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## GALLERIES

### Last Minute Gallery grows in Northampton

THOSE who remember Ann August, the longtime women's clothing store in Northampton, will recall the small brass cylinders and the pneumatic tubes that sales clerks once used to send customers' payments to a cashier on the third floor.

The pneumatic tubes were among a number of architectural features workers discovered in their renovation of the former shop's second-floor space in recent months. The work renovated and expanded the display and office space of the Last Minute Gallery, which opened last May above The Mercantile storefront at 108 Main St.

Gallery owner and director Jonathon Podolsky of Northampton celebrated the completion of the work last Friday with a grand reopening party and an exhibition of paintings by Worcester artist Jon Petro.

A few days earlier, a visitor to the as-yet-unfinished space found little evidence of the second-floor dress department once located there. The white-walled room now runs the length of the building, about 85 feet, with an office section overlooking the First Churches on the other side Main Street.

On a recent tour of the reconfigured space, Podolsky said the work involved removing soffits, carpeting and parquet flooring, relocating ductwork and re-finishing the room's original wood floors.

The renovation, which was designed by LineSync Architecture, a Wilmington, Vt., firm, also retained some of the floor's original architectural features. Podolsky pointed to lighting fixtures in the office area, where translucent white half-columns run from floor to ceiling along the front wall. The columns have rectangular cutouts that reveal the building's original granite supports, complete with the wooden pegs used to raise them way back when.

"A lot of the things we found during the renovation, we didn't know were there, said Podolsky.

Some innovations are decidedly high-tech. The office is set off from the

gallery space by two large glass doors that pivot around a central column. "It's like a moving glass wall," said Podolsky. Visitors to the building can get a preview of the art on display in the hallway outside - where six small windows are cut into a curved wall.

Podolsky owns and runs Whole Health Expo, a health fair held in three cities, including Northampton, and Nextopia, a marketing company that promotes authors and artists. He said he chose the space for the gallery because it seemed suited to displaying artwork and because of its location in the middle of Main Street.

He said the gallery will focus mainly on abstract, contemporary art, including sculpture, multimedia pieces, installation and performance art. Along with photographs depicting the construction's progress, the current exhibit features 10 large-scale black-and-white abstract paintings and six drawings by Petro.

Describing himself as a "process-oriented artist," Petro said his pieces seek to explore the unconscious, intuitive visual forms that derive from an initial, figurative image.

He describes his art this way: "I have no real association with this image; it becomes something that did not exist prior to its being painted. Consequently, it is not associated with anything but itself." In a phone interview from his home, Petro said this is the first time his work has been exhibited in the Valley.

Podolsky said Last Minute Gallery is both a labor of love and a business venture, although he conceded his other two companies have so far picked up the tab for the gallery.

"My mission in life is not just to make money," said Podolsky, "but also [to] do social good." He said he believes he can accomplish that, in part, by providing this showcase for art.

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