



Happenings

The annual **Memorial Day Parade** this Monday, May 27, begins at 10 a.m. at Mohican Park Avenue, continues to the high school, then proceeds to Memorial Park and concludes at the American Legion. For information, call 693-1964.

The **village board** meets Tuesday, May 28, at 7:30 p.m. in village hall.

The weekly **farmers' market** begins next Friday, May 31, and continues through Nov. 22, 10 a.m.-4 p.m., at the intersection of Cedar and Main Streets. This year look for fresh fruit and vegetables from Westchester Greenhouses, fresh pizza made with local ingredients at The Cookery's food truck DoughNation, and Italian specialties from M&M Italian Provisions.

Local photo-historians Judith Doolin Spikes and Anne Marie Leone present an interactive **Then-and-Now slide show** featuring vintage photos from the village's downtown commercial area next Sunday, June 2, at 2 p.m., at the public library, 55 Main St. This free lecture is sponsored by the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society.



TIM LAMORTE/RIVERTOWNS ENTERPRISE

Maria Carluccio eyes one of her Wall Stories stickers in the stairwell at her home.

Exhibit features artist's visual connections

By Carter Smith

"Let me tell you a story, since we're talking about stories," Maria Carluccio said. "Yesterday my car broke down."

Carluccio, a Dobbs Ferry-based artist, illustrator and author, had been asked to define inspiration. She began with a tale of mundane stress. "I pulled into my service station and the mechanic took a look at the steaming engine. All I could see was dollar signs. Crap!"

"When I woke up this morning without a car," she continued, "I felt a bit overwhelmed. But, as the day went on, I opened up some folders and looked at

some things I've been so passionate about. I suddenly felt the despair fade and the inspiration take over. Inspiration overrides the difficult things we face everyday. It's the powerful energy that brings you just a little bit closer to hope."

For Carluccio, hope is a thread in all of her art — some of which is on display at South Presbyterian Church's Donald Gallery in Dobbs Ferry. "Many things I create have the idea of hope somehow

integrated," she said. "I think a lot about how we are all connected. That's what prompted me to do the blog 52 Flowers (fiftytwoflowers.blogspot.com). I saw that nature could be a symbol for so much of what we all experience. Coming up with universal ideas is what really drives me."

Carluccio's connection to nature is on display at her show, which features

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Carluccio

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pieces with titles like “Leaf,” “The Weathered Tree,” “Thorns and Berries,” and “Purple Flowers.”

52 Flowers, which Carluccio describes as “a blog that examines human behavior and nature,” includes artwork, poems and reflections. Several poems from the blog, with accompanying prints, are included in the show. Others come from her blog “Beautiful Truths,” which she describes as “a place where I hope to collect ideas that float through my mind and phrases that speak to something very deep with in.” A third blog, titled “The Art Inside: Exploring the Creative Process,” is a wide-ranging survey of “what’s involved in the making of art.”

Carluccio, 45, moved to Dobbs Ferry eight years ago, after living in Brooklyn, Hoboken, San Francisco, Pittsburgh, Kansas City and Milan, among other places. Her daughter is a third grader at Springhurst Elementary School.

With 20 years of experience as a commercial artist, Carluccio is also a children’s book author and illustrator and has served as the creative director and co-founder of Wall Stories, a series of wall sticker mural sets. She has received multiple awards from the New York Society of Illustrators and 3x3 magazine. She has also worked for Hallmark Cards and has taught illustration and drawing at the Academy of Art University in San Francisco. Her work — which can be found on greeting cards, bedding, t-shirts, placemats, iPhone cases and more — has been licensed to such companies as Pottery Barn Kids, Target and Papyrus. Her book “Who Loves Me?” received the Children’s Book of the Year award and Mom’s Choice award

All you need is the desire to share a part of who you are. Whenever you ask someone even a simple little thing like ‘How was your day?’ there is a story. Stories are everywhere.

