

The Next Frontier:

Wrightsville Avenue's blossoming studios open their doors to the public

BY: LAUREN HODGES



COURTESY OF DEBORAH CAVERNAUGH

"COASTAL CAROLINA" by Deborah Cavanaugh is displayed inside the Deborah Cavanaugh Studio on Wrightsville Avenue and can be viewed during the upcoming First Friday Studio Crawl of other Wrightsville studios.

This town always seems to have a hot new artistic neighborhood: the ever-expanding historic riverfront never goes out of style. Lumina Station and the Forum house gorgeous upscale galleries and shops, and last year the New Castle District became the "it" place to see and be seen. However, this month the studios dotted along Wrightsville Avenue's map are aiming to become Wilmington's freshest art locality.

"This neighborhood is great for artists," Deborah Cavanaugh, artist and owner of Deborah Cavanaugh Studio on Wrightsville Avenue, says. "We have an independent coffee shop, The Smudged Pot, which sells art and is very individual. We also have a guitar store, a dance studio and lots of other things that make this an artistic community."

Cavanaugh, along with Red Tulip Gallery owner Francesca Dekker, as well as artists Mitzy Johkneer and Julia Jensen, have founded an organization named WAWAS, which stands for Wrightsville Avenue Working Artists Studios. WAWAS

is planning a monthly studio walk, similar to the concept of Fourth Friday Gallery Nights downtown. The difference is a concentration on studios instead of galleries—that, and the walking.

"Well, you can't exactly walk to all of them, but you could if you really wanted to!" Cavanaugh, whose studio sits on 5401 Wrightsville Avenue, says laughing. But the drive in between is just a short distance, keeping all the studios within the same emerging neighborhood. The founders are embracing the difference, hoping that it will provide a new experience for the Wilmington art community and its loyal patrons.

"We want to keep it mostly studios because this is meant to be interactive," Cavanaugh explains. "People can see works in progress, watch the artists create something new and just be in a creative environment."

Cavanaugh, known for her history as a self-starter, decided to become a painter 12 years ago after her children presented her with a box of watercolors for Mother's Day. Each painting has something to say, literally: Cavanaugh likes to include sayings in every piece.

"They are all about making life a little easier, a little more joyful, and helping us all to recognize that on any day, while the list of all that is going wrong could be written down, the list of all that is going right could never be finished," she says.

The Red Tulip Gallery is housed in a bright blue house, which Francesca Dekker shares with her physical therapist husband. Dekker, who was featured in *encore* last year, has been busy showing her work around town at events like Orange Street Art Festival and venues such as Racine Center for the Arts. However, her private studio on Wrightsville Avenue is a different experience altogether.

"Whenever someone stops by my studio, I get very excited because they get to see my work in progress," Dekker says.

"I always invite people out here."

The open-door policy regarding the artists' studios is what inspired the WAWAS walk in the first place.

"The four of us founded this because we wanted people to notice how artistic this area is," Cavanaugh says. "We wanted to invite the public out to see what we do, what is out here."

The walk is set to take place on the first Friday of every month with hosted tours of the founding artists' studios. Hopefully, the up-and-coming neighborhood will be hosting many more events in the future in order to increase Wrightsville Avenue's artistic awareness and reputation.

"We are planning on a fund-raiser at the end of the year," Cavanaugh reveals. "We're going to plan something for the holidays, too, and a few other things are in the works for WAWAS."

The WAWAS First Friday Studio Crawl will commence on October 3rd from 6-8pm. The crawl begins at Deborah Cavanaugh Studios at 5401 Wrightsville Avenue. Call 910-297-5383 for more information.