

Ceramic arts studio staying put in Railyard

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After years of uncertainty, Santa Fe Clay appears to finally be home for good in the Santa Fe Railyard.

The ceramic arts studio and retailer has signed a long-term lease with the Santa Fe Railyard Community Corporation, the nonprofit that runs the city-owned development. Santa Fe Clay has been a fixture in the Railyard since 1974.

"I just want people to know (the lease) is beyond my lifetime and it really spells permanence for many, many years to come," owner Avra Leodas said.

Meanwhile, Santa Fe Clay is moving forward with plans for a small expansion on the east side of its building, which faces the Santa Fe Farmers Market.

Leodas hopes to partly fund the project through a campaign on crowdfunding website Kickstarter. The effort has netted more than \$18,000 since the campaign went live on Monday.

"Our studio has really gotten behind it. We raised over \$17,000 our first day. That shows a kind of massive, both local and national, support for what we do here," she said.

Leodas said the turning point for Santa Fe Clay's new lease was when SFRCC chose Austin-based Violet Crown Cinemas this spring to develop a movie theater on vacant property adjacent to Santa Fe Clay's building. Violet Crown was the only one of four bidders which didn't want to build on Santa Fe Clay's property.

For the past few years, Santa Fe Clay has been on a short-term lease in the Railyard. The lease included a clause allowing SFRCC to terminate with nine months notice in exchange for Santa Fe Clay receiving a greatly reduced monthly rental rate.

SFRCC sought the termination clause with an eye toward new development. The Railyard nonprofit got pre-emptive approval from the City Council in 2010 to demolish the Santa Fe Clay building.

Santa Fe Clay then signed the short-term lease after a plan to leave the Railyard didn't pan out.

Leodas and SFRCC executive director Richard Czoski declined to say how much Santa Fe Clay will pay under the new lease. Czoski said the agreement is for up to 50 years.

Czoski said Santa Fe Clay is an integral part of the cultural fabric of the Railyard and a "great use" as a local business that appeals to Santa Feans and visitors.

Also, "they're a great tenant because they want to retain the existing building and I think it suits them well," Czoski said.

Santa Fe Clay includes a retail supply business, gallery and fully equipped studio, and is home to 20 resident ceramic artists. It offers year-round workshops and classes.

Expansion for kiln, classes



Santa Fe Clay's expansion will be an 80-by-20-foot addition running the length of the building. Slated to have skylights, four large windows and a glass entryway on the northeast corner, it will house the company's kilns and a classroom. The plan has been approved by SFRCC's board.

"My feeling is it will not only be a benefit to Santa Fe Clay but it's going to help complete this side of the railroad tracks in this side of the Railyard," Leodas said.

Once the Violet Crown cinema is built, "this section of the Railyard is finally going to be completed," she added.

Santa Fe Clay will pay for the expansion with \$50,000 of its own funds and, Leodas hopes, \$50,000 raised through the Kickstarter campaign. Santa Fe Clay has until Nov. 6 to raise the money. Leodas said she's confident the campaign will work out – the entire \$50,000 must be raised by Nov. 6 in order for Santa Fe Clay to collect any of the money – but her backup plan is a bank loan.

"It's a huge step for us. It's the most exciting step for this business in quite a few years," Leodas said.

For more information, visit kickstarter.com and search for Santa Fe Clay.