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Snohomish County entertainment
Developer's goal: space for artists

By Diane Wright
Times Snohomish County Bureau

Whether it's a warehouse district in Minneapolis or a former molasses factory in St. Paul, Minn., Artspace Projects is helping to transform some of America's downtowns. The Minneapolis-based, nonprofit real-estate developer for the arts has created living/working spaces for artists around the country: Pittsburgh; Reno, Nev.; Galveston, Texas; Portland; and Seattle's Pioneer Square.

Late last year, its representatives visited Everett and Lynnwood to meet artists, business people and local leaders to discuss establishing a regional arts center where artists and the community could meet.

Last month, Artspace notified the Arts Council of Snohomish County and Everett that it would like to proceed. The city wants to take the next step, said Judy Tuohy, the director of the Arts Council, and is waiting to receive a proposal from Artspace so work can begin on details. "We're pretty positive that it's going to move forward," she said.

More than 130 people attended Artspace Vice President Chris Velasco's slide presentation in December at the Everett Conference Center. He talked about how in New York's SoHo district in the 1950s and 1960s, artists developed lofts and studios in warehouses and industrial spaces. Once the district became gentrified, the artists were forced out by market conditions. People called it the SoHo syndrome. "Artists move in; rents go up; artists go out," Velasco said.

Artspace was created in 1979 as a nonprofit arts-advocacy agency, and some years later the company went into property development for the arts. Its mission is "to create, foster and preserve affordable space for artists and arts organizations," Velasco said. "Artspace puts the financing and managing in place to keep them in good condition and guarantee that this space will be affordable in a 50- and 90-year span," said Wendy Holmes, the vice president of resource development at Artspace.

Projects take about three to five years to develop. After studying demographics, the board may approve a document to plan, build, own and operate a multiuse arts facility. The idea of a living/arts center appeals to Janet Foley, a Snohomish artist working in fused glass.

"I know what the arts can do for a city," she said. "And I know the power of other artists just being around — someone to do welding, to do table stands — those are the kinds of things that you can feed off. That goes for any artist. When you're in a living arts center, they're there."
Foley's enthusiasm doesn't surprise the folks at Artspace, who specialize in facilities that offer a mixture of arts uses. Another part of their mission is to help arts organizations with permanent facilities.

That's where the Arts Council comes in. Now housed in Everett's Monte Cristo Hotel, it would be part of the live/work space.

"We're trying to be a regional art center," Tuohy said. "All of our programming is county and beyond. We're hoping that artists and students at various colleges will come and use the [proposed] facility, not only just the ones living there. Our goal is to see if we can have production space and all of the Arts Council programming and exhibits [there]."

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Usually, there's a cap on the amount of income a person can have to qualify to live in an arts space. The Tashiro Kaplan Artist Lofts, an Artspace project in Pioneer Square, are for people who are at or below 60 percent of the area's median income. It depends on the market, according to Artspace. In Seattle, rents range from $667 to $1,087 a month.

An artist-selection committee in the city usually reviews applicants, and usually the spaces are flexible with open floor plans. Artists sometimes choose a lonely kind of existence, an insecure lifestyle without health insurance or pensions.

"Living in an artists live/work building, you have an understanding with each other," said Cathryn Vandenbrink, the regional director for Artspace. "It creates an incredibly strong community."
At the **Tashiro Kaplan** Artist Lofts, there are dancers, actors, musicians, painters, photographers, sculptors and writers, as well as 16 children and nine families.

"It's different from regular housing," Vandenbrink said. "These are people who are living and working in their spaces 24 hours a day. There are people coming and going all the time. They have potlucks almost every week in the building. It's a strong sense of community."

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