

# Artwell getting new home

## Visual arts nonprofit also gets new leader, joins store

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REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

TORRINGTON — Artwell, the 17-year-old visual arts nonprofit, is moving to a higher-visibility location on Main and Water streets and will collaborate with a new art supply store in a shared space.

Artwell also named Michael Yurgeles, its former president of the board of directors, as its new executive director. He replaces founding director Stewart Wilson who has stepped down to dedicate his time to teaching art at Rocham-

beau Middle School in Southbury and to have more time for his own art, Yurgeles said.

Yurgeles plans to revamp Artwell with a partnership formed with new art supply store The Art's Desire.

"We've known for a long time that collaborating with a not-for-profit and for profit is a great thing for the economy," Yurgeles said.

He said the new location, in the former pawnshop at 47 Main St., was chosen because "we wanted to be in closer



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Artwell, currently at 19 Water St., will be moving to the intersection of Main and Water streets in Torrington.

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proximity to the Warner Theatre and the Nutmeg (Conservatory for the Arts) so we'd have more visibility."

The move is part of a real estate deal negotiated by Kevin Nelson, the Litchfield County Commercial agent hired last year by the building's landlords, Torrington Downtown Partners. Nelson told downtown revitalization proponents on Tuesday that he wants to emphasize visual arts in the properties the Downtown Partners purchased in 2010.

A wall will separate Artwell and The Art's Desire but will have access between the two spaces.

Yurgeles said when The Arts Desire is open, they will watch over the gallery space when Artwell volunteers are unavailable, but the door can also be closed and locked when Artwell holds events outside of The Art's Desire's regular hours.

The former Larai's tobacco shop at the corner of Water and Main street, which also housed the short-lived Studio 59, will become "the living room," a small gallery exhibiting Artwell members' works in regular rotation and as a showroom for The Arts Desire's home decor offerings.

Artwell will likely move into the new space by Oct. 1, Yurgeles said. Arts Desire hopes to open about the same time.

Jessica Washington, co-owner of the Arts Desire, is opening the shop with her sister, Lisa Stepler. "I'm very excited — very intimidated, but very excited," Washington said. "It's our first business venture."

Yurgeles said he is planning to ramp up fundraising efforts because his position is now volunteer, and the organization wants to add full-time staff in the future.

"We're hoping to move (executive director) to a paid position, and we're putting the metal to the pedal for our staffing," Yurgeles said.

"We have some supporters and friends out there," and the organization will be approaching them for more support.

Yurgeles said he also wants

to do more solo gallery shows for regional artists; forge partnerships with galleries throughout the state that would allow them to "swap shows," a move that would diversify the artists with work shown at Artwell; and host once-per-month artist talks.

Yurgeles, 55, is a longtime volunteer at Artwell who is an artists himself, focusing mostly on photography. A New York City native, Yurgeles grew up in New Hampshire and lived in Litchfield while directing the art program at the Forman School in Litchfield.

He is now an adjunct professor at Northwestern Connecticut Community College in Winsted and has lived in Torrington for two years.