Unity and community is strength

By GEORGINA KENYON

Creative thinking is a natural talent, and three artists in Gippsland are using it to present their business.

The Miart gallery, in Newborough, Gippsland, was launched in August 1987 with nothing but a shopfront and three eager artists.

Since it started, one of Miart's original founders, Ms Gaye Nieuwenhof, has set up an Internet site with a virtual exhibition, which has led to the business opportunities sitting as judges on a German art prize jury.

The website at http://www.asiapac.com.au/~mawrap/index.htm has also attracted international interest from other artists and travellers, with its modern Gippsland landscape paintings.

She met her future partners, Kerrie Warren and Judi Money, when she tried to buy their house.

A potter, Mr David Oshorne, joined the group later, and all four realized they could solve together their common problems as painters — lack of space, isolation and the need to sell their work.

Ms Money says that Miart saved all three regional artists. "We had tried all the usual avenues of artists trying to make a living from selling our own paintings at local markets and weekend galleries, or creating and selling our own pottery, to sell other people's work in a shop in Moe."

But Miart provided a place to market their work separately to specific markets while creating a shared pool of buyers for future sales.

The artists at Miart joined forces to pay the $75 weekly rent in Newborough, and the venture has been so successful it is now recruiting other artists, from painters and textile workers to wood turners.

Each artist works as a separate business, allowing them to market their work separately to specific markets, while creating a shared pool of buyers for future sales.

Ms Warren has commissioned works hanging in the buyer at the Haughwood Power station, in Willamastown galleries and Government offices in Traralgon. Her works sell for $3000.

The other artists sell to local companies for $350 and more.

According to Ms Warren, buyers look more for a successful consistent style rather than content, as form is the artist's "signature."

Ms Nieuwenhof says the regional gallery had to price items so local residents could afford them.

"It is the local community which will support you when you are starting out, and hopefully again if business is bad."

After winning local support, the gallery searched further afield for the tourist market, which demanded the artists produce different styles for a broader range of tastes.

And while a planning decision as simple as the freeway bypass around Newborough has closed the market to many tourists who no longer stop in the township, Ms Nieuwenhof says the regional setting is "an ideal place to work and it's proven a cheap business start."

The business has become part of revitalizing Newborough and joining it to its sister town, Moe, through a network of artists keeping in contact with each other. A niche publisher and a music shop have recently opened as part of this networking. Miart now houses five artists, including a potter and another painter.