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IN AN INDUSTRIAL POCKET OF BROOKLYN, A BAND OF PIONEERING UPSTARTS ARE BUILDING A DIY UTOPIA.

Deep in Brooklyn, between cement factories and meat distributors, Kevin Lindamood is launching a creative revolution. Behind a rusty, unmarked door sits Lindamood's OfficeOps, a community art center, office, and cultural center that provides artists and non-profits with inexpensive space and services. In a city where space and support are finite, OfficeOps is a savior for dancers, publishers, photographers and the like, who are short on money but long on ideas.

The mission is simple, yet revolutionary: "We want to bring a group of people together who can produce work without signing over intellectual property rights," says Lindamood, one of OfficeOps' five principal partners. With content production—be it a magazine, play or song—intellectual property rights are the real value. They are rights typically relinquished when working within the confines of larger forms of content creation—a major record label or book publisher, perhaps. OfficeOps emphasizes creativity over cash flow. Here, ideas are currency. And they offer countless means to cash in.

The 15,000-square-foot former factory possesses a full DIY arsenal. OfficeOps—complete with 11-foot ceilings, refurbished floors and old-school pinball machines—features darkrooms, kitchens, studios, conference rooms, a radio transmitter, a functioning post office, and even a 3,000-square-foot floor where bands rock and skating parties roll. An adjacent floor offers DSL-equipped offices and studios renting at less than $2 a square foot (a steal, considering New York City office space can run anywhere from $10 to $50 a square foot). So far, a theater company, a Japanese production firm, a yoga teacher, a capoeira instructor, and even a rooftop film festival have committed to the East Williamsburg facility.

OfficeOps is "a magnet school for content producers," Lindamood says. It's a dream that started four years ago when Lindamood and his soon-to-be associates—then just roommates—lived in a factory-to-loft conversion. They spent their time salvaging junk around the city, when on one of their salvaging operations they met Samuel Friedman, factory owner and Hassidic Jew who saw potential in this band of scavengers. Friedman who had recently lost some loft because of code violations, had a plan he had been cooking up for quite some time. "He brought us a bottle of whiskey and some blueprints and said, 'Let's get this going.'" Lindamood remembers. He showed them one of the buildings he had bought but never converted, and with that, OfficeOps was born.

Over the course of four years, OfficeOps brought in 30, 24-foot trucks filled with recovered scrap (including lockers from Tyco, roller skates from Texas, and numerous cigarette vending machines) and cobbled together the resource center. They put in all the energy they could muster; and after hours of back-wrenching labor, hundreds of broken finger nails, and splinters on top of splinters OfficeOps is now open for business.

"Everyone that works here has leveraged themselves emotionally and financially much further than anyone should have," Lindamood says.

The potential of 15,000-square-foot space was too good
to pass up. An art studio and offices were built first, followed by an event space and darkroom. And a radio station. And kitchen. Layer after layer was added until, like a papier-mâché community center, the facility was complete.

The tenants, not surprisingly, are pleased with the results.

For Rooftop Films, a film festival that premieres short flicks—where else—on rooftops, OfficeOps was an ideal fit. The non-profit needed a legitimate rooftop venue (that was copacetic with both landlord and firemen) with a large indoor space for rain dates, along with affordable office space.

"I know of no other space with that combination in New York City—or elsewhere, for that matter," says Joshua Breitbart, Rooftop Films' co-director. The space is both "it's affordable and flexible, and it will disappear if we don't use it."

Moreover, OfficeOps is "great for DIY people," says Beth Duchardt, a member of the Compound Eye Theater artists' association. Compound Eye, which specializes in "high-enthusiasm and low-budget theater and art," staged a festival of sleep and dreams at OfficeOps. "The experience was outstanding" Duchardt says, because "if you don't have a lot of money, they'll work with you."

In fact they may even work with you if you don't have any money at all.

Take yoga teacher Delyn Hall, for example. OfficeOps wanted to offer community yoga classes. Hall secured the job and, to keep costs low, OfficeOps provided studio space for free. This allowed her to charge just two dollars per class, thus opening yoga to a steady class of 10 students who may not have had access otherwise.

"Their willingness to support this endeavor is unparalleled," Hall says. A huge dance studio is prime . . . there's a lot of goodwill involved in this."

The OfficeOps mission is to "have a relationship with other people based upon a creative repertoire," explains Lindamood. This belief is reflected in the background of those involved. Lindamood and the six principal partners—Jennifer Grogan, Dylan Taylor, Todd Grogan, Michael French, Michael Radosta, Eamonn Farrell—have backgrounds ranging from photo to video to forestry to disaster relief. They have lent their diverse talents—and surplus space—to a number of collaborations. From stop-the-war sign-making workshops to philosophical open forums to political art shows, OfficeOps infuse their expertise into every program and idea.

Still, for all the goodwill and creativity, the center still operates at less than full capacity. Perhaps the "build-it and if they come, great" philosophy—as Lindamood puts it—is partly to blame.

OfficeOps has never adver-
tised, preferring to build infrastructure rather than customer base. So, the business depends on a little word-of-mouth—and a lot of faith.

“We’re not trying to convince people to come out here,” Lindamood says. “People come on the strength of the value. Because everything came out of the trash, we can give people 10 times the value for a 10th of the cost.”

And that value continues to increase. OfficeOps is bustling forward with new ideas. Time-share offices and studio space are underway. Plans are being made for computer labs and student centers. There is even talk of constructing dormitories for a work-exchange hostel. For example, a photographer could bunk in the hostel for several weeks, working concession at an event or repairing a rusty hinge. In exchange, he’d receive free lodgings, Internet, and darkroom access.

These are grand plans, yet Lindamood and OfficeOps remain grounded. Though the project grows and mutates, all expectations have been exceeded.

“We surpassed our goal a while ago,” he says. “Right now we’re just tangled up in the momentum. [If it fails] the worst case scenario is that we come out of this with a lot of great working relationships with people we respect and who respect us.” — Joshua M Bernstein

For more information on OfficeOps, go to www.officeops.org.