

CHRISTIE LANE INDUSTRIES 'ADDING VALUE' TO THE COMMUNITY

By ZOE GRESZLER

Here's why the agency is now purchasing and renovating blighted properties



Christie Lane Industries transformed the former Crider Jewelers at 16 W. Main St. into 16W — a downtown space used for special events for CLI and its partners or as a rental facility for public use.

Many have seen the construction that has gone on, and continues, downtown at 16 W. Main Street and 38 W. Seminary St. as Christie Lane Industries (CLI) complies with new state standards.

For the local organization aimed at providing services to help those with developmental disabilities, while the projects started as a way to comply with the laws and mandates, they have turned into much more.

"I think a lot of it is tied to the rules that are set by the state of Ohio that we are

being charged with integrating folks more into the community," executive director Holly Binkley said of the new buildings CLI has taken over.

"By 2020 we will no longer be allowed to operate a segregated workshop model,

"We're seeking public input saying 'OK, we have this transition we're charged with, how does the community want to see CLI futuristically? What kind of things can we contribute to the community, something that would A) benefit the folks that we serve and B) enrich the community overall. So it's kind of tied to that."

"It's about building community

services and it's about about building communities," executive director Jen Swicker said. "That's the main take away and main focuses that we have — to build services, not only for ourselves but for the community at large."

"The transformation that we see ourselves making is purchasing blighted properties within the local area and then remodeling those, fixing them up so they serve multiple purposes," Binkley added.

Those purposes include building the community and creating a site for the individuals CLI serves, especially those "on the non-vocational side of things."



"We would really like to target those folks in breaking up this large workshop model and so hubs that are within the community and make the community easily accessible for these folks that are on the non-vocational side of things (is what we want)," Binkley said.

"And there's a huge downtown movement going on with the Imagine Norwalk stuff that's going on and so we feel that it's a really good area of town that we want to be linked in. On Seminary Street the house we purchased is right on the back side of Suhr Park and is a really accessible link into the downtown area."

The move to privatization has brought several changes for CLI, but Binkley and Swicker said the biggest came when they realized CLI "can no longer be this stagnant agency."

"That is probably the most exciting part about CLI, that we have such a robust and dynamic strategic plan," CEO John Schwartz said, agreeing CLI was anything but stagnant.

"We've got to continue to grow the services we provide and a lot of that growth is going to be growing into the community; so we've got these small hubs that enrich the community," she said.

Swicker said 16W and the Seminary Street property provide something that the community has been asking for — to be a part of the big picture.

"People are asking for something different," she said. "Individuals are asking to be more a part of the community. Not just go and tour their community but to be an active part and to be contributing members. There are so many things that they can do. And part of (these downtown locations) is to be an education piece for the community at large."

That education Swicker said comes in the form of letting others know that the individuals CLI helps want to serve the community too. She said they have "many skills and abilities that can contribute" to the betterment of the community, just like anyone else.

It's been a big move for the clients as well. Swicker said "they're growing in their independence and saying 'I want to be a part of that,'" something they hope these hubs will help with.

"And they are telling us 'We want to volunteer here and work there and we want to use the rec center and play and swim and do whatever. So the big focus is to show they want to show that they have abilities and can contribute too, just like you or I. They just might do it a little differently or might take a little longer to do something."

Binkley said the hubs hopefully will aid in breaking down any stigma left in the community. She hopes the CLI "adding value to the community" will "show value that the folks that we serve have as well."

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Continued on page 34 >>



Christie Lane Industries recently purchased this house at 38 W. Seminary St. The plan is to provide community-based services and activities on the first floor and offices on the second floor. CLI intends to devote the vacant lot at 36 W. Seminary St. to outdoor public events.

there for 2018. They can do reception dinners. People can bring in their own food, can hire a caterer and have alcohol. There's an occupancy for 75 in that space."

Swicker said things are going "very well" at 16W, which she attributes to its uniqueness, something they hope translates into their Seminary Street project as well.

"It's a different space and there's nothing like it around here," she said. "That's one of the things we want to be — unique in what we're bringing to the community. The new space (on Seminary) will be unique too. We're hoping it will be for a community arts facility. Arts as in photography, painting, etc. That will also be available to rent to the public."

Plans for this location are exciting, according to Schwartz.

"We know that it will be the daily base of operations for between three to six individuals who require facility-based supports," he said.

"We also know that we intend to both go out from there into the community, but also to build programs that will bring the community into our space. It will be art-based, but that's a pretty broad category. We're going to have to build this, which typically means a ongoing process ... CLI is following its strategic plan."

"It's just going to be a very clean space, a very large, open space, like a creativity space is how I see it," Binkley added. "I can see something like from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. it could be an open studio time and local artists could come in and do something creative alongside our folks that receive services here at Christie Lane (Industries)."

