

No experience needed – will train



Potter Beth Turnbull-Morrish and stained glass artist Lisa Waterman will be instructing at the Thames Institute of the Arts, in Chatham, this summer. Photography by Matt Neeb.

If you are looking to add a little more sizzle to your summer, look no further than the Thames Institute of the Arts, St. Clair College, Chatham.

Now in its fifth year this “summer school of the arts” has a terrific selection of 26 courses to fan your creative flame.

For three glorious weeks in June adults can escape, one week at a time, to a paradise of artistic activity. Painting, drawing, printing, quilting and creative writing are but a taste of what’s offered.

John Lawrence, director of the Institute of the Arts wanted to create a summer learning program that would allow participants to explore and grow their artistic side in a “warm and welcoming community.” To this end, he sought facilitators who are both artistic and people oriented.

“We look for the best instructors from across southern Ontario. Geographically they are spread across southern Ontario with six from London, six from Chatham, five from Hamilton, Oakville, Grimsby area, and one each from Oshawa, Toronto and Guelph.”

Lisa Waterman hails from Strathroy and this is her fifth summer teaching at the

Institute. “I was one of the inaugural ones,” she says laughing.

She has two classes in the offering: “Stained Glass” and “Stained Glass Intermediate.”

The first course covers the basics. Working from patterns, students learn both the copper foil and lead methods. The intermediate course emphasises the creation of original work and three-dimensional construction.

“People may be scared because they are not artistic,” says Waterman. In reality stained glass work is very physical work. Very hands on. And repetition is the key to success.

“With each new skill they may have to do it about 10 times before they ‘get it,’” she says. An average project incorporates 50 to 60 pieces, so practice is built right in.

The creativity comes with confidence. “Every year someone blows me away with what they do,” Waterman says.

Waterman describes the growth of the Institute program as “very organic. A lot of the buzz is word-of-mouth from satisfied students – something she feels is the “best possible” kind of reference.

This is Londoner Beth Turnbull-Morrish’s

first summer as an instructor at Institute. She is teaching a pottery course for absolute beginners.

The course covers the ins and outs of working on a potter’s wheel. Students will learn the basic forms of throwing, the cup, bowl and plate, how to do additions such as handles, decorating and glazing techniques.

Turnbull-Morrish’s approach to teaching is light and fun. “It’s about sharing my passion,” she says. She believes in giving students a strong fundamental base and that “practice makes better.”

“I like to use sports analogies,” Turnbull-Morrish says. “For example golf lessons. There are a hundred things you have to do before you swing the club, and it feels like the most awkward thing in the world but once you do it over and over again it becomes natural. It is about training your body to move in a certain way.”

“One thing that really struck me from students that had taken other courses is the feeling of community that they had, it’s kind of a learning vacation. They had a great time,” Turnbull-Morrish says.

Retired secondary school teacher Heather Walkom of Woodstock is returning for her fifth year as a student at the Institute. She is taking *Watercolour Unlimited*, the same course she has taken four times before from instructor Joyce Hamilton.

It’s not that Walkom doesn’t pay attention in class; it’s that she finds Hamilton to be an excellent teacher. “I like her style,” Walkom says. The course is designed for beginners to experienced artists and employs both traditional and exploratory techniques to “get the creative juices flowing.”

Walkom goes each year with a group of close friends. “We call it going to art camp,” she says.

Londoner Patricia Baldwin is returning for a second summer at the Institute. She says she first heard about the Institute

through ArtSCAPE Magazine. Last year she took *Colour* with Julie Donec, this year she is registered for *Creative Written Memoirs* with John Gardiner

Colour allows students to choose which medium they will use in the class and Baldwin worked in watercolour. “Donec was a great teacher,” she recalls.

Baldwin liked the small classes and the myriad of afterschool activities. “I really developed a sense of community,” she says.

The Institute’s atmosphere is decidedly relaxed, in a busy sort of way. “We maintain this,” says Lawrence, “by providing additional out of class activities.” Student and instructor artists mingle at a wine and cheese reception, instructor slide show, cross-class visits, dinner-out options and a closing barbeque lunch.”

“The summer atmosphere is very different from the rest of the school year. Laid back might sound cliché but that is really how it feels,” says Devin Andrews, Operational Support staff. “I enjoy spending my summers working at the Thames Institute. It is really like a vacation at work. The fun and camaraderie is infectious.”

Lawrence agrees, “I enjoy seeing the participants caught up in their artistic endeavors and their apparent pride in their accomplishments.”

The popularity of the Thames Institute of the Arts as a summer “retreat” for adults can be measured by its steadily climbing enrollment which has more than doubled over the past four years says Lawrence.

“We have also started to stretch our wings a little and grow beyond our traditional summer vacation learning base to now include workshops and weekend classes year round,” Andrews adds. “We have never rested on our laurels, we continually grow and evolve.”

Beth Stewart is a visual artist, writer and teacher. July 14-18, she is teaching a newly minted course in coloured pencil at the TIA.