



Wilkesburg's Former Johnston Elementary School Reopens as a Community Center at Official Community Forge Ribbon Cutting - April 11th, 2018 @ 6PM

After 9 months of volunteer-driven renovation, business management, and local organizing, the property at 1256 Franklin Avenue is now a community asset once more.

COMMUNITY FORGE WEBSITE: www.CommunityForgePGH.com

GENERAL CONTACT EMAIL: Hello@Forge.Community

PHOTOS FOR PUBLICATION (Reno/Before): <http://bit.ly/2uJccfF> (Current State/After): <https://bit.ly/2pZTsoR>

WILKESBURG, PA – The mission-driven organization “Community Forge” acquired the former Johnston Elementary School in July of 2017 and has been working daily for the past 9 months to transform the property into a community center. Today, the building is open again and now houses more than a dozen local businesses, co-working areas, education non-profits, arts organizations, community outreach groups, a youth after-school space, and weekly community events. On April 11th at 6PM, all are invited to attend the official Community Forge Ribbon Cutting, hosted by the Duquesne Small Business Development Center, to celebrate the progress to date.

Community Forge was able to purchase the Johnston School and begin renovations by securing a \$500,000 loan from Bridgeway Capital. While key items were managed by professional contractors, the majority of the renovations were done for free, by the Community Forge board, and with the help of an ever-growing volunteer network. Today, the first two floors of Community Forge have been brought back up to code, received occupancy permits, and opened for business, managed by a small team of property managers hired locally for \$15 an hour. The business operations are managed for free through a volunteer board, and further renovations will occur, as possible, on the third floor, roof, basement, and outdoors.

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. The Community Forge team has quickly swelled over the past year to include local residents, partner organizations (such as fiscal sponsor: New Sun Rising), and advisors. According to Executive Director Mike Skirpan, a native of the Mon Valley: “It's incredible to see how quickly so much positivity has occurred within our walls. Whether it's our neighborhood kids, a group of local pastors, or a university outreach team, people see the integrity of the effort and want to be involved. We began exploring a model to bring life back to these large, vacated buildings sitting in places with too little space for community life, leveraging scrappy, inclusive, and transparent practices and opposing the rapid, displacing style of development that causes gentrification. We are excited by all that's been accomplished and the support we have received in our first phase, but our work here is really just now beginning.”

Leaders in Wilkesburg have shown strong support for the project. According to Wilkesburg Mayor Marita Garrett: “We are glad to have Community Forge in Wilkesburg. They have been proactive in integrating themselves in our community, while creating a safe, innovative space for community members. Their official opening is just the beginning for many great things to occur in the Borough.” Tracey Evans, Executive Director of the Wilkesburg Community Development Corporation noted, “I am pleased to support Community Forge's



efforts in Wilkinsburg over the past year. We're excited to join the Community Forge board at their ribbon cutting ceremony to officially welcome the organization to the community. We look forward to future opportunities to collaborate with Community Forge and the many other small businesses that operate out of the space!" Wilkinsburg City Council Member Patrick Shattuck also shared his thoughts with the following statement: "Community Forge has reinvigorated this corner of our community. By inviting people to Wilkinsburg to share and create - and making sure that Wilkinsburg residents and youth are at the core of the success, Community Forge has restored not just a building, but an entire way of life. I am so glad that Community Forge chose to be part of our Wilkinsburg community."

At the Ribbon Cutting, which will also feature local entertainment and food, Community Forge will be launching its **Membership Program** - an initiative to further engage supporters in the project while raising money to allow the organization to continue its work. **Memberships** start at \$50 a Year and include 5 Items:

1. A Community Forge T-Shirt
2. An Invitation to all Community Forge sponsored events, including the annual Members Gala.
3. A Seat On One Planning Committee (Justice, Arts, Education, Business, Community Development)
4. Inclusion In and Access To Membership Directory
5. Special Discounts for Community Forge Business and Partner Organizations Across Pittsburgh

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

For More Press Information Contact:

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COMMUNITY FORGE
★ **GRAND OPENING** ★
FREE EVENT
WEDNESDAY, APRIL 11
@ 6 PM - 8 PM
1256 FRANKLIN AVENUE, WILKINSBURG
★ RIBBON CUTTING HOSTED BY SBA DUQUESNE ★
ENTERTAINMENT BY:
* **BRETT STAGGS** *
* **K-THEATRE DANCE COMPLEX** *
* **DJ illeso** *
★ **CATERED BY JACKIE KENNEDY CATERING** ★
questions?
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www.communityforgepgh.com
