City Council Approves Lease for Edwardsville Arts Center to Use Montclaire Station as Interim Home

by Cathy A. Hensley
March 6 2024 6:45 AM

EDWARDSVILLE – A building that for 55 years served as an Edwardsville Fire Department station is about to become a hot spot of a different kind – for art and artists of all ages and abilities -- thanks to a collaboration between the City of Edwardsville and the Edwardsville Arts Center. The City Council on Tuesday, March 5, unanimously approved a 24-month lease for $1 a year with the Edwardsville Arts Center that will allow the nonprofit to operate and offer classes at the recently retired Station 2, at 340 Montclaire Avenue.

The agreement will provide the 23-year-old arts organization an interim location to continue serving the public while making plans and raising funds for a permanent location yet to be determined. The Edwardsville Arts Center hopes to be up and running in the new site in early June.

"We are committed to the arts and the mission of this dynamic community organization that has served as a heartbeat for artists as well as those who love art of all types," Mayor Art Risavy said. "We are thrilled to know that our former Montclaire Station will be brought back into service in such a wonderful way." The Edwardsville Arts Center will be leaving Edwardsville High School on May 5 as the Edwardsville School District looks to utilize the space for an increasing student population. Arts Center officials praised the school district for its generosity over the past 14 years in donating 3,000 square feet of space for classes and exhibits, and thanked the City of Edwardsville for its support and assistance while permanent options are explored.

"I'm incredibly grateful for the generous support and commitment to the visual arts by Mayor Risavy and the City," said Beth Browne, the executive director of the Edwardsville Arts Center. "This partnership allows us to continue our art programming for the community while extending our timeline to identify and plan for a final home. The location is in the heart of the community, which is where we believe art belongs. We're excited to provide a new purpose for the firehouse which will focus on the expansion of our art education programs for children and adults."

The Edwardsville Arts Center will repurpose the station's former office area into classroom space for drawing and painting, while the former sleeping quarters will become a ceramic studio.

A couple of kilns are planned for the former vehicle bays, an area that is heated, but not air-conditioned, and so will have seasonal limitations. While the overall space at Montclaire is smaller than the existing site, Browne said it will offer opportunities for additional classes to be programmed at certain days and times of the year. The walkable nature of the neighborhood also is a plus, allowing the center to potentially expand its artistic outreach.

Station 2 cannot offer the exhibition space the Edwardsville Arts Center previously enjoyed, but its staff will make good use of its "satellite galleries."

Those include Edwardsville City Hall, the Edwardsville Public Library and Main Street Community Center in Edwardsville; Glen Carbon Village Hall and the Glen Carbon Heritage Museum in Glen Carbon; and a new site, the Bank of Madison County, 119 S. Main Street in Edwardsville. The City of Edwardsville already partners with the Edwardsville Arts Center on multiple initiatives, including the highly acclaimed

Edwardsville Art Fair, held in City Park each September; Arts in the Park summer classes; and the street banner art contest. Station 2 on Montclaire Avenue, which opened in 1969, closed earlier this year as the Edwardsville Fire Department transitioned to the new East Fire Station at 7407 Governors' Parkway, a site more strategically positioned to serve the area's growing population.