

Indian Orchard storefront now cozy art gallery

By DANIELLE PAINE

SPRINGFIELD – The difference between a blank canvas and a masterpiece is the artist's vision.

For the Indian Orchard Main Street Partnership, their neighborhood is that canvas and their vision to perfect it began to unfold late last month when the doors to a new art gallery opened to the public for the first time.

The cozy storefront at 137 Main St., once home to Stella's diner, is now Gallery 137 and is poised to become an example of village charm and new hope for a neighborhood on the cusp of reinvention.

"What we've got here is a neighborhood in the city with beautiful natural resources that people just don't know is here," said Fred Andrews, executive director of the partnership.

Clever renovations to the former eatery include an office where the walk-in freezer once was, salvaged tin ceilings and storefront art displays, all with complete access for the handicapped.

The next phase will be turning the gallery's garage into a classroom for art workshops. It's scheduled to be completed in the spring.

"Our view, from a grassroots level, is that the arts are the best way to build a neighborhood," said Brian Hale, vice president of the partnership, who is also heavily involved in the restoration of the Bing Arts Center on Sumner Avenue in the Forest Park neighborhood.

Once combined with other culture cultivating projects, supporters are hoping the gallery will serve as a means to an



Staff photo by MIEKE ZUIDERWEG

Brian Hale, left, vice president of the Indian Orchard Main Street Partnership, stands outside Gallery 137 on Main Street in Indian Orchard with Julia Courtney, second from left, director of the gallery, and gallery board members Peter Lyon, Deanna Chrislip and Jorge Costa.

IF YOU GO

Gallery 137

Where: 137 Main St., Indian Orchard, Springfield

For info: Call (413) 543-6994

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Art: Indian Orchard storefront a cozy gallery



Marc Adamchek, of the Indian Orchard section of Springfield, touches a topographic sculpture by artist Matthew Webber, of Unionville, Conn., during an opening on Sept. 29 at Gallery 137 on Main Street in Indian Orchard.

Staff photo by MIEKE ZUIDERWEG

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end for local troubles. Specifically, they're banking on a domino effect in which bustling sidewalks and a boom in business lead to a better quality of life.

"The arts encompass a huge number of businesses that like to group together," said Don Silverman, president of the partnership, said. "We're hoping to draw them here."

Silverman referred to numerous studies showing the business of creativity as a driving force in the economy.

"Once we have a vibrant and stable economy, one not comfortable for criminals, they tend to move away," Andrews said.

The Indian Orchard Main Street Partnership is leading this local revolution against the urban decay that has weighed heavily on the "village" for decades.

Armed with \$100,000 in state funds for their projects, this nonprofit group of residents is

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Don Silverman, president,

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working at a breakneck pace to turn the tides.

The gallery, coupled with new storefront designs along Main Street and the massive development of a riverfront park and bike trail, is the hopeful beginning of the partnership's master plan.

Each of these is now under way, although some, such as the riverfront park, will take years to complete.