

Art Walk's new stride

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Russell Medford, chairman of Artetude Gallery, stands among the artwork. The new gallery will join the first Art Walk of the year this evening. / Erin Brethauer/ebrethau@citizen-times.com

Asheville Art Walk returns today — with a new face, new energy and a new approach.

The newly branded Downtown Asheville Art District will host its first art walk starting at 5 p.m. and feature new shows and special events at 25 galleries in the area.

The idea behind the change is to establish a “destination

identity for the gallery owners who are responsible for many artists at one time,” said Russell Medford, who opened ArtEtude Gallery at

89 Patton Ave.

“We want to kind of take it to the next level as a formal gallery association.”

The next level means more “new” for the district. New this year: The walks will be held once a month instead of every other month. Also new: There are more galleries in the mix. Of the participating galleries, there are five new businesses on the walking tour: ArtEtude, blue, Handmade in America, Mora and Updraft Gallery. The art walks will continue through December.

Those attending the Art Walk can also opt to join the “art ride”: The organization will offer for the first time a trolley service from Grey Line Trolley between the venues, as well as free parking at the Asheville Convention and Visitors Bureau, 36 Montford Ave.

Medford celebrates the support he’s received from the downtown business community since opening ArtEtude in June. The idea to rebrand as a district emerged at a meeting a few months ago, he said.

“There were about 20 gallery owners who were in one room, and we realized we had quite a bit in common,” he said. “As they say, ‘Rising tides lift all boats.’ ... We all share the same level of commitment to quality and business integrity.”

The Downtown Art District, he noted, is really a more commercial variation on the vibrant River Arts District down the hill, so to speak, from ArtEtude.

“We love the River Arts District,” he said. “It’s primarily studios, and it’s a different vibe. We kind of view ourselves as the commercial translation of (the studio system).”

ArtEtude represents a dozen artists and focuses on showcasing on cutting-edge sculpture, painting and photography. The gallery features work from artists as far away as Texas and New York, as well as two from Asheville.

Jo Ridge Kelley, an expressive painter who works in the River Arts District, will be spotlighted during the art walk today. She will be “the artist in the window,” Medford said. She will complete a painting in the front of the gallery, as well as answer questions and share the meaning of her work.

The Medfords, who moved from Boston to Atlanta in 1989, first discovered Asheville when Margaret Offerman helped open the Mission Healthcare SECU Cancer Center. She is a celebrated oncologist and biochemist; Russell Medford is a [cardiologist](#)

and molecular biologist.



They are also co-founders and managing partners of Salutrained Group, a consulting firm that provides guidance to senior life science, foundation and institutional executives.

Offerman worked for seven months with Mission.

“I had never been to Asheville, and I would come up as often as I could (to visit Offerman),” Medford said.

“Both of us were just taken by how beautiful it is here. The culture here was also something we hadn’t anticipated. We knew about the legacy of crafts here, but were impressed to learn about (contemporary galleries) Haen and Blue Spiral 1.”

They are lifelong art collectors and enthusiasts, and acknowledging the healing power of art, for both personal health and the strength of a community.

After purchasing a house on Town Mountain last year, they opened ArtEtude. And they continue to give back to the reason they discovered their new home.

ArtEtude Gallery contributes a portion of each sale to the Mission [Hospital](#)

Foundation and the SECU Cancer Center, Medford noted.

