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## Franklinton undergoes artful revival Warehouse provides studio space and hope for a neighborhood



CHRIS RUSSELL |  
DISPATCH

Artist Andrew Ina works on a project in his studio at 400 W. Rich St. Ina is one of 100 artists renting studio space there.



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By **Charlie Boss**

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The warehouses sat abandoned along East Franklinton for years, relics of a once-booming industrial neighborhood.

The buildings, which had produced water coolers for the nation and uranium for the Manhattan Project, now attract the city's creative class and have become the driving force behind the area's rebirth.

About 100 artists have claimed studio space in the 105,000-square-foot facility at 400 W. Rich St., and more than two dozen are on the waiting list.

"They basically cannot build studios fast enough," said Matt Egner, vice chairman of the Franklinton Area Commission. "It's just been amazing how much interest there has been."

But the property is more than an artists colony, neighborhood leaders say.

It also has become a hub for the community, with a Saturday farmers market and the Dinin' Hall, where a rotating group of food trucks gather during the week. People from across the city have flocked to events held there, including a bike race in Franklinton and the Urban Scrawl, where artists gather to create murals on wooden boards.

Organizers have started to take wedding reservations for a 3,000-square-foot event space scheduled to open late this month. A bar-restaurant is slated to make its debut around the same time.

"What we're seeing, the development is beyond our expectations," said Jim Sweeney, executive director of the Franklinton Development Association, which is charged with boosting quality housing and facilitating economic development. "It's what we've been hoping for."

He credits the effort behind the 400 W. Rich St. project for the surge of interest in the area, from housing redevelopment to new businesses.

"There's a lot of interest in moving out here, and we haven't built one house yet," Sweeney said. "My goal is to ensure that (the eastern section of Franklinton) becomes such a strong development focus eventually that energy carries across the rest of the freeway and into Franklinton."

Columbus officials issued a 20-year redevelopment plan that includes an arts-and-innovation district in the southeastern part of the neighborhood.

City officials say they also anticipate as many as 4,400 new or rehabilitated homes.

Last month, the plan earned national honors from the Congress for the New Urbanism, a Chicago-based group that promotes mixed-use neighborhood development and sustainable communities.

"This neighborhood is seeing more progress in two years than most places in 10 years," said developer Lance Robbins, who owns the 400 W. Rich St. property. "It's truly a phoenix."

Robbins hopes to begin construction soon on loft apartments across from 400 W. Rich St., as well as new studio space at a nearby vacant warehouse he also owns.



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He is currently negotiating with Ohio State University to provide collaborative space for its STEAM Factory, a showcase of work by the faculty and staff that focuses on science, technology, engineering, art and math.

“When I bought property in Franklinton 12 years ago, I can’t tell you how many people said, ‘Why did you do this?’” Robbins said. “And I said, ‘There will be a day ...’”

Located across the Scioto River from Downtown, 400 W. Rich St. is in part of a neighborhood once known as the Bottoms. Vacant lots and old industrial buildings are scattered across the area. The average home value in the neighborhood is around \$40,000, Sweeney said.

Multiple facilities currently make up 400 W. Rich St., including one structure built before the 1900s, said Chris Sherman, Robbins’ property manager.

But the space featured an open floor plan with large contiguous spaces throughout the building that lent itself well to studio space, he said.

While the 400 W. Rich St. warehouse has become a haven for artists, organizers say it still holds true to its industrial roots.

“The Short North is where art is sold,” said Andrew Lundberg, a graphics designer and artist who has rented studio space there for two years. “This is where art is made.”

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**BOB SMITH (CMHCOW)**

Great story. What an exciting time for Franklinton!

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