

Gainesville Sun, March 3, 2006

Bellamy Road, opening today, is paved with artistic offerings

Historic house enjoys a new life as Melrose gallery

By **MARINA BLOMBERG**
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Hammers were banging and screw guns whining in the background as Keith Bollum spoke Thursday afternoon.

Bollum described how 14 months of work will culminate today with the grand opening of his Bellamy Road Fine Arts, Literature and Film gallery in the historic Hilton-Brinson House, the second fine arts gallery to open in Melrose in eastern Alachua County.

"We pretty much took the house apart and rebuilt it," he said.

The two-story, wood-siding structure, which in recent years functioned as a restaurant and then a produce market, was built in 1886, and needed a bit of structural replacement.

"But those yellow pine floors, they were still beautiful," he said.

Bollum, who lived in the Orlando-DeLand area for 20 years but most recently operated a bed-and-breakfast in Minnesota, said it didn't take business associate David Warner long to persuade him to sell the B&B and move to Melrose to help renovate a vacant building Warner had owned for 10 years.

"Move from Minnesota to Florida in winter? Are you kidding?" Bollum laughed.

He lives in the upstairs of the building, which also has been restored.

The gallery is divided into three sections. Bollum, who has collected fine and antique books for 25 years, has set up his section in one of the rooms of the house for sale and display.

The art gallery - overseen by associate and artist Linda Pollini - is in the 40-by-50-foot main room of the house and currently features watercolors by Linda Blondheim and other local artists' works.

The WiFi Lounge - which features wireless Internet - is in another smaller room, where specialty coffees are served. There are two porches for outdoor seating.

Bellamy Road also will host literary events, lectures and occasional musical performances. Experimental films, classic movies and documentaries will be shown periodically and will be available for purchase.

Hours will be Thursday through Sunday from noon to 7 p.m., in addition

to special events and openings.

"Since moving here, I have been amazed at how many artists and craftsmen live here, as well as retired professors and other intellectuals," Bollum said.

Sunny Corr, treasurer of the Melrose Business and Community Association, said, "We are thrilled at the job they have done to restore the building. And this is surely to become a cultural center."

MBCA member Walton Smith echoed that sentiment: "We are loving it."

Jeannie Berger, 74, whose grandparents owned the home, brought a congratulatory bouquet to Bollum on Wednesday, thanking him for restoring it.

Bellamy Road is named after the first Florida Federal Highway, a 25-foot-wide trail built between Pensacola and St. Augustine in 1824-26. The 445-mile path goes through Melrose following State Road 26.

