

Siler City arts and culture beckon visitors

By Sarah Kuhn

Often times after people come to downtown Siler City they comment, "I had no idea there was so much going on here. I thought Siler City was just Highway 64." They are pleasantly surprised at the vibrant arts community nestled in the western part of Chatham County.

If you have not been here, let me take you on a little tour. Veer off 64 onto Raleigh Street and, as you come into downtown, you will spot a cozy used book shop called Paperback Plus. My favorite service offered is that the staff will search for any book you are looking for and call you when it comes in. Continuing down Raleigh Street past the historic post office, you will see Raleigh Street Gallery. The Gallery carries a fine collection of pottery, paintings, jewelry, and more, including paint-your-own-pottery. Many of the artists selling their wares in the store have studio space above it. So if you want to see how the wares are made or order something special, the artist is right there to talk with you.

Now let's head down Chatham Avenue, book-ended by the Farmers' Alliance Store and the North Carolina Arts Incubator (NCAI). Walking into the Farmers' Alliance Store is like stepping back in time. Established in 1888, it is the oldest store in existence in Chatham County. It sells everything from hoop cheese to coveralls, bee keeping supplies to pickled okra. The store doubles as a local museum, its walls covered in old newspaper clippings and photographs.

Continuing on Chatham Avenue you come to the Hotel Hadley Studios, a gallery and studio space inhabiting the historic landmark Hotel Hadley, built in 1904. The gallery offers new exhibitions monthly, multi-use space for workshops, and studios. Next door is the tailor shop and beyond that, CCCC's sculpture building and gallery space.

Hmmm, I think it is time for a coffee break. Luckily, across the way is Courtyard Coffee and Soda Shop. Courtyard Coffee offers specialty drinks, soda, and a



Lamp by woodworker Jeff Clark, Raleigh St. Gallery

plain ole' good cup of coffee in a cozy environment. The coffee drinks feature locally roasted coffee and milk from a dairy just down the road! While sipping your latte you can sit in the courtyard and enjoy the day or wander into the NCAI Gallery Shop, which sells work created by the resident artists of the incubator program and regional artists. NCAI has a separate gallery called the PAF gallery that has rotating monthly shows featuring a local artist. Next door is NCAI Studio 227, where the real work

is done. This large old building, formerly housing an automotive dealer, is now home to eight painters and CCCC's weaving classes. It is such a treat to meet the artists and watch them work! Next to the studio is the Chatham County Camera Club. The Camera Club is a diverse group of amateur and professional photographers. The works of an individual photographer are featured every month. Across Chatham Avenue is Hart Studios and Stained Glass by Sam. Hart Studios specializes in functional art and Sam's stained glass is gorgeous. Down the way is Person To Person Gallery. This shop features the eccentric and very humorous work of Roger Person. His work is beyond description; you just have to see it to believe it.

Now let's take a left down 2nd St. to Against His Will Gallery. This gallery and studio space specializes in fiber arts. Among other crafts, you will find local wool, yarn, looms, and handmade designs. The spinners are always willing to demonstrate how the wool is spun into yarn. Fascinating!

I could go on, but part of the fun is discovering the treasures of Siler City for yourself. I want to mention the two things I love most about downtown Siler City. The first is the opportunity to meet the artist that made the gift I will give to my mother this Christmas. I get to watch her work and learn the story behind the piece. This is so unique in a world where everything is made in a far off land by far off hands. The second is how the town and local artists have partnered to revitalize and preserve their old historic downtown buildings, while breathing life into new businesses. The past of the town is woven into the present seamlessly.

So, come on over to Siler City this holiday season! Many of the businesses are hosting Christmas Markets and specials ... and we promise there won't be traffic or long lines, only warm smiles and quality art!

Beyond the holidays, Siler City features a Artwalk every 3rd Friday of the month from 6-9 p.m. All the shops are open with new exhibition receptions and some even have live music!

Sarah Kuhn is co-owner and artist at Hotel Hadley Studios.

New Hope Valley Railway

Santa Trains

Experience a bit of North Carolina history!
Ride the famous *New Hope Valley Railway!*

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North Carolina Railway Museum
5121 Daisy Street, Bonsal, NC 27562 Post Office Box 40, New Hill, NC 27562

Santa himself will be waiting to see you and yours aboard the train with candy canes and a big smile for all!

Fare: \$10.00 Adults - \$7.00 Children

SANTA TRAINS OPERATE SATURDAY AND SUNDAY DECEMBER 4TH, 5TH, 11TH, AND 12TH

TRAINS AT: 11:00AM - 12:15PM - 1:30PM - 2:45PM - 4:00PM
The New Hope Valley Railway is located off Old US1 in the historic community of Bonsal, NC, on the border of Chatham and Wake Counties, just nine miles south of downtown Apex.

SILER CITY KNOWS ART

AGAINST HIS WILL
117 E. 2nd Street ■ (919) 742-1122
Here you'll find handmade surprises galore, including wearable art, candles, jewelry, knitting needles and much more.

NCAI GALLERY
223 N Chatham Avenue ■ (919) 663-2072
Find wonderful handcrafted items created by 50+ Incubator, other local and regional artists - something for everyone!

RALEIGH STREET GALLERY
120 West Raleigh Street ■ (919) 663-6278
Unique consortium of Craftsman and Artisans. We have pottery, original paintings, jewelry, wood and fiber arts, and so much more.

PAPERBACKS PLUS!
208 East Raleigh Street ■ (919) 742-4033
We sell used books and can order new books. We accept books for trade credit as well as buy books.

PERSON TO PERSON ART STUDIO & GALLERY
210 N. Chatham Ave ■ (919) 663-0982
Unique art for interesting people!

HOTEL HADLEY STUDIOS
130 N. Chatham Ave ■ (919) 663-0241
One of the newest studios to open in Siler City, with special exhibits during the 3rd Friday Artwalk.

STAINED GLASS BY SAM/ HART STUDIOS
224 N. Chatham Ave. ■ (919) 545-1051
Custom windows, repairs, church restorations, classes, supplies. Mixed media art, cards, paper crafts, and decorative painting.

COURTYARD COFFEE & SODA CAFE
223-B N. Chatham Ave ■ (919) 663.2152
Coffee, espresso, latte, cappuccino, hot teas, chai, mochas, smoothies, Italian sodas, sweet treats, coffee by the pound.