

ArtReach Alliance set to open new center next to City Hall on Oct. 24

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For people like Tom Higgins, having a central space to meet and collaborate with other artists could unlock a new world for St. Croix Valley area artists.

"Being able to be in the same place and have an evening or a time to share ideas with people you wouldn't meet otherwise, is something you can't really find easily in any other place I know of in the Valley right now," said the Marine on St. Croix singer/songwriter. "It's just a good thing for the community."

Starting Oct. 24, ArtReach Alliance will offer just that - a new center for the arts. The organization will open shop at 224 Fourth St. N., just across the street from the Stillwater Public Library.



ArtReach, a local arts organization that puts on arts events, sponsors arts education and supports the work of local artists, bought the house in late 2008. The house, which was built in the 1860s, was purchased from the estate of Richard Huelsmann, who had approached the organization's board in 2007, saying the community needed a center for the arts.

The organization began renovating the spacious home last winter, bringing it up to code by making the building handicap accessible and putting in a sprinkler system, among other improvements.

But there is still a lot of work to do on the building, said Jessica Pack, executive director for ArtReach. The organization is asking for volunteers to help paint, landscape, clean or help with other tasks in getting the building ready for the grand opening.

ArtReach, which was founded in 1992, has never really had a centralized, multi-use facility, Pack said. They'd had office space in the Washington County Historic Courthouse for the last eight years or so, but had no space for artists.

Having a new home will create new opportunities for ArtReach, said Bill McCarthy, the group's board chair.

"It gives the organization a physical identity," he said. "For many people ArtReach has been this elusive entity that sponsors music on the library rooftop, ValleyReads in the schools, and the Historic Home Tour but with no clear identity itself. I believe this facility can help to change that."

The new space will serve as the organization's central office. They will host art classes, workshops, gallery exhibitions and other events. Artists will be able to use one of the four studio spaces on either an ongoing basis or a one-time basis, Pack said, and one of those studios will be for use by members only.

The bright, 4,200-square-foot home has 52 windows, and the studio on the southeast side has an incredible river view.

"It's going to be a really beautiful place for ArtReach," Pack said.

The space not only gives artists a place to work and show, but also connects the organization to the artists in a new way, McCarthy said.

"We have extraordinary volunteers," he said. "Meeting and planning in coffee shops and spare rooms is fine. But having a space that will eventually integrate art and performance connects all of us to the work in a special way."

The building puts the organization nearer to a much larger goal for McCarthy and the ArtReach board.

"The ArtReach vision is to make the St. Croix Valley a nationally recognized center for the arts," he said. "This building is one more step toward that vision."

To volunteer, contact Jessica Pack at 651-439-1465 or email her at jessica@artreachalliance.org.

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