



To understand the idea behind an enterprise coming together in Williamsport known simply as the Pajama Factory, it helps to know the titles of some of the people involved. Mark Winkelman and Suzanne Winkelman, owners, are known simply as executive director and marketing director, respectively. Marshall Harris, sculptor and onsite manager, is called The Pajama Czar. Michael Pilato, mural painter, has been dubbed The Dreamer. Fascinated? Read on.

Dreams and Possibilities *at the* Pajama Factory

by Erica L. Shames
photographs by Gordon Wenzel

The Pajama Factory is envisioned by its New York City owners Mark Winkelman, architect, and Suzanne Winkelman, advertising executive, as a mixed-use site that will expand from artist studios to one day include upscale loft apartments and restaurants to become a Williamsport destination.

On paper, The Pajama Factory looks like this: 300,000 square feet of floor area throughout a complex of eight interconnected brick buildings, ranging in height from three to five stories. The wood floors are typically 50 to 60-feet wide and ceilings are 12 feet high, allowing customized spaces to be created that boast natural light, ventilation and great views. A courtyard currently houses an outdoor pavilion, a patio with seating and a sculpture garden featuring work from a wide range of artists. Current tenants occupy about 30 percent of the complex. Doris Day fans may recog-



“I’m very excited about the possibilities here. It’s like a blank canvas.”

Sculptor and Pajama Czar Marshall Harris is looking for folks who share a vision of what the Pajama Factory can become.

nize the Pajama Factory as, rumor has it, the place where the movie “The Pajama Game” was filmed.

Anything is possible

What’s fascinating about this project, as titles of some of the people involved suggest, is that renovating a dinosaur like the Pajama Factory puts into motion an infectious anything-is-possible attitude. In fact,

on the Pajama Factory Web site (pajamafactory.net), the project is defined in these utopian terms: “The Pajama Factory is a community of people who have come together to build off each other’s strengths and dreams in order to create something bigger than themselves.”

“I see the opportunity to realize my vision, to be a part of improving the local

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Mark and Suzanne Winkelman’s dream is to build a creative incubator at the Pajama Factory.

Pajama Factory

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community around our building, to restoring and preserving the history of the Pajama Factory and to create a stimulating creative community," said Mark.

Sculptor and factory manager Harris relocated to Williamsport from Marblehead, Massachusetts, to be part of this renaissance and to be closer to Philadelphia, where he is working on his master's degree in sculpture at the University of the Arts.

"I'm very excited about the possibilities here," he added. "It's like a blank canvas. Any old building has a lot of issues. Whoever has some vision can see beyond the building. We're looking for folks who can see that vision."

Nuts and bolts

The project is being implemented in three phases. The first phase, financed in part with a low interest loan from the city, includes the construction of 30 studios, and office spaces sized from 200 square feet to over 3,000 square feet. The installation of a new passenger elevator, with a stop on the roof for a future roof deck, will be completed by spring.

The second phase, expected to start at the end of 2010, will continue the studio building program, construction of the basic live/work lofts, and a portion of the communal shop spaces, including a metal shop and woodworking or craft shop accessible to the artists and tenants, and the ceramics center.

The third phase will continue the studio and work space building program and construction of 40,000-square-foot of high end living lofts on the fifth floor, with 14-foot ceilings, large expanses of glass and beautiful views of the hills that surround Williamsport. "We're building a playpen for adults," Mark exclaimed.

Harris says the acre and a half roof that covers the buildings is an ideal platform for solar technology, wind generation or, at the very least, a green roof. "It's just like a ripe garden ready to have somebody put some creative energies into it," Harris likened.

In the works

Already the Pajama Factory is showing renewed signs of life. This past summer, a Williamsport First Friday event and a festival



The view from a Pajama Factory studio space.

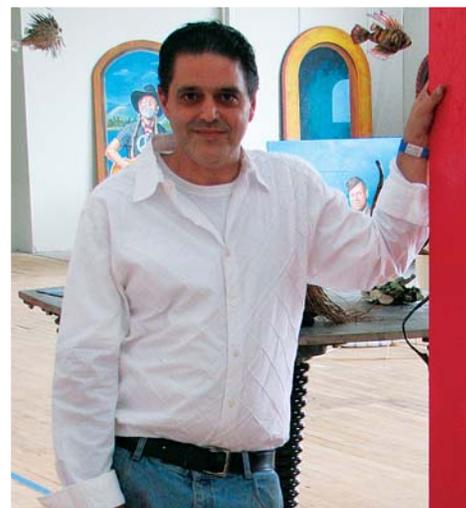
organized by the NE PA Wine Association were held on site. With encouragement from Eagle Rock Winery owner Anna Falat, a Pajama Factory tenant, and Harris, festival organizer Dan Thompkins expanded the event from its focus on just wine to include art and artists, and to expand the venue from just the first floor and courtyard to the second floor, where 20 artists rent studio space. "I'd like to continue the festival here every year," said Thompkins.

