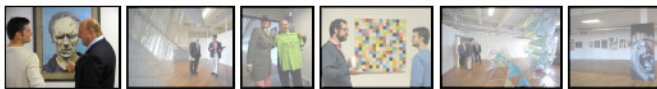




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# Former Allentown cigar factory transformed into artist studios



Alburtis-based artist Josh Lerch, left, stands in front of his portrait of Clint Eastwood as he talks to Allentown Mayor Ed Pawlowski following a ribbon-cutting for the Cigar Factory on Nov. 19, 2013. The building, which dates to the early 1900s and was once a tobacco production facility, now includes 40,000 square feet of artist studios and a centrally shared art gallery.

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on November 19, 2013 at 6:49 PM, updated November 29, 2013 at 4:16 PM

An **Allentown** (http://topics.lehighvalleylive.com/tag/allentown/index.html) factory built as a tobacco production facility about a century ago has a new purpose serving the city's arts community.

The **Cigar Factory Artist Studios** (https://www.facebook.com/CigarFactoryArtists) held its grand opening today at 707 N. Fourth St., unveiling 40,000 square feet of artist studios and a centrally shared art gallery.

"We feel this is a big step forward for the arts community," said George Huang, a developer who spent three years trying to make the project a reality.







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"It's been a long road and this was certainly a labor of love," Huang said.

The privately renovated building retains several historic features of the circa-1900s tobacco factory, including earthy brick walls, original hardwood flooring and high ceilings.

Gene DiPalma, the property manager, said the building includes gallery areas that artists can use any time for their own shows, as well as spaces the community can rent for parties or art exhibitions.

"We have a lot of phenomenal artists in the building now, and we hope to see more," DiPalma said. "It's available to the community and we'd like to see everyone back."

The studio will host an art exhibit and installation by FUSE Art Infrastructure of Allentown starting Thursday as part of an ongoing NOW Third Thursday series taking place at the facility.

"This is indeed a great day for art," said FUSE director Kiki Nienaber. "We want to continue developing the arts in all of Allentown."

The first and fourth floors of the building host an eclectic mix of art works, from large metal sculptures to paintings by artists from across the Lehigh Valley.

Allentown Mayor **Ed Pawlowski** (<http://topics.lehighvalleylive.com/tag/ed%20pawlowski/index.html>) said the arts can help revive and transform cities, and he believes developments like this will help energize Allentown.

"We have a great arts community developing here in the city, and we want to do everything we can to support it," Pawlowski said.

Contact Allentown reporter Colin McEvoy at 484-894-2549 or [cmcevoy@express-times.com](mailto:cmcevoy@express-times.com) (<mailto:cmcevoy@express-times.com>).

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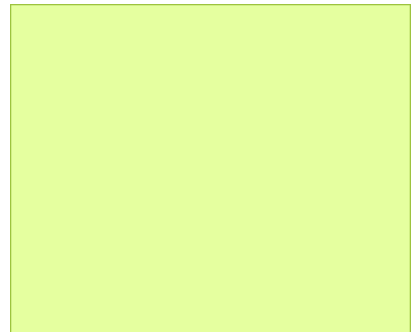
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