

## Gallery paintings impress, not just for show

SOUTHFIELD — Prior to a 1999 renovation at Park West Gallery on Northwestern Highway, window shopping was a popular pastime.

On one side of the 63,000-square-foot building were seven tenants, including a popular pizzeria, which attracted potential art fans, according to gallery owner Albert Scaglione.

With art sales increasing, Scaglione completed a \$3 million renovation, turning the entire building into a gallery.

“When I bought the building (in 1979), I had a dream of one day occupying the whole building,” Scaglione said.

A marble floor, Greco-Roman exterior, and a park with a pond were among the renovations made to the building and property, Scaglione said.

But with the gallery expansion came the elimination of sublessors who attracted potential customers.

More than a decade since the renovation, Scaglione said it's still a challenge getting passersby to recognize the building as a gallery with paintings for sale, and not a museum, with paintings just for show.

On every wall are paintings from world-renowned artists, and next to each is a price tag.

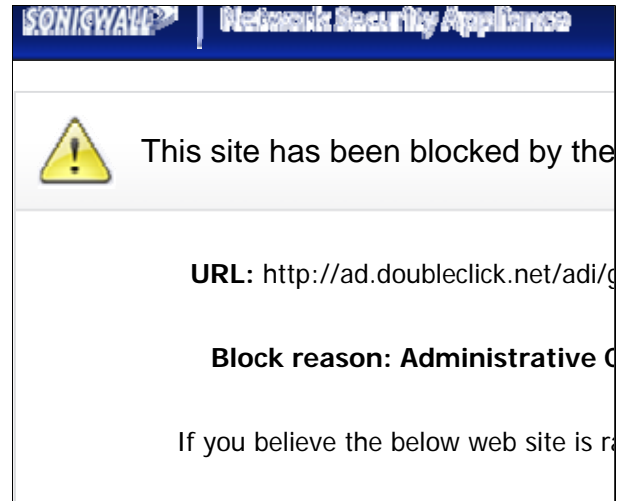
“You'd be surprised how many people drive by and think it's a museum,” Scaglione said. “It is, but it's not. It's a place where you come and buy something, or browse.

“I had more traffic when it was a strip mall. Many think we are an art museum in the suburbs. That's not what we are. We're a gallery where you shop.”

Paintings are valued at more than \$100,000 to less than \$1,000, according to Scaglione. It takes advanced technology and a devoted workforce to keep the inventory up to date, he said.

“Behind these walls, I have 150 people working,” Scaglione said, pointing to the right, facing the front desk. “It's the only entity of its kind with hundreds of people whose mission is to serve the art community, bringing the work of living

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artists to a wider audience in a non-intimidating, educational and entertaining way with the thought that art is for everyone, not just for the super rich or the intellectual.”

Joanne Leonetti, the receptionist and client services representative, feels like she has the best view in town. Her chair swivels, which allows for a view of the paintings on the back wall without getting on her feet.

“I turn around (in the chair) and look at everything (on the walls),” Leonetti said. “I’m also that ‘crazy’ person that makes sure everything is straight. I like to straighten out the paintings. Right now, I’m noticing (a) Picasso (painting) is crooked.”

Scaglione, 72, is a New Jersey native who moved to Michigan after enrolling in graduate school in mechanical engineering at Michigan State University in 1964.

A teacher in New Jersey convinced him to consider MSU, he remembers.

“He told me, ‘I think you’d like the midwest, the work ethic,’” Scaglione recalled. “I moved here, never left.”

Scaglione said he taught mechanical engineering courses at MSU, and then Wayne State University, before taking a risk and opening the Park West Gallery out of a building he rented at Nine Mile and Telegraph in Southfield.

Scaglione remembers the rent being \$500 per month at the start, which was steep for the kind of budget he was used to having.

“I was a good saver, and my wife and child lived on \$15 a week for food,” Scaglione said. “You could buy three pounds of hamburger for a dollar, powdered milk. That was my food staples.”

Park West Gallery’s business grew to the point that an expansion was necessary, Scaglione said. In 1979, he constructed the building the gallery now occupies at 29469 Northwestern Highway for \$1.7 million.

“When you think about it, that was about the price of what a ‘big home’ is today,” Scaglione said.

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### Where it’s at

What: Park West Gallery

Where: 29469 Northwestern Highway (between 12 and 13 Mile roads), Southfield

Hours: 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Monday-Wednesday; 10 a.m.-7 p.m. Thursday-Friday; 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Saturday.

Phone: (248) 354-2343

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