Art academy

Mural artist Michael Pilato, who created the mural in downtown Williamsport, moved to Williamsport from State College four years ago. He and his wife Keiko started the Public Art Academy at the Pajama Factory. Michael envisions the PAA as a place where prospective students can come to the gallery, see artists working and pick their teachers.

"The teachers rent the space by the hour, so it's very cheap, and they have the opportunity to finally make some money," said Pilato. "That's our whole philosophy—to get money back into artists' hands. The gallery commission from pieces we sell goes right into the scholarship funds we've developed."

Pilato has been successful helping to draw famous artists to the PAA, including Zenos Frudakis, whose work includes the Air Force Memorial, Larry Welker, who cast the World War II memorial, and Henry Royer, whose 12-foot-tall piece made of rusted Corten and polished stainless steels



Michael Pilato, muralist, always wanted to open an art school and created the Public Art Academy in a space reminiscent, he says, of Charlie and the Chocolate Factory.

was recently on exhibit under the Brooklyn Bridge. All three artists have sculptures adorning the Pajama Factory courtyard.

"Artists really want to come and be part of this movement at the Public Art Academy," stresses Pilato. "We want to prove that public art brings community and economic development, and Williamsport's the perfect place to prove that. There is crime, there are issues—but they're not that big or unsolvable. It's all about improving the quality of life here."

As part of the philanthropic arm of the PAA, Pilato works with at-risk youth. When



Entrance to Eagle Rock Winery's retail store at the Pajama Factory.

Tenant Chad Andrews, director of education for the Public Art Academy, specializes in printmaking, drawing and painting.



An anonymous donor gave artist Geoffrey Haun, curator of the Ankleroot Art Gallery on West Fourth St., a year of Pajama Factory rent.



Last summer, the Williamsport Arts and Wine Festival, expanded to include the Public Art Academy and the artists' studios on the second floor, was held at the Pajama Factory.

Pilato hired a professional to paint the school's space, he added a caveat. "Our rule was he had to go out and find people from the neighborhood to work with him," said Pilato. "Now, some of those kids who worked with him have jobs for \$22 an hour working with painters."

As part of the renovation 800 windows had to be replaced at The Pajama Factory, some of which had been broken by neighborhood kids. "When a blacksmith who rented space in the Pajama Factory started fixing the neighborhood kids' bicycles, no more windows were broken," said Pilato with pride.

"There is a center for at-risk youth up the street," he continued. "There was trash all

over the neighborhood. The Public Art Academy assisted the children in painting the trash cans. Now there's no trash. The kids took ownership. It's these kinds of things that artists can do in a community. That's kind of the lead that the PAA is taking to pull artists together." For more information about PAA, visit publicartacademy.org.

On site

Marshall Harris' work, among others, is on display at PAA. With a diverse background that includes museum curator, graphic designer, interior designer for restaurants and exhibit designer for zoos and aquaria, Harris comes to the Pajama Factory with a range of talents. As a sculptor, Harris has

developed the skills to work successfully with an extensive array of media and materials. Realizing much of what is produced in our society gets thrown away, Harris includes discarded objects within his work to create what he refers to as "aesthetic landfill." This is most evident in a recent piece titled "Broken Crayons" which incorporates an assortment of obsolete computer components as well as hundreds of discarded floppy disks.

Harris' work is shown exclusively with galleries and is held in various private collections. His on-site sculptures include "Approach With Extreme Caution," made from remnants of a railroad crossing found inside the Pajama Factory.

Historic angle

The real story of the Pajama Factory starts in New York City's Tribeca neighborhood, where Mark and Suzanne Winkelman "grew up" over the past 25 years. "Transforming a raw warehouse into a family home and retail space, and the building itself into a prime condo in one of the most desirable neighborhoods in Manhattan, took vision, hard work, perseverance and a belief that our community had great potential," said Mark. "These are all relevant to how I view the Pajama Factory."

"This time," adds Suzy, "we're creating our own neighborhood and hopefully it extends beyond."

The Pajama Factory allows Mark to further expand into building renovation and preservation. "Three years ago, I was excited by the idea of creating and constructing livable, green and efficient buildings but I couldn't find the client/project mix where these ideas could be tried out. Finding the Pajama Factory and Williamsport was a fluke, but it is perfect."

Admittedly, the Winkelmans say they didn't have a vision when they started. "What we bought was potential," confirms Mark. "As an architect I was loving it. But it's really scary! Development in New York is different. The capital costs to even enter the system are enormous. And you need a polish to your product to compete with everyone else. But a whole different way to develop is to buy something as cheaply as possible, build on it and make it a working environment that will support itself. And we're almost there."

For information about the history of the Pajama Factory, more photographs, a complete list of tenants and information about sculptures in the Pajama Factory courtyard, please visit susquehannalife.com. **SL**

You're Invited

Susquehanna Life magazines has opened a second office at the Pajama Factory, at 1307 Park Avenue, Suite 13, Williamsport. You're invited to our open house Dec. 4, 2009. Come celebrate with us and get to know the Pajama Factory and the people associated with it. RSVP by Dec. 1 at susquehannalife@gmail.com.



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