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Come home to community, connection, collaboration

North Minneapolis' Homewood Studios builds a more connected community in the heart of the old Jewish neighborhood

By DEBRA FISHER GOLDSTEIN

Each day as George Roberts hangs his banner to let the community know that Homewood Studios is open, he recalls memories of growing up in a neighborhood where shop owners cranked open their awnings and began the daily ritual of opening their storefronts.



"It was a feeling of well-being, that all was right with the world," Roberts said. "I feel that same feeling when I open my studios here."

He added, "We're normally open on Tuesday nights, but every once in awhile it's closed because I'm at a meeting. Here in Homewood, people notice. They ask. They want to know if everything's OK. We're not invisible here in Homewood. And that's the kind of neighborhood I want to live in."

It is in this neighborhood that Rimon: The Minnesota Jewish Arts Council, an initiative of the Minneapolis Jewish Federation, and the Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest (JSHUM) will host a two-week festival of creative and engaging events titled "The Northside Today: Memory, Place, Home, Community," which will run June 16-29. Several of these events will be held at Homewood Studios, 2400 Plymouth Ave. N. — in the heart of the old Jewish neighborhood still known today as Homewood.

Roberts and his wife, Beverly, have lived in this neighborhood for more than 40 years and had long envisioned an art studio.

"I wanted to give back to a community that had given so much to me," said the former North High School teacher, who taught literature and writing for 32 years. "This community gave me around 17,000 students. And when we studied Mark Twain, we studied the music and art of the time. I've always incorporated the arts into my teaching. Art is a connector. And I wanted to build a more connected community."

Roberts, a letterpress artist and poet, had walked past the vacated, boarded-up building for years. In 1998, he presented his vision to the Minneapolis Planning Commission. Through collaborative efforts and hard

work, a community studio was born — with rental space for artists, gallery showrooms, gathering spaces, and a

meetings of all types. As part of "The Northside Today" festival, artist David Feinberg will lead a two-hour workshop on memory and place 7 p.m. Monday, June 20.

Most of the stone pillars that mark the boundaries of the old Homewood residential development are gone. But



Nikki Yang

An artist rendering of Homewood Studios, by Nikki Yang.

sculpture and flower garden, which is master-gardener Beverly's palette.

According to Roberts, Homewood Studios is founded on the belief that "the visible presence of working artists contributes to the vitality, self-image and coherence of our community. I see the arts as a way to build communities, to bring people together. People come to our studio to experience art and to ask questions. We engage in conversation, opinions, discourse."

And in that spirit, a juried art show, sponsored by Rimon and JSHUM, will open on June 16 at Homewood Studios. A reception for the selected artists, which will take place 7 to 10 p.m. Saturday, June 18, is open to all and will be rich with conversation on "Memory, Place, Home, Community."

The accepted art encompasses many visual media including drawing, painting, sculpture, photography, mixed media and textiles, and offers artists the opportunity to interpret this longtime home for immigrant groups and minorities.

Visitors will also enjoy Homewood Studios' monthly children's exhibit, *1x1xOne*, which features one student, one piece of art, once a month. In this Northside neighborhood where George and Beverly Roberts have lived for so many years, the generational connections continue, as this month's featured artist is a niece of one of George's former North High students.

Homewood Studios offers adult and children's art classes; a Northside Teacher's Art Show; a twist on the usual book club; Tai Chi classes; a writer's group; and community

the few that remain stand tall, rebuilt by community members.

"We taught the kids how to pour concrete," Roberts said. "And we put a time capsule in each one."

A look back in time reveals that Homewood was a development designed with the wealthy Scandinavian buyer in mind, and bore a legal codicil prohibiting Jews and other minorities. When the "desired" buyers didn't bite — because the Northside was considered too far away in the countryside — Jews were the first permitted to buy. Today, the restored Homewood pillars mark a neighborhood that celebrates inclusion, rather than exclusion.

When the banner is raised the doors of Homewood Studios are open, inviting neighbors to come in and look, ask questions, experience art, and be a part of community, collaboration and connection. The community and its stately trees may have been damaged by the recent tornado, but artists like George and Beverly Roberts keep seeding and growing the roots of Homewood deep and strong.

"We are North Minneapolis and we are going to keep being who we are," Roberts said. "The people who are living here, it's because they want to. It makes for a good community."

And our larger community is all the richer for it.

For a complete description of "The Northside Today: Memory, Place, Home Community," visit: www.rimonmn.org.