

Connie Cuthbertson - Northwoods Gallery & Gifts

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Connie Cuthbertson turns natural gift of art into a natural gallery of gifts.

As an artist, Connie Cuthbertson estimates that over the past quarter of a decade she has completed thousands of paintings. But as prolific as she has become, her artistic roots remain decidedly humble. Consider the story of how she started selling her paintings. “The first ones I sold were done with Crayola paints,” laughingly recalls Cuthbertson, who reports that her first painting – framed, no less - fetched a relatively meager \$25. Still, that first sale sparked something in Connie. “What it did was just snowballed into fantastic amounts of wanting to learn,” says Cuthbertson, “and I really think that’s what it is for anybody if you want to become successful, you have to have a real drive and a passion to want to know more about it.”

Connie Cuthbertson has turned her drive, passion, and love of art into a successful downtown business in Fort Frances. Northwoods Gallery & Gifts features not only a large selection of Connie’s paintings, but also a wide variety of giftware, clothing, and novelty items. Northwoods has been open for about nine years now, but the idea for the store started taking shape back in 1986. Cuthbertson says she opened a studio gallery in her home called ‘CC Pictures and Frames’ while her two daughters were young, in order to spend more time around them. “I was doing some watercolour painting at that time,” explains Connie, “and people liked how I framed my paintings, so then I went ahead and started framing things for other people.” Eventually her children got bigger, and Cuthbertson realized it was time to move the business out of the house.

Northwoods Gallery & Gifts lives up to its name in at least a couple of ways. First of all, you will find a number of Canadian-themed items that will remind you of life in the Great White North.

Secondly, the store features plenty of exquisite natural woodwork from floor to ceiling, which Connie’s family and friends helped put into place. Cuthbertson says she wanted Northwoods’ décor to have an impact on her customers. “I wanted them to feel like they weren’t in Kansas anymore,” says Connie, adding “it’s like they’ve escaped reality, they can walk in here and just let their mind go...and to me that is a key element to any shopping experience, it has to be an *experience*.” Cuthbertson says the plan is working, especially when it comes to how her male clientele have reacted. “The guys come in and right away they’re kind of talking about the floor,” says Connie, “or the counter, and saying ‘Wow, how did you do that counter?’ And I’m telling them it’s an epoxy pour, it’s got seven coats on the floor...I did it all with my husband and my dad and brothers, and we had real ‘family action’ doing all the remodeling.”

And while the natural beauty of wood was definitely an inspiration for the store, Cuthbertson says natural beauty also inspires her paintings. Connie tells the story of a walk along an Australian beach one morning at about five thirty. “The sun was coming up, it was just so incredible, the light was so beautiful,” recounts Cuthbertson, “I walked down the beach when there was nobody else there...and there’s this little boat moored off shore, and I knew then that I was going to paint that.” Connie reflects “it’s like I just get a feeling that I have to paint a certain feeling. And when the feeling comes through for other people when they look at it, it’s like they’re captivated by something, they’re not sure what, then I know I’ve gotten it right.” She also offers the following insight. “You know, it’s not so much what the object is,” says Cuthbertson, “it’s the feeling that you get when you’re looking at it, so that’s what I try to paint.”

If you have the feeling that you’d like to feast your eyes on some of Connie Cuthbertson’s artwork, and maybe have a look at some of the many other decorative and delightful items she has for sale, visit Northwoods Gallery & Gifts, located at 273 Scott Street in Fort Frances.