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## A place to farm talent

**Diane Peters, National Post, National Post** Published: Saturday, November 01, 2008

Here's a puzzle: What do you do with five empty brick barns on 4.3 acres of land in the middle of an urban residential area? The answer was so challenging, it took nearly 30 years to figure out.

But this month, the creative solution of how to reclaim the TTC barns between Christie Street and Wychwood Avenue south of St. Clair, which were abandoned in the mid 1980s, will be unveiled.

The Artscape Wychwood Barns is a multifaceted venue blending arts and environmental groups and programming. "It's really an opportunity for arts and the environment and community to meet together," says Artscape executive director Tim Jones.

Artscape, which has developed the Parkdale Arts & Cultural Centre and Artscape Studios in the Distillery District, worked with the city and The Stop Community Food Centre over the last four years to plan and execute the \$21.2-million, 60,000-square-foot project.

The site, officially open on Nov. 20, features four of the five barns fully renovated and serving a distinct purpose.

The largest, the Studio Barn, at the northern edge of the property, has been retrofitted into 26 live/work spaces for artists and their families and 15 art work-only studios. It houses The Community Gallery, a venue for in-house, local and international artists to display their work.

Beside that is the Covered Street Barn, the oldest on the site. Run by the Green Arts Barns Community Association, it will be rented out for events (it already hosted an Artscape fundraiser in October and will house an association fundraising party on Nov. 15), and every Saturday morning, it will be filled with food for a year-round farmers' market.

The Community Barn provides office space for 12 arts and environmental nonprofits, including arts company B Current and LEAF (Local Enhancement and Appreciation of Forests). The building also has a 100-seat theatre and a rehearsal space, both run by children's theatre company Theatre Direct.

The smallest -- The Green Barn -- contains The Stop's commercial kitchen and classrooms. Outside, the group will be tending a 3,000 square foot greenhouse, an outdoor bake oven, outdoor garden and a compost demonstration site.

And the city-run green space surrounding the barns includes a playground and splash pad, sports field with outdoor skating rink, beach volleyball courts and a fenced-in dog run.

The entire facility has a minimal carbon footprint. Its geothermal heating, rainwater recycling system and energy-efficient lighting has earned it the LEED (Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design) Canada certification, the first ever given to a heritage site.

The buildings are complete and the tenants are moving in. While some events have been planned, many are in the early idea stage. The official opening ceremony on Nov. 20 is scheduled for 3:30 p. m.

Nick Saul, executive director of The Stop, says his organization would like to hold weekly community suppers. Jones hopes to see tenants collaborate to host everything from one-of-a-kind performances to arts or environment-themed social events. "We don't really know what kind of things will grow out of it," says Jones.