



*Office of Mayor Lawrence J. Morrissey
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PRESS RELEASE

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October 10, 2013

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RHA GRADUATES FIRST ETSY CLASS

RHA Residents Become Craft Entrepreneurs

ROCKFORD IL – OCTOBER 9, 2013 – The Rockford Housing Authority (RHA) today celebrated the first graduation class for the Rockford Etsy – Craft Entrepreneurship Program (CEP). The four week program, launched on September 18, 2013 is designed to teach self-sufficiency and the entrepreneurial skills needed to successfully sell crafts and arts on the Etsy website (www.etsy.com).

The twelve inaugural students in the program are all residents of the RHA and have craft skills that range from carpentry to photography to jewelry making. They have spent the past four weeks learning how to navigate the Etsy website, how to market their wares, and how to manage the business end of their art.

Their dedication to learning a new means of self-sufficiency has allowed them to earn their own personal laptop. Most importantly, the residents have learned a means to earn supplemental income and to build on their skills to become self-sufficient and eventually to move out of the RHA site.

Jamie Kasper, a Scattered Site resident and class participant summed up her excitement about the classes when she said, “Before I was not able to express myself creatively in Rockford without scrutiny but I must say that I have been in every inch of this city and it is changing for the better and we are embracing the arts and diversity instead of hushing it and because of all these great programs and mentorships in much needed areas of the city”.

The road to self-sufficiency began in July of 2012 when Rockford Mayor Larry Morrissey, an Etsy enthusiast himself, tweeted the company’s CEO Chad Dickerson and asked if he would be interested in exploring a partnership with the City of Rockford.

"What started with a tweet from Mayor Morrissey about the need for an 'Etsy Economy,' has led to a groundbreaking public-private partnership," said Chad Dickerson, CEO, Etsy. "We're inspired daily by the potential Craft Entrepreneurship has to create new economic opportunities for local residents, and provide paths to a brighter future."

The result of that tweet led to several meetings and the first steps into a public-private partnership which focused on developing the craft entrepreneurship program. Local partnerships were quickly formed in Rockford, and on February 28, 2013, RHA, the City of Rockford, Rockford Public School District, The Rockford Area Arts Council, The ELEMENT, Rockford Area Economic Development Council, Rockford Area Convention and Tourism Bureau, Rockford Etsy Team, Alignment Rockford and Etsy executed a letter of intent to deliver a craft entrepreneurship program for the benefit of the hard to employ.

The craft production/manufacturing co-op concept is designed to eliminate the background and skills barriers by creating new entrepreneurial enterprises so that individuals are not competing against other local citizens for the same job. Instead, they will be working with a team of partners to create new wealth in our local economy by creating and selling new products globally.

The City of Rockford is committed to supporting these co-op models through its participation in the Community Action Agency and Workforce Investment Board. These City extensions are able to provide supportive training, investments in educational programs and micro-loans for start-up and business expansion. From this commitment the Etsy Craft Entrepreneurship curriculum was created. The program was piloted this summer and then refined into the four-week program that launched this September.

"Today we are here to celebrate the efforts of the first Etsy Craft Entrepreneurship class in our nation! All of our participants have worked hard to create product and launch Etsy shops; to become entrepreneurs. They have taken steps towards self-sufficiency on a path less traveled; they have leveraged an exciting opportunity," Ron Clewer CEO, RHA

Mayor Morrissey, who first spoke about this unique partnership in his 2013 State of the City address was unable to be at today's celebration as he was in New York as part of a panel for the Brooklyn Beta conference with Etsy CEO, Chad Dickerson.

"I'm very proud of the graduates of this first class of participants and proud of our community for helping to make this opportunity possible," stated Mayor Morrissey. "Rockford is now joined by New York City where Mayor Bloomberg has also embraced the craft entrepreneurship concept. We are united by our outstanding friends at Etsy. We're part of a growing movement that believes that our nation's future depends on expanding education and training for small business craft entrepreneurs. These RHA residents are paving a new pathway toward prosperity for economically disadvantaged citizens. They are literally making their future happen instead of relying on someone else to do it for them."

About Etsy, Inc.

Etsy is a marketplace where people around the world connect to buy and sell unique goods. Our mission is to re-imagine commerce to build a more fulfilling and lasting world. Etsy is headquartered in Brooklyn, NY. Learn more at www.etsy.com.

About Rockford Housing Authority

Rockford Housing Authority (RHA) is committed to being a catalyst for positive change in the neighborhoods where its residents live. RHA operates under the belief that a quality home is the foundation of society and community and that a quality home life provides hope and the pathway to achieving the goals of its residents. RHA provides housing to low-income families, elderly and disabled citizens of Rockford.

About Craft Entrepreneurship:

Learn more about the Etsy, Rockford, RHA initiative and how it has captured President Clinton's attention here: http://www.etsy.com/blog/news/2013/developing-craft-entrepreneurship-an-update/?ref=about_blog_post

BusinessWeek covers the Rockford/Etsy Craft Entrepreneurship program at:

<http://www.businessweek.com/articles/2013-09-25/etsy-wants-to-be-the-rust-belts-new-factory>

Visit <http://craftentrepreneurship.com/> for more information on craft entrepreneurship.

For news cut footage please visit:

https://www.dropbox.com/s/7w2xnn9ke3emozu/NewsCut_EtsyFirstClass.mp4

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