

Dedham Life

The key to your community

A woman with curly hair is working on a piece of jewelry in a workshop. She is wearing a black shirt and a necklace. In the background, there is a blue machine and a window. On the table in front of her are various tools and a cone-shaped object.

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March 2014

Behind the Bling

Metalsmithing Among the Art Happening at Mother Brook

Acclaimed Silversmiths Find New Home at Mother Brook

Opened last year, the Mother Brook Arts and Community Center features artists in a range of disciplines.

by Joe Heisler
Community contributor

It was June 2011 when silversmith Donna Leventhal and fellow artists at the deCordova Museum in Lincoln received word that the board of trustees had decided to refocus its mission on its sculpture park. The name would be changed to the deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum and the metalsmithing studio would be closed. This was tough news, but Leventhal and a handful of her colleagues were not ready to call it quits.

First challenge — secure the deCordova's highly specialized, heirloom metalsmithing tools, many of which had been purchased and donated to deCordova by Florence Hollingsworth, who was the founder of the museum's metalsmithing programs. The creation of precious metal jewelry, hollow ware (bowls, pitchers, teapots and trays that serve as containers) and objects of intricate design requires a unique set tools, and the deCordova's tool chest was long considered among the finest in New England, with some of the pieces being more than 100 years

old.

The deCordova worked on an agreement that would allow the artists to buy the extraordinary collection of more than 200 specially crafted hammers and stakes, along with an assortment of other precision equipment. The group then incorporated into an artists' collective named MetalMorphosis, and began the quest for a new home.

"Our work is well-regarded and a lot of people and institutions wanted us to join them," Leventhal said. "But we needed an ideal location for a permanent home."

After being wooed by locations throughout Massachusetts, Leventhal's mother, a resident at Newbridge on the Charles and an artist in her own right, mentioned a meeting she had attended recently in East Dedham at the former Avery Elementary School. There, she said, a new nonprofit board had formed in an effort to convert the recently closed facility into an arts and community center.

Leventhal connected with Jean Ford Webb, the newly hired executive director of the Mother Brook Arts and Community Center, or MBACC, and a relationship was formed. With approval of Dedham Town Meeting and the Board of Selectmen, MBACC signed a lease in March 2013 to take control of the old Avery building and grounds. The metalsmithing collective was poised to lease some of the building's newly designated studio spaces, which had quickly attracted more than 100 inquiries.

Nearly nine months later, MetalMorphosis is ready to open its doors in its new home with longtime deCordova instructor Laurie Savage, who will teach classes, and Kimon Yannopoulos serving as studio manager.

"We want to share our studio with the community — offer-

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Kimon Yannopoulos of MetalMorphosis paints the inside of a cabinet inside the silversmiths' space at MBACC.

Photo courtesy of Alex Jones



Tools used by the silversmiths line a cabinet in their space at the Mother Brook Arts and Community Center.

Photo courtesy of Alex Jones



From left, Deborah Pressman, Irene Briedis and Orietta Geha of MetalMorphosis stand in the hallway outside their space at the Mother Brook Arts and Community Center.
Photo courtesy of Alex Jones



Ava Fiorito, 18 months old, watches as Antoinette Hemphill leads an exercise class for new mothers in the gym at MBACC.

Photo Courtesy of Alex Jones

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ing classes that promote artisan silversmithing,” Leventhal said. “We offer a fully equipped studio with high ceilings and big windows featuring specialized tools, state-of-the-art ventilation and 12 work stations.”

Webb said the quality of the artistry by MetalMorphosis ranks among the best in New England and expects a big demand for its classes, which began in February.

“This is central to MBACC’s mission — encouraging the entire community to join in creating and celebrating the arts,”

Webb said.

True to that mission and its roots in the historic East Dedham neighborhood, MBACC has opened its classrooms for a variety of community uses and functions. The former gymnasium doubles as performance space for theatrical and musical productions as well as recreation space for the Momma Beasts’ morning workout crew. The town uses the former library as a polling station on election days. Even a local Cub Scout pack has found a home there.

Selectman Paul Reynolds, who championed the arts and community center concept while serving for more than a year on the Avery School Reuse Committee, said, “MBACC is using the arts and the art of community building to accelerate all the positive changes underway in East Dedham.”

Thanks to scores of volunteers, including Jim Ray and team at Mystic Scenic Studios of Norwood and Dedham’s Kevin Scollan of Trinity Painting, MBACC has built out its studio spaces, and they are all rented. Some of those in residence at MBACC include:

- Colleen Ellse, Letter and Lark - custom letterpress designer and printer
- Jason Bryant Parker, Whole In The Head Productions - storyboard artist/illustrator
- Patty Chang and David Kelley - new media artists and filmmakers
- Danielle LaPointe - installation artist in mixed media
- Josephine Burr - ceramic artist

Opening of Art Center

2013

The Mother Brook Arts and Community Center opened last year and features artists in various fields.



Storyboard artist and illustrator Jason Bryant Parker is one of the many artists with a space at MBACC.

Photo courtesy of Alex Jones

- Dedham School of Music - classes and performances
- Alex Jones Photography - published studio photographer

State Rep. Paul McMurtry, an East Dedham resident who serves as co-chair of the MBACC board, said he couldn't be any prouder.

"We are sustaining a historic building with a committed board of directors that shares a cultural vision of a community center that is a catalyst for economic growth and the pride of the neighborhood," McMurtry said.

Income from rentals is helping to sustain the center while the organization applies for grants and conducts private fundraising. Several capital projects are in the queue, including a new front entryway, lighting and a keyless door entry system made possible by a \$22,700 grant from Blue Hills Bank. Future plans call for an update to the heating, cooling and ventilation system, installation of an elevator and handicap-accessible bathrooms, an outside sculpture park, walking trails and access to nearby Mill Pond on Mother Brook and a café.

MBACC's inaugural art exhibition FLIRT, curated by award-winning visual artist Martha Wakefield, opened Feb. 7 and runs through mid-March.

For more information about the exhibit and MBACC in general, visit motherbrookarts.org.

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The Town's Art Center

Mother Brook Arts and Community Center sits on the banks of the historic canal that shares its name.

The Mother Brook Arts and Community Center is housed in the former Avery School at 123 High St., which is less than one mile outside Dedham Square and in the town's most economically and ethnically diverse neighborhood.

The 38,000-square-foot building is a well-built and classic early 20th century schoolhouse with large, light-filled rooms. It sits on the banks of the historic Mother Brook, the oldest man-made canal in the United States. The canal was built in 1639 to create a source of hydropower for flour and textile mills, which resulted in a handful of dams and picturesque ponds along the brook, providing a unique backdrop for an arts and community center.

The center is also located a short distance from the original Dedham Pottery factory, which operated from 1896 to 1943. Its artisans produced the world-famous crackled glaze and cobalt blue pattern; the most recognizable pattern being the "crouching rabbit" that was featured in the recent Dedham Public Art Project.

MBACC has a long-term lease with the town of Dedham to establish and operate an arts and community center to be used for the public benefit of residents of Dedham and the surrounding area.

Learn more at facebook.com/MBACC.Dedham and motherbrookarts.org —**Jean Ford Webb**



The Mother Brook Arts and Community Center is home to the silversmiths known as MetalMorphosis and various other artists.
 Image courtesy of Mother Brook Arts and Community Center