



AT THE JOHNSTON SCHOOL
WILKINSBURG, PA

Wilksburg's Johnston Elementary School To Be Transformed Into a Community Space

The former Johnston Elementary School Property will soon open again, as a hub for Community Events and Small Businesses

COMMUNITY FORGE WEBSITE: www.CommunityForgePGH.com

GENERAL CONTACT EMAIL: Hello@Forge.Community

PHOTOS FOR PUBLICATION: <http://bit.ly/2uJccfF>

WILKINSBURG, PA – On July 18th, the mission-driven organization “Community Forge” acquired the Johnston Elementary School at 1256 Franklin Avenue from the Wilksburg School District. Community Forge plans to transform the Johnston School into a community space that will be a home for small businesses, local events, municipal meetings, and educational programs. Since late 2016, Community Forge has been speaking with the School Board, City Council, the WCDC, and local Wilksburg residents about plans for the space. Now, after securing financing from Bridgeway Capital, renovation is beginning, and the space is slated to open to the public by November 2017.

The building is a commanding 4-Story, 45,000 SF structure, surrounded by over an acre of outdoor space. The school features 20+ classrooms, an Atrium, Library, Gym, Cafeteria and other multi-purposes areas, which will become available as offices, co-working rooms, artistic venues, educational areas, and event spaces. The plans for the outside of the building include creating a playground, a sports park, basketball hoops, a community garden, and open spaces for neighborhood gatherings.

Community Forge was founded in 2016 by a group of eight young adults with roots in Pittsburgh, including alumni from Carnegie Mellon and the University of Pittsburgh. According to Executive Director Mike Skirpan, a native of the Mon Valley: “Everyone on this team is working toward a vision of the school being an agent of positive change. Coming in we had different skills, from PhD scientists to educators to extreme sports athletes, but all shared the value of wanting to create opportunity for and alongside Wilksburg. Coming in with ideas for education, arts, and business possibilities, we are eager to hear from members of the community and work together on what is most desired and needed.” The mission of the organization is to: “Grow an inclusive Community Center dedicated to supporting Wilksburg by cultivating Arts, Civic Engagement, Athletics, Education, and mission-driven Small Business.”

Leaders in Wilksburg have shown strong support for the project. According to School Board Director Ed Donovan: “One meeting with the energetic and visionary leaders of this organization convinced me that they would be an asset to our community...I can't imagine a better match than Wilksburg and Community Forge.” From Tracey Evans, Executive Director of the WCDC: “We are excited to welcome Community Forge to Wilksburg, and look forward to seeing a long-time vacant building be repurposed for our community's benefit.” And according to City Council President Patrick Shattuck: “...this coalition is well positioned to transform the former Johnston School...into a hub of community activity and innovation. They are kind and generous...they understand the value of Wilksburg, its residents and kids and want to see us thrive and grow while they too succeed.”

Community Forge is asking anyone interested in joining the space as a tenant, holding an event in the space, or learning more about the project and how to be involved to reach out at Hello@Forge.Community or www.CommunityForgePGH.com

For More Press Information Contact:

Mike Skirpan, Executive Director, Community Forge

Email: Mike@Forge.Community

Phone: 608-886-2295

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