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FEATURED

New MakerSpace, thrift store to 'reimagine' ReUse Industries mission

From staff reports
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A new MakerSpace will exist in the old ReUse location, but under a partnership among local organizations pooling resources and skills. File art by Terry Smith.

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A new MakerSpace and thrift store will soon open at the former Reuse location on West Union Street.

ReUse Industries ceased operations in February, with leaders of the nonprofit citing an inability to “meet its financial obligations,” The Athens NEWS previously reported.

Rural Action CEO Debbie Phillips told The NEWS that the new entities are yet to be named, but they will, in part, revive the mission of ReUse Industries.

The MakerSpace and thrift shop are both products of numerous meetings among local nonprofits that followed the closure of Reuse, with one meeting in particular garnering more than 60 attendees from multiple community organizations.

Phillips commented that each non-profit in the partnership involved in the making of these new entities — Rural Action, the Appalachian Center for Economic Networks (ACEnet), Habitat for Humanity of Southeast Ohio, Passion Works Studio, Zero Waste Event Productions, Athens Public Libraries and Athens Hocking Recycling Center — has an area of expertise it hopes to bring to the table.

ACEnet, for example, will spearhead the operations of the MakerSpace.

“ACEnet is immensely gratified to contribute our entrepreneurial support and expertise with other community collaborators to reimagine the Athens MakerSpace,” Leslie Schaller, director of programs at ACEnet, said in a Rural Action press release. “We appreciate the critical role Rural Action has assumed to preserve the space and equipment that local makers need to build skills, engage in product design, and launch their creative enterprises.”

The new MakerSpace plans to offer membership tiers that include access to workshop spaces, including those dedicated to fabrics, textiles, metal, wood and plastics.

The MakerSpace will also offer access to technical assistance and business planning for local entrepreneurs interested in taking their craft or skill to market or further develop an existing business, according to a Rural Action press release.

ReUse Industries kicked off operations in 1994, according to its website, “when a committee of community volunteers (was) pulled together by Rural Action to establish an ‘Ultimate Recycling Center’ with a sustainable economic development mission: to promote, support, sponsor and conduct economic development activities, including research, job creation, job training and business development, that utilize waste and discarded resources.”

Its mission, according to the ReUse Facebook page, is “to promote, support, sponsor and conduct economic development activities, including research, job creation, job training and business development, that utilize waste and discarded resources.”

ReUse previously operated a facility on U.S. Rt. 50, west of Albany, where people could donate reusable furniture, housewares, toys, electronics, office supplies, building materials among others; and/or buy restored versions of those goods, all with the intention of diverting reusable goods away from the landfill and boosting local economic development.

To kick off the opening of the MakerSpace and thrift shop, an upcoming recycling event will occur in the parking lot of their West Union Street location from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Sept. 26.

Simultaneously, an open house will occur from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. that day.

Staff will accept a variety of materials, including mattresses; e-waste (including electronic components); rechargeable batteries; all metal items; medical supplies and equipment (no medicine); clothing and textiles; and 30-gallon bags of trash, which will cost \$3 per bag.

All recyclable items collected during the event will go to local and regional businesses to be recycled or up-cycled, Ed Newman, zero waste director at Rural Action, said in a press release.

“The partners involved share a vision of developing a stronger culture of entrepreneurship in the region while promoting reuse and up-cycling to deepen our zero waste economy,” Phillips said in a media statement. “We have a lot of talent and creativity in our community. We want to develop infrastructure and ways to support those individuals and enterprises that will create wealth, reduce poverty, increase creativity, restore the environment and promote a sense of hope and possibility in our community.”

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