

**Heavenly Building Houses Art**  
*Newfield News*  
**October 15, 2008**

Visitors to Paul McMillan's art gallery and studio in Enfield pull up to a large, white Methodist Church, complete with a working bell tower and a plaque next to the door announcing the reverend's name and service times. A large religious mural behind where the altar should be greets people as they walk through the bright red doors and up the steps to the gallery space.

The building caught McMillan's eye because he had previously had a studio in an old school house, he said. The church was built in 1836 and McMillan is the second owner in its history. Now instead of facing a preacher, the chairs under the vaulted wood ceiling are turned to view the paintings hung on the walls and leaned on old pews. McMillan converted the space to a showroom and studio less than six months ago. The main hall is used for art shows and concerts while the downstairs area is for staging, additional works and art lessons.

"I can show my work downstairs and have a gallery show upstairs," McMillan said. "We can have concerts and gallery shows."

The acoustics in the old church make the space ideal for concerts and the paintings are left on the walls while the music is preformed. Named the McMillan Art Center, the space hosts area artists and visiting artists. The first show in the space attracted 135 visitors and the second show drew around 100 people. McMillan said he encourages artists to show their best work as well as smaller, sellable pieces.

"If we don't show our best work people won't come [for] long," he said.

A "surprising" number of artists have responded to the opportunity to show their work at the center, McMillan said, but the space will likely only have two more shows before it shuts down for the season. The gallery is currently displaying a 30-year retrospect of McMillan's paintings including moonlit landscapes and images that border on surrealism, with expanses of blue sky reminiscent of Salvador Dali.

McMillan said the biggest challenge he faces with the gallery is encouraging people to drive out of Ithaca to visit. He has sold less than \$200 worth of paintings to people in Ithaca but around \$5,000 worth to people outside of the community.

"My biggest lesson that I've learned about our community is that we need to let the outside area know how many great painters we have here," he said.

McMillan is also trying to teach people that they don't have to go into cities to get cultured.

"I hope that I can create the opportunity for people to see that they can see great art here," he said.

The gallery currently does not receive outside funding and McMillan is hoping more people will begin supporting two-dimensional art in the Ithaca area.

"This business is at risk in a very serious way without support," he said.

McMillan said Methodist congregation members are always welcome in the building. People who were baptized in the church 85 year ago still come back and members of the church have expressed their gratitude that the old building is continuing to serve the community. The building still looks very much like a church and McMillan doesn't have plans to paint over the 1970s altar painting of angels and sheep, but people shouldn't be put off by the gallery's sudo-religious vide, he said.

"The only thing I'm proselytizing is art," McMillan said.