

Six Degrees looks ahead at what's to come

By Zander Sherman

Six Degrees Muskoka, located in downtown Bracebridge, looks back on the summer's seven themed exhibits, 90 digital animation classes, and 600 art instalments fondly. So do the residents of Muskoka, who've responded with enthusiasm in a survey being concluded at the time of press.

"People were blown away and amazed," says Jen Skinner, who co-founded Six Degrees with her husband, Don. "It was unexpected. And that's what we like."

The 42-question survey gathered the opinions of artists, demonstrators, and community members alike, and nearly all to date have indicated their support for the gallery.

"So far ninety-three per cent of our respondents recommended Six Degrees to someone else," says projector co-ordinator Tamsen Tillson. "And all were very positive about our impact on the downtown experience for shoppers, other retailers in downtown Bracebridge, and the Muskoka arts community."

Now the gallery has closed, the Skinners are using feedback from the community to help form their strategy going forward. At the same time, they don't want people thinking Six Degrees, or its animation studio, Pixels on the Parallel, didn't make enough of an impact during



Photograph: Sandy Lockhart

Jen and Don Skinner operated Six Degrees Muskoka this past summer. The gallery is now closed for the season, but was well received.

the summer to carry it through the fall.

"This is an adaptive reuse of a 124-year-old building, and we're basically building it over," Don says. "It's a huge

priority. A massive amount of resources . . . We're rehabilitating the entire thing."

Though much of the work being done to the building will be completed over

the winter, some finishing touches, such as the planned rooftop ribbon (an energy conservation measure which would generate domestic hot water), will come a little later. In the meantime, the Skinners are excited by a forthcoming animation event in Ottawa, which they'll use to co-ordinate a winter intensive workshop.

"We hope to have a Christmas class and challenge students to create a 'short' in time for the G8 Summit," says Jen.

And come spring, the plan is for Pixels on the Parallel to resume its classes and busy creative schedule. The top two floors of the Six Degrees building are already leased to an international firm, and the rest of the space will be adapted to a variety of uses in an effort to make the building sustainable from all angles.

"Sustainability is number one," says Don. "We see the use of rentable interstitial space as a value-added piece to Six Degrees. And the added cultural value of creative content – static art, animated art, visual art, performance art – creates a richer environment."

With winter coming on, the Skinners are now looking for input from the community about how to empower youth and arts.

"Six Degrees is a global community idea about connectivity," Jen says. "We want ideas about how that relates to your creative cultural side."