

Form, shape, *space*

Downtown Alliance proposes moving Hazleton Art League to former Security Savings building

By **KENT JACKSON**
Staff Writer

The only home that the Hazleton Art League ever had at 225 E. Broad St. is growing cramped.

For three years, league members have thought about renovating and expanding their headquarters or moving to a larger building.

“What we want is a jumping, exciting community arts center that makes us happy and proud and provides the opportunities to learn, grow, come together, experience and enjoy ourselves that only the arts can provide,” the league’s co-presidents wrote a year ago in the group’s newsletter.

City officials and members of the new Downtown Alliance for Progress liked the league’s idea for an art center:

And they suggested a place: the former Security Savings bank building at 25-31 W. Broad St.

When considering new uses for the building, Mayor Joseph Yannuzzi thought of the art league.

“We heard they wanted to move, but they didn’t want to leave downtown. We

approached them,” Yannuzzi said.

Luzerne County owns the Security Savings building, but currently has no use for it and has considered transferring the building to the city. Yannuzzi had proposed moving the police department into the building, but those plans were abandoned.

“I think it’s fair to say everybody on the board of the art league is excited about the possibility,” Carl Frankel, a co-president of the league, said.

Right now, an art center is just a possibility.

The league doesn’t know if it could afford to remodel and maintain the building. Perhaps the league would need another group or a business to share the space and the expense.

To answer some questions, the league and the alliance applied for a grant to study the cost of converting the building to an art center.

“We hope to have the information we need when the study is done or while it is in progress and then take a vote to commit or not commit,”

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JAMIE PESOTINE/Staff Photographer

Art center

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Frankel said.

The art center could house art classes for children and adults, exhibits, musical performances and meetings of photography and book clubs, and a boutique for selling original art works.

All those activities occur now in the building that housed the league the past 66 years but now needs repairs and expansion.

Just to make room while preparing for the fourth annual Art Youth Expo or AYE4 on Friday and Saturday, club members have had to move items into other rooms temporarily.

"It really is a space issue," Frankel said.

Art league members joke that their headquarters in a converted home next to Zenier's Towing goes unnoticed, even by people who drive past every day, Frankel said.

"I don't think we'd have that problem with Security Savings. We would just say "That beautiful building with the columns," he said of the 104-year-old structure. The Downtown Alliance

ART YOUTH EXPO

The fourth annual Art Youth Expo or AYE4 will start Friday at 6 p.m. and continue Saturday from noon through 8 p.m.

Before commencing their art walk, visitors can stop at the sponsor, the Hazleton Art League, 225 E. Broad St., to collect a map to the other sites.

Lackawanna Junior College, Frankie's Pizza, Fellin's Jewelers, Dragonfly Cafe, The Shop 2, Butler Enterprises, Hazleton Area Career Center, Jimmy's Quick Lunch and Hazleton Active Adult Center will host exhibits or performances.

Artists younger than 30 have created paintings, photographs, sculpture and other works. More than 30 groups, soloists and street performers agreed to entertain during the exhibit.

for Progress asked consultants to consider how to convert Security Savings into an art center when submitting proposals for a comprehensive plan for downtown.

This month, the alliance expects to hire a firm to prepare the plan, which will include an inventory of businesses and buildings and strategies for recruiting businesses, marketing downtown and plans for parks, facades and the streetscape.

City council members consider the arts center a good fit with downtown.

"I think that is a great idea," council President Jack Mundie said.

Councilman Keith Bast said he would like to learn

more about the plan from members of the league and the alliance.

"It would definitely pull traffic, and is a better location for what they do," Bast said.

Council members Jean Mope and Jeff Cusat approve of a downtown arts center if the league can manage the expenses.

"I don't know if the art league would be able to afford moving there or what they would need to get into it," Cusat said.

Mope mentioned that the city also considered plans for parking on part of the property next to Security Savings, where a parking garage also is proposed. The

alliance plans to host a farmers' market outside the Security Savings building this year.

Yannuzzi called the arts one ingredient for a vibrant downtown.

"It would be ideal to get cultural events downtown," he said. "You have to have that, offices, retail, restaurants. We have a little of each. We're hoping to build on that." He also said downtown

would be a great place for a high school for the arts that the Hazleton Area School Board has considered creating.

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