

Entertainment & Life

Former Washburn professor to open ceramics studio, gallery and classroom in NOTO Arts District

By Savanna Maue

Posted Dec 15, 2018 at 12:15 PM

Updated Dec 16, 2018 at 8:46 PM

With her new studio, Monette Mark is encouraging her students to get their hands dirty.

Earlier this month, Mark opened Fire Me Up Ceramics and Fine Art Studios, a studio space for 15 ceramicists, a soon-to-be studio space for herself, and a classroom for various ceramics classes.

Mark and her husband bought 1000 N. Kansas Ave., formerly Junkers Anonymous, in early November, and have since been working to prepare for classes.

Two weeks after closing on the property, Mark helped host the 53rd annual Kansas Artists Craftsmen Association Conference, where guest artists from around the state visited her new space — in all its disheveled glory — to collaborate on a future NOTO statue and attend a workshop hosted by Mark on recycling and creating kilns.

Mark has been a teacher for about 11 years, teaching at Washburn University and Wichita State University. While at Washburn, Mark said she began to realize how great the need was for more ceramic studios in Topeka.

“I’ve talked to people who home school, I talk to Scouts who say, ‘We don’t have any place to get our ceramics badges,’ and people who say, ‘We really need a place for our kids to get an art education, and classes during the daytime when our kids can go,’ and I said, ‘Well, that’s what we’re going to do,’” Mark said.

Mark pointed out Topeka doesn't have a citywide arts center like other surrounding communities, and while the Mulvane Art Museum does offer classes, they often fill up quickly.

By February, Mark said, she hopes to be able to offer classes and continue to improve the utilization of her building.

Mark already has filled all her studio spaces. Past students at Washburn were interested, as well as her friends and even artists from Washburn's over-60 audit program.

"The age range is going to be vast, which is really good," Mark said. "It was really good at Washburn, as well, because the people with the most experience weren't always the older people, but the ones with more experience would help the other person who didn't have it."

Security systems and keypad access also are in the works, Mark said, allowing adult students or those with rented studios to come and go 24/7.

As for the rest of the building, the space has been divided into a gallery, studios and, on the second floor, an office space, apartments and artist residencies.

"Artists can come here, have a place to live and have a place to work," Mark said. "And also it's great to be close to an artistic community."

Location was a major factor when choosing her building, Mark said, and having friends in the NOTO Arts District was helpful when finding the right space.

"Since NOTO is a very small, people talk," Mark said with a smile. "I wanted to be a part of NOTO and the community and get more people excited about ceramics."

To learn more about the studios, visit firemeupceramics.com or the Fire Me Up Ceramics Facebook page. To register and learn more about classes, call Mark at (785) 766-4667.

Fire Me Up ceramics is open to the public for soft openings from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Dec. 16 and 23.