

THE KANSAS CITY STAR.



FYI AT THE MOVIES

Keira Knightley reigns in "The Duchess," and villain Ralph Fiennes isn't too bad either.
★★★ | F1

TODAY'S WEATHER: HIGH 82, LOW 55, SUNNY AND WARM. FORECAST | E12

50¢

KCK's downtown arts scene blossoms

A small community of artists hopes to grow and echo the success of the Crossroads district.

By MARK WIEBE
The Kansas City Star

About nine months ago, artist Lacey Lewis knew the time had come to move the brushes and canvasses from her Kansas City, Kan., living room to a real studio.

But Lewis also knew she couldn't find affordable space in, or even near, the Crossroads Arts District. So she did something that more artists are doing these days — she looked for space in downtown Kansas City, Kan., and found it in the basement of the former *Kansas City Kansan* newspaper building.

The rent was the best Lewis could find, the space was generous, and the landlord — City Vision Ministries, a nonprofit urban development corporation — seemed committed to cultivating the arts downtown.

SEE ARTS | B5

FROM B1

Lewis was pleasantly surprised: "When I first heard about this, I said, 'What? There's art in Kansas City, Kansas?'"

She is now one of 10 artists — four from Kansas City, Kan., four from Kansas City — leasing space in Pressroom Studios in the 700 block of Armstrong Avenue. They're part of an emerging downtown arts community that hopes to echo some of the success the Crossroads has enjoyed, including the popular First Fridays.

Except the art walk in Kansas City, Kan., dubbed "Follow the Dotte," is held the second Friday of every month. Formally organized two years ago, the season runs from March to October. Tonight's event featuring 10 galleries marks the end of the second season, but organizers say that several galleries will remain open through the winter.

The studios and the art walk, however, are just two examples of downtown's arts scene. There are others:

■ **Imago Dei**, a nonprofit that promotes the arts, including Christian art, opened an office and gallery earlier this year and on Saturday announced plans to build a \$16 million arts campus.

■ **Kaw Valley Arts and Humanities Inc.**, a nonprofit organization, recently opened an office and gallery space next to Pressroom Studios.

■ **The YWCA of Greater Kansas City**, in downtown Kansas City, Kan., opened an addition in 2007 with a new theater and gallery space.

Word of this new art scene is just beginning to spread. Jeff Becker, executive director of the Arts Incubator of Kansas City in the Crossroads district, said he considered moving a satellite studio into the Pressroom. The organization decided against the move, but Becker said he's impressed with what downtown Kansas City, Kan., is doing.

The artists are acutely aware of the potential they have to help revitalize downtown. Many will recite a familiar litany: Low property values attract artists, restaurants and retail

KCK ART WALK

Downtown Kansas City, Kan., will hold its "Follow the Dotte" art walk from 5 to 8 p.m. tonight, featuring 10 galleries. Organizers are planning several activities and performances in front of the Kansas City, Kan., Public Library, 625 Minnesota Ave. A shuttle service is provided by the 7th Street Casino and will be available at the library.

then follow, property values increase, and artists then begin to look elsewhere for their space.

The Crossroads appears to be near the end of that cycle. Artists in Kansas City, Kan., think they're at the beginning.

"Lower property values are part of it," said Patrick Alexander, arts and events coordinator at the YWCA and the former owner of a gallery in downtown Kansas City. "Artists are definitely pioneers. They say, 'Hey, here's something that hasn't been touched. Let's make it our own.'"

Imago Dei is taking that pioneer attitude to a new level. Its plans call for creating a centerpiece out of the Screenland Granada theater in the 1000 block of Minnesota Avenue. At Saturday's announcement, Imago Dei said it has a contract to purchase the theater from owner Butch Rigby.

The organization plans to use the theater and a new 6,000-square-foot building as a base for its operations. From them, it will offer courses in visual and performing arts, publish its annual magazine, provide rehearsal space, stage performances and offer gallery space to a growing list of regional, national and international artists.

A second phase will feature three new buildings with room for a cafe, individual studios, retail shops for the artists, a sculpture garden and arts education space.

Executive Director Lori Triplett said Imago Dei plans to open its new space in the Granada on Dec. 31. When it does, she said, it will be poised to offer even more space to artists.



JIM BARCUS | THE KANSAS CITY STAR

Artists within the Pressroom Studios in Kansas City, Kan., include Steve Curtis (from left), George E. Lewis, Darrell Trubey, Kim Eichler-Messmer, Steve Larson and Lacey Lewis. The studio is in the 700 block of Armstrong Avenue.

"Downtown Kansas City, Kansas, is our home, and we're thrilled to have a home," Triplett said.

A new Children's Campus, business and retail space and a new townhome development are planned for the east side of downtown. City Vision has renovated the old City Hall into loft apartments and leased the floor above the studio space in the *Kansan* building to an engineering firm.

A recently formed downtown business improvement district promises to create a safer and more attractive environment for pedestrians, including art lovers.

But the art lovers themselves are helping with the revitalization. Steve Curtis, a photographer who was the first to occupy space in the Pressroom, thinks the city's arts community is establishing roots for future improvements downtown.

"Everybody kind of forgets that when the Crossroads started it was just four open doors," Curtis said.

Make no mistake: Downtown Kansas City, Kan., is years removed from generating the kind of traffic the Crossroads does. It will take more galleries to attract more restaurants and more patrons. As it stands, Curtis said, the second Friday art walk is still a relatively modest affair, drawing about 100 people.

But that's up from 50 the previous year.

"Now what the arts would like is people coming downtown and buying art," Curtis said. "Get more people. Retail. Restaurants. A little entertainment. ... It's not going to be just art that turns this place around."

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