

\$50k grant to open art spaces at Hub

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Citizen

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A grant of \$50,000 is allowing the Cowichan Station Area Association (CSAA) to enhance their building with a pair of art spaces.

The group's fundraising chair, Jill Thompson said April 11 that she's delighted.

"First of all we've been working on ways to fund the renovation of Cowichan Station School, particularly the old school house which is 100 years old next year," she said.

It needs extensive renovations to bring it up to the current building code and the group was scouting around for some money to get that job done.

"Along with that, about a year ago now, a group of professional clay artists in the Valley approached us, very interested in the old art room because it has the right layout and it was a good size for a community clay studio.

"We really loved their vision of involving the community in the arts and in creative processes. It's a very inclusive vision. And from their perspective, it's a way for artists to have a space that's large enough to allow them to pool their resources and their time and make a better living as artists. We really wanted to support that," she said.

The clay studio itself will be run by the Clay HUB Collective and then they will run programs for the community.

The other side of the ground floor, the old kindergarten room, will become an "indestructible" room, she said.

"We're looking at an easy clean-up space where people can do art work that might be messy. We had some artists coming forward saying: there's nowhere in the Valley where you can rent a venue and do art that might be messy because no one wants their venue messed up.

"So, we thought: let's make a venue that's built for that. You can do charcoal

sketching, oil paints, you could have a kids art birthday party. Go ahead and make a mess because we're going to build it to be easy clean up. Sometimes to make good art you need to get messy," Thompson added.

There's a bonus in all this, too.

"We're now able to in the process renovate the washrooms, bring the plumbing and the electrical up to code and make the whole ground floor wheelchair accessible. We're going to start as soon as we can. We just got the cheque yesterday. The work went out to bid. Now, we have to look at the quotes that came in and choose our contractor," she said.

Everyone is excited that the old school house will be really alive by its centennial but the artists are also delighted.

Clay whiz Cathi Jefferson, founding director of the Clay HUB Collective said last week, "We Clay Hub potters sure want to thank everyone who has been so amazing helping make this grant happen and giving us a place in this community to provide a clay making place open to everyone."

Construction is set to begin in May and both spaces are expected to be open by fall 2013.

The entire redevelopment of the old building has been an ambitious local volunteer effort to return Cowichan Station's former elementary school into community service.

As an example, CSAA held a special dinner and dance Friday, April 12 to celebrate the 125th birthday of Cowichan Station.