



Tri-CitiesNews from Batavia, Geneva and St. Charles
By Jamie Greco, Special to the Tribune
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Batavia's Water Street Studios expands



Nick and Jake Battista learned about print making from Joe Mastroianni when they visited the Water Street Studios Print Lab in St. Charles. (For the Tribune, Jamie Greco)

Water Street Studios in Batavia is expanding — and not just as a result of its new print lab in St. Charles.

Jim Kirkhoff, director of development at the studios, says the new location also fulfills the organization's mission to expand the definition of what makes a neighborhood.

"It was a strategic decision by our board to reach out further into our community — and not just the artistic community but the geographic community," Kirkhoff said. "We're not Batavia; we're not just the Fox Valley; we're not just Kane County; we are an organization that focuses on creating community through the arts, and we have a very wide interpretation on what that community is."

Water Street Studios in Batavia is an artists community as well as a gallery that rents studios to artists. The expansion into St. Charles offers specialized printing equipment for artists to use.

Before the doors at 117 W. Main St., in St. Charles, opened July 1, Water Street Studios had obtained the equipment for a print lab through grants from the Community Foundation of the Fox River Valley and the Kane County Riverboat Fund Program, but it lacked space for the bulky equipment.

"We've been able to buy really high-end professional equipment for printmaking, metal work, welding and ceramics," Kirkhoff said.

The equipment for the mediums of etchings, prints, screen printing, jet printing and lithographs can be cost-prohibitive for many artists.

"The presses cost around \$4,000 or \$5,000, and the inkjet printer, the ink cartridge is over \$1,000," Kirkhoff said. "We're doing this for artists just coming out of school or artists who have taken classes with us and want to transition to more independent work."

Joe Mastroianni, who had taken classes in relief printmaking at Water Street Studios in Batavia, drives in from Naperville to avail himself of the equipment.

"I have art supplies all over my living room, but in our town house, I can't put in a big press like this. Plus it's expensive," he said.

Artists can book the studio once they have demonstrated knowledge of the equipment, either through completing classes at the studio or through previous experience.

"We have different membership fees for these programs," Kirkhoff said. "They can become a one-year member, or, with the print lab, they can book four-hour blocks."

The lab can be a challenge to find. It is tucked into the basement of Biggby Coffee on Illinois Route 31. Although it has a Main Street address, the facility has no access from the street. To enter the lab, visitors need to go through the courtyard behind the Main Street building.

Still, 14-year-old Jake Battista of St. Charles and 12-year-old brother Nick managed to run across the workshop on a recent trip to an adjacent yogurt shop. Though they weren't planning to find a new artistic interest, both boys left thinking classes might be in order.

"I like all art," said Jake after seeing a demonstration of the equipment. "I'd love to take a class."

Said Nick: "I wish art at school was more of a challenge. It's kind of cool here because it might be a little more of challenge."

For more information about the Water Street Studios Print Lab, go to waterstreetstudios.com.
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