

Collaborative programs taking shape at TwispWorks

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An interpretive center, an organic-waste recycling project and collaborations with Seattle-area universities are among the projects that are beginning to take shape at TwispWorks.

Last summer the Public Development Authority, which is developing the former Forest Service property, requested ideas for projects and programs that could take place on the six-acre site.

The PDA received 22 responses from individuals and organizations, and has been discussing these ideas over the past several months to develop partnerships that will carry out the PDA's mission, said Maggie Coon, executive co-director of the PDA.

"The most fun part of my job is to talk to all these people who have great ideas, matching their ideas to the infrastructure and buildings we have," Coon. She said many ideas are continuing to evolve, several proposals are moving forward and some will be visible on the site by spring.

The projects are evaluated based on their compatibility with the PDA's mission, which states the PDA "fosters and promotes economic vitality, local agriculture, arts and culture and innovative education opportunities. Programs are rooted in a commitment to sustainable practices in our community and beyond."

Two of the partnerships that are underway emphasize innovation in education, bringing students from Seattle University and the University of Washington to TwispWorks for real-world learning.

Seattle University's Albers School of Business MBA in Sustainability will be working in collaboration with Methow Recycling Roundup, a local business that provides onsite collection of recyclable materials. Students in the masters program will help Methow Recycling Roundup develop a business plan to expand into organic-waste recycling.

Casey Bouchard, co-owner of Methow Recycling Roundup, said the collaboration grew partly from the fact that his partner, Joseph Weaver, is an alumnus of Seattle University. Bouchard and Weaver were contemplating the idea of developing an organic-waste recycling service and producing a line of soil amendments, like mulch or compost, for sale. Weaver initiated conversations with Seattle University about getting help in developing a business plan, and the collaboration evolved from those talks.

"Seattle University was really excited about the opportunity to give their students something to work on that's real-world," Bouchard said. And the collaboration fit with TwispWorks' mission of focusing on educational opportunities.

"Students from Seattle University will be visiting and helping us assess the opportunity and develop a business plan," Bouchard said. Students will meet with Bouchard and Weaver at TwispWorks, and one of the questions to be addressed will be how the site will be utilized.

"There's a lot of potential there," Bouchard said. "That's one of the questions that the students will help us with...how best to use the facility, whether we'll be producing there, collecting there or just selling there."

Working with Methow Recycling Roundup to develop a business plan provides valuable real-world experience to Seattle University students, said Carl Obermiller, chairman of the Albers School of Business marketing department.

"Clearly we have an interests in the sustainable business issue and entrepreneurship and startups, and TwispWorks is interested in that too," Obermiller said. "The possibility of doing a weekend class may be an attraction for students," he said. Seattle University may want to have a continued presence at TwispWorks even after the Methow Recycle Roundup project to continue involving students in solving real business questions.

The University of Washington has already had a presence at TwispWorks, bringing students from the university's College of the Built Environment to participate in last winter's initial master planning sessions, and again in the spring to design and build sprouthouses – mini-greenhouses – that are installed on the south end of the complex.

Rob Corser, an assistant professor of architecture who brought the students to Twisp, plans to bring more students this spring, although he's not sure yet what they'll be doing.

"The sprouthouses were a great collaboration, a great opportunity. This spring we're hoping to do something of the same scale, where students can think creatively," Corser said. He plans to bring undergraduate and graduate students to "work together to try to come up with something on a small scale, like the sprouthouses, that will meet a real need. We will wait to see what subgroups of TwispWorks come forward to...collaborate with us. We want to be responsive to the needs of the PDA and the community."

Corser said he had students "do a theoretical problem based on the TwispWorks site" in one of his architecture classes last fall, asking them to design a retreat center at the site.

"It's a real-world scenario. It's a real organization with a real site and a real town with a context to respond to," Corser said. "It's a fabulous opportunity for us at the UW, for me as a teacher and for students to be able to participate with an energetic group in a really interesting part of the state."

Another project with an educational focus that is moving ahead at the site is the Methow Valley Interpretive Center, the brainchild of a group of residents led by Twisp resident Carolyn Schmekel. The interpretive center would provide information on the geological origins, flora and fauna, riparian attributes, and native inhabitants of the valley.

Schmekel said the idea grew from a visit she made to an interpretive center at Ocean Shores, where she talked with the curator of exhibits at the center. As a result, she developed ideas for a similar center that would be an educational resource for children and adults about the natural features of the Methow Valley.

The project is proposed to open next summer in the house on the corner of Fifth Avenue and Glover Street; renovation plans are underway.

Two studios are planned to occupy space in the building known as the South Warehouse, which is scheduled for renovation through a grant recently awarded to the PDA by the Icicle Fund.

Sara Ashford, a local fabric artist, plans to locate her studio there in the spring. Ashford uses natural dyes and earth pigments to create unique fabrics. Her 874-square-foot studio space at TwispWorks will provide a place to dye fabric, teach classes, and sell her work.

"I'm proposing a dyers' garden right outside the studio," Ashford said. Plants used in natural dyes, like marigolds and madder root, could be grown and harvested, she said. Ashford will move in a 10-foot-long sink that she uses in dyeing, a big table where she can stretch out fabric, and a large loom for weaving.

"It's my dream," said Ashford, who has never had enough space for all her work. She said she is also excited about the prospect of working in proximity to other artists who will have studios at TwispWorks.

Complementing Ashford's fabric work, Lisa Doran plans to locate a clothing design and sewing business in adjacent space in the South Warehouse. Her focus will be on classes to teach clothing design, construction and repair.

Doran studied apparel design at Seattle Central Community College, and locally has provided the costuming for many productions at The Merc Playhouse.

"One of my dreams would be for people to dye their own fabric in Sara's studio and come and design their own clothes with me. That would be a perfect marriage," Doran said.