Maria Carluccio

from Creative Child Magazine in 2010.

Despite her success as a commercial artist, Carluccio has rarely exhibited her work. In an interview with the Enterprise, she admitted that putting her art on display made her feel vulnerable. “I am learning how to push through that vulnerability and just express without all the self-criticism,” she said. “For me, artwork feels safer than poems and writing. It can be scary to say ‘this is me’ — the good, the bad and ugly. That’s why I want other artists to know that we all feel that and it’s OK. Just keep moving forward.”

Carluccio grew up in Teaneck, NJ, and credits her parents for inspiring her. “My dad practiced law,” she said. “He had all kinds of bizarre cases, which fed his passion to learn about people and their stories. My mom was an artist. She nurtured every creative interest I had.”

Carluccio found art to be a refuge from life in a large family. “I am the middle child of five,” she said. “It was kind of crazy in our house at times. I remember many hours in the basement alone, doing something creative like drawing or crafting with clay or just playing with my dollhouse. There was a big table down there where I had space to do whatever I wanted.”

Though her experimental spirit led to trouble when she scratched doodles into a soft leather tabletop, Carluccio remembers the thrill of having her creativity sparked. “From that point on I knew I was hooked,” she recalled. “I always thought

that it was cool to be able to draw what you could see, but it was magical to draw what you could feel or imagine.”

As a young adult, Carluccio decided to see the world. “I went to live in Italy for a few years,” she said. “I would paint, draw and collect all sorts of things in my journals. I would find treasure in the exotic scraps of paper. I would find characters for stories. I would learn how to trust my own intuitive spirit.”

Carluccio has also visited Japan, and relates to the Japanese term “wabi sabi,” which has to do with appreciating the value of the imperfect and unfinished. “Wabi” refers to simple and unpretentious and “sabi,” the beauty that comes with age. “I guess I do subscribe to ‘less is more’ because I love things that are beautiful in their simplicity — when the nature of what shines through,” she said.

Carluccio was asked how her process has changed over time. “The process of creating is pretty much the same,” she answered. “I always try to have room for play, room to interpret. The mediums have changed though. I used to do everything by hand and just send originals to my clients. Now I do almost everything digitally. But digital work comes with its limitations. That’s why I like to explore how I can make the work still feel hand done. I try to make that unique quality of that specific medium come through. For example, recently I did a bunch of watercolor pieces. I kept thinking about how much I love the way colors bleed into each

other when they connect so that’s what I chose to accentuate in the work.”

To find ideas, Carluccio collects. “I write lists, gather books, papers, objects, and whatever speaks to me,” she said. “It’s all about the snippets and pieces of ideas — nonsense that has no home yet. I have a little tin box full of 3x5 index cards with pieces of ideas on them. All my ideas seem to start there.”

One piece hanging in the Donald Gallery contains the phrase “Find connections in everything that surrounds you.” That idea flows through Carluccio’s work. “See the paradox, see the theme, and see how it relates to something else,” she advised. “For example, I love to think about how unique and funny dogs are. I started a folder on dogs a few months back. One of the things in there is a list of names of every dog I have known. It’s silly, but it’s just one of many things I do to flush something I’m fascinated with. Months after I started that folder I wrote a story about a dog. I’m working on that book next.”

Carluccio has mentored students of all ages throughout her career. If she wasn’t a full-time illustrator and artist, she might choose teaching as a profession. She encourages students to see themselves as storytellers. “All you need is the desire to share a part of who you are,” she said. “Whenever you ask someone even a simple little thing like ‘How was your day?’ there is a story. Stories are everywhere. That’s why I love to talk to kids about their stories and help them see that they have everything they need right in front of them.”

Carluccio’s exhibition runs through June 23. The gallery is located at South Presbyterian Church, 343 Broadway. Hours are Tuesday through Sunday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. For more information about Carluccio’s work, visit mariacarluccio.com.