

# Bruno Works gives start-ups a space in Downtown Pittsburgh

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Kaitlynn Riely / The Pittsburgh Press

John Norton was wrapping up his lunchtime talk, a how-to on maneuvering a sailboat around Pittsburgh's Point.

He'd covered the basics with the group gathered at Bruno Works, touching on what boat to use, what marinas to launch from, how to judge the currents and read the winds, and he'd offered encouragement, that sailing around the Point could be done, if one was sensible.

He ended, though, with a word of caution: "Of everything to worry about, you must take barges seriously," he said. "This is the one thing I worry about, and it's what I worry about all the time."

This was Sailboating 101, not typically a class offered in a workplace in the middle of a workday.

But then Bruno Works, located within the Bruno Building on Liberty Avenue above the ToonSeum, Downtown, is not a typical workplace.

Spread over two floors and 3,500 square feet, Bruno Works is "work space for tiny little start-ups." The bright space, open for use 24/7, has wood floors, two kitchens, free coffee, wireless Internet, a printer, a scanner, a room for private phone conversations, a conference room, a station with art supplies and a photo backdrop, plus enough desks to accommodate 20 full-time and 20 "flex-time" workers.

And about once a month, some space is cleared so that people who work in the building -- as well as members of the public -- can gather to hear speakers discuss topics ranging from how to pitch oneself to planning a bicycle tour to how to sail on Pittsburgh's rivers.

Launched this year, Bruno Works is the creation of Eve Picker, a real estate developer who has owned the Bruno Building since 1999. Ms. Picker, who has a background in urban design and architecture, has also founded the nonprofit cityLAB and the online publication Pop City, among other entrepreneurial endeavors.

She has been renting out space in the Bruno Building on an informal basis for a few years, and said recently she has noticed a need for more commercial space for start-ups, a niche she thought her building could fill.

"I really thought that Downtown could provide a slightly different hub," she said.

Co-working office space already exists in other parts of Pittsburgh, such as with the Beauty Shoppe in

East Liberty and REVV Oakland, but Ms. Picker believes Bruno Works is the first commercial site Downtown marketed to start-ups. It offers low-cost month-to-month leases and a working environment that is relaxed but still more formal than working out of a home or coffee shop.

"There's only so much working out of coffee shops you can do," Ms. Picker said.

But making that jump -- from a coffee shop to an office -- can be a challenge for a start-up company.

Not that most start-ups need much in terms of space. They don't, said Kit Needham, entrepreneur-in-residence at the Carnegie Mellon University innovation center known as Project Olympus. Needs include wireless Internet, a shared printer, some white boards, she said. Maybe a microwave.

"Nothing fancy," she said. "No paneled walls or anything like that. It's fairly basic."

But while the biggest worry for a Pittsburgh sailor is barges, chief among concerns for a start-up may be the cost and commitment requirements of a work space.

"What they need is month-to-month leases because, first of all, they can grow quickly and they can outgrow their space, or they go out of business, so having a liability such as a long lease or rental, it can actually impact or be negative for them getting funding," Ms. Needham said.

At Bruno Works, the monthly leases are \$300 for a full membership, including an assigned desk, \$150 for "flex member" status without an assigned desk and \$75 a month for a student membership, with other options such as reserving a window seat or having a flex plan with the Beauty Shoppe.

Currently, 22 people share the space, Ms. Picker said. They include a self-employed lawyer who uses the space for writing long briefs and for meeting with clients, a man who builds video game consoles, a math tutor who helps students using the video-calling service known as Skype, and three members of a web company that builds apps.

Some of Bruno Works' tenants hold day jobs Downtown and build their start-ups in the evening.

Such as Taylor Durham. Mr. Durham, 23, a 2011 graduate of Robert Morris University, produces local cable programming for City of Pittsburgh events during the day.

But he is also the CEO and founder, along with another person, of Dark Horizon Studios, an audio and video production company. They wanted office space so their company could grow, but found nothing within their price range within the city until they discovered Bruno Works.

"It was perfect for us," Mr. Durham said. His company has since grown to include 12 people, and on a recent Friday, Mr. Durham was moving to a larger space within Bruno Works to accommodate his staff.

"We've been here for three or four months, and we love it here," he said. "It's easy for us. Everybody knows how to get Downtown. I think it's ideal for any start-up."

On a recent Friday, Mr. Durham was benefiting from what Sara Blumenstein, coordinator for Bruno Works, described as "cross-pollination," or networking while at work.

The filmmaker had been recruited to film the afternoon talk about sailing, and so he was behind the camera as Mr. Norton, who is Ms. Picker's husband, spoke to a group of about 15 people.

The talks, Ms. Blumenstein said, are "something a little bit off-center" that Bruno Works offers.

In a start-up field that is sometimes heavy with what Ms. Picker described as "tech talk," the occasional how-to classes are a way to engage people in conversations about "interesting and creative things."

"I'm interested in creating a little community here," Ms. Picker said.

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