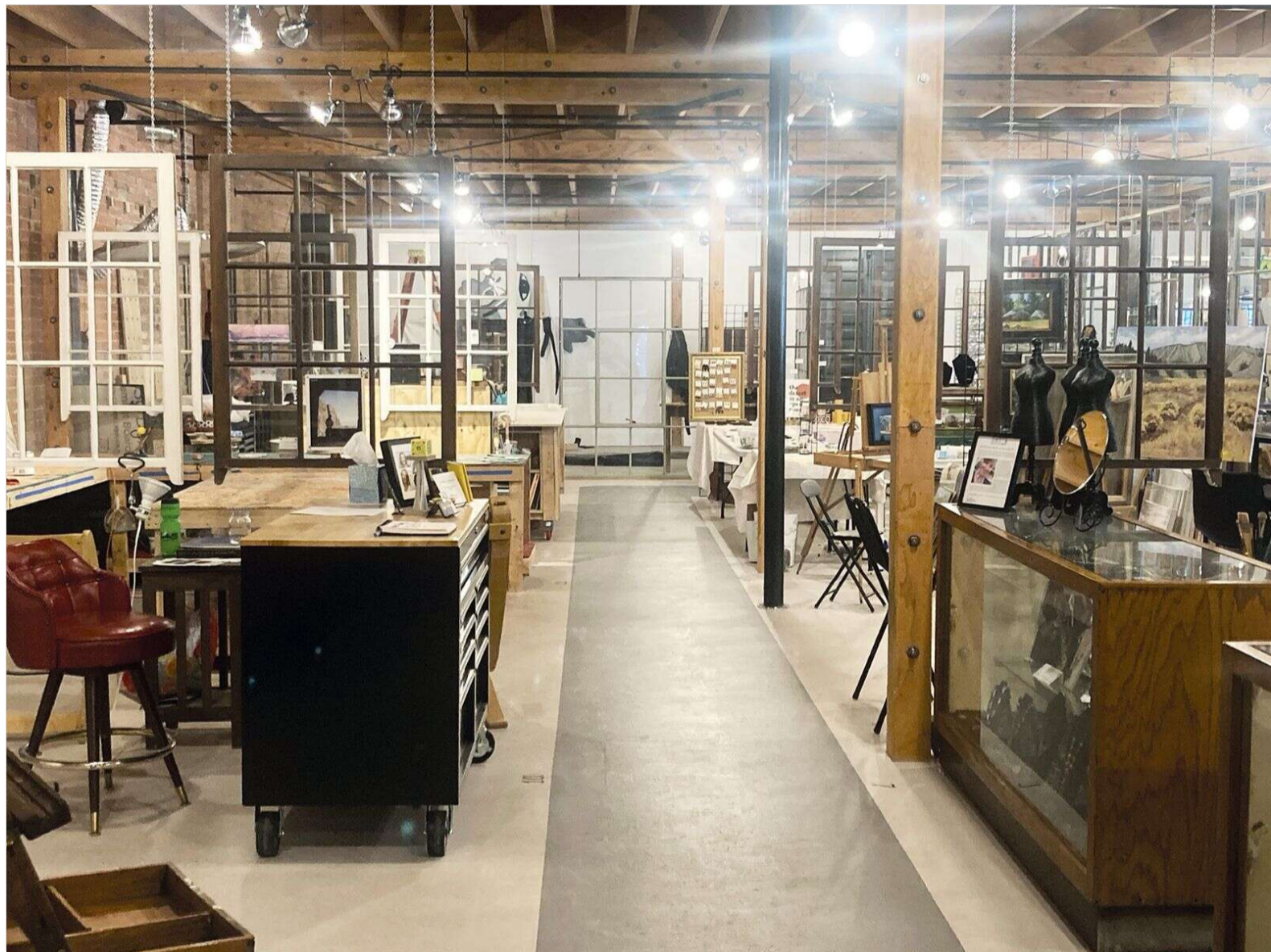


Creatives get to work in ArtRoom

Smiley Building offers spaces for artists to create, sell, collaborate

By Katie Chicklinski-Cahill, Herald Arts & Entertainment editor

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The ArtRoom in the Smiley Building offers spaces for creatives to work and sell their wares in a collaborative space. (Katie Chicklinski-Cahill/Durango Herald)

When you walk into the Smiley Building and look through the doors to your immediate right, it's hard to imagine the auditorium that used to be there.

The new space – about 4,000 square feet – has been converted from a fairly dark space to a room awash in natural light. Twenty work spaces have been partitioned in the space, each separated by windows repurposed from the building itself, said Charles Shaw, co-owner of the Smiley.

Shaw said the ArtRoom, which opened for occupants in September, was an easy space to fill because of the high demand and high prices in Durango. He said monthly rent in the ArtRoom is between \$250 and \$400, with the majority of spaces costing \$250 to \$300.

“Everyone has really liked it. The artists have all liked it and people who have come through really enjoy it,” he said. “Part of why I really wanted to do this space was I wanted to make some really affordable artist space ... these things are getting so expensive. Rent is so expensive in town.”

The ArtRoom houses an eclectic group of creatives, including jewelry makers, painters, photographers, an architect, leatherworker, potter and upholsterer.

Heather Freeman, owner of The Painted Playground, is one of the artists in the space. In fact, she said, she snatched the last available work area in September.

“I was enjoying a concert at Buckley Park and a friend of mine had told me about this space and I contacted Charles and he was like, ‘Sure, come on in and check it out, but I have two spaces left.’ And by the time I got here there was one space – I actually got the last space,” she said.

One of the benefits of the space, she said, is it allows for people to wander through and see what the artists have to offer and to even catch them in the process of creating.

“It’s been amazing. We have gotten people walking in who haven’t been here in a long time, people maybe that have lived here a while and have kept an eye on Charles and know his deal of just constantly creating and having this bigger and bigger vision of how to do things in the building and the community,” Freeman said. “And then people that are visiting come in that are out-of-towners, which is awesome. I talked to somebody yesterday from Ohio, and he’s like, ‘yeah, I’ve seen this kind of concept in a couple of different cities, but this is like no other.’”



Artist Heather Freeman, owner of The Painted Playground, said she enjoys the collaborative nature of the ArtRoom’s space. (Katie Chicklinski-Cahill/Durango Herald)

She said the group of renters is made up of all kinds of creative people, and that’s what helps keep the space vibrant – and fun.

“Everyone’s a little different, not only in the art we make, but in how we’re presenting ourselves in the world: Some of us are hobbyists and come in and just paint to fill our tanks, and we do it for ourselves,’ she said. “Other people are really wanting to make it a go and this is their living, so they’re playing and having fun and selling their stuff, too.”

And for Freeman, being surrounded by like-minded people instead of in an isolated studio, has helped her both artistically and from a business perspective.

“It plays an essential role for not only artists, and people being able to express themselves, but for being able to come together as creatives and be in an environment that is nurturing and supportive – we get to talk to each other all the time, even though we’re not all here at once,” she said. “I can’t tell you how many meaningful conversations I’ve had with other artists in this space – it could be about anything, it could be about the creative side, or it could be about the business side of being a working artist.”

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