

November 25-26, Naples Renaissance Fall Art Festival, Naples. Contact: Richard Sullivan, the von Liebig Art Center, PO Box 839, Naples, FL 34106; phone 239-513-2492. Website: www.naplesart.org. Space fee: \$265. Attendance: 7,500 (staff estimate).

By Donna Wilson

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Medium: Paper Collage

This young show is the “baby” of Richard Sullivan, director of the prestigious February Naples National show, and he is determined to do whatever it takes to make it a success. For its first two years, the show (known as the Haldeman Creek Art Festival) was held in an up-and-coming area of Naples, and even with decent advertising, the crowds just did not materialize. So Sullivan moved the show to its new and hopefully permanent location right off prominent and trendy Fifth Avenue, on 10th Street.

The show is still mostly invitation only, but a few spaces are available for additional artists. Sullivan makes it very clear that he will be loyal to those exhibitors who stay with him during the early years of this event, which is always appreciated. He is one of the most artist-friendly directors out there, and the caliber of art at his shows is good.

All spaces have large back areas for storage and one sidewall. (Yeah!) Setup is the night before, after the street has been closed; you can pull right up to your location for loading/unloading. He does as much advertising as his budget will allow and is always on site and willing to listen to any type of constructive criticism. And because he keeps the show relatively small (at 116 exhibitors), most of us can get a decent slice of that proverbial pie.

So how were sales? The move definitely helped- attendance was better. It was never strong, but it was steady both days, which was an improvement over previous years. Patrons in Naples are well heeled, sophisticated and usually have deep pockets. Many of us simply laid the groundwork for other upcoming Naples events, even though we did make some sales over the course of the weekend.

Keeping in mind that this is the fall in Florida and not the winter, I was pleased with my \$3,000+. While a few artists were disappointed, some did extremely well. A clothing exhibitor was doing the happy dance, and an artist with very high-end African pencil art also did well.

All agreed the move was an improvement and that, given time, the show would be a winner. Sullivan is committed to the show for the long haul. Don't drive from another state, but if you are in the area, this could be a profitable way to spend the holiday weekend while still enjoying Thanksgiving Day with family and friends. I'll be back.