

# Artists prepare to take up residence in innovative Sailboat Bend Artist Lofts

BY HELENE FOSTER

Nerissa Street was the first one in line to apply for residency at Sailboat Bend Artist Lofts. She says she lined up early, “not out of superstition, but because the opportunity is so fantastic.”

The Sailboat Bend Artist Lofts – a joint venture of Artspace Projects Inc. and the Broward County Cultural Division – will allow 37 professional visual and performing artists like Street to live and work alongside each other in the heart of downtown Fort Lauderdale as part of an innovative artistic and cultural community that will add to an already flourishing, vibrant neighborhood.

Street, of Fort Lauderdale, is an accomplished writer and actress. She sees this new community as more than just a place to call home. “My work will take on a whole new dimension as I now have 36 other sources of inspiration, feedback, mentorship and critique,” she says. “I know working in this space means that each of us will expand and influence each other, even unintentionally,” she adds.

Susanna Murphy’s “whole life is music and art.” The Miami-born artist and musician always dreamed of living in an artist community such as this and looks forward to the flexibility offered at the Lofts. “This really is a dream come true,” she says. “I can have my art space set up all the time and not have to paint on the dining room table. It will be great to have all the creative space I need.”

Greg Galavotti, a singer/songwriter who will also take up residence at the Lofts, agrees. “The nice thing about living in a community like Sailboat Bend is that we will be around other like-minded people; people that are artists and are driven by the same desire to create and express themselves.”

Galavotti plays guitar, drums and bass guitar – instruments that might be considered a nuisance to neighbors in a conventional community. “The construction is so solid that I don’t think noise concerns are going to be as huge an issue as they would in other buildings,” he observes.

Artspace Projects Inc. is a Minneapolis-based non-profit organization that has created similar artist communities in Connecticut, Chicago, Minnesota and Maryland. The Fort Lauderdale location is the first of its kind in Florida. Steven Glassman, Arts Education and Community Development Specialist for the Broward County Cultural Division, says that the Sailboat Bend living quarters will be conducive to these artists’ lifestyles as well as their budgets.

“The artists will have the opportunity to live and work in affordable one-, two- or three-bedroom residences, ranging from 500 to over 1,000 square feet,” he explains. There will be common areas for residents as well. In exchange for their new affordable housing, the artistic contributions of these artists will add



*The Sailboat Bend Artist Lofts will provide homes for 37 diverse artists working in a variety of disciplines.*

to the revitalization of Sailboat Bend, the only historically designated neighborhood in Fort Lauderdale.

According to Glassman, the artists who will inhabit Sailboat Bend Artist Lofts were selected based on their “commitment to their art form” as well as demonstrated financial need. The artists took part in a detailed selection process over a span of nearly a year. Applicants participated in a lottery and also went through several in-depth interviews. Rents will be calculated on a sliding scale.

The Sailboat Bend Artist Lofts officially broke ground in June 2007 and were slated to be completed in late December.

Additionally, the nearby historic West Side School will become the new home of the Broward County Historical Commission. When it is completed in the spring, it will feature a collection of artifacts and historical memorabilia on view to the public. Exhibit space for the artists living the Lofts is also planned.

Glassman feels that the Lofts will blend extremely well into the Sailboat Bend area. “It is a neighborhood with a variety of homes – both historic and new – and the Lofts will be a great addition to the mix. It truly is a perfect fit.”

Dean Crowell, Asset Manager for Artspace Projects Inc., is eager to see the finished project. “I am really happy with the overall design,” he says. “It is very well integrated with the historic West Side School, which is currently under renovation. There is a nice symmetry between the buildings and the adjacent condominiums, but you can clearly see that it is an artist residence.” ★

*Helene Foster is a writer in Parkland.*



*The historic West Side School, built in 1923, is being renovated to house the Broward County Historical Commission.*