

Art now full-time career for former

By HARVEY CURRELL
Special to The Sun

Walking into Dave Beckett's art gallery is an instant escape from winter — a step into the summer world of light and colour.

Beckett is a self-taught artist who has become something of an icon in the historic hamlet of Marchmont, which sits on the edge of Orillia, about 130 km from Toronto. His dramatic use of colour and his ability to recreate little flashes of Canada's past have made Beckett's work known across the country.

After spotting a big pastel rendering of rose-coloured rock in sunlight beside a clear lake, I told him: "I know that place. I've been there."

"That's what everybody says," Dave replied. Perhaps this widespread identification with the things and places he paints explains the popularity of his work.

If you are interested in Canadian art and you happen to find yourself near Orillia this winter, call Dave Beckett and arrange a free visit to his gallery. Closed Monday and Tuesday, the gallery is usually open Wednesday through Sunday, from noon to 5 p.m., but you should call ahead to make sure. Telephone 705-325-6809 or visit www.davebeckettartcanada.com.

Part of the Beckett home and gallery is a squared-log house, 177 years old. The remainder is a board-and-batten addition, blending artfully with the ancient structure. Both are surrounded by three acres of lawns and fields. At the back of the lot is a big studio where Beckett paints and stores his canoe.

Beckett has been an artist all his life, but a working artist only since about 1980. At age six, he received his first box of paints from his grandfather and started to paint. He grew up in the Oril-

lia district where his family ran a small resort, struggled through high school, took art lessons as a teen, painted continuously as a hobby but found a successful career in newspaper advertising and design.

Up until 1979, when a health issue forced early retirement, he was advertising sales manager for a Canadian newspaper chain. Moving back to the Couchiching region, he honed his painting skills for six years, bought the historic house at Marchmont in 1986 and offered his work to the public. The popularity of his paintings surprised him.

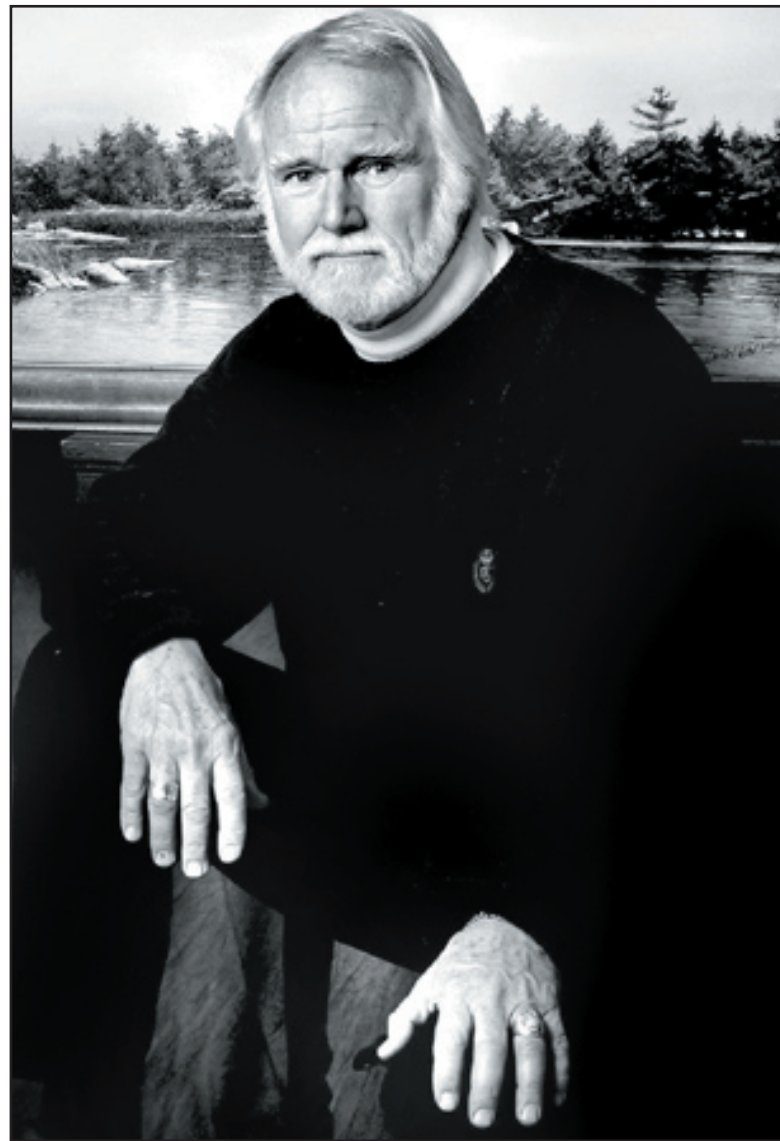
He now paints mostly in pastels, has an agent who markets prints of some of his work, but sells 70% of his originals at the Marchmont gallery. Commercial galleries across Canada also carry his paintings. He has won many awards and has paintings in national collections.

At the gallery, prices for prints range from \$130 to \$1,300. For a Beckett original, you could pay from \$1,000 to \$12,000.

When you visit the gallery, plan to take a few extra minutes to have a look around the Marchmont area. It's an 1800s mill village that has been surrounded by Orillia suburbs.

BECKETT GALLERY

To get there, take Hwy. 400 to Barrie and then Hwy. 11 to Orillia where you go west on Hwy. 12 at Exit 133. Follow 12 west for 6.4 km to the first intersection past



ARTIST DAVE BECKETT paints from his studio in historic Marchmont.