





THE RIPPLE EFFECT

Where Will Change Lead Us?

A conversation with Andria Friesen & *SVPN Magazine* editor Sabina Dana Plasse

IT'S HARDLY NEWS THAT BUSINESS IN AMERICA and across the world has changed since the pandemic. In 2022 and 2023, a new group of people made their homes in the Wood River Valley from cities and elsewhere across the nation. Newcomers may not be aware of the abounding challenges in a place that is both a small mountain town and a world-class resort. Ketchum business owners are known for their resiliency. They are always dependent on weather, tourism, repeat customers, and always bracing for disasters, wildfires, and recessions. Andria Friesen comes to mind in thinking of resilience and the changes and challenges this town shares.

SDP: I have spent a good part of my 18 years in this Valley writing about the galleries and the artists whose work is exhibited here. When I learned that your prior gallery was closing, I was stunned. I recall so many exciting installations and fascinating artists, as well as how you used the space to support numerous Valley nonprofit organizations. It was only a year and a half ago that *SVPN* celebrated your gallery's milestone anniversary. And our following issue highlighted the new owner. This must be surreal for you?

AF: Yes, the closing is perplexing. And, for me, a highly significant and unexpected ending. I can fully appreciate the desire to pursue other passions and address personal issues, but I do not understand why the gallery was comingled with these decisions. There certainly were multiple options for a positive way 'out.' I think, on some level, I am still in shock. In a small town like Ketchum,



Andria Friesen and crew installing COMING SOON signage on behalf of Sun Valley Contemporary Gallery

it's not just about one person's livelihood when any business closes or leaves town for another location. There is a ripple effect that impacts many careers and lives.

SDP: Many of us who were drawn to this Valley have suffered highs and lows and risen like Phoenixes from the ashes, sometimes literally. This community has become attractive to so many because of the results of hard-working and motivated residents before them. Gifting your gallery as you did is not entirely surprising, given the culture of generosity in this community. Why did it dissolve so soon after the change in ownership?

AF: Good question. Following the 35th anniversary of my gallery, I was consumed equally with the excitement of 'paying it forward' by gifting the business and how fulfilling I found mentorship to be. Clearly, I neglected to look at any potential downsides. Anything other than thriving never crossed my mind.

SDP: In a small, rural community like Ketchum, how do numerous fine art galleries thrive as if operating in a major city or cultured, cosmopolitan area?

AF: Less than one percent of art galleries in America have been in business for 35 years or more, and Ketchum had four (now three). This is an extraordinary statistic and speaks volumes for our collective passion, our visitors, and for the supporting role of our pristine surroundings. Institutions are not created by longevity alone—the strong commitment and ethics of so many in this town accentuate its uniqueness.

SDP: Since opening your gallery in 1986 on First Avenue, many changes are now underway, and that Avenue is soon to thrive with new residences, offices, and businesses. It would appear a gallery would benefit a great deal from the surroundings. What will become of the space?

AF: You are absolutely correct on the benefit, and I'm thrilled to announce a new gallery will soon move in. The ownership is based in Canada, and they have a leading art presence in Whistler and Banff. This will be their first U.S. gallery, **Sun Valley Contemporary Gallery**. At present, their intentions are to represent at least a few of the artists from the Friesen Gallery roster, and, of course, this is deeply meaningful to me. The artists are sincerely appreciative given their unexpected loss of representation in the Valley. I've greatly enjoyed all my communications with Sun Valley Contemporary Gallery and believe they will be a fresh and exciting asset to our local art scene.

SDP: This is big news! And it's easy to see how delighted you are. Also, given what that building means to you, you're no doubt relieved it will again contain a gallery. You possess great fortitude to persevere. What's next for you?

AF: The space could accommodate a variety of enterprises, and yes, I am truly grateful another gallery will soon flourish there. As for what's next, I plan to take the sum of my experiences and weave them into something worthwhile and of service.

SDP: Ketchum is a special place, and I care deeply for this community, as do you. However, are we facing irreversible change and loss?

AF: Indeed, this rural gem within Idaho has changed. And while change is inevitable, I am certainly optimistic we can retain the small-town feeling of genuine care and respect this town was built on and has progressed with. I still believe in the soul of Ketchum.

SDP: Having owned an art gallery in Ketchum, Idaho, for 35 years, what does it mean to be part of this community, especially as a business owner?

AF: Only recently have I realized that this community taught me what community is. What I am clear on now is how much I've learned from this locality. From 1986 to the present, I have received innumerable expressions of kindness and generosity. I aspire to emulate these acts and am thankful they far outweigh the lessons I learned the hard way. ■