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Lansing Art Gallery moving to above-ground space in Knapp's building

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The Lansing Art Gallery and Education Center announced this week it will move into the Knapp's Centre at 300 S. Washington Square, where it will occupy an above-ground space with natural light perfect for showcasing art.

The gallery's search for a new location began seven or eight years ago, Executive Director Barb Whitney said. The move was spurred in part by negative feedback from the community about its lower-level exhibition space at 119 N. Washington Square.

Many visitors had urged the organization to consider an above-ground location, saying stepping down below the earth was troubling for a visit to an art gallery.

"We don't like to call it a basement, but it is a lower level," Whitney said. "There are perceptions around that that aren't necessarily ideal."

Renovations are underway in the suite the gallery will occupy ahead of a tentative Dec. 15 move-in.

The move itself, three blocks south from the current location, will take place between Christmas and New Year's Day. The reopening is still being scheduled for either January or February.

The Knapp's Centre was built in 1937 and long home to Knapp's Department Store. It was praised in its time as a major modern building in the Midwest and eventually added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1983. The historic building now contains apartments and offices, including those of the Lansing State Journal.

The new location, the gallery's sixth location, isn't its first historic home. The gallery was formerly located above Jim's Tiffany Restaurant from 1967-1975 and occupied the former

Liebermann's department store building from 2004-2009.

The Knapp's building is now owned by the Eyde Company, which Whitney said gave a significant contribution to the gallery's move into the building. While she declined to detail specifics of the arrangement, she said it was a very positive tenancy negotiation, even though the new location presents a higher operational cost for the gallery.

"The George F. Eyde Family has been a dream to work with, from the preliminary stages of envisioning what it could look like for our organization to become tenants in the space to executing the lease," Whitney said.

The lease is for one year, and Whitney wrote in a statement on the gallery's website that the move is a short-term solution. But there's potential in the facility itself and appeal of the landmark status for Knapp's to serve as a longer-term home for the gallery, depending on how 2022 goes.

"Having a prominent location and an architectural landmark has the potential to draw guests from across the state," she said. "And, it makes it even more welcoming for people within our own community."

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