

## Community Arts Program Moving Forward

Just as summer is fading, the artistic side of the Huntington community will be coming into bloom with the opening of the Huntington Arts and Entrepreneurial Center in the downtown UB Block now being renovated.

The center will be home to classes for fledgling artists along with studio and gallery space for practicing artists, explains Katy Strass, who stepped in as Arts Center director in March. The downtown area near the Arts Center will be brightened by murals, with the Hayes Lemmerz Skate Park at Yeoman Park also benefitting from the artists' brushes.

The Arts Center is a joint project of Pathfinder Services, the City of Huntington, and the AP Development Group, the Indianapolis-based real estate development company that is overseeing the rehabilitation of the UB Block on Franklin Street across from the Huntington County Courthouse. While there's no firm opening date, Strass says the plan is to have everything — including the 37 market rate apartments — ready for a grand opening toward the end of summer, probably around August.

Meanwhile, Strass is working to recruit artists to paint the murals, with the first project likely to get underway at the skate park.

“We wanted to paint the ramps, give it a splash of color,” she says. “We'd like to get people who skate to get involved with that.”

The public art at the skate park will be designed with the safety of the skaters in mind, and volunteers are welcome to suggest designs.

Strass is still working to secure permission from building owners for murals to be painted along what will be known as Arts Alley, the north-south alley between North Jefferson and Warren streets leading from Rotary Park to the Arts Center.

“We hope to get these projects finished before the center opens,” Strass says.

The vision includes one large mural that will be commissioned from an experienced muralist, with the possibility of using volunteers to assist the muralist. The location of the large mural has yet to be decided. There will also be smaller murals, “faux crosswalks,” and possibly windows to decorate with art.

Strass is looking for artists — preferably local, but out-of-area artists are also welcome — to do those projects this summer. While there is no specific theme for the outdoor art, all pieces must be approved by the building owner and the arts committee.

The Arts Alley was designed to serve as a catalyst for the entire community arts project. The project itself is the vision of a community group that met during the summer of 2018 to formulate the Community Arts Plan for the City of Huntington, and that plan has been incorporated into the city's recently updated Comprehensive Plan.

When the Arts Center opens later this year, it will feature a commercial kitchen for a culinary arts program, a pottery wheel and kiln for workshops and individual use, and workshops in creative writing and digital photography. The fee-based workshops will be open to the public and could be one-time events or series of classes.

“I do want to emphasize that it is for everyone, all ages, all skill levels, all abilities,” Strass says. “This is a community thing.”

Summer and after school art camps will be offered for students.

Gallery and exhibit space will allow local artists to display and sell their work. Local artists will also be able to rent private studios.

An apartment and private studio space will be provided for an artist in residence, who will be selected through a competitive process. The artist in residence will provide workshops at the Arts Center and possibly in local schools.

The Arts Center will have space on the first two floors of the UB Block.

The \$8.5 million rehabilitation of the UB Block began in the spring of 2018. The block is made up of three buildings, two that originally belonged to a fraternal organization known as the Independent Order of Odd Fellows and the third serving as home to the United Brethren Church's publishing business.

The first IOOF building was constructed in 1889, and the other two buildings followed in 1915. UB Publishing eventually grew into all three buildings but ceased operations in 1981. The buildings deteriorated and, by 2013, were targeted for demolition.

A community campaign to save the building was successful, and local, state and federal dollars were secured to help fund the project.

To get involved with the project at Hayes Lemmerz Skate Park or the Arts Alley murals, call Strass at 800-833-1671, extension 3124, or Andrew Rensberger at [andrew.rensberger@huntington.in.us](mailto:andrew.rensberger@huntington.in.us) or 356-1400, extension 2003.



Arts Center Director Katy Strass is working to line up artists, classes, and community projects that will be based at the new Huntington Arts and Entrepreneurial Center, opening later this year in the renovated UB Block across from the Courthouse in downtown Huntington.

