

Woven into the fabric

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Zimman's celebrates 100th anniversary by supporting arts program

By Wendy Killeen, Globe Correspondent | October 22, 2009

As a kid growing up in the family business, Michael Zimman said he had the year 1909 imprinted in his mind.

It was the year his grandfather, Morris Zimman, opened a store in Lynn to provide durable clothing and household goods for recent immigrants like himself in the working-class neighborhood.

Today, Zimman's - which has been family-owned for three generations - specializes in home décor, including fine fabrics, furniture, lighting, and decorative accessories.

Known around the country, it is still a big part of Lynn as it celebrates its 100th anniversary in the city.

"When we made it to this milestone, I wanted to give something back," said Zimman, who now runs the business.

So, instead of throwing a party, Zimman's is hosting a "Chair-ity Event" Saturday to benefit Raw Art Works, a 22-year-old arts therapy program for underserved youth in Lynn.

"We wanted to do something that would have an impact locally, and it feels right to tie in with the arts," Zimman said. "We are in a creative art-related business; home décor is really adult art projects."

He said he got to know some RAW students when they did window displays for the store.

"RAW is really incredible. These kids would have nowhere to turn and look at [the art] they do," Zimman said. "Not only is it a wonderful service for kids and families, but a wonderful service for broader society. Doesn't it make sense to support these kids and get them off on a good track?"

And, he said, "It's so wonderful to be able to help young creative minds."

In addition to raising money for programs, he hopes the event increases awareness.

"It's hard to get people not directly from the community interested in RAW," he said. "Our clients come from a broad area." And, he said, they are "people with disposable income."

A highlight of the event is the auction of 12 chairs designed by RAW alumni artists. Zimman's had the chairs upholstered in plain canvas, which the artists painted with acrylics. They are being displayed at the party in tableaus created by the artists and Zimman's designers.

The evening includes a catered cocktail party, live music by Jazz on a Rug, a video screening, and an exhibit and brief presentations by RAW artists.

Mary Flannery, cofounder and artistic director of RAW, said the alumni artists are "the cream of the crop; they live, breathe and smell art 24-7." Some are now in college and some have graduated from college.

"They flock to RAW because it is clear to them that it's important to give back to the program," she said.

The artists include Alison Miller, Angela Santora, Dan Chapman, Jeremy Correnti Wood, Brandon Gorski, Thonah Ep, Hongchau Huynh, Davey Chhoeun, Le Nguyen, and Keoun Neak.

Each chair tells a story, Flannery said. The seat of one is painted like a nest with eggs in it "so if you sit in it you feel like a hen."

Another has a rendering of a chair on the chair.

"They are truly art pieces that could be in a living room or bedroom," she said.

“Hopefully, people will be excited and end up with the next Picasso in their house,” Zimman said.

All proceeds benefit RAW, a free after-school arts and film program for ages 6 to 19 in which art therapists and professional artists make high-quality art with at-risk kids, providing increased opportunity, responsibility, and confidence to succeed.

Flannery said there are waiting lists for the programs.

She said the party at Zimman’s is “such a blessing; such good-neighbor stuff.”

“This has been a dream of mine before I moved to Lynn,” Flannery said. “I’d go to Zimman’s for visual therapy. And I thought, ‘Someday, I want to collaborate and do a fund-raiser.’ I think their clients will dig RAW.”

Chair-ity Event to benefit Raw Art Works, Saturday 7 p.m., at Zimman’s, 80 Market St., Lynn. Tickets are \$25 in advance; \$30 at the door. Call 781-598-9432, ext. 112. For more visit www.zimmans.com, www.rawart.org. ■

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