Artists build island retreat

Clean-up is first task as Artspace begins makeover of school near Hanlan’s Point

BY ROBERT CREW
ARTS WRITER

Imagine you are an artist with a major exhibition coming up. You need to get away from it all to put the finishing touches on that great northern landscape you are creating.

Perhaps you're an author who has a suitcase full of proofs to read so you can make sure your great Canadian novel has no typos. What you need most of all is to be alone.

Maybe you are organizing a retreat for your ballet company, to plan strategy for the new millennium.

Toronto Artscape has the perfect place for you.

Artscape has just taken over the former Toronto Island Public and Natural Science School, leasing it from the city for 20 years at $1 a year.

The newly named Gibraltar Point Centre for the Arts is on the southwestern edge of Centre Island, near Hanlan’s Point and a few steps away from an idyllic, secluded sandy beach.

Peaceful, it certainly is. Seagulls cry and waves lap the shore. Look hard enough and you might just be able to see the city — out of the corner of your eye.

Islanders bicycle by, giving a friendly wave as they pass the blue-gray sprawl of buildings where so many of them went to school.

The single-storey school was built in six stages, beginning in 1909 and with a major ago, the H-shaped centre will become a haven and meeting place for artists from all disciplines, taking in its first customers in about two months’ time.

“The only limit on what we can do here is our imagination,” says Susa Serran, Artscape’s partnerships and community relations officer.

The 30,000-square-foot centre will have several types of tenants.

- Long-term users who sign one- to three-year leases for studio space at $8 per square foot per year, half the average rate in downtown Toronto.
- Long-term tenants who provide service for other artists, such as an artist-run gallery, a music/recordings studio or a framing service.
- Short-term rentals by individuals, collectives or non-profit organizations that would use facilities for rehearsal, classes, workshops, lectures and camps.

These renters will be charged $25 to $40 per hour, depending on the room or rooms being used, and would be responsible for everything, including marketing, registration and transportation.

- Living/working rentals of the centre’s 15 former staff dormitories an work studios that will be “highly subsidized” but for short stays only.

“We are not running a hotel or here,” say Jones. “They will be long-term tenants, people who anchor the place, but also people moving through every month.”

Artscape is a non-profit organization that manages five other properties: at 60 Atlantic Ave., 900 and 1313 Queen St. W., 96 Spadina Ave. and the Music Gallery at 17 Richmond St. W. Founded in 1985, its main aim is to provide low-cost work and live/work.
Old Island school saved, artfully

By MOIRA MacDONALD
Toronto Sun

For Toronto Island's historic old public and
natural science school, it looks like art is about
to triumph over the wrecking ball.

It's expected the school will be turned into
an arts centre by a non-profit, taxpayer-funded
group called Artscape. Toronto Islanders who
wanted to save the school, parts of which were
built in 1901, approached the group.

On Tuesday, Toronto city staff will recom-
mend the city's economic development com-
mittee amend an August 1997 contract that
gave the go-ahead for a new $3.4 million Is-
lan Public Natural Science School con-
ditional on the demolition of the old school.

"We're not asking the city for any money.
We're asking for a 20-year lease on the build-
ing at $1 a year," said Susan Serran, coordi-
nator of Artscape's project. "'Here's a build-
ing that has many good years in it. Why not re-
duce, reuse and recycle?"

'A new idea'

Artscape has managed to overcome envi-
ronmental, financial and contractual argu-
ments against saving the school.

The city's parks department had originally
opposed the idea when islanders started work-
ing on it last fall. But Frank Kershaw, the de-
partment's policy and development director,
said Artscape is "a new idea not present at
other times. They are prepared to refurbish
the school."

The project is also planned to be financially
self-sustaining after three years, Serran
added.

Artscape plans to renovate the 26,000-
square-foot school over three years, creating
up to 25 artist studios for lease as well as a
"mini-conference" centre that could be used
for meetings of up to 250 people. The econom-
ic development commission is supporting the
idea partly because of its potential for con-
tributing to the city's cultural life.

Artists get island haven as school saved

By SHANNON BLACK

An old school on Toronto Island slated
demolition will be reborn as an arts
facility later this year.

The former site of the Island Public and
Natural Science School, a sprawling
30,000-square-foot building bordered
by an inspiring stretch of beach, will be
remodelled to serve professional artists
in search of affordable studio space.

"It is a place that is meant to embrace
individual artists," said Tim Jones, execu-
tive director of Artscape, a city-spon-
sored non-profit arts organization.

"But it is also meant to welcome other
sectors of the not-for-profit community
in Toronto."

The school, located at Gibraltar Point, on
the southwestern edge of the island, will
split into different types of space, available
rent by the square foot. Artists wish to
secure a long-term lease (up to 10
years) will pay $8 per square foot — ha-
the average rate in downtown Toronto,
a cording to Mr. Jones. Small bedroom
previously used by school staff, will be
rented to out-of-town and internation
artists for shorter periods. And the large
rooms in the school, including a comm-
room and a dining hall, will be remade as
retreat centre and studio space for not-
profit organizations and arts programs.

Artscape hopes to raise $250,000 to re-

1948 to 52. There are a variety of cultural
buildings, including the old post office
and the old fire station, both of which have
been converted into art studios. A number
of buildings have had underground foun-
dations dug to allow for art exhibition
space. The rooms are mostly empty, with
the exception of a few artist's studios and
a few small conference rooms.

Artscape grew out of the Toronto
Arts Council, which was formed in 1973.
And it was to arts council, Art-1466, "We
are community-driven, not art-driven.
York" and Queen St. W., as exam-
ple of the community. It was formed to
help with the revitalization of the
Island, which has been neglected.

"We were community-driven, not art-
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