Spaces for Art Grow In Downtown Newark
Expansions in Spaces for Arts
Aided by Transportation, Cost Factors

Evonne Davis, artistic director at Gallery Aferro at the gallery in downtown Newark
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By SHARON ADARLO
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Two Newark art galleries are expanding into prime downtown real-estate spaces while Rutgers University is opening an arts-and-

cultural hub in one of the city’s historic buildings—moves that are expected to draw more attention to the growing local art scene.

The Gateway Project, a temporary pop-up gallery located at the Gateway Center adjacent to Newark Penn Station, will expand to a permanent gallery space and dozens of studios. Gallery Aferro on Market Street is expanding to 90,000 square feet from its current 20,000 square feet and will also include more studios. And at the Hahne & Co. department-store building on Broad Street, Rutgers is opening in 2016 Express Newark, a 50,000-square-foot facility with a gallery, a lecture hall and various art-and-media workshop spaces.

Some longtime observers of Newark arts see the additions attracting more artists to New Jersey’s largest city, particularly those fleeing from expensive studio rentals in Manhattan and Brooklyn.

“I think it will provide exponential growth,” Linwood J. Oglesby, executive director for the Newark Arts Council, a nonprofit group devoted to promoting arts and culture in the city, said of the planned expansions. “We have seen an explosion in Newark with artists coming to the city. It’s relatively inexpensive in Newark compared to the rest of the metro area.”

Evonne Davis, director and a founder of Gallery Aferro, said she has people already waiting to sign up for art studios, with about 50 from New Jersey and another 50 hailing from elsewhere. “They are champing at the bit,” she said.

Gallery Aferro, which sits on a busy strip on Market Street, currently has exhibition spaces, a gift shop, and 12 studios for rental to artists. The organization holds often eclectic art exhibits and various other events such as poetry readings.
The expansion calls for the gallery to take over two adjacent buildings, adding 60 new studios. The new space will include a print shop, a photo co-op with a traditional darkroom, an audio studio, a tool library, a cafe and an enlarged gift shop.

The gallery also will host space for a creative think tank, an incubator for digital and experimental media and a flex venue that could be used for poetry readings, fashion shows or other community events. Gallery Aferro is joining with different arts organizations to create a menu of these program initiatives.

The gallery is raising money through its website and an Indiegogo campaign, which garnered more than $20,000, for the additions. The additions along with the existing space are owned by RBH Group, a redevelopment company in the city.
“Artists bring with them a whole slew of positive things. A sort of cultural tourism and hopefully shopping and patronism of local restaurants,” said Ms. Davis about the expansion’s possible benefits.

At Gateway Center, the Gateway Project will become a permanent fixture and expand from its 13,000-square-foot exhibition space to three floors totaling 24,000 square feet. The additions will allow the gallery to host about 70 art studios, exhibition spaces and additional workshop or studio space for arts organizations, said Rebecca Jampol, a founder of the Gateway Project along with Jasmine Wahi.

Studios will boast 19-foot ceilings. About 18 of the studios will be located next to main thoroughfares in Gateway Center, which are used by about 30,000 people on weekdays going and coming from the train station, said Ms. Jampol.

Ms. Wahi notes that in addition to being about 20 minutes away from Manhattan, Gateway Center’s connection with Penn Station provides a link with curators, art collectors and artists in other urban centers along the Northeast Corridor. “Accessibility is so easy because it’s in a train station and there is ample parking,” she said.

The gallery is also raising money through Indiegogo for various programming and construction costs. The former office spaces turned gallery and studios are owned by C&K Properties, a real-estate company based in New York City. Kevin Collins, a managing director at C&K, said the company hopes to nurture Newark’s art scene.

At the Hahne building on Broad Street, Rutgers-Newark officials envision a new arts center, Express Newark, to encompass three floors and have exhibiting spaces, a lecture hall, a print shop, a portrait studio, a multimedia studio, space for a design collective, and arts incubator, said Nancy Cantor, the school’s chancellor.
Rutgers-Newark’s Institute of Jazz Studies will also have a presence there while the center will be collaborating with different arts and cultural organizations such as the Newark Museum, the New Jersey Performing Arts Center and Gallery Aferro as well.

The approximately 440,000-square-foot building, where the center will be located, will also have a Whole Foods and is right across the street from bustling Military Park. Contingent on securing $8 million for the center from various sources, the school has been given the green light to spend up to $25 million on the project.

“It’s going to be a real open, collaborative space. It will bring people together. It will be very open and high tech,” said Ms. Cantor.

With the art scene getting a shot in the arm with the new real-estate moves, Ms. Wahi and others are optimistic on the various projects’ impact on the city.

“I think it’s great there is demand in the tri-state area,” she said. “There is something for everyone. It’s great each organization has this unique vision and what it brings to the table. It makes Newark into more of a destination place.”