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## Clayworks helps people get their hands dirty

Nonprofit group lets artists get creative but also reaches into the life of the city.

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Michael J. Solender for Neighbors of the City. His column is called 'neighborhoods'



Clayworks is a community-based nonprofit educational organization. COURTESY CLAYWORKS -

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Reach Clayworks, 301 East Ninth St., No. 150, at 704-344-0795 or [www.clayworksinc.org](http://www.clayworksinc.org). Muddy Fun Days will be held 10 a.m.-noon and 1-3 p.m. Jan. 22 and Feb. 5. Advance registration is required.

For a growing number of Charlotte-area pottery enthusiasts, there is no substitute for getting your hands muddy as the purest and most enjoyable form of creative therapy.

That is according to Adrienne Dellinger, executive director of Clayworks, a community-based nonprofit educational organization dedicated to promoting and developing artists and the ceramic arts through classes, workshops, community outreach and gallery and studio space.

While Clayworks has been in existence for more than three decades, many in the Charlotte community are unaware of the programs it offers or the way in which it touches the community.

Clayworks became an independent organization in 2005, after stints operating under the Spirit Square Center for Arts & Education and the McColl Center for Visual Art.

During the past several years, the organization has expanded its offerings beyond ceramics classes to include specialized wo

ceramists and a gallery that promotes and sells the work of faculty and professional artists.

"We've actually picked up students during the recession," says Clayworks Board President Pam Davis. "There is a genuine sense of community amongst our program participants and resident artists. We provide the opportunity to do something creative, allowing people to take their mind off their troubles and interact and learn from people with similar interests."

The studio offers beginning, intermediate and advanced courses, from beginning wheel and hand-building to white ware and sculpture techniques. Each of Clayworks' instructors has a degree in ceramics, and the majority are professional artists who have exhibited in regional and national venues.

The organization provides rental studio space, access to materials and kilns, all accessible 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Dellinger is fond of saying, "Clay doesn't wait for you," so the facility needs to be available when the clay is ready to be worked.

Muddy Fun Days are offered monthly and are two-hour workshops open to the public through advance registration and a small fee. The workshops are a great way to get a hands-on introduction to ceramics and gauge your interest.

Community outreach is a large part of the mission at Clayworks. In addition to offering workshops and demonstrations for Charlotte-area schools, Clayworks has partnered with Charlotte's YWCA to offer after-school programs for disadvantaged youths.

"Transportation is really a critical need for many of the kids we serve, so we pack up and go to where they are," said Dellinger. The program has been offered at the Belmont, Park Road and the South Side Ys, allowing children to make ceramic pieces that are taken back to Clayworks for firing, then returned to the kids.

"You can really see children's confidence build and know that you are making a positive impact," said Dellinger.

Another huge contribution Clayworks and its supporters make to the community is through the Empty Bowls program, an annual fundraiser for Second Harvest Food Bank.

Donors buy bowls, with the proceeds going to support the food bank.

"We have a studio-wide commitment to the program," said Dellinger. "Each of our artists makes bowls, and we are consistently the largest provider of bowls ... supplying 300 or so bowls each year."

In its quest to become the premier nonprofit ceramics organization in the Southeast, Clayworks is moving to a new facility that will more than double its space and dramatically increase its capacity to serve the community.

The move, which will take place this spring, is a direct result of the increased demand for classes and studio space. The number of students has increased from an average of 55 per session in 2005 to an average of 110 per session in fiscal year 2009. For the first time in the organization's history, students were turned away in winter 2010, due to lack of work shelves.

Clayworks will move from its East Ninth Street location uptown to Monroe Road in the Oakhurst neighborhood. Clayworks generates 70 percent of its revenue through classes, sales and workshops. Additional funding comes from grants and contributions.

The group's capital campaign is under way with hopes of generating much of the \$1.1 million it will take for the purchase and furnishing of the new facility.

Michael J. Solender is a local freelance writer. You can reach him at [michaelsolender@gmail.com](mailto:michaelsolender@gmail.com).

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