



## Fire House Gallery Sees New Leadership, Ideas

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Amy Barley is the new director of the Fire House Gallery in Berryville. She started in June and has already set up an agri-art section for locally produced artisan goods. (Photo by Scott Mason/The Winchester Star)

**BERRYVILLE** — The Fire House Gallery has entered its fifth year of providing shoppers local art, and a new director has taken over the gallery to move it into the next phase of its life. Amy Barley, 50, director of the Fire House Gallery at 23 E. Main St., said she has plenty of plans for the community art resource.

“Part of the reason I was hired was so that there would be a regular person, day-in-day-out, organizing and coordinating all aspects of the business,” Barley said. “My goal, too, is to make it more accessible and make it more of a venue. Maybe have evening [music] jams here.”

Barley took over the gallery in June after serving as temporary director of the Shenandoah Arts Council.

“It was perfect timing,” she said.

She replaces Kate Petranech, who was founding volunteer director from 2010 to May.

“Berryville Main Street felt it was necessary to create a paid position to manage the gallery,” Petranech said. “I was not interested in a paid position.” Petranech continues to volunteer in the gallery.

Barley said taking over the position has had a few benefits. One was that many of the artists represented by the Arts Council are also featured in the gallery, so Barley was already acquainted with them.

Another benefit is that as a Berryville resident, Barley has a personal stake in the community. The Fire House Gallery was created by Berryville Main Street as an economic development project featuring distinctive handmade arts and crafts from local and regional artists to enrich the local culture.

“For me, it’s wonderful because it’s local,” Barley said. “I get to serve people within my own county and town. It’s a nonprofit. I tend to be drawn to nonprofits. I like working for a mission.” Since becoming director, Barley has made a few changes. One was to the general look of the space.

“I’ve painted,” she said. “And that was a big deal, actually. I tried to warm it up a little bit — have a little bit more variety of colors.”

The new colors include a purple countertop and a corner painted a rust color. The corner will also have a new purpose.

“It’s going to become a Local Goods Nook,” Barley said. “We’re going to start providing agri-art as well as fine art and pottery.”

Agri-art refers to artisan consumables. Barley has begun stocking the gallery with locally made honey, syrups, meat sticks and more.

The additions are meant “to offer a little bit more variety for people,” she said. “Agri-art is a trending tourism piece now, too. Since we’re a rural area, it makes sense [the gallery would] have those kind of products.”

One of Barley's goals is to increase the amount of local traffic in the gallery, and the local goods will hopefully do that.

Barley said many locals only see the Fire House Gallery as a place to go once a year to find Christmas presents.

"There are people down the street that have never been inside the gallery," Barley said.

If the locally made products draw regulars into the gallery, they may leave with more than syrup because Barley also plans to begin stocking Virginia wines in the agri-art section.

According to Sue Ross, director of Berryville Main Street, they're very happy with the recent developments.

"She's really going to town," Ross said. "She's got creative ideas."

Ross was director of the gallery from 2005 to 2010.

"Amy's just coming into the gallery, so she's done a lot really fast," she said."

Barley said that Berryville Main Street staff have liked the ideas she's presented, including ones that change the items traditionally carried by the gallery.

"The Berryville Main Street board, they're really supportive," she said.

For the future, Barley plans to make the gallery a place people come to spend time and not just pass through. She plans to have more musical events and possibly poetry readings and art walks in the area.

She has already begun a new regular event: Thursday Lunchbox Jam Sessions. Every Thursday, anyone can show up from noon to 1 p.m. with an instrument to play or they can simply listen.

There will also be new educational opportunities.

From 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Nov. 28, the gallery will hold the first in a series of demonstrations by local artists. That day, Rachel Rogers-Rodgers of Elegantly Eccentric Designs in Clarke County will be making jewelry at the gallery and answering questions about her process.

"It's pretty usable as a venue space," Barley said.

For more information about the Fire House Gallery, visit [firehousegalleryva.com](http://firehousegalleryva.com).

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