

Cultural celebration

Tahawus Lodge Center holds one-year anniversary

By FELICIA KRIEG
 Contributing Writer

AUSABLE FORKS — About a year ago, dance artists Rebecca Kelly and her husband, Craig Brashear, opened the Tahawus Lodge Center on Main Street in AuSable Forks to the public.

Their goal is to “cultivate a love of arts and culture” as well as business and entrepreneurship in the small town.

“People inadvertently go right through AuSable Forks” and a cultural center would benefit both residents and visitors, Kelly said. “This town is very resilient and it’s going to embrace change” and the Tahawus Lodge Center is a part of AuSable Forks’ transformation, Kelly added.

There will be a free open house tonight in celebration of the Tahawus Lodge Center’s first year. Refreshments will be served and guests will have the opportunity to view Todd Bissonette’s exhibit of sports and dance photographs. Tours of the building will be offered, and attendees can see the variety of activities and classes that the center has offered in a five-minute video. Guests can have their questions answered by Kelly, Brashear and members of the Tahawus Lodge Center Steering Committee. Kelly expects about 50 people to attend.

For 2012, Kelly and Bras-

hear are considering holding a Young Filmmakers Workshop, a quilt show, crafts and artisan workshops, dance classes and new fine arts exhibits in the Windows of Change Gallery.

The center has hosted four art exhibitions in the Windows Gallery in the past year, including the work of Arto Monaco, the artistic mind behind the Land of Make-believe previously located in Jay, and Mark Hobson. Summer dance classes were also offered for children, teenagers and adults. The collective events and exhibitions encompass a “varied expression that reveals the talent and skill of local artists,” Kelly said.

Kelly and Brashear began working on restoring the 100-year-old Masonic lodge after it was acquired for \$20,000 by the Appleby Foundation, a nonprofit that operates Rebecca Kelly Ballet, in July 2010, according to Essex County tax records.

The three-story building is “very plain but very handsome,” Kelly said.

And Brashear and Kelly like the name, which Kelly said was most likely interpreted by white settlers to the area to mean “cloud splitter” in Native American.

The basement and first floor are currently available for rent as retail space. In the meantime, the Windows of Change Gallery and additional interior gallery fill the space on the

first floor. After renters are secured, Kelly said she hopes to move the galleries to the second floor.

The third floor has been remodeled into a spacious dance studio. The studio continues to be a work in progress though, Kelly said. She hopes to rent the space to local dance and recreation teachers for their own use and possi-

IF YOU GO

WHEN: 4 to 7 p.m.

Thursday, Dec. 29.

WHERE: Tahawus Lodge Center, 14234 Route 9N, Main Street, AuSable Forks.

Attendees are invited to bring a dish or holiday treat to share.

bly offer yoga, pilates and karate classes there in the future.

Despite their successes and ideas for the future, Kelly and Brashear have encountered some considerable setbacks in their path to “reclaim every particle of the building” and remodel the space, Kelly said. “Water swirled around us for a period of months.”

A flood in April left 4½ feet of water in the building, and to make matters worse, Tropical Storm Irene struck a few months later, leaving 6½ feet of floodwater in Tahawus Lodge Center. During these times, cleanup efforts had to take precedence over planning the next art exhibition, which was unfortunate, Kelly said. Luckily, the Center qualified to receive \$1,000 from the New York Council for the Humanities Hurricane Irene Disaster Recovery Grant.

According to the



Tahawus Lodge Center's website, the entire project was estimated to cost \$1.2 million over five years starting in 2010. The center was granted \$60,000 as part of the New York State Main Street Revitalization Fund. The money was used to remove asbestos and restore the storefront to a classic wood design by December 2010.

Kelly said hundreds of thousands of dollars still need to be raised to transform the building and "get it ready for the next 100 years." Kelly said she and her husband are striving to bring the building up to the "modern standards of energy efficiency." Improvements need to be made on the electrical and plumbing systems as well as the building's insulation.

There is still much work to do and renovations and repairs continue to progress at the rate of funding, Kelly said. The Tahawus Lodge Center "depends on the community for its success," she said. "We all pitch in."

Kelly added that experiencing the arts and culture must be an active experience.

"You have to engage with it."

"This town is very resilient and it's going to embrace change."

Rebecca Kelly



Tahawus Lodge Center owners Rebecca Kelly and Craig Brashear stand in the Windows of Change Gallery at last year's holiday open house. This year's event will feature a photography exhibit by Todd Bissonette, tours of the building, a video documenting the events of the year and refreshments.



Staff Photos/Kelli Catana

The Tahawus Lodge Center in AuSable Forks has been transformed into an active cultural center despite setbacks caused by floods earlier this year that have delayed further renovations and additional events. Summer dance classes were taught on the third floor dance studio and art exhibits by Arto Monaco and Mark Hobson were featured in the first floor Windows of Change Gallery earlier this year.