



# The Denmark News

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## High art: Former feed mill finds new life as art studio

By Steve Arveson  
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When Shawn Kane picked up the final load of feed from the Denmark Feed Mill last year, little did anyone know that 10 months later, the 100-year-old mill would be slowly evolving into a place of high art.

Veteran artist Molly Johnson and her husband, Brian, own the home adjacent to the mill that stands at the corner of Broadway and Elm Street in Denmark. For the last 10 months, they have also owned the mill. Since that time, they, along with friends and family, have invested countless hours gutting and cleaning the building to prepare it for its new life as an art studio.

"Living next door for 12 years, we've always wanted to own it," Molly Johnson said. "One aspect for me was a reunion of sorts -- the house and the mill back together. They were together 65 years, maybe, and there are parts of the owner in our house left behind and there are parts here (in the mill) and it's nice to put that together."

For several years the family that owned the mill, the Skornicka family, also owned the home the Johnsons currently live in.

"The other thing is that it is

just a great old building and I've always looked for studio space," Johnson said. "It just kind of fit."

Johnson has an extensive resume as an artist and is a graduate of the American Academy of Art in Chicago. She has been a freelance artist for two decades and was recently the first graduate of the Kewaunee Academy of Fine Arts. She has an extensive list of awards and shows including a one person show in Cedarburg July 5 through Aug. 15, and her new Denmark studio will be featured in the Northeast Wisconsin Art Studio Tour Oct. 9-11. She also has works hanging in Suster's Arcade, commemorating their 100th anniversary, and in the Denmark VFW hall on Green Bay Road. Complete details of all of Johnson's shows are available at [www.mollyjohnsonstudio.com](http://www.mollyjohnsonstudio.com).

Before Johnson's studio is ready for the art studio tour though, there is still a lot of work to be done.

"We're hoping that by June, the first floor will be clean enough for a celebrate life party for my niece who is finishing chemotherapy and my mom is turning 70," she said. "We're having that party so the first floor needs to be party-ready. Not perfect, but party-ready."

That's not to say that plenty of work hasn't been done already.

"We wanted to get rid of any-



Molly and Brian Johnson, Denmark, purchased the century-old feed mill next to their home on Elm Street for Molly to use as an art studio. The four story building will take more than five years to completely renovate. The studio will be part of the Art Studio Tour this fall. The Johnsons hope to have an open-door policy, inviting locals in to view Molly's work.

thing that smelled or that shouldn't be there if we wanted to occupy it as a studio. We had to gut these rooms completely," she said.

But Molly and Brian didn't do it alone. They had a crew of about 10 friends known as the Monster Mill Men, in reference to the television program Monster Garage.

"They have been fantastic. They know who they are," Johnson said. "Their wives are patient enough to let them come every Wednesday."

The mill is four stories high and Johnson has a plan for each level. The top area will have more windows installed as well as seating, and it will be used for a viewing room.

"It's an awesome view of Denmark," Johnson said.

The third floor will be Johnson's private studio and the second floor will possibly be used for co-operative artistry with other artists. The main floor will be Johnson's personal gallery and could also be used for teaching. Johnson was the art teacher at All Saints School in Denmark for eight years.

Remnants of the old mill still remain including the front counter

that is now adorned with old photos of the mill.

"When I grew up my dad did the same thing with the old buildings but they tore it down and used the lumber to build a house," Brian Johnson said. "I just think the history behind these buildings is neat and if somebody else were to come in here, they could have either moved it or knocked it down. I think that would be a shame. It

doesn't look real pretty right now, but in time."

Molly's advice to anyone who would like to check out the renovations they have made to the mill -- come on in.

"I would prefer more by appointment but if the door is open, please come by. I don't know if I'll have set hours but we want to have an open door policy."



Molly Johnson sits at her sketching table inside her new art studio on Broadway, formerly a feed mill.



The old Denmark Feed Mill is getting new life as an art studio thanks to the Johnson family, who live directly west of the closed down mill.

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