



YES ESSENTIALS®
STAIN-RESISTANT SEATS.
THE NEW SANTA FE
[Learn More](#)

[Build & Price](#)
[Locate a Dealer](#)
[Schedule a Test Drive](#)
[Payment Estimator](#)



Building community

Baldwin residents transforming old lumberyard into arts center

By **Mindie Paget**

Sunday, November 30, 2003

[Discuss / Share](#)



Thad Allender/Journal-World
Photos

An old lumberyard built in 1914 in downtown Baldwin is in the process of being transformed into an arts, cultural and social center called the Lumberyard Arts Center. Sandy Cardens, upper left, is coordinating the project at 718 High St. "We like the idea of having this space as a unique gathering place for the community," she said.

Baldwin — Sandy Cardens stands on an aging catwalk, glancing from the weathered wooden trusses to the boarded-up storage bins at the Ives-Hartley Lumber Co. and sees potential.

In her mind's eye, rooms that once stored cement and glass bustle with eager students learning to paint or throw pottery. In second-floor lofts that likely housed plywood and 2-by-4s, artists toil in modest studios. The Baldwin City Community Theatre, just days away from opening night, rehearses a production on a fully equipped stage at the north end of the building. And shoppers browse the streetfront gallery, occasionally buying work by local artists on display there.

But today, Cardens needs a heavy coat and scarf to shake off the winter cold seeping through the uninsulated tin walls. Three truckloads of gravel coat the floor of the 140-foot-long center "hallway," and although volunteers have labored to clear decades of debris and soft, rotten wood, this still just looks like an abandoned lumberyard.

But give it time, Cardens says.

"We like the idea of having this space as a unique gathering place for the community. Somebody wanted to have a wedding in here already, and it's just the way it is," she says, gesturing toward the unrefined interior.

Below the permanent stamped signs on the old building's brick facade that read "1914" and "Ives-Hartley Lumber Co.," a temporary sign announces the proposed future of the local landmark: "Lumberyard Arts Center, Under Construction."

Though Cardens and her steering committee don't yet own the building, they're hoping to have secured a temporary lease from the Baldwin State Bank by the first of next year. They've already raised \$10,000 toward the \$400,000 to \$500,000 they believe it will take to preserve -- not restore -- the building and customize it to meet their needs.

When will it be ready to roll?

"I have a target date," Cardens says wistfully. "Two years from the first meeting: June 2005."

Downtown fixture

The Ives-Hartley building has its roots in practicality.

Two civic-minded businessmen, Mr. Ives and his son-in-law Mr. Hartley, owned a lumberyard at the turn of the 20th century in what was once known as West Baldwin. They decided to rebuild in downtown Baldwin and, despite Ives' death, Hartley erected the new building in 1914. The business, with its brick facade, has been a community fixture ever since.

Linda Ballinger, arts center steering committee member and president of the Baldwin City Community Theatre board, was born in 1943 in Baldwin and recalls a little shoe and leather



Thad Allender/Journal-World
Photo

Artwork for sale decorates one of four rooms that project backers hope to turn into art classrooms in the old Ives-Hartley Lumber

repair shop that occupied the west window-front office for as far back as she can remember. She also recollects using the long central driveway between the lumber racks to build floats for homecoming parades during junior high and high school in the 1950s and '60s.

"It's always been a place for community gathering," she says.

Many people could benefit from turning the building, which until a year ago housed Baldwin Lumber Co., into an arts center, Ballinger says, not the least of which would be the community theater, which has no permanent home of its own. For five of the past six years, plays were performed on a rented outdoor stage that cost \$4,000 to \$5,000 before production expenses.

"Many of those years, we broke even or we went in the hole, and that's not the way to run a theater," Ballinger says. "We need another source for staging here. This (the arts center) is the opportune way of being able to do that."

The committee wants to keep the arts center open to fulfill as many community venue needs as possible. That might mean allowing the police force to give training sessions there, for example. It also will mean charging only a nominal fee to rent the space or take art classes.

"We're not out to make any money," steering committee member Diane Niehoff says. "We just want to be able to pay our utilities and taxes."

Energizing opportunity

Cardens, one of more than 30 artists working in Baldwin, had been eyeballing the building for months before she realized Baldwin residents Diane and Jim Niehoff also had been toying with ideas for preserving it.

"We just didn't want to see it fall down," Diane says. "We'd like to keep downtown Baldwin alive and try to think of what the best use of a building like that would be. Some had talked about putting offices in there, but that doesn't bring lots of people to downtown."

