's first) on the site of what's now Towles Court. A native of Scotland, Gillespie

PHOTOS BY BETH LUBERECKI

was an entrepreneur who “helped to build Sarasota to what it is today,” says Brenda Fleming, an artist who gives tours of Towles Court.

In the 1920s, William B. Towles developed the area into a residential neighborhood, building tin-roofed bungalows to house both year-round and seasonal residents of Sarasota. The community thrived for some thirty years but then began to fall into decline as much of the city’s population moved from downtown to the suburbs. The cottages were eventually divided into apartments for migrant laborers.

Developer N.J. Olivieri saved Towles Court from demolition in 1983, buying up the historic properties with the idea of transforming the neighborhood

Bright colors abound at Towles Court, where the bungalows-turned-galleries have been painted every shade of the rainbow.

into something in the vein of Colonial Williamsburg. But in the early 1990s, a group of friends presented him with a plan for turning Towles Court into an artist colony. Olivieri ran with that idea, securing special zoning provisions from the city. In 1995, the first artist, Kathleen Carrillo, signed a lease



Donna Raymond’s gallery space looks as if it belongs on a tropical island.

for space at the colony, and a host of others have followed her lead ever since. Today the Towles Court Arts District serves as home to more than twenty galleries, studios, restaurants, and shops.

Bright colors abound at Towles Court, where the bungalows-turned-galleries have been painted in every shade of the rainbow. The Katharine Butler Gallery features an apple-green exterior with raspberry trim, while the Little Art Gallery boasts a yellow paint job and fire-engine-red doors. An orange staircase with purple railings leads to Designs by Donna B, a second-floor space where Donna B. Raymond sells her handcrafted necklaces and earrings made from natural stones, dichroic glass, wood beads, and other materials. “I just adore my spot,” she says. “It’s like working in a little tree house.”

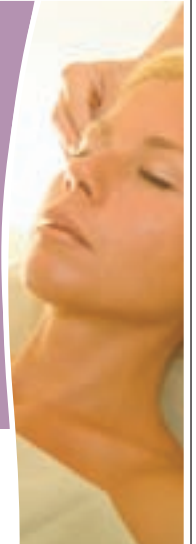
Downstairs from Raymond, a playful dragonfly fountain sits beside the front door of the Sharp Stevens



for beauty and wellness

- Massage
- Skin Care
- Manicures
- Pedicures
- Make-up
- Hair Salon

Ten Private Treatment Rooms



- Medi-Spa**
- BOTOX™
- Radiance™
- Restalyne™
- Aqua Detox™
- Photo Rejuvenation
- Needleless Wrinkle-Filler



www.sanibeldayspa.com
239.395.2220



A dragonfly fountain by Ed Sharp guards the entrance to the Sharp Stevens Gallery.

Gallery, run by Ed Sharp and Bette Stevens. Sharp's popular metal sculptures (like the dragonfly) tend to sell quickly at the gallery, which also showcases paintings by Marge Bennett and Debbie Dannheisser, stoneware by Walter Yovaish and Pat Kelly, and jewelry by Vicki Brodtkin.

Stevens appreciates the diversity found at Towles Court, both when it

comes to the kinds of works on view and the prices of the works. "The area is absolutely charming," she says. "I don't think you'll find a place like this anywhere else. It's two blocks from [downtown Sarasota's] Main Street, but you feel like you're out in the Bahamas somewhere."

Lush landscaping helps contribute to the tropical vibe, with moss-draped

oak trees, palms, and other vegetation lining the paths between the galleries. Follow one path to the southeast end of the court to discover Inside/Out. True to the spot's name, the merchandise here fills both the indoor and outdoor areas of the bungalow. Exotic flora occupy downright quirky planters made from repurposed materials—a bowling ball, pocketbook, toy truck, and several pairs of kids' shoes. Inside, a yellow-walled space holds an offbeat mix of items, ranging from rattan furniture to Hawaiian shirts to crystal champagne glasses.

Co-owner Mary Beth Megan equates the emporium with a playhouse, where she can dig in the dirt, display her junk-shop finds, and discover new uses for ordinary things. "There's no place else around here where you could find basically a house with a yard where you could do this," she says.

On the third Friday of each month, Towles Court hosts a gallery walk from 6 to 10 p.m., complete with live entertainment and refreshments. "When we have our gallery walks, there's just nothing like Towles Court," says Skip

If You Go

The Towles Court Arts District is located on the eastern edge of downtown Sarasota. To get there, take Interstate 75 north to Exit 210 (Fruitville Road). Take Fruitville Road west approximately six miles to U.S. 301 (Washington Boulevard). Turn left onto U.S. 301. Go three blocks, then turn right onto Adams Lane.

Most galleries are open Tuesday through Saturday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. A gallery walk is held on the third Friday of each month from 6 to 10 p.m. For more information about Towles Court, call 941-866-0267 or visit www.towlescourt.com. For information about tours of Towles Court, contact Brenda Fleming at 941-933-2210.



PHOTOS BY BETH LUBBECKI

Dyrda, proprietor of Skip 'n Zip's Studio and Gallery.

A creator of custom murals and floorcloths as well as a graphic and Web site designer, Dyrda has been at Towles Court for nine years. He and his wife, Illene, are some of the few artists who still reside there; though a number of artists lived at Towles Court following its 1995 rebirth, many have since deemed the bungalows too small for living and working and have converted them to solely gallery/studio space. Dyrda admits that, from a work perspective, he'd be better off in a large warehouse space. "But what I like about Towles Court is the social aspect," he says.

During the gallery walks, Riccardi transforms her studio into the Blue

Door Gallery, which highlights her work as well as that of Jeanne Chinnis and Cheryl DeSear Moody. It's this kind of collaborative spirit that makes her happy to be a part of Towles Court. "When artists share and paint together, they inspire each other and support each other," says Riccardi. "It makes the creative environment so much more rich."

Change is constant at Towles Court, with artists continually moving in and out and bungalows frequently coming up for sale or lease. "It's interesting how things evolve around here," says Fleming. (In fact, as of press time, the pink cottage housing Fleming's mother's gallery, the Beverly Fleming Gallery, was on the market.) But for the most part, when

an old-timer decides it's time to go, someone new comes along to carry on the tradition, like Jonathan and Toni Greene, who opened the Metamorphosis and Etc. galleries at Towles Court in 2005, or Ronelle Ashby of the recently opened Ashby Art Antiques.

"There are still a lot of people out there who like this area and are ready to jump right in and give it their shot," says Dyrda. "I think Towles Court will be around for awhile." 🐾

Beth Luberecki is a freelance writer and the features editor of Times of the Islands.

A New Era in Aesthetic Enhancement



CONTOUR
*threads*TM
The Clear Choice in barbed sutures™

Have you ever looked in the mirror and pulled up your cheeks or the skin above your eyebrows to a higher position and wished it would stay there?

Now there is a simple new technique that makes it possible.

Introducing a new era in minimally invasive rejuvenation techniques -

Contour ThreadsTM

www.contourthreads.com





ASSOCIATES IN
COSMETIC SURGERY

ROBERT J. BRUECK, M.D.
Board-Certified Plastic Surgeon

MICHAEL K. KIM, M.D.
Board-Certified Plastic Surgeon

LORRAINE GOLOSOW, M.D.
Board-Certified Plastic Surgeon

3700 Central Avenue
Fort Myers, Florida 33901
239-939-5233

14 Del Prado Boulevard N.
Cape Coral, Florida 33990
239-772-1930