

A sanctuary for small business, young minds

Couple transforms church space into work/learning place

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In Hastings-on-Hudson, a young couple has reopened a vacant church building as a creative learning sanctuary for youths and shared workspace for adults launching enterprises that will better their communities.

Their nonprofit enterprise, The Purple Crayon Center for Learning and Social Innovation, is designed to help its users “actualize their passion and potential,” said Sarah Silbert Hinawi, executive director of the center at 52 Main St. and its supporting foundation, the Saul Silbert Charitable Trust. She co-founded and opened the community enterprise in March with her husband, Adel Hinawi, center curator and operations director.

Sarah Hinawi directs a family trust set up by her late grandfather, Saul Silbert, a former Internal Revenue Service collection agent and income tax preparer who saved and invested wisely. Hinawi, having worked in education and program development in New York City at The College Board and in Columbia University’s LitWorld literacy program and Teen Screen suicide preven-



Adel and Sarah Silbert Hinawi in the former Hastings-on-Hudson church where they operate The Purple Crayon Center for Learning and Social Innovation.

tion program, saw the family foundation as a way to exert a more meaningful impact on the learning and lives of youths often alienated by their school experiences.

Purple Crayon was designed as “a youth

center to foster self-directed learning,” said Hinawi, a graduate of Ardsley High School who lives with her family in Hastings-on-Hudson. The center’s flagship program, Draw Your Future, is an after-school drop-

in program that helps junior high and high school students prepare for college and career choices by fostering self-direction and self-knowledge. The program includes weekly peer-led discussions and monthly one-on-one academic or career counseling while deliberately steering clear of traditional college preparatory or arts education course formats.

The Silbert foundation about one year ago acquired the property at 52 Main St. Built in the 18th century as a Baptist church, it had served the Polish Catholic parish of St. Stanislaus Kostka from 1914 until the Archdiocese of New York closed the parish in 2005.

“It was falling apart,” Sarah Hinawi said. “It really needed a lot of work.”

The Hinawis invested some \$300,000 in renovations and repairs to the roughly 2,000-square-foot sanctuary and building, completing the challenging project well under engineers’ cost estimates of more than \$1 million, Adel Hinawi said. Church pews have been recycled as bookshelves, benches and other furnishings in the center.

A civil engineer, Hinawi gave up his job

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at the New York City School Construction Authority to join his wife in the nonprofit venture and directed the building project. Also a sound engineer, he designed the acoustics and sound system in the high-beamed sanctuary, which the Hinawis are developing as a musical concert and community performance space.

Sarah Hinawi said Purple Crayon will charge a \$500 annual fee for its weekday

drop-in program for youths. "We need our programs to be revenue-generating in order to be sustainable," she said. "The model here is more one of social enterprise than philanthropy."

The church's 1,500-square-foot basement has been redesigned as The Inc., a shared workspace for startups and other small businesses, nonprofits and parents reentering the workforce. Users can rent drop-in desk space in a common office, permanent desks or a private furnished office in a collaborative setting with shared conference room, kitchen and office equipment.

"The common denominator will be that they can benefit from the growth potential and support that this group can provide," said Hinawi. "I think of The Inc. as Draw Your Future for grown-ups." The shared space is to allow people "to start work that's relevant to your life situation, that you're passionate about."

Monthly rental rates range from \$40 for a "hot desk" and use of the shared meeting room for two hours a month to \$350 for a permanent desk.

One of The Inc.'s first renters, Elizabeth Galletta, uses the space as a quick getaway

where she does the writing and editing she cannot do with four children at home.

A part-time language therapy clinician at Montefiore Medical Center in the Bronx, Galletta also writes and edits research papers on stroke rehabilitation. With The Inc. a short walk from her home, she uses her permanent desk there largely on evenings and weekends.

"I find that I can go there for a few hours and get a lot of work done in those few hours that I can't do at home," she said. "It's just been terrific for me to have that space."