



# LEHIGH VALLEY NEWS

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## Allentown Cigar Factory Artists' Studios holds tour for city officials

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ALLENTOWN, Pa. - Several City of Allentown officials and the president of the Allentown Tenants' Association gathered late Tuesday afternoon for an informal tour of the Cigar Factory Artists' Studios, the Alternative Art Gallery and the Coffee House without Limits, located on North Fourth Street just north of its intersection with Tilghman Street on the site of a former cigar factory.

President of the Allentown Tenants' Association Julian Kern, Allentown Police Sgt. Pete McAfee, Fire Marshal Michael Zellin, and city controller Jeff Glazier were offered a tour by Brandon Wunder, gallery director of the Alternative Gallery and Billy Mack, coffee house proprietor.

Wunder said the near city-block-long building contains 45 artist studios, of which 60 percent are occupied. He said the main gallery, in addition to containing many unusually alluring and brightly colored local artist original paintings, also has a stage able to host live musical performances.

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A filmmaker, Wunder said the building also hosts numerous film screenings and festivals throughout the year.

"We are in isolation here, but we get to evolve uniquely," Wunder said.

He pointed out the surrounding neighborhood which comprises Allentown's tenth ward, has not been the focus of any city improvement plans in the past 20 years and contains several illegal dumping sites and blighted properties.

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Wunder, along with Kern and others, are looking to transform the neighborhood into an artists' haven, renovating nearby row homes into housing for artists; the row homes and their floor plans would offer plenty of studio space.

In addition to art, he said the former cigar factory has become a hot spot for stopover musical performers. He said many multi-city touring musicians frequent the building, which was renovated in early 2012 and opened in September of the same year.

Wunder said Mayor Pawlowski's office has been very cooperative with regard to his efforts and the filmmaker has secured a grant writer and is now looking for funding sources.

"We are using art as a vehicle to fix the problems around us," he said.

The Allentown Arts Fest will be held Sept. 30 through Oct. 2 at Cedar Beach Park. It will feature artists' renderings, locally brewed beer, food, a technology booth and 8-foot-by-16-foot graffiti walls.

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On this day: September 21  
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