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**Title: Artists nest in Birdtown factory Lakewood considers imitating Cleveland's creative live-work districts**

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Lakewood - Workers on the first floor of the Lake Erie Building dart around on forklifts moving coils of metal. Big pieces of equipment whir as metal is heated and formed.

It is a far cry from the work under way on the second floor of the century-old factory.

Martha Cliffler cuts glass plates into pieces for mosaics. Next door, Robb Durr finishes a larger-than-life foam figure of "Crocodile Hunter" Steve Irwin. Down a hall, decorated with paintings, ornamental lights and throw rugs, Phyllis Fannin demonstrates how prints are made on her paper press.

In the midst of all this, dogs Oscar, Carl and Bailey wander through the cluster of studios looking for toys. And during a break, the dogs' owners muse about their comfortable, creative space and the art they create there.

"All of us have grown with the comfort around us," said Fannin, a former art teacher at Lakewood High School. "That's the beauty of the community here. We all respect each other."

Fannin and the half-dozen other artists may seem out of place in this industrial setting, but they are welcomed by city officials, who hope to create as many as three neighborhood arts districts. The Lake Erie Building adjoins the historic Birdtown neighborhood, **one** of the areas envisioned as an arts district.

Along with using special signs, landscape and promotions, the city proposes zoning that would allow artists to live where they work, similar to the live-work districts that exist in Cleveland, said Tom Jordan, the city's planning and development director.

A 22-block area around St. Clair and Superior avenues, recently named the Cleveland Art Quarter, is home or studio space for about 500 artists. The special zoning was created six years ago.

To shine the spotlight on Lakewood's most secluded artists, the city is co-sponsoring an open house June 21 at the Lake Erie Building. The event runs 4 to 6:30 p.m.

The Lake Erie Building is part of an 18-acre complex on Lakewood's East Side. The structure was built in the early 1900s as an automobile factory for Templar, advertised as "The Superfine Small Car."

The company went bankrupt in 1924.

Lake Erie Screw Corp., an industrial-fastener manufacturer, was a tenant for many years.

The building is now owned by **Pride One Omni** in Medina, and about 70 percent of the building is occupied, primarily with manufacturing companies.

The upstairs tenants have dubbed themselves the Screw Factory Artists.

The building's spaciousness, with lots of windows, high ceilings and solid, soundproof walls, is ideal for potter Kristen Cliffler, whose latest project is ceramic cupcakes and pies that convey subtle messages about motherhood and sexuality.

"We totally keep to ourselves unless we need an opinion," said Cliffler, who can just yell over a room divider to ask her mother's advice.

Martha Cliffler scours flea markets, thrift stores, even neighbors' trash looking for dishes, figurines, knick-knacks and the like that she can cut up, paint and glue to shadow boxes, old toys and household appliances. Representative of her work is "Our Lady of the Ironing Board," an ironing board covered with medals, crosses and other religious artifacts.

Also sharing space with the Clifflers are pastel artist Ann Caywood Brown, who likes to slip a pair of red shoes into her landscapes, and Candace Rich, who makes lampwork glass beads.

Next door is sculptor Durr, who makes life-size figures out of bronze.

"I love coming into my little world," said Durr, who has created a living-room-type space in a corner of the studio.

At the other end of the hallway are Fannin and her former art student, Randy Rigutto, a painter. Occasionally socializing gets in the way of creating art, Rigutto said.

"We can talk about anything, for any length of time," he said, laughing. Even the night security guard sometimes weighs in with his comments about Rigutto's large canvas paintings.

"It's just nice to hear what I'm not getting and what I am getting," he said.

Fannin's artwork ranges from colorful folded paper designs to etchings to decorated plastic torso figures. She incorporates a lot of 1950s images, like trading stamps, dress patterns and paper dolls, combining humor with sarcasm.

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Caption:

Artists such as Robb Durr, who crafted this angel, are welcomed by city officials, who hope to create as many as three neighborhood arts districts.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHRIS STEPHENS THE PLAIN DEALER

Phyllis Fannin holds Oscar, who comes to work with his owner, Kristen Cliffel, right. Most days Fannin also brings her dog, Bailey, to the studio.

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Robb Durr designed a talking action figure of "Crocodile Hunter" Steve Irwin for K&M International in Twinsburg, where he works. As part of that promotion, Durr made this huge foam figure, which is now on its way to an Australian tourism expo.

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