



## Extended 'Family'

**Revolving Museum exhibit explores our most fundamental relationships**

By KATHLEEN DEELY, Sun Staff

LOWELL -- The black-and-white room in the back of the Revolving Museum is perfectly chaotic. A chair protrudes sideways from a wall. Nearby, a bed frame hangs in similar off-kilter fashion. Someone has painted 411 in black and white on a computer.

It feels like teenage angst. And that's no mistake.

The room was created by teenagers from the Molloy Alternative High School for the museum's Family Rooms exhibit, which is up through August.

The exhibit explores the emotional ties of family. A dozen local artists worked with family members to create their take on the family's emotional, life-sustaining bond. Some of them, like Boston painter Kate Gilbert Miller, even asked their families to participate.

Her husband, father and brother all pitched in to augment her paintings with a stool-turned-plant, a map, photographs and vases with uprooted stems.

Diane Testa put the years and layers of her life on display. Using cards that her mother stored in their attic all these many years, the museum administrator filled two walls with birthday cards, report cards and valentines.

"When I think about family, the power of the written word is a part of that," said Testa, who provides postcards for people to send to their own family members on a small writing desk.

With Family Rooms, museum director Jerry Beck has a new strategy. The five-month show will grow month to month. The most ambitious installation, "The Home Show," comes in August. Beck and a team of museum artists and supporters will transform four homes in Lowell and Chelmsford with a work of art. The project is similar to TV shows like Trading Spaces. Teams of artists will work with selected homeowners to create a piece of permanent or temporary art.

"We are going to go in and involve them in the process, pick a room in their house to create a new work, either with video, lighting or functional furniture or a mural," said Beck.

Jim Wilde, executive director for Merrimack Valley Housing Partnership, helped Beck come up with the idea and is in charge of finding interested first-time home buyers.

"For those willing to participate, this is a nice way to showcase their house. It's always nice when you can combine art with business," said Wilde.

Once complete, the homes will be open Aug. 20 and 21. Beck hopes entire neighborhoods will get involved so it takes on a block-party feel. "We'll have music, food, drink. It will be like 'welcome to my new home,'" said Beck. "We hope whatever we produce they will keep it."

Like the theme of the exhibit, the museum has because one big family, reaching out to members of the community to keep installations public and relevant.

In June, artist Allison Nesbitt will unveil a cave sculpture of stalagmites and stalactites in the museum's Lab space on Market Street. With help from students from the Lowell Extended Time Program, Nesbitt's cave will include a contemplation pool to encourage lingering.

On Saturday, April 9, Matt Studivan and his Outlet staff will put on a performance called "Static Styling," based on the family theme, and on May 13, Renovation Journal throws a party for its latest issue, based on family-related issues.

Family Rooms is up until Aug. 21. Revolving Museum, 22 Shattuck St., Lowell. For more information, go to [www.revolvingmuseum.org](http://www.revolvingmuseum.org).