

The Red Door Art Gallery building was raised in 1915 as the home of the National Bank. It is a beautiful building built in the federal style with two 24 foot high pillars that stand as sentries guarding the bank's front door. The bank stood as a pillar to the community in the heart of downtown's Main Street, which is now 418 Dakota Avenue.

Inside the bank were 26 foot high ceilings adorned with horse hair impregnated decorative plaster. Four bank vaults acted as supports and protection for the wealth of the twin towns. Beautiful Terrazzo floors finish off the building, indicative of the high quality of the structure.

The bank was in business until 1953 when the bank closed its doors. For the next 40 years the interior of the building changed as numerous businesses built walls and installed a dropped ceiling covering the interior architecture of the building. The building was vacated in 1994 and fell into ruin as the roof leaked and interior structures molded and rusted, collapsing in on themselves.

In 2009 a local resident, Roger Jensen, considered the building in his search for a home for the arts. Roger's background in architectural drafting and estimating, and his visionary talents, gave him the drive to envision this dilapidated building as a beautiful art gallery. Roger spent many hours selling the idea to key community individuals as well as members of the Three Rivers Arts Council (TRAC). The building was finally purchased in August of 2009 through a no interest loan from the City of Wahpeton.

The long task of gutting and renovating the building began. A new roof was engineered to prevent the hard work of renovation from being reversed. The majority of the renovations were accomplished with the help of the NDSCS Building Trades students in fulfillment of the commercial requirements of their curriculum. Their continued efforts, along with the skills of many local carpenters, painters and other craftsmen, continue to renovate the gallery.

An upper balcony vault with 18 inch concrete walls was removed, as was the upper balcony wall overlooking the main floor bank tellers. Steel structures were removed from the ceiling and the leaking sky light was covered and sealed from below. A new Terrazzo staircase was built from steps obtained from a courthouse in Brainerd, MN. The walls were insulated and sheet rocked. A drop ceiling was installed to cover the crumbling ceiling structures as they dried out in their new environment. A new state of the art LED lighting system was installed and an Art Deco chandelier, circa 1922, was hung to greet art lovers as they enter the gallery.

Numerous volunteers from the community donated their time and financial resources to keep the renovations progressing. Renovation components were salvaged from many resources that helped us retain a "historical presence" to the new gallery.

While the renovations were in progress there was discussion at the TRAC meetings about who should operate the art gallery. The TRAC Executive Committee quickly realized that while it was within TRAC's mission to own an art gallery, it lacked the business culture and operating structure to effectively operate a gallery as a going concern. As a result, several members of TRAC agreed to form a new entity to fulfill this effort. The Red Door Art Gallery (RDAG) was created and held its first organizational meeting in January, 2011. At this time, RDAG applied for tax exemption status under section 501c3 of the US Tax Code.

Our doors opened in May of 2011 as we secured a contract with the Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) to be the information center in the heart of downtown Wahpeton. Two TRAC members were hired to man the gallery on weekends. That gave us the opportunity to display a limited number of pieces from local artists. As the summer progressed we sold both art work and public enthusiasm and support for the new gallery. On December 3<sup>rd</sup> we had a Christmas open house to showcase our newly opened gift shop and more than a dozen local artists.

Our first exhibit in the gallery was of Brad Berger's wildlife photography with a successful artist's reception. Our official Grand Opening was held on March 24 and 25, 2012. Our featured artist was Barbara Benda Nagle from Moorhead MN. We invite you to visit our gallery in the heart of downtown Wahpeton next time you are in the area and see the many local and regional artists that are displaying in the gallery.