



ArtHouse donations surpass \$115K after fire in Homewood



TYLER DAGUE
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5:15 AM

Vanessa German hoped to raise \$75,000 to rebuild the ArtHouse, a creative community center in a century-old house in Homewood that was severely damaged in a Feb. 14 fire.

By Tuesday afternoon, the [GoFundMe](#) page had surpassed \$116,000, drawing donations from as far away as Africa.

“Why do people all around the country, and even people outside of the country, care about this house that so many people care about in this little neighborhood in Pittsburgh?” Ms. German asked.

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“I think that there’s something that is so basically human about an open door and a true welcome into a space where you know that the space has been shaped intentionally by love and care.”



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Fire damages Art House in Homewood, owner says

The artist and owner walked through the Hamilton Avenue house last week with a structural engineer and an architect to inspect damage from the fire caused by unattended candles on the second floor, where an artist-in-residence was living. The artist escaped the blaze without injury.

In addition to donations, Ms. German said she received five letters of support from people in the United Kingdom.



“I’m continually really surprised. I don’t know if I’ll ever have the language to express really clearly and purely the gratitude that I have.”

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She described the fire as a “fast-moving inferno” that crept up from the second-floor bathroom, through the floor, to a closet with towels and cleaning supplies. Flames reached the metal roof, trapping the blaze within the three-story building, which is a block away from the fire station.

The engineer said up to half of the roof must be rebuilt along with



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Police and firefighters had to restrain Ms. German to keep her from entering the house to rescue art. Fortunately, firefighters were able to save her artwork stored there, she said, including works based on Toni Morrison's "Song of Solomon." Ms. German made the master lithographs during her residency with Philadelphia's Brandywine Workshop. Two weeks before the fire, art handlers removed five works for a show at DC Moore Gallery in New York City.

In addition to repairing the building, Ms. German plans to raze the existing garage and have a new one built with a ceramics studio. She is also planning to add a ramp to make the building accessible. She dreams that one day the house will run on renewable energy and be accessible on all floors.

Meanwhile, work on the ArtHouse garden will continue and readings are scheduled in the spring. Two new artists will be living in the house by Christmas, she said.

Ms. German declined to name the current artist in residence, but did say she was providing an Airbnb rental for the artist for the next two months to finish up her residency. These Black Midwives, a local collective of female artists of color that includes Ms. German and author Deesha Philyaw, has agreed to publish the artist's manuscript.

ArtHouse began in 2012 with Love Front Porch, a separate house where Ms. German produced works of art on her front stoop and provided a welcoming space for children to create and share. That evolved into an open space several days a week with volunteers providing art supplies and snacks.

Further down Hamilton Avenue, Ms. German purchased two houses side by side. One became her own residence and studio, and the other, a 1903 Victorian that in a previous era was a candy shop and arcade, became the ArtHouse. The building has functioned for about eight years as a community open space with room for artists in residence.

Ms. German calls the ArtHouse a bit of stability in turbulent Homewood, where she says over 100 people have been evicted as developers buy up property.

“... ..”



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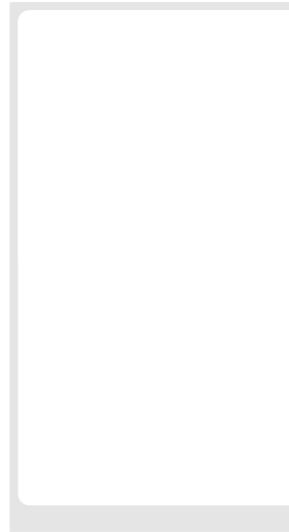


of so much change.”

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