Swicker agreed, adding there was an addition to the house that was removed, creating an additional space next the to the building for further development.

"(I imagine it) like a studio space for local artists for what have you to just to come in and create. We also have that lot next to it, a green space. We're hoping to develop that for something. We've talked about community gardens, farmer's markets, yoga on the lawn, whatever somebody would want to use that space for, we're hoping to be able to create that environment so anyone who would want to create, could come and in utilize that space."

Christie Lane has been busy, but the plans haven't stopped. The organization plans to continue to develop additional hubs throughout the community, allowing their clients to integrate more, add value to the community and fill gaps where there are needs.

"That's kind of our strategic plan down the road," Binkley said. "We don't know how many more hubs at this point but there have been lots of ideas thrown out. In three years we want to completely faze out 100 percent of the non-vocational part of the program that happens here — it will be completely community based."

For more information or to find out how to partner with CLI on this or future projects, email holly@firelandslocal.com.

"We're providing value to the community," she said. "That's a natural transition of the folks that we serve too."

Christie Lane Industries has owned 16W, at 16 W. Main St., for about three years. It took the organization about a year to get the former Crider Jewelry store off the ground and running as a brand new facility Swicker said, due to updates and renovations that were needed.

"There was tons — tons — of work," Binkley said. "We could have invested in some strip mall space, somewhere off the beaten path, but we really wanted to have a presence in community and have CLI as a contributor to the community. They purchased this space that had been for sale and was doing nothing and now it's just this beautiful, updated, renovated space that serves kind of trifold."

16W is used for special events for Christie Lane, events hosted by Christie Lane for a special partnership and as a rental facility available for the public's use.

The space once featuring drop down ceilings, carpet, glass jewelry counters and faux wood columns now has been reconstructed into a beautiful and modern open concept entertaining space. The space is clearly visible with the front wall being floor to ceiling pull-away glass doors. The drop down ceiling used previously was removed to reveal the original decorative plaster ceiling and molding.

Though the space's day-to-day use include offices, services and rentals.

It has also proved to be very beneficial in partnerships with other local businesses and organization where they host events and help raise money for various deserving causes. Such events have raised money for Piggyback Foundation, senior services, the Huron County Humane Society and even allowed the organization to cut a \$900 check to the Fire department's Operation Warm. some of the fundraising activities they've held include a wine and chocolate pairing party, Cinco de Mayo, a beer and bourbon event and even a jukebox event.

"The third piece of this building is it is for rent to the public for baby showers, graduation parties, business meetings, whatever anyone would like," Binkley said. "We've even booked a wedding

SEPARATION — ONE YEAR LATER

The Huron County Board of Developmental Disabilities (HCBDD) and Christie Lane Industries (CLI) finalized a carefully planned and gradual business separation in July 2016 that was more than two years in the making.

The split — brought about because of state and federal rule changes — resulted in CLI becoming a completely independent provider of adult day services, no longer associated with HCBDD in a business sense, although it continues to lease the building next to the county board's offices on South Norwalk Road through an interagency agreement with HCBDD and the Huron County commissioners.

"We provide funding for services from multiple providers chosen by the people we support," said HCBDD superintendent Kari Smith. "CLI is no different from any other provider now that they are not connected with us."

"They decide how to do business, what properties they want to purchase, the events they choose to promote and what their overall philosophy and approach will be. The change has been complicated to explain at times, especially since 'Christie Lane' has been such a defining name for all the services to people with developmental disabilities for so many years in Huron County. And HCBDD still operates Christie Lane School here in Norwalk, which may add to some of the confusion about the relationship between CLI and the county board."

Another area that may be unclear to taxpayers after the separation, said Smith, is the continued need for local funding for Huron County Board of DD services.

"We pay for services provided to over 600 people every year, before birth and throughout all life stages," she said. "The number of people in need of our services doesn't decrease, no matter who the providers might be. We make use of local levy dollars to draw down Medicaid funding; for every \$40 of local tax money we collect, we're able to get another \$60 through Medicaid waiver programs to pay for more services for more people over the course of their lifetimes. We've been fortunate to have great support from Huron County taxpayers in those efforts throughout our more than 60-year history. That support will always be both needed and appreciated."

HCBDD continues to offer Help Me Grow Home Visiting, Early Intervention, the Christie Lane School program, service and support administration, Family Support Services, job development, community recreation, community connections, self-advocacy group, Aktion Club, provider relations and recruitment and monitoring of all services.

The county board also pays for the PLAY Project and physical, occupational and speech therapies for children, Artists' Open Studio, adult day services, job coaching and follow-along, transportation, and Medicaid waivers that provide for transportation, home modifications, adaptive equipment, and in-home supports from provider agencies. **DN**

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