Lafayette’s Unnamed Makerspace

401 E. Cypress St.

Mission: To start a makerspace community in Lafayette

What’s a makerspace? To put it simply, it’s a community center with tools. Makerspaces combine manufacturing equipment, collaboration and learning for the purpose of enabling members to design, prototype and create.

They offer tools and resources that aren’t typically available to people working alone, and bring together a community of creative and tech-minded people who want to help each other. It’s a culture of inclusion, support - and fun.

Makerspaces (also called hackerspaces, TechShops and FabLabs) are rapidly growing in number and popularity across the country and worldwide. Almost every major city in America is home to at least one. Scott Converse, founder of a successful space in Longmont, Colorado, predicts that every town with a population over 50,000 will have a makerspace within the next five to 10 years.

Ultimately, the function of the Lafayette Makerspace and the resources it offers will be directed by the needs of its members. Those needs could include 3-D printers, metalworking equipment, laser etchers, photography equipment, robotics equipment, open-source electronics--such as Arduino-based projects--and large-scale woodworking tools, in addition to other resources suggested by users.

David Maynor and Jackie Lyle, two of the project’s organizers and founding board members, have started the application process for 501c3 articles of incorporation. In the meantime, Acadiana Open Channel is acting as fiscal agent for Lafayette Unnamed Makerspace, Inc.

A team of four people -- Crawford Comeaux, Heather Miller, Ethan Jordan and Mark Henderson -- is tasked with the following list of startup needs:

-Performing detailed analysis of successful and unsuccessful makerspaces, also reporting on the two other makerspace community efforts in Louisiana (Lake Charles and New Orleans)

-Determining brand identity, including a name, logo and marketing materials.

-Readying the space (cleaning, painting, inventorying, etc.) for upcoming fundraisers and visits from donors and potential members

-Developing a digital media presence, including a blog/website, wiki and active social media accounts

-Creating a list of possible activities and programming to occupy the space based on community input and membership meetings.

-Identifying and outlining safety needs of the space

-Assisting the board in identifying potential sources of funding and support

-Other unspecified tasks we encounter throughout the process.

Board members have secured a lease on a 10,000-square-foot former warehouse located on the edge of downtown. It’s a perfect home for the project.

Preliminary research indicates that the building is roughly twice the size of other makerspaces in towns comparable to Lafayette. The additional space means potential for unique programming and a diverse set of interests. Picture bicycle building, indoor farming, kilns, a dark room. The possibilities are endless.

We envision the Lafayette Makerspace community as a pool of talent that local businesses will look to for prototyping, widgets, software needs and more. We also hope to partner with the Lafayette Parish School System to incorporate students and educational activities into the space.

Recurring operational expenses will include rent, utilities, internet (although we plan to ask LUS, Cox and AT&T for help with the project), and liability insurance.

Rent for the facility is $1,000 per month for the first month (March), $1,500 for the next six months, and $2,000 after that. Insurance will cost around $3,000 a year.

We estimate monthly operational costs to run between $3,000 and $4,500. We are currently exploring ways to reduce those numbers.

The primary source of revenue for operations will come from membership dues. The “makers” could gain access to the workshop and tools by purchasing memberships, teaching classes or building items required for ongoing projects.

We’re still in the process of calculating membership fees, but we have people and companies willing to make up the difference - until we build our membership and are self-sustaining.

We believe our membership could easily reach 50 or more within the first few months. That's based on countless conversations with interested parties in town and also on research we've done so far on successful and unsuccessful spaces.

The project will need to raise some one-time start-up funds to purchase tools and other resources, though there's great potential for sizable equipment donations as we move forward.

We are pursuing other avenues of revenue for the space, such as corporate sponsorships, donations and fundraising events (wine auctions, parking for Festival International, etc.)

We are also seeking grant opportunities through Lafayette Consolidated Government; Lafayette Economic Development Authority; University of Louisiana at Lafayette;  Louisiana Office of Culture, Recreation and Tourism; Louisiana Cultural Economy Foundation; Institute of Museum and Library Services; SchoolFactory.org; and Lafayette Educational Foundation.

The makerspace effort is in its earliest stages, but already we’re seeing overwhelming support and enthusiasm for the project. We're looking for community members to jump in and help however they can. Insight, ideas, fundraising, tool donations, tool drives, cement for handicapped parking, plumbing services. Any and all assistance is welcome and appreciated.

If you have any questions about the project or would like to learn more about how you can help, please contact Heather Miller, h.e.miller84@gmail.com, (337) 255-8015.