

the forum

>>> COMMUNITY

NATURE'S PLACE

Rainforest Art Foundation has big plans for old YWCA building

The Rainforest Art Foundation and the Marlene Yu Museum are working to convert the former YWCA and battered women's shelter in downtown Shreveport into another phase in the effort to bring the arts and commerce back to the downtown area.

Stephanie Lusk is the co-director of the foundation and said renovations on the old YWCA are to start this spring with completion scheduled for the fall. In December, Lusk said the museum will host its grand opening and has issued a call to local artists and international writers for the debut.

Artists are being asked to submit a brief biography, statement of their work, a photo and a caption describing the work, its title, year, medium and dimensions. The foundation needs the information before Oct. 6 and will select those applications that are appropriate for one or all of its inaugural exhibitions.

Those exhibits are "The Beauty and Spirit of the Rainforest," "Disappearing of the Rainforest" and "Nature Through the Lens."

The "Beauty and Spirit" exhibit will feature wildlife like plants, flowers, animals, forest or rainforest scenes. It will also honor local artist Minor Vinck's glass work and nature etchings. Vinck will be 99 Jan. 22.

The "Disappearing" exhibit will focus on green movement themes like forest fires, landslides, deforestation, carbon emissions, endangerment to wildlife, community displacement, global warming and glacial melting.

"Through the Lens" will feature photography.

Writers are being asked to submit a 250-2,500-word short story in English for consideration in a second category of projects. The judges will look for science fiction literary, digital, comic and performing arts narratives about what life would be like under extreme weather conditions. Those works might be selected for production at a later date.

The renovation of the existing building is ambitious. Lusk said an effort was being made to raise money and awareness about the project and the goals of the Rainforest Foundation in order to make



(Top) Bright green paint on the Ironworks can be seen on the YWCA building and is the same color as the bright green gates in The Long Island City location to be an abstraction of the rainforest. Marlene Yu stands in front of her large-scale art work titled "Fly Over Milky Way," which will be on display this year.

them possible.

On the drawing board are changes to the main floor, which used to house the YWCA offices. The plan is to open up the floor to create the main exhibition gallery. On the lower level, a permanent space will be designed for housing Marlene Yu's large-scale work. A rehearsal space is also planned for the level.

The old cafeteria space will be transformed into another event space and more rehearsal area.

Lusk has special plans for the old pool area, to turn it into a whitewater training area and climbing venue. The River Rocks Life area, as it will be known, fits the philosophy of the foundation, Lusk said, by creating an "appreciation of nature through outdoor skills development."

Lusk said she and her husband are whitewater sport enthusiasts and often their group has to travel considerable distances to find a suitable training area at certain times of the year. "It would be awesome to have something local, indoors, and year round to encourage more interest in these outdoor sports and also to train athletes," she said. The foundation would also bring more people to the arts district year round and to the museum.

The second and third floors are slated to be redesigned into additional exhibition space and for the museum and foundation.

Lusk's plan is to honor her mother by recognizing her 70th solo exhibition in her 77th year at seven local institutions, Lusk said. In September, they hope to exhibit at the Louisiana State Exhibit Museum, then in October at the Robinson Film Center. The exhibit will move to the Marlene Yu Museum in December, the Bossier Arts Council in January, The Meadows Museum of Art at Centenary in February, Sci-Port: Louisiana's Science Center in April, ending at the Shreveport Regional Arts Council. For more information on this tour, check the website at www.marleneyumuseum.org.

Shreveport was chosen to become the home of the foundation and museum, Lusk said, after her father researched the area. She said he has extensive experience in renewing urban areas into arts districts, having worked in New York's Soho, Tribeca and Chelsea areas, among others. Those areas were transformed through the infusion of artists and their works, she said.

"The artists liked the large spaces [in the older areas]. When they came in the galleries followed them and then the boutique shops and then the Yuppies. The neighborhood changed. Now it's a fashion district, and it's completely overrun by tourists. But art started up that