The Center: one year in operation

Barely one year ago, The Center (123 S. Cherry St.) opened its doors to the public. The Center was a dream I had and I only manifested what I wanted so much. It was the love and support of people, young and old, from the community, and the generous support of my wife. Now only one year into existence, so much has happened, and so much appears ready to happen. The best way I can share the energy and spirit found at The Center is to let you hear what some of its visitors have to say. So I solicited for comments and the following was volunteered: As a member of the West Central Illinois Food Co-op, I was glad to see our move to The Center. This relocation attracted more people living downtown, including college students, to become involved with the food co-op. We have also promoted activities, many of which are family-friendly, that bring together Knox College students with the greater Galesburg community — a welcome addition to downtown,” Laura Bush-Collins.

“The Center has provided new opportunities for people to share and discuss ideas. It is one of the most exciting and significant experiences that I have had,” said Molly Cavalli, a student at Knox College.

I have enjoyed the new friendships that have been created as well as re-nurturing old friendships. The Center is a great haven of trust and a springboard for people who believe in the power of joining together to improve the quality of life for all who seek it,” Sal Garza.

“For me, the Center has been a second home. At Knox I’ve often felt a lack of outside influence from adults, children, in general, other people who live in the real world, and not the surreal collegiate bubble. The Center is a place where my intelligence as an (almost) adult and a college student is respected, and yet people from all walks of life continue to share their knowledge and experiences with me,” said Nelma Funk.

I go for the progressive politics, for laughter, a chance to compare notes on the ironies that always seem to accompany oppression, or injustice. I leave feeling that I have allies, that others care — and that not only can we positively change our society, our culture, but we can have fun while doing it,” Diana Mack.

“I live a 30 minute drive from The Center. I’m not a regular but have attended about a half dozen events there. The Center has given me a new perspective that has that feel of inclusionary cooperation. It is in many respects a change to a more community based sustainable activity that may be required for happiness with economic downturn. I may not be always in synch with every view of those that come to The Center, but I feel comfortable expressing my views, discussing my particular views there. David Korten’s words in his recent book, Agenda For A New Economy, apply to the Center. Korten wrote, ‘The power of civil society is the power of authentic stories. Despite appearances, civil society holds the upper hand, because the power of authentic stories ultimately triumphs the power of both state and corporation.’ Nurturing the relationship of community—like that of family—brings happiness. Paul.

“I love The Center! There are plenty of places in Galesburg for you to come together to do socially important and progressive events and to hold engaging conversations. This is one of those special places for a reason,” said Hal Walsh, a student at Knox College.

“The experience that has meant the most to me is the opportunity to get to meet people from our community that I would not have met without The Center existing. You have so generously donated this place to meet and share ideas. You have given all of us an opportunity to think more, consider more, and find solutions to issues facing our community. You have given all of us the chance to learn from the expertise and experiences of others. I have enjoyed the opportunity to hear different perspectives,” said Marilyn Webb.

“My experience at The Center has been very brief. However, there are many positive attitudes surrounding the facility and its members that are openly willing to contribute to improving our community. The Center balances bringing neighbors together and making our environment more pleasant, all with genuine care. I must say that I am better informed of resources available to give my kids a healthier life because of The Center.” Kelly.

“Warm spring day I was walking down Cherry Street past The Center storefront. I wondered what was inside and walked in. Diana was there. Asked her what The Center was. She talked for awhile and then let us in. ‘It’s whatever you want it to be.’ ‘Whatever you want it to be?’, I thought. She told me about a meeting coming up in a few days. I went to the meeting during which some of the upcoming events were discussed. Discussion came around to the question, ‘What is The Center?’ So I asked her. Again the answer was, ‘It’s whatever you want it to be.’ ‘I thought,’ I’ve been around you guys for ten months, I’d have to say that when someone asks me, ‘What is The Center?’, after rambling about for a few minutes, I answered, The Center is whatever you want it to be.’” John.

“I see The Center as a facilitator for social action. There is not a board of advisors or anything like that. The Center acts as a sort of meeting place to jump start a group for doing whatever needs to be done. One of the things I really admire about The Center and the way its set up is that there is no hierarchy of people you have to go through to get a plan approved. There isn’t a set group of people who do everything. Instead there is a whole variety of people from different backgrounds who meet different days and interested in different things. To me, this is what makes The Center so valuable. The people who use it don’t all have to please some high-up group of people. They can just use the space to facilitate what they think needs to be done in the community,” Maury.

“My wife and I attended a recent event at the Center, a fundraiser for planting city trees, and were so pleased to see how well the Center has helped to integrate Knox College students and residents of Knox County and Galesburg.” Rick.

“I am a relative newcomer to Galesburg, having been here for a mere six years. My previous homes have been in Brooklyn, New York, Chicago and Park Forest, Illinois and then to Galesburg. The Center is unique in that it is a meeting place for all of the residents of the city that are interested in the Arts.

I have seen movies there that were only available to me previously in hard-to-find theaters, at very high prices. The Center can only continue to grow as it offers additional services to the townspeople. We have the intellect and we have the time. Just keep your imagination flowing as to what else you can offer to the residents.” Les.

These are just some of the several hundred people that visited The Center this past year. Their unwavering commitment to community and open modes of communication is testament to the character of the city of Galesburg and the surrounding areas.

As I said, there is a lot more to come and you, any of you, can make The Center a part of your lives as well. Come join the fun. Visit the website, at www.thecenterinGalesburg.org, or contact me via email at thecenterinGalesbury@gmail.com (and I can put you on the weekly email list). Most of all, stop by, have a seat, and share a story or a dream.

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