



Nichole Kitchen (left) the new executive director of Muskoka Arts and Crafts, pictured with MAC member Wendie Donabie. (Photo by Dave Opavsky/Metroland)

New director pictures a new direction for MAC

**MAC HAS A SOLID BASE OF SENIOR ARTISTS
WHOSE KNOWLEDGE IS THE BACKBONE**

By Patti Vipond

When Nichole Kitchen's sister showed her the posting for an executive director for acclaimed artists' organization Muskoka Arts and Crafts (MAC), her reaction was immediate.

"I thought, my goodness, this seems like my dream job," said Kitchen, who applied after the competition closed but was contacted the next day and hired soon after.

Painter and former MAC board member Wendie Donabie said after two promising out-of-town candidates refused to move to Muskoka, the MAC board decided to hire locally. It was a brilliant decision.

"This wonderful woman came into our existence," says Donabie, one of MAC's senior artists. "We were all so happy to find her. Nichole is just fantastic. This job was meant for her."

Kitchen and husband Liam Kearney, both from Elliott Lake, moved with son Ollie from Toronto to Bracebridge in July 2020. Though many were then fleeing the city, the couple had decided pre-pandemic to move to Muskoka, specifically to Bracebridge.

"Previously, my husband's music career was doing really well in the city so it didn't make sense to leave," explains Kitchen. "But when COVID hit, we knew this was our chance."

While viewing houses in Bracebridge with their realtor in May 2020, the couple saw an attractive house zoned commercial that had been a law office. Later that day, the realtor discovered it would soon be re-listed as residential. The family was enjoying Kirby's Beach when Kitchen saw 25 messages pop up from their agent saying they needed

to make an offer right away. The couple's extended family helped them turn the office into a home in two weeks.

"We got really lucky," said Kitchen. "Everyone has been so welcoming. Our neighbours are lovely."

Kitchen grew up surrounded by artists, most notably her mother, and was an artsy, creative kid. She graduated from Georgian College with an Interior Design Diploma and subsequently worked in the design and construction industry as a Project Manager. Kitchen built stores for clothing retailer H&M across Canada and the U.S. She was also given the opportunity to travel globally with the company.

After the birth of her son, Kitchen left H&M to get wider, and transferable, experience at general contractor Structure Corp in Toronto. During the past two years, she worked on the lovely heritage Royal Hotel in Prince Edward County, Ontario.

"That was an art project in itself," she says. "It's beautiful and very custom. I worked with artisans, some that made the furniture. I went out with a bang and was ready to do something community-focused."

It seems appropriate that as MAC's perennially popular Summer Show celebrates its 60th anniversary that new ideas are in progress to rejuvenate the organization. Kitchen will ensure all changes are gradual.

"With a new board and amazing artists who have been part of MAC forever, we don't want to change quickly," says Kitchen. "We're excited about the Summer Show's 60th anniversary and plan to add some new, fun and exciting elements. For our Spring Members Show, opening along with the Chapel Gallery on Earth Day April 22, MAC will host



The annual MAC summer show turns "60-plus" during its July 15-17 run in Bracebridge. (Photos courtesy MAC)