

Gallery Open at the New Tahawus Lodge Center in AuSable Forks

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Last Friday, I went to the [Windows of Change Gallery Opening at the new Tahawus Lodge Center](#) – currently under renovation as part of an ongoing rehab project. On display was "The Forks - there's no place like home" by photographer Mark Hobson, which features intimate and intriguing portraits of the local community.

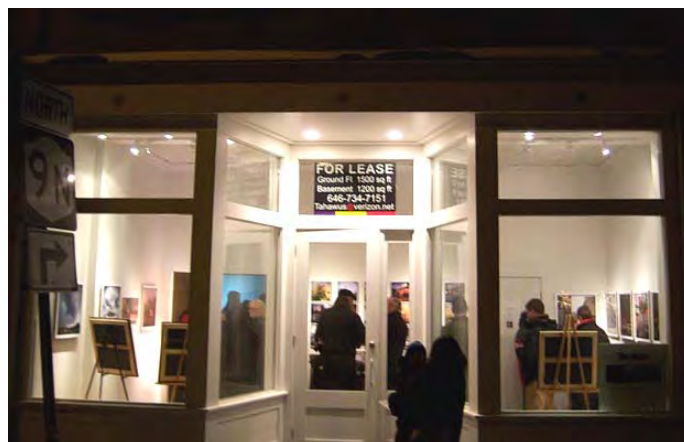


Craig Brashear and Rebecca Kelly – dance artists from New York City – are leading the project to transform the historic Masons' Lodge into a new center for arts activity. The Mason's Lodge, an anchor building in the business district of Au Sable Forks (in the Town of Jay), sits on the intersection of the main street and the river. You might know the name Rebecca Kelly from her dance company, "[Rebecca Kelly Ballet](#)," which has been bringing professional dance performances to The Lake Placid Center for the Arts for many years. Rebecca's hope for the renovated space is that it will be "a place where the art world and the village community engage with innovative projects," and a "flexible, entertaining, exciting gathering place" that will "reflect the talents and personalities of the people it serves." Eventually, the upper two floors will focus entirely on non-profits offering dance, theater, art, and education activities. The street and lower level will be made available for retail. Later in the year a pilot series of early childhood creative movement classes will be offered for adult-and-child combinations. I look forward to seeing the rest of space when they are done with the renovations and I'm glad to see a new home for artistic events in the area.

When I first drove up, I immediately noticed The Windows of Change Gallery, which stands out as a clean, intimate space that made for an appealing home for

Hobson's photographs. You can't miss it – it's the front gallery housing the exhibit and you can see Hobson's great photos right through the great shop front windows. Hobson, who lives and works in the Adirondack Park, has had his photography exhibited in galleries throughout the Adirondacks, and the south Jersey Shore. You might have seen Hobson's work recently in the [Lake Placid Center for the Arts](#) Annual Juried Exhibition. "Most of my pictures feel like memories of dreams from long ago," says Hobson, describing his work. "In my mind my pictures seem more like...glimpses of lost connections to something intuitively known or remembered ." Of course, a picture is worth a thousand words, so the best way to experience Hobson's evocative work is to head over to Ausable forks and check it out.

It is a great photography show in an exciting new gem of a space and I recommend stopping by for a visit. For more information about the Windows of Change Gallery and the Tahawus Lodge Center visit: www.TahawusLodgeCenter.org or email Tahawus@verizon.net. For information on seeing the "The Forks – there's no place like home" exhibit by appointment, contact Mark Hobson at blovius@charter.net. See more of Hobson's work on his website: <http://landscapist.squarespace.com/>.



AusSable Forks, opening a door to the future



On the Scene

Naj Wikoff

The other day my cousin Frissie was waxing poetic about going to the movies in AusSable Forks. On Dec. 29 yet another reason for visiting the Forks was unveiled at a packed open house for the Tahawus Lodge Center, the former Mason's Lodge 790, which is to become a community cultural center.

The cultural center has a ways to go before it is ready to host events. There is no heat or water, and much insulation, renovation and rewiring remains to be done. However it was quite clear that Craig Brashear and Rebecca Kelly's vision for the once forlorn edifice has a lot of promise. Massive amounts of junk, crud and mud have been hauled out, key structural work has repaired and the lower entry has been fixed so that now is apparent what a dazzling asset it would be to the town center.

Brashear and Kelly are dance artists from New York City who have a home on the Silver Lake Road and have been performing and teaching at the Lake Placid Center for the Arts and other Adirondack venues for many years. They run the Rebecca Kelly Ballet, a performing contemporary chamber ballet company, Onstage, a training and performing program for rural youth, **Kids Co-Motion**, an urban youth program, and now the Tahawus Lodge Center.

"Wait to you see the views," said Rebecca as she dragged me upstairs. "They

are fabulous. And look at the wooden floors. They were hidden under asbestos tiles. And back here we are going to create a little pied-a-terre for visiting artists. They will have a great view of the confluence of the East and West Branches of the Ausable River."

I gazed out. The views were a wow, those up and down Main Street and that of the rivers and hills beyond. The whole community was laid out beneath us and twinkled in the gathering dusk.

"Here is our studio," said Rebecca as we now moved on up to the third floor. "What do you think? Doesn't this space beg to be a studio? Look at the view up Main Street. Isn't it a classic? We had to rip out the rug that had 40 years of pigeon droppings on it. It is a wonderful space with lovely light breezes in the summer."

