

NEWS

The Barns' door is open

Artscape Barns ribbon-cutting ceremony and open house is on Nov. 20

BY PATRICIA MARCOCCIA

Nearly a century after his death, Canadian painter Marmaduke Matthews' dream may finally come true.

He left the legacy of a historically and architecturally significant enclave of homes at Wychwood Park in mid-Toronto, but when he purchased the property in the 1870s, he initially wanted to create an artists' colony. Today, just a couple of blocks over, the Artscape Wychwood Barns hope to fill that niche.

On Nov. 1, Minna Koistinen, a glass artist and designer, will move into the Barns with her two sons, aged one and four. She said she is looking forward to living in such a supportive community with her children.

"That's one extra—being that they will get to grow up in this environment," Koistinen said. "It's almost like a microcosm for a very wholesome kind of living. Hopefully it will turn into a model that can be learned from," she added.

Construction began in March 2007 to transform the former TTC streetcar repair site near St. Clair Avenue West and Christie Street into a multi-tenant arts and environmental centre. The 1.8-hectare area contains four rectangular, interconnected barns and 11,800 square metres of park space that will feature a children's playground, a splash pad, an enclosed off-leash dog park, an outdoor volleyball court, and trees and shrubs that are all indigenous to the area. The latter is one of the environmental attributes granting this area Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification.

The Green Arts Barns Community Association in partnership with the Taddlewood Heritage Association will host a fundraising gala on Nov. 15—the Street[Car Barns]Party—to celebrate its completion.

The Studio Barn stands along the northern end of the site, facing homes on Benson Avenue. It houses 26 rent-geared-to-income (RGI) work/live studios, ranging

from bachelor to three-bedroom units, and 15 work-only studios for professional artists. The Studio Barn will also exhibit work from local and international artists in a community gallery.



The Artscape Wychwood Barns at Christie Street and Benson Avenue is opening on Nov. 20. It will house both live/work and work-only studios, a large space for community events, and a year-round greenhouse.

Rebecca Singh, a performer and freelance writer, has been seeking affordable housing and artist support for nearly three years. "It's a real challenge to make ends meet and live autonomously in Toronto. There's definitely a need that needs to be addressed," she said.

The Covered Street Barn marks Toronto's first LEED-certified heritage property. Built in 1913, this 743-square-metre space boasts soaring ceilings and floor-to-ceiling windows like the other barns, and is lined with the artist work studios on the north end. Community members can reserve this space for events, exhibitions, and festivals.

The Green Barn Farmers' Market, which currently runs at St. Michael and All Angels Church at St. Clair and Wychwood avenues, will pack up at the end of October and find its new home here beginning on Nov. 22.

The Community Barn also provides space for 12 not-for-profit community arts and environmental organizations in areas such as theatre, cultural art, storytelling, sound, and tree planting.

Tim Jones, executive director of

Artscape, describes the Barns as "a place where artists and environmentalists will rub shoulders."

He believes that the mix of tenants and variety of uses throughout the space will make for a dynamic

environment that has more of an impact on the community. "They're not just buildings, but platforms for collaboration," Jones remarked. Artscape has raised nearly \$21.2 million to fund the project, and he hopes to close the gap at its fundraising gala on Oct. 23.

The Stop Community Food Centre will operate the Green Barn—a 929-square-metre space including a year-round temperate greenhouse, a sheltered garden, an outdoor bake oven, and a compost demonstration site.

Nick Saul, executive director of the Stop, describes it as "a big classroom where people will be inspired to rethink food and how it affects them and their surroundings."

Local Councillor Joe Mihevc (Ward 21, St. Paul's West) has played a strong role over the last eight years in the revitalization process.

"I cannot remember one meeting that was not richly attended. There are lots of feelings about this place," Mihevc said. "It really shows a committed community that really believes in this space and in participation in community building," he added.

In anticipation of the barns' completion, Roscoe Hanford, local resident and manager of the Green Barn Farmers Market, has been looking at old photos of TTC workers playing hockey, skating, and enjoying social gatherings at the site.

"My daughter went down there the other night to take photos. She's 11. She made a web album and sent it to her friends. She called it 'The End of the Beginning,' which is so poetic, and it is—we're just nearing the end of the beginning of the barns being a social hub," she said.

"We're just on the cusp now of starting to live up to the congeniality that's so evident in these old photos. I just can't wait."