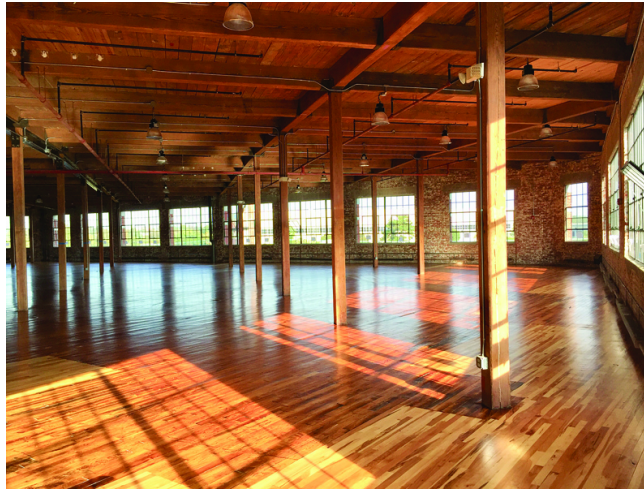


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October 11, 2017

Trenton-based Nonprofit Isles to Celebrate Mill One Social Profit Center With Fall Fest



OLD MILL, NEW LOOK: A view of the interior of Isles' Mill One facility, a historic mill in the final stages of renovation, that will serve as the home of the organization's Social Profit Center. (Photo courtesy of Isles, Inc.)

By Doug Wallack

On Saturday, October 21, Trenton-based nonprofit Isles will hold its first ever Fall Fest fundraiser in the new Social Profit Center at Mill One in Hamilton. The event will feature food and drink from local restaurants and vendors, along with performances and works from area musicians and artists. The Fall Fest is meant to showcase the greater Trenton community and to celebrate the renovation of Mill One — the historic mill building on the Hamilton-Trenton border that Isles purchased in 2006. Since then, Isles has been rehabilitating the formerly vacant mill in order to transform the striking brick and timber building into a mixed-use facility that will house not only Isles' own facilities and offices, but also nonprofit and for profit businesses, artists' studios, and residential units.

Founded in 1981, Isles seeks to fulfill its mission of "foster[ing] self-reliant families and healthy, sustainable communities" through a wide array of community development and environmental programs. Isles trains and educates Trenton residents through an alternative high school and vocational training programs, giving them the skills to support themselves. They also offer financial services to help build their clients' credit and increase savings. Isles works to improve the health of the communities in which it operates by supporting over 60 community gardens in Trenton, and by launching lead testing and remediation efforts for thousands of homes across the city.

Isles also plays a role in urban planning, collaborating with community stakeholders to plan and develop Trenton real estate for affordable housing, arts and cultural facilities, open space, and more. It is an unusually broad portfolio of activities, especially given the tendency of nonprofits to focus on a few very pointed services or products, but Isles founder and CEO Marty Johnson believes that the complexity and dynamism of communities demand a multifaceted approach. Under his direction, Isles follows best practices from many community development organizations, implementing a diversity of “light-touch, low-cost interventions.” Something about this must work, as Isles has received plaudits from the likes of the EPA, the White House, and the United Nations.

Mill One, which is now in its final stages of renovation, furthers Isles’ work in a number of arenas. When completed, Isles hopes that the facility will become a center of community and an arts and cultural hub that — along with the nearby Grounds For Sculpture — will anchor Hamilton Township’s Arts and Culture Overlay district. Isles also expects that, as a host to businesses and nonprofits, Mill One will benefit the local economy. Literacy New Jersey, Mercer County is one of the facility’s early tenants, and Program Director Catherine Mitch says that her organization looks forward to using Mill One’s shared spaces for volunteer training, in addition to benefitting from the good vibes of working alongside other nonprofits. Johnson says Isles anticipates that colocating and sharing resources and ideas in this manner will help Mill One’s nonprofit tenants cut costs and flourish.

Beyond the organizations and individuals it will host, and the work that will happen in it, Mill One is also an impressive building with a rich history. Designed by architect William Poland, the mill was built in 1897 by the V. Henry Rothschild Company as a clothing factory. Acquired by Straus Woolen Mills at the turn of the century, the mill was the site of a massive and very nearly explosive worker’s strike in 1913 that saw hundreds of irate working women chase an official out of the factory and into a nearby trolley car. The mill housed a number of tenants throughout the 20th century — most of them clothing factories of one type or another — but by the late 1980s it lay vacant.

The Isles renovation refurbishes many of the mill’s original features. Princeton University’s Department of Engineering rebuilt the enormous 1890s mechanical clock that sat in the mill’s clock tower. Isles took pains, too, to restore the mill’s handsome original brickwork. But much is new as well. Mill One has been updated as an environmentally-friendly building with modern interiors, structural improvements, new plumbing and electrical lines, and a new roof that is variously covered in a large solar array, a rooftop garden, and a series of skylights that leave the interior awash in daylight. Years of work have breathed new life into the old mill.

The Fall Fest will both commemorate this work and anticipate all that is to come at Mill One. By integrating so many community organizations in the celebration, “the event is in keeping with what the space is going to become,” says Isles Resource Development Manager Karen Hollywood. The Trenton Circus Squad will perform, and artists — including Mill One artists-in-residence Malcolm Bray — will demonstrate their practice to attendees. Food and drink will come from over a dozen local restaurants and vendors, including The Cheesecake Lady, 1911 Smokehouse, and Jersey Cider Works. Some of the evening’s fare will even integrate ingredients from Isles’ own gardens.

The Fall Fest will take place at 5:30 p.m. on Saturday, October 21 at Mill One, 1 N Johnston Avenue, Hamilton. For tickets and additional information, visit isles.org/features/islesfallfest or call Karen Hollywood at (609) 341-4722.