"I have been wanting to come over and see it for a long time," said Donna Ignatuk of Jay. "I am so excited. The space is beautiful. It is better than I expected."

"Well, you'll be the first to know when the ice jams go out," said Assemblywoman Janet Duprey looking out the window. "This view is simply amazing."

"This cultural center is the latest of a growing number of examples of small projects in the North Country that will have a huge impact on communities, projects where people are not sitting around waiting for some large government grant to make things happen," said Plattsburgh-North Country Chamber of Commerce president Garry Douglass. "Just like the

people in Tupper Lake creating a ski center, if we waited for others we would never get anything done. People are just getting down and doing it."

"We had hoped to have had this open house in September, but sometimes timelines get stretched out," said Craig Brashear.

"The important thing is you have kept at it," said Douglass. "You are not giving up."

"We are very dependent on tourism here in the North Country," said Duprey. "These are the types of things we need to do. I am just so fascinated by the view. This is such a North Country town. It will be wonderful to have this cultural center here in the hub of the village."

"The town is waking up from a Rip Van Winkle nap," said Kelly. "The strength of this community is how people come together. It has been just amazing."

"It's exciting," said Duprey. "We talk about rebirth of a small community and this is a perfect example of it that. I've never been in this building before. It is beautiful. It represents a terrific future for AuSable Forks."

"I am so pleased that Tahawus Lodge is in these people's hands," said Jessica Mulvey. "My father took his 3rd Degree here, a significant step for a Mason. Three generations of Mulvey men have been Masons here. I am so grateful that this building has been saved and will be used as a community center. I am very glad to see this rejuvenation in the village. The cultural life has been lacking in the last two generations and I hope this project

will bring it back to the level that my parents and grandparents remember. My son Anson may not be taking his 3rd Degree here but he may get a chance to perform here one day thanks to the efforts of Rebecca and Craig."

"I was moved to tears when I first saw the plans," said Jay Town Historian Sharon Hewston. "I am a sixth generation resident. I was so excited when I walked in. This used to be a post office over here. I love that they are trying to maintain and hang on to the history of this place, such as with various architectural details. There are a lot of memories here. I feel that all the spirits of this building can feel this going on."

"We renovated the front," said contractor Shawn Casey. "It's nice to see the progress. There is still a ways to go, but I think now people can see that it can be fixed up. I was surprised by the turnout. I think people are very interested and very excited."

"This is a wonderful project," said Audrey Challoner-Desjardins. "This is the greatest thing that ever happened to Ausable Forks. Of course it will take a lot of funding and that is always difficult, but look how far they have come."

"If you don't aim high you will never get there," said Dr. George Najim.

To learn more and how to get involved, visit www.rebeccakellyballet.com/Pages/Tahawus%20home.html.



Sharon Hewston, Rebecca Kelly and Donna Ignatuk



Shawn Casey mixes with the crowd



Craig Brashear, Dr. George Najim and Audrey Challoner-Desjardins

A little TLC in Au Sable Forks

By Keith Lobdell

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Au SABLE FORKS — When Rebecca Kelley and her husband, Craig Brashear, first purchased the former Tahawus Masonic Lodge in Au Sable Forks, she knew what could eventually be there.

"It's starting to look like what I was seeing in my head," Kelley, head of her own ballet company, said about the open house that was held at the site of the Tahawus Lodge Center Dec. 29.

"This is a beautiful building, I really like to fix things up big and beautiful," Kelley added.

The TLC is also part of a bigger picture along the main street of the hamlet, which includes several renovation projects to a number of the buildings along Main Street.

"There is a lot going on to help build up Main Street," Kelley said. "With the help of many, we can transform a wonderful historic building into an inspirational, bustling hub of community activity, enterprise and cultural programming."

Kelley spoke excitedly and optimistically as she gave people a tour of the three-story structure, laying out her vision before them of what each room would eventually become.

"I've been impatient because in my mind, I can see it all and what it will be," Kelley said. "It is very satisfying to reach this milestone and have an open house. There's still a lot left to be done. I hope that our enthusiasm for the project, though, is something that is contagious and inspiring to others."

Many residents and those interested in the project visited the site during the open house, including town of Jay Supervisor and Essex County Board of Supervisors Chairman Randy Douglas and Housing Assistance Program of Essex County (HAPEC) Executive Director Alan Hipps.

"We have been working with Rebecca and Craig to help with grants and funding for the



Rebecca Kelley shows off the view from the Tahawus Lodge Center on Main Street.

Photo by Keith Lobdell

project," Hipps said. "There are a number of sites along Main Street that we have been able to help with, and it's exciting to see the changes."

"They helped by administering a grant for Main Street revitalization," Kelley said. "It has been very positive to come together through this with some of the other businesses along Main Street and see how that are progressing. Everyone wanted something to happen, and, through this, you can start to see it happening."

Kelley said that the next step in the process of bringing her vision to life is set to begin, but the thing that is lacking is funds.

"For the next phase, we have a lot of fundraising that needs to be done," she said. "But the great thing is that people from everywhere are interested in this. We are looking forward to everything that is going to happen."

For more information on TLC and its mission, contact them at (646) 734-7151 or (212) 431-8489. They can also be reached through e-mail at tahawus@verizon.net or through their Web site at www.applebyfoundation.org.