

# New owners of old Tubbs factory in Norway envision hub for artists and small businesses

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F.W. Tubbs & Co. factory in Norway is getting a make-over to serve artists, crafters and small businesses. *Submitted photo*

NORWAY — Darkened and neglected for years, [a relic from Norway's reign as snowshoe capital of the world](#) is getting a new lease on life, and new owners.

The old Tubbs factory on Tannery Street has been rescued from potential outside developers by a local group committed to expanding the town's burgeoning arts scene and local economy.

Lights Out Gallery and Lights Out Consulting, sister entities sponsored by Creative Norway, has purchased the building. The rambling workspace will serve as headquarters for all three groups and, eventually, a collection of local artists and small business owners.

Partners Daniel Sipe, a marketing specialist from Presque Isle, and artists Karle Woods and Reed McLean, who grew up in Oxford Hills, launched Lights Out with a mission is to provide publicity and exposure to Maine artists using virtual platforms through social media in lieu of traditional gallery space. It also sponsored concentrated pop-up shows for emerging artists to get their work seen.

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Now, with its newly acquired 13,000-square-foot building, Lights Out will continue to feature artists in their dedicated gallery space. And the partners are executing a multi-pronged plan to make 10 Tannery Street a hub for the arts and small business owners.

"This building will be usable for hundreds of people in the community," Sipe told people gathered Monday night during a visit by Gov. Janet Mills, who had come for a tour of the facility. "It will be a factory of things."

"We will have studio and gallery space," McLean said. "Also, shared co-worker space. Upstairs there will be a dance studio, (possibly) a music practice room. And downstairs will be a maker's area, a crafts space for the community to rent out."

It has already rented office space out to Creative Norway and moved its own operation into the building. The Oxford County Maine Democratic Party is also leasing work space through this November's elections.

Long term, the shared workspace will be an open area with a conference room and small cubicles where people can conduct phone business and video conferencing. Small business owners will be able to rent space to operate out of during their workday. McLean said there will be a few public computer workstations to accommodate those who need mobile start-up assistance.

Creative Norway will manage the dance studio space, using it for its own performance rehearsals and classes and also leasing it to other groups for similar purposes. The studio is expected to open in October.

The basement will house industrial wood and metal working equipment for artisans to lease, and bench space they can rent out to pursue their trade. Sipe said he expects the group will hire a manager, or group of artisans, to manage that space when it is ready.



F.W. Tubbs & Co. of Norway manufactured snowshoes for years.  
*Submitted photo*



Lights Out Gallery partner Daniel Sipe welcomes visitors recently to the group's new headquarters at 10 Tannery Street in Norway. The gallery space will feature works of Maine artists. Currently, an 11-panel mural that originally hung at the Maine Department of Labor is on display at Lights Out. *Nicole Carter/Advertiser Democrat*

"The idea is to provide people with a space where they can practice their traditional crafts and build their business with our tools at an affordable, accessible rate," McLean said.

When Lights Out was handed the keys, it opened a building full to the brim with abandoned manufacturing materials from various enterprises and years of stored stuff that "three families couldn't live without," according to McLean. Now largely cleared, they have taken out a building permit to start rehab in the form of replacing all the sills.

Sipe, McLean and Woods will share their plans with the community during a public hearing before Norway's Planning Board on Aug. 11. From there the first phase of rejuvenation will start.

"We have enough to do repairs, replace the sills and install windows," McLean said, "to bring the building up to code."

Lights Out purchased the old factory on one acre for \$138,000. Sipe says it will take around \$250,000 to realize their vision for operations; to achieve a state-of-the-art facility will take more than \$1 million. Renovation will be done over time as revenue is collected and grants received.

"We were able to acquire this because people didn't really see it," said Sipe. "You could walk right by and not realize it was here. It could have been purchased by developers and turned into condos or something, for people from away. (Snowshoe) manufacturing was an important part of Norway's heritage.

"Now, this building will continue to be a place for the community and for local business."

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