

Clifton Crafthouse Co-op Receives \$357,534 USDA Grant

Clifton Crafthouse Co-op awarded Rural Business Development Grant for local taproom, commercial kitchen, community event space, and affordable housing project.

CLIFTON, OH, USA, October 10, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The [Clifton Crafthouse Co-op](#) has been awarded \$357,534 through a USDA Rural Business Development Grant to support its effort to create an ecosystem of community spaces designed to support a wide variety of small businesses and meet community needs. Located in rural Ohio just 3 miles outside of Yellow Springs, the project combines a taproom showcasing locally sourced food and beverages with a shared commercial kitchen, community event space, and affordable housing for creatives.



Margaret Neff's soapmaking class in the Creators' Market was visited by University of Dayton Students working with the Clifton Crafthouse Co-op in their Community Engaged Engineering course with the Ethos Center

“Small businesses need space like this so they can thrive but it’s almost impossible to find in rural areas,” said Piper Fernwey, Managing Director and Board President. “Our grant proposal included letters from a local artisan soapmaker, a small farmer, a food truck owner, photographer and a digital technology company. That really shows the need for this kind of space and the breadth of businesses that will benefit.”

“With the 27% local match added in, this represents nearly half a million dollars of investment in this exciting community effort,” Fernwey said. The funds will be used to finish predevelopment activities including outreach, community development, needs assessment, site acquisition and assessment, and design development activities necessary to ready the project for development

after the 1-year grant period.

Like the Gem City Market which opened in Dayton last year, the Clifton Craffhouse Co-op is a project of [Co-op Dayton](#) and member of their Just Economy Network. Lela Klein, Co-Executive Director of Co-op Dayton, Project Manager for the Gem City Market, and board member of the Clifton Craffhouse Co-op who grew up in neighboring Yellow Springs, said “It’s incredible what the Clifton Craffhouse Co-op has achieved in such a short time, from incorporating and opening memberships so quickly to now having a concept space open and being awarded a significant grant after only 1 year. This is a huge win for the Clifton and surrounding communities, for small business owners and entrepreneurs, and for the cooperative movement.”

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Lela Klein

As a cooperative, businesses and individual members have the chance to be co-owners, building community wealth while participating in a business that’s accountable to the community, and operates for the benefit of the community, not just the bottom line. The project was designed to meet [specific needs](#) identified by local non-profits, and seeks to leverage the cooperative model to create a community space for the benefit of all.

Situated across the street from the Clifton Opera House one way, and the Clifton Union School House the other, the

Co-op building is accurately described as a cornerstone of the community. Throughout its’ 120+ year history, it served as a gathering space during its time as a general store, meeting hall, even a dance hall. The Historic Clifton Mill, nationally renowned for its award-winning Christmas Lights display, and the Clifton Gorge State Nature Preserve are a short walk away. Just 3 miles down the road from the eclectic Village of Yellow Springs in one direction and the Village of Cedarville in the other, with Wilberforce, Springfield, Xenia, and Dayton all a short drive away, this tiny Village – home to just 147 people - is part of a rural community that is diverse, vibrant, and rich with local businesses, artists, and attractions.

The concept space - the Creator’s Market at the Clifton Craffhouse Co-op - opened in the



Architect rendering by Field 9 architecture showing the proposed renovation for the Clifton Craffhouse Co-op.

adjacent smaller building last month, and features a gallery, craft market, and space for classes and workshops. Plans are underway for opening the shared commercial kitchen later this fall, thanks to a \$30,000 grant from ALOFT Dayton and a \$10,000 mini grant from Hall Hunger Initiative.

Margaret Neff of Cedarville, OH is a certified soap maker and teacher through the guild and owner of Nature's Touch Soaps, as well as a board member of the Clifton Crafhouse Co-op. Like many creatives, classes and workshops are an important part of her business, but she's had challenges finding a space adequate for holding soap making classes, currently making due with the studio above her garage. "I get lots of

students from various states. I think I've had students from 12 of states come to this area to take classes, to learn how to make soap. I have taught in almost every public building in Clifton, trying to find a spot that would work so I'm so excited because the Crafhouse will give me a spot where people can come and spread out and we can have classes and I'm really excited about that." Neff hosted her first all-day soapmaking class in the space last month.

Unlike other shared vending arrangements, crafters don't have to pay an annual or monthly fee to participate. Use of the space is open to all business member-owners of the Clifton Crafhouse Co-op, with participating vendors contributing a small percentage of sales to go towards overhead and helping staff the space. The demonstration kitchen is available for use by members for classes, workshops, and events, and with the addition of the shared certified commercial kitchen later this fall, will be available to farmers, cottage food vendors, and food trucks for food prep, canning, baking, etc.

To be co-owner of the Clifton Crafhouse Co-op costs just \$250 in a one-time equity contribution - there are no ongoing membership costs or fees. As a project based in creating economic opportunity and supporting community affordability and accessibility, a variety of payment options are available ranging from flex payment plans as low as \$25/month, choose-your-own, even a new in-kind payment option for low-income creatives. To encourage those who can to give more and help reach their fundraising goals to renovate the larger space, a range of limited time Original Crafters Benefits are available. Tax deductible donations are also welcome and available through the Greene County Community Foundation.



To sign up to be a member-owner of the Clifton Craffthouse Co-op, sign up to be a vendor at the Creators' Market, or see the full vendor agreement visit them online at cliftoncraffthouse.coop.

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