



## Millworks' Farm to Table Restaurant, Studio Space Opens Ceiling for Harrisburg Artists

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LIGHT SHINES IN THE MILLWORKS AGAIN

### HARRISBURG

Midtown Harrisburg is undergoing a new renovation in the Millworks, located at 340 Verbeke Street in the former site of **Stokes Millworks Building** where industrial workers formerly manufactured trim, doors, and laminates as early as the 1920s. The Millworks, led by owner and developer, **Josh Kesler**, will house a farm to plate restaurant and bar, a rooftop terrace, an open air courtyard, twenty-five artist studio spaces, and three galleries that will display and sell the works of the resident artists. Artists will have access to a community art space that will have a darkroom, kiln, printing press, and large tables for projects that benefit from workspace.

A longtime Harrisburg City resident, Kesler has seen Harrisburg's transformations over the years, including the recent arts renaissance. He attended Central Dauphin East High School and Lebanon Valley College, graduating in 1998. Kesler is the sole investor and sole stockholder in the Millworks.

An innovator and advocate of community and urban farming, Kesler opened a farmer's co-op in the **Broad Street Market**, the second continuous farmer's market in the United States. He helped art expert and music promoter Matthew Hickey put in **Harvest**, a stand that sells all locally sourced produce and dairy from the Harrisburg region. The stand includes produce by a dozen local farmers, including the Joshua Group's farm, a nonprofit who works to mentor and employ inner city youth and to make locally grown and organic produce more accessible and affordable for its neighbors in the Allison Hill neighborhood and beyond.

Purchasing the Millworks directly next to the Broad Market seemed inevitable for Kesler. **The Susquehanna Art Museum** is moving in around the corner at the Keystone Building. Kesler decided, “How could I not own this building? Once I bought the building, a magical combo of possibilities came up with the idea of the artists’ space.

It was important to keep it low rent, pretty cheap, to have a common area for artists, and to have an outlet for those artists to be able to sell those things that they make. We have a cool restaurant bar attached to it to bring in people, and then you get the synergy.”

Kesler chose David McInay, known for his work in **Harrisburg Area Community College** (HACC), as the architect on the project to transform the 27,000 square foot building. McInay had just moved back to York after ten years working in Paris. His touches on the Millworks will make use of the brick and heavy timber, and the structure will preserve what Kesler calls its’ “super cool old look.”



“Right now we are focusing on big infrastructure construction. We are pouring concrete floors, fixing doors and windows. We are approaching it historically...from a preservationist stance,” Kesler explains.

The design includes industrial doors and garage doors for easy load in access for artists to work on large projects. The Millworks’ rooftop terrace deck overlooks the market that sources the restaurant. The terrace will be connected to beer garden from which drinkers can have a bird’s eye view directly into the artist studios and gallery.

Kesler who has played in bands will bring in live talent to perform in the spaces. Managing the outreach to artists is **Tara Chickey**. Originally born in Camp Hill, Chickey has painted her place in community arts as a **Moviate** board member and as the Co-Director of the **Mantis Collective**. Chickey’s task is to pull together concepts for artists, the gallery, and the public art space. After community feedback, Millworks will craft the final layout and equipment list from the slate of artists.

“Half of our spots are claimed. It’s a lot of commitment. We still have a lot of people who have connected. It seems like every time we do showings, an artist sets foot in that space.... I feel like the studios are my romantic vision...perfect.

The third floor has amazing vaulted ceiling with planks of wood at least 20-30 feet high, huge industrial windows that open, with beautiful light coming in,” Chickey breathes in.





Plans are for weekly Saturday open house hours where the studios and gallery are all available for patrons. The Millworks will also showcase art in the restaurant area for the folks who taste its farm to Woodberry kitchen dishes. Visitors will have access to art at every angle: from the table, from the deck, in art spaces, and in the design.



Kesler speaks from his clear desire to enrich his hometown Harrisburg,

“Community is a social focal point of the Midtown. Part of the intention is to bring the exposure of the Midtown into a later hour. We will create and provide an environment that is conducive to bringing in people from the surrounding region. We have the menu to appeal to a regional crowd. We have a lot of ingredients for a new awakening for Harrisburg.”

*BONNIE MACALLISTER is a multi-media artist, grant writer and journalist residing in West Philly. Her work has appeared in Tom Tom Magazine, Toronto Quarterly, Nth Position (U.K.) and Grasp (Czech Republic). Send feedback [here](#).*