



news

For Immediate Release:
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**FairfieldDD To Purchase Art & Clay On Main
*Downtown Site To Be New Home For Blue Shoe Arts***

(Lancaster, Ohio – February 8, 2010) The Fairfield County Board of Developmental Disabilities plans to purchase the business assets of Art & Clay on Main and lease the Main St. space that has housed the ceramics studio and gallery the last 10 years.

John Pekar, Superintendent of FairfieldDD, said the agency plans to establish a creative arts and business "incubator" for individuals with disabilities.

He said the Art & Clay name will remain, and that the agency plans to continue the retail ceramics operation and hopes to continue serving individual artists, groups and county schools with specialty art classes. In addition, Blue Shoe Arts Studio and Gallery, supported by FairfieldDD, will move into the space from its current location at the Opportunity Center on Coonpath Road in Carroll.

"We've talked about finding space outside our Opportunity Center building so that Blue Shoe Arts could play a more active role in Lancaster and Fairfield County's vibrant arts and cultural community," said Pekar. "When we found out that Art & Clay was closing at the end of last month, we saw an opportunity to move into a turnkey situation and work with the former ownership to continue their good work, while at the same time expanding employment and social opportunities for individuals we support."

Art & Clay and FairfieldDD had partnered in the past. Blue Shoe Arts had exhibited work at the downtown space for the last couple of years, and had been the focus of Lancaster Festival ArtWalk shows in both 2008 and 2009. In addition, groups from both the Opportunity Center, which provides a day program for adults with disabilities, and Forest Rose School, both of which are operated by FairfieldDD, have worked on ceramic projects at the downtown business.

“This is a fantastic opportunity and I’m pleased that the mission of Art & Clay will live on,” said Becky Hajost, who started the Art & Clay concept and will remain part of an advisory board that FairfieldDD is developing to help guide the project. “I’m also excited to be involved in a transition and advisory role as they will continue to work with the many downtown museums, as well as schools and churches throughout the community.

“I’m also excited that Art & Clay will continue to be part of the downtown landscape and become a lynchpin of future development as community leaders create a vision for what the downtown business district can become.”

FairfieldDD looks forward to the role that the Art & Clay and Blue Shoe collaboration can play in the city’s vision, as well.

"We're excited about the opportunity to have our artists become part of the downtown community," said Ray Schmidt, President of the FairfieldDD Board. "It's extremely valuable for us to have our artists interact with not only other artists but with the entire community. Here at Art & Clay our people have a chance to be known for their creativity and artwork – not their disability."

In addition to serving as the new home for Blue Shoe, the business will continue to offer classes and welcome both individuals and groups into the ceramics studio to work on

projects. The Board is also discussing additional options, such as a small cafe, to occupy the space, as well as offering regular community social events.

"This is more about empowering people with disabilities to earn a better living and become "of" the community than anything else," said Pekar. "Blue Shoe Arts has been very successful, but we felt we needed to take the next step that would allow the artists to lead more fulfilling lives. In this model, they can take a more active role as part owners of the business."

The new concept operated by FairfieldDD does not have the same profit pressure as a traditional business. Its goal is to meet operating expenses.

"Our purpose here is to provide jobs and training for people with disabilities," said Pekar. "It's similar to our partnership to operate THE ZONE at Ohio University-Lancaster.

"Our goal is 'social profit,' such as providing employment opportunities and community involvement, not just for the artists but for other individuals we support. This gives them the opportunity to become part of the fabric of the community."

The Fairfield County Board of Developmental Disabilities supports more than 850 children and adults, as well as their families, throughout Fairfield County. For more information about programs and the people the agency serves, contact Community Outreach Coordinator John Bosser at 740.687.7244 or visit FairfieldDD.com.

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