

Springfield MakerSpace provides creative outlet for artists and learners



Mona Colburn sets up an embroidery machine for a project Tuesday. [Rich Saal/The State Journal-Register]



"We try and share what we what we know with other people," said Jeanette Eichhorn, a member of Springfield Makerspace who sorted jump rings used to make chains and decorative necklaces on Tuesday. The creative space is holding an open house in their new location this week at 1000 S. Spring St. [Rich Saal/The State Journal-Register]

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More than three years after forming and now with a larger workspace, Springfield MakerSpace, 1000 S. Spring St., is inviting local residents to join their close-knit "crafting community," where things, both big and small, are created every day.

"People ask me, what's a makerspace?" said member Bob Emerson, a retired engineer. "And I say, 'Well, we make things.'"

The answer may seem simple, yet it perfectly sums up what the group does. From embroidery and jewelry-making to 3D printing and computing programming, the group has something for everyone.

"That's basically what it's about. We try and share what we what we know with other people," said member Jeanette Eichhorn. "... The more people we bring in, the more things we have to choose from, the more we skills we have."

According to Makerspace.com a makerspace, also called a hackerspace, is "a collaborative work space inside a school, library or separate public/private facility for making, learning, exploring and sharing that uses high-tech to no-tech tools."

The concept has risen in popularity around the country as a means to foster an innovative mindset and prepare those looking to break into the fields of science, technology, engineering and math (STEM).

In Springfield, the concept of a makerspace was born in the basement of the Illinois State Museum a few years ago. But that was short-lived as the museum would soon be closed due to the budget impasse.

"Then we lost our funding and I'm like, well, I'm still going to pursue makerspaces. I don't care that the museum is not interested," said Mona Colburn, a former researcher at the museum who now helps lead Springfield MakerSpace.

But members said the museum shutdown was a blessing in disguise as it gave them a reason to get their own space. So, with help from educational non-profit New Blankets, Springfield MakerSpace was launched.

This allowed them to store their equipment and materials there instead of hauling it back and forth out of the museum basement.

The group, which has more than 200 members in their Facebook group and about a dozen regular members, has recently moved from a small space at 1227 S. Pasfield St. to their current space, which they say allows them to host bigger classes.

The space currently includes six 3D printers, with Emerson boasting that one can sit down in a chair, get scanned, and within hours, have a mini-bust of their head printed out.

Some 3D-printed items on display included a bust of Abraham Lincoln and a functional, though somewhat out-of-tune ukulele. The group also offers 3D printer assembly courses, where people can build their own printers to take home. The kits cost about \$100 a piece.

"This is something that's not offered anywhere else in Springfield," Eichhorn said. "Where would you go to learn that?"

Though technically a commercial business, everyone at the makerspace is a volunteer. They said they encourage members to chip in \$20 a month and non-regular users to pay \$5 per visit, which is used to cover overhead costs.

Some plans for the future include teaching non-credit courses through Lincoln Land Community College and new workshops on everything from Raspberry Pi computers to tie-dying T-shirts.

"People are surprised how much fun they have when they start using their hands and their brains," Colburn said.

Those interested in checking out the space are encouraged to join the Facebook group, or call (217) 553-9172. MakerSpace is holding open houses at their Spring Street location from 2-7 p.m. Saturday and 1-4 p.m. Sunday.

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