

Danville Art League pursuing ex-Red Cross building

By Tracy Moss
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DANVILLE – Danville Art League members are forging ahead with efforts to raise about \$60,000 to move the former Red Cross building to an empty lot on Oak Street and make that site its new downtown home.

The 71-year-old nonprofit Danville Art League has operated since 1963 in a small building it owns at 502 Sherman Street, but for several years, the members have thought about moving to a bigger site.

"This just fell in our lap," said Art League President Marsha Russell of the opportunity to move the vacant Red Cross building from the corner of Seminary and Franklin to vacant lots on the corner of Seminary and Oak streets. The art league would then be housed in the city's Renaissance district, a neighborhood west of the downtown business district that has experienced a revitalization of its housing stock.

Russell said the idea originated with residents who live in the Renaissance district and are dedicated to continuing revitalization efforts there. A new senior housing complex and a larger, more modern home for the art league could be a big part of those efforts.

Sterling Group, a development company in Mishawaka, Ind., plans to build a 72-unit senior housing complex where the Red Cross building now sits. Sterling is waiting on approval from the state for tax-credit financing and would have no use for the Red Cross building.

John VanMeeter, director of development for Sterling, said the company is more than willing to work

with the art league and donate the building as long as Sterling's timeline can be met.

Bonita Wyatt of Chrisman unpacks supplies while getting ready to paint Wednesday at the Danville Art League



Bonita Wyatt of Chrisman unpacks supplies while getting ready to paint Wednesday at the Danville Art League facility on Sherman Street in Danville.
Photo by Rick Danzl

facility on Sherman Street in Danville. The company should know after July 1 whether it will receive the tax credit financing through the state. VanMeeter said closing would take about 120 days after financing is approved, and Sterling would be prepared to move earth on the site the day after closing.

He said Sterling would not want any delays after the closing, so the art league would have to be prepared to move the building in that 120-day period after financing is approved.

"That's our only stipulation, but it should give them plenty of time," he said.

That's why art league members are working now on fundraising efforts, so the money is in place not only to physically move the building, but also for excavation at the new site, building a foundation, parking lot, porch, ramp and for electrical, plumbing, landscaping and interior work.

VanMeeter said there is a lot of competition for the tax credit financing and only about one in five applications receives it.

But the art league cannot delay fundraising until after July 1, because of the tight time frame for moving the building if Sterling's financing does come through and the project goes.

Russell said the league will put the

To donate

To help the building fund, write a check to the Danville Art League and mail it to P.O. Box 772, Danville, IL, 61834-0772.

Upcoming events

The Danville Art League presents the Sharon Schmitz Regional Open Art Competition April 24-26 at the Village Mall, 2917 N. Vermilion St., Danville. The competition features the work of professional and amateur artists in a variety of media categories, including oil/acrylic painting, watermedia, drawing, photography, mixed media and sculpture/ceramics. Also at the mall on the same dates, the league hosts the Town and Country Amateur Art Show for adults and youths 18 and younger. Judging takes place the morning of April 25.

donations into a building fund that will be used, at some point in the future, for a new building whether this project happens or not.

"If not this, then we will try to find something else later," Russell said.

The art league, which has about 100 members who are artists or support the arts, has outgrown its building, which is one-third the size of the 3,200-square-foot Red Cross building.

Part of the league's mission is to stimulate creativity and art appreciation through its classes and workshops, but the current building doesn't have enough space to do that and, at the same time, offer open studio space for its members, which is also the group's mission.

"We are really, really cramped," said

Russell, who added that the group's supplies are stored at a member's house.

The league offers classes and a summer camp for children and classes and workshops for adults. A larger building would provide a room dedicated for children's classes with a connected bathroom and a dedicated adult classroom, both separate from an open studio and gallery area.

According to league members, other benefits include more parking and a more modern, efficient building, and it would mean saving a building that would be demolished.

Russell said this has generated a lot of excitement among league members, but they are still proceeding with care. She said a few members have questioned whether a new building is

necessary when the current one is paid for and affordable for the group's limited funds.

But, she said, once they heard the details, they were in support.

The league is forming an advisory committee, including people with financial, legal, grant writing and building experience. In addition to organizing some local fundraisers and letter-writing campaigns, the members are researching what national foundations might offer grants, and they welcome donations of any size.

"We would like to see it done, but we've been here for 70 years, and we are going to be cautious. We don't have a lot of money, and we're just trying to do everything we can, the best that we can," Russell said.