

# The Newport Daily News

Monday, August 31, 2009

## OUR VIEW

### New exhibit sheds light on fine artist

For more than 20 years, William Vareika and his wife, Alison, have run the William Vareika Fine Arts gallery on Bellevue Avenue in Newport.

During that time, they have organized numerous art exhibits and sales to benefit various charities, from Save The Bay to the Potter League for Animals.

But we can't imagine a project more near and dear to William Vareika's heart than the exhibit that opened Friday night, "John La Farge: American Artistic Genius and Renaissance Man."

Vareika was a pre-law student at Boston College when he first became acquainted with La Farge's work upon wandering into Trinity Church in Boston, which housed some of La Farge's murals. He made La Farge the focus of a project in the one art history class he took at BC — a class that influenced a change in his career direction from future lawyer to successful art dealer.

In the 1970s, Vareika successfully led an effort to save the historic Newport Congregational Church at the corner of Spring and Pelham streets, which featured La Farge murals and opalescent glass windows.

Last week, he opened an exhibit of some 160 works by La Farge, including eight stained-glass windows, as part of a fundraiser to benefit the restoration of a total of 13 windows that will be installed in a new chapel being built on the Salve Regina University campus. In addition to eight windows — six restored and two not, for contrast — other La Farge glasswork is on display, as are oil paintings, watercolors, drawings and prints, books and letters written by La Farge and photographs of him.

A fundraising reception Friday night and a percentage of sales during the exhibit, which will run through Nov. 30, will benefit the fundraising drive for the acquisition, restoration and installation of the windows at the Our Lady of Mercy Chapel, which was designed to include them. Vareika said his goal is to raise \$1 million.

Construction of the chapel, as well as the associated spiritual life center, inter-faith prayer room and offices, is expected to cost \$7 million, said Katherine Horoschak, Salve's director of major gifts.

The windows have historical ties to Newport and to the Sisters of Mercy, which run Salve. La Farge, who spent much of his time in Newport, designed the 13 windows for a private Catholic chapel and music room in the Kay Street home of sisters Mary Gwendolyn Byrd Caldwell and Mary Eliza Breckenridge Caldwell about 1890. Before the Caldwell home was demolished in 1931, Bishop James Cassidy acquired the windows and had them installed in a Sisters of Mercy convent in Fall River, Mass.

When the convent was to be demolished, Vareika and Sister M. Therese Antone, then president of Salve and now the university's first chancellor, moved to preserve them. "The momentum of saving the windows helped lead to the creation of the chapel," Vareika said. "Now they will be enjoyed by future visitors to Newport," as well as studied by Salve students.

This important project will allow more people to learn about La Farge, America's most famous stained-glass window maker and one of the first American impressionist painters, as well as his contributions to local and art history.

#### TO GO

**What:** 'John La Farge: American Artistic Genius and Renaissance Man,' an exhibit of more than 100 works by La Farge that will benefit the restoration of 13 La Farge stained-glass windows to be installed in a new chapel at Salve Regina University.

**Where:** William Vareika Fine Arts Ltd., 212-214 Bellevue Ave., Newport.

**When:** The exhibit will run through Nov. 30, Monday through Saturday, 10 a.m.-6 p.m., Sunday, 1-6 p.m. Free admission; a percentage of sales will benefit the project.

**Info:** Call 849-6149, e-mail [info@vareikafinearts.com](mailto:info@vareikafinearts.com), or go online to [www.vareikafinearts.com](http://www.vareikafinearts.com).