

Local tattoo artists raise money for building renovations

By Andrew McKeon *The Bulletin*

Garfield - The last time a local newspaper came to Garfield and interviewed anyone at Artisan Tattoo (5001 Penn Ave.), it ended up costing the store owners a lot of money.

Mel and Jason Angst have been operating their tattoo shop for nearly four years now, but it could all be over in less than six months.

When they first began planning for a downstairs café and a piercing shop to the second floor of the building, the Angsts were unfamiliar with the process of bringing a building up to commercial zoning code.

Tattoo a surprise visit the very next day.

As a result of the inspector's visit, the building must undergo significant renovations in order to simply keep its doors open.

A grand total of \$87,000 worth of renovations, including a very expensive fire escape with roofs, is required for Artisan Tattoo to stay in business. ADA compliance also dictates that the tattoo shop must renovate three different bathrooms.

"While we anticipated bumps in the road during our development, we never could have predicted these kinds of unfortunate scenarios," Mel said.

"I've got a quote for you. People ask me why I don't just buy another building for less than these renovations cost. I tell them that I glued 250,000 pennies onto this floor, one by one, so I'm not going anywhere."

- Mel Angst, *Artisan Tattoo*

"We owned another business before, but we were only renting that property," Mel said. "It's a whole different ballgame now that we own our business property."

The store-owners soon obtained a building permit to renovate the façade structure of 5001 Penn Avenue.

Everything was on track for the café to open on schedule while the piercing shop was busy installing features upstairs to comply with the new zoning regulations.

Artisan's owners describe their store as more than a tattoo shop; it is a growing community's potential "dream factory."

"Not only do we use this space to feature art of all mediums, but also as a community forum for local non-profits and as a classroom space for arts education," Mel said.

The Angsts have always welcomed any media interest about their plans, so they saw no harm in answering a few questions from a local reporter.

Unfortunately for Artisan Tattoo, it was journalistic due diligence that ultimately complicated their business plans.

Upon fact-checking some of the zoning records for 5001 Penn Avenue, the same reporter made a call downtown to speak with the Building Inspection Bureau for the Garfield neighborhood.

The newly appointed inspector noticed an inconsistency in some of the records for that location and decided to pay Artisan

"It puts everything that we've worked so hard for at risk. We have poured so much of ourselves into creating this space that it's hard to imagine everything coming to an end so quickly."

With less than six months to complete the project, the Angsts have turned to social media in an effort to raise funds that would help them deal with some of the costs.

"If we manage to raise this obnoxious amount of money, then we're not only keeping our business alive," Mel explained.

"We're working with strictly local contractors and architects, not only to get this job done right, but also to contribute to Penn Avenue and its economic well-being while we're at it."

With a little help from another friend, they put together a very revealing, almost confessional, video piece highlighting the struggles of keeping a small business afloat in the face of such financial turmoil.

As of press time, Artisan Tattoo had raised almost \$20,000 toward its goal. Information about the fundraiser can be found at www.indiegogo.com/projects/keep-artisan-alive.

Mel encourages anyone interested in Artisan Tattoo to stop by the store. Now that they are making renovations, the store-owners want to inform others about how to comply with zoning codes. They are once again welcoming questions. ♦



ABOVE: Jason and Mel Angst, owners and operators of Artisan Tattoo (5001 Penn Ave.) in Garfield, try directing foot-traffic into their store while also completing a massive building renovation project. Photo by Andrew McKeon.

BELOW: Construction of a new fire escape behind Artisan Tattoo begins; a recent building inspection requires compliance with all ADA standards in order for the business to keep its doors open. Photo by Andrew McKeon.

