

## Artscape lauded for building another community

### *Liberty Village-based group restores Wychwood Barns*

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Five years after the concept was first approved by the City of Toronto, the end is in sight for the long-anticipated Artscape Wychwood Barns.

The project, which has seen an old TTC transit hub turned into a community space with a greenhouse, provides sites for several local not-for-profits and affordable live-work spaces for artists.

Liberty Village-based organization Artscape masterminded the transformation, turning the derelict old buildings into a new and vibrant space that will serve a multitude of community needs.

The Wychwood Barns are simply the latest in a long line of revitalization projects spearheaded by Artscape. The organization has been instrumental in rejuvenating the Distillery District, Toronto Island, Queen Street West and, of course, Liberty Village itself.

Artscape President and CEO Tim Jones said the \$21.2-million Wychwood Barns project was a perfect example of a community banding together to salvage an historic Toronto landmark.

"(The barns) sat here for the better part of 30 years, a derelict site in a residential neighbourhood," he said. "The conventional wisdom with a site like this says tear it down and build residential housing. We thought differently and the community thought differently."

The barns are home to 26 social housing units for artists and their families, with rents geared to income. The complex also includes 15 artist studio spaces, 13 offices for non-profit agencies, performance and event spaces, a year-round greenhouse, a sheltered garden, an outdoor bake oven and other features.

There is also a new, 127,000-square foot city park that includes a children's area, an off-leash dog area, beach volleyball court, natural winter ice rink and other amenities.

Jones said Artscape looked to incorporate as many features as possible in the historic site.

"We heard when we talked to the community that they had all kinds of aspirations for an arts centre, for a community centre," he said. "Some people thought it should be affordable housing, some people thought it should be a museum."

Artscape did its best to incorporate as many distinct uses and elements as possible, turning it into a true community hub. Though there is still some work to be done on some of the barns, all residential tenants and some non-profit organizations have already moved in and a local farmer's market will open on Saturday, Nov. 22.

"In the very early days of this project, we were looking for good ideas and we got all kinds of wonderful ideas," he said. "Collectively (tenants in the barns are) a pretty powerful force. Together, they generate a lot of value."

While the Artscape Wychwood Barns have been embraced by the community, there were some speed bumps to overcome at first. The community had questions over the viability of the project and over how it would impact the quiet residential area.

"In the early days of the project, there were a lot of questions about this, and some were worried about parking, traffic and noise," Jones said.

However, as plans started to take shape and people began understanding Artscape's vision, the local community's fears began melting away.

"During the last three years of this project, every community meeting we've had has been a love-in," Jones said.

The project was funded through all three levels of government as well as through numerous private donors. With capital costs covered, the building will be financially self-sustaining through rent money.

The project will also be environmentally-friendly, with a glycol loop which uses the earth's energy to provide heating and cooling. Water to irrigate the park and flush on-site toilets will be collected through roof runoff.

"The goal is to no longer put any storm water into the city system," said Artscape Wychwood Barns architect Joe Lobko. "We think this will be the first LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Gold certified heritage site in Canada."

Ward 21 Councillor Joe Mihevc (St. Paul's West) said Artscape was instrumental in getting the project off the ground and keeping momentum moving forward. He said the Liberty Village-based organization helped make all the difference in the Wychwood community, near St. Clair Avenue West and Bathurst Street,

"Artscape brought tremendous energy, vitality and passion," he said. "This place is a sparkling new way of thinking about who we are in this community."