

The Art of Healing

LONGTIME EUGENE DENTIST DON DEXTER MOVES HIS ART GALLERY TO A NEW LOCATION NEXT TO HIS CURRENT PRACTICE

By Brianna Murschel

One of the few photography exhibition spaces around town, Don Dexter Gallery, is moving to a newer and larger space.

The new gallery opens April 15 and will showcase 14 photographers. It is located by the Eugene Dental Sleep Center on the second floor of The Inkwel building in Crescent Village in northeast Eugene. The opening is free to the public, and the photographers will attend the event for an interactive experience.

Don Dexter sold his dental practice in south Eugene in December 2022. Within the office, he had hosted an art gallery for the past quarter century. The idea stemmed from an experience he had at Northwestern Memorial Hospital in Chicago, where the art program consisted of community art, art collection and healing art. “For me, it was a place to build community,” Dexter says, “for having my patients come into a place where they felt better.”

Over the past 25 years, Dexter hosted opening receptions, community art projects and collaborations with different types of mediums at his dental practice gallery. But for the last 12 years, it has been exclusive to photography. “I enjoy all mediums — but I chose to focus on photography because Eugene does not have many galleries to begin with,” Dexter says.

“I think there's some very unique things about what I'm doing,” Dexter says. “I'm a Native American. This is an Indigenous-owned gallery. It's my values that are going to be here and shared.”

Dexter is Modoc descended and a member of the Klamath Tribe in southern Oregon. He is the first of his family to attend and graduate college and the first of his tribe to become a dentist. After attending dental school in Portland, Dexter worked with the Indian Health Service in central Oregon.

In January, he opened the Eugene Dental Sleep Center, which focuses on treating obstructive sleep apnea with an oral appliance alternative to a continuous positive airway pressure machine (CPAP).

After 25 years, he took the opportunity to pivot from general dentistry to sleep dentistry, which he had already been doing for about 10 years, he says. It's also an opportunity to expand the interest of art through the gallery.

The new location is a continuation of displaying and supporting art in a new part of town in a 475-square-foot space, larger than the lobby of his former dental office. “I'm excited up here because this is a whole new market,” Dexter says.

Dexter explains that the three components of the gallery include room to build community with receptions, a space for wellness presentations and space for groups to collaborate. In April and May, speakers will present on different wellness topics such as mindful meditation, insomnia and lifestyle medicine.

“So this model up here is more aligned with the traditional values of wellness, prevention, maintenance and community,” Dexter says. “My new philosophy is, I call it ‘ABC,’ always building community or art builds community.” ■

Don Dexter Gallery opens Saturday, April 15 from 4 pm to 7 pm at 2911 Tennyson Ave., #202. Light bites and refreshments will be served. After the opening, hours will be 8 am to 5 pm Monday through Thursday and 8 am to 1 pm Fridays. See more at DonDexterGallery.com.



Image courtesy of Don Dexter Gallery

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