One of Diane's favorite places to shop in Dallas is an old dairy barn that's been converted to retail spaces for artists and merchants.

"I could see something like that happening here," she says. "We have a very active theater group in Baldwin. ... We have a very active arts council."

"I'm a real dreamer. I can see possibilities in a lot of old things."

So far, the community seems energized about the possibilities as well. About 50 people attended the initial public meeting in June 2002, when Cardens and the committee introduced their vision for the building. More than 50 volunteers -- including Rep. Tom Holland, D-Baldwin -- have logged upwards of 300 hours on designated work days, and skilled workers have provided specialty services. Jim Niehoff, owner of Niehoff Heating and Air, for instance, did electrical work, repaired the roof and added heating and ductwork.

"We're just getting so much help from so many people," Cardens says. "I'm just amazed."



Thad Allender/Journal-World
Photo

A passer-by peeks into what organizers hope will become an arts and cultural center in downtown Baldwin. Once a lumberyard, the facility would house a theater, kitchen, four classrooms, a retail gallery space and possibly artists' studios.

New life

Artists had their first art show and sale in the future gallery space Nov. 22 and sold \$700 worth of work. Hanging on the back wall of the gallery, which also would serve as the arts center office, is a preliminary floorplan. It shows a large proscenium-style stage taking up the back third of the building, a kitchen, four classrooms and several offices. Cardens would like to pave the front two-thirds of the central driveway with bricks to create a courtyard.

"The city has about 50,000 bricks I'm trying to talk them into giving us," she says.

As for other architectural notions, the committee is hoping to be inspired by the ideas of Kansas State University architecture students who are taking on the building as a third-year studio project next semester.

Don Watts, the architecture professor teaching the class of about 16 students, says working with people who are interested in the arts will be a plus.

Co. building. Other plans for the structure at 718 High St. in Baldwin include a fully equipped stage, a retail gallery space, a Chamber of Commerce office and a brick-paved courtyard.

"I see this as a wonderful opportunity for my students to not only have experience with meeting the public and discussing design, but in this case a very informed public of artisans in their own right who will be asking really good questions and helping provide a kind of educational experience which you don't get in a normal classroom," he says.

The students will visit the site and meet with the community before developing designs. Then steering committee members will travel to Manhattan to give input midway through the design process before the students return to Baldwin to present their ideas.

Watts characterizes the building's style as vernacular.

"It's just a brick front and a very practical kind of construction that, because of its simplicity, will lend itself to adaptability well," he says. "It's basically a basilica type of space with a large trussed central aisle. For a lumberyard, that sounds pretty uppity, but that's what's going on there."

"Quality buildings take on many lives," he continues. "We're simply looking at a way to bring a new life to this old lumberyard."

That's what Cardens wants, too.

As she meanders through the building, shivering in the winter cold, she can't help but smile as she talks about the possibility of leaving the aged wood the way it is and adding Victorian style light fixtures to fill in for the warm light that pours through the building's upper windows during the day.

"In the summer," Cardens says, "the west light comes in these windows, and it just glows in here."

[Print](#) [Favorite](#) [Comment](#)

[E-mail to a friend](#)

[Facebook](#)

[Tweet](#)

[LinkedIn](#)

[StumbleUpon](#)

[Google +](#)

[More sharing options](#)

Comments

Use the comment form below to begin a discussion about this content.

Commenting has been disabled for this item.

Events

[Today](#)
[Best Bets](#)
[National tours](#)
[Local bands](#)
[Music venues](#)
[Galleries](#)
[Theaters](#)
[Submit an event](#)

Latest

[Headlines](#)
[Classifieds](#)
[Style scout](#)
[Townie guide](#)
[Blogs](#)
[Podcasts](#)
[Video](#)

Music

[News](#)
[Turnpike](#)
[Reviews](#)
[Bands](#)
[Music videos](#)

Movies

[Showtimes](#)
[Scene Stealers](#)
[Theaters](#)

Food

[Find restaurants](#)
[Open now](#)
[Delivery](#)

Nightlife

[Bars & Clubs](#)
[Drink Specials](#)
[Tonight's events](#)

More

[Party Pix](#)
[Crossword](#)
[Comics](#)
[Deadwood archive](#)
[Store](#)
[Contact us](#)
[Lawrence Brides](#)

Contents of this site are © Copyright 2013 lawrence.com. All rights reserved. [Contact us](#). [Privacy policy](#). [DMCA Notice](#). [RSS](#). [Jobs](#).