

## Art for the economy's sake



Neil Benson (left) and Joel Spivak are members of a group of artists who work entirely in found objects and who call themselves the Dumpster Divers. Works will be on view tomorrow at 734 South St.

APRIL SAUL / Staff Photographer

# South Street looks to its funky past

By Zoe Tillman  
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

Local artist Neil Benson lugged an old neon sign into a vacant storefront on South Street between Seventh and Eighth Streets early Thursday. He placed it near the old computer he was taking apart, and next to the boxes and chairs he had constructed out of old license plates.

Benson is a member of the Dumpster Divers, local artists who work almost entirely with trash. The Dumpster Divers, along with several other local artists, are setting up shop in stores along South Street that closed or that have been vacant since the economy began tanking.

The "gallery" at 734 South St. will open to the public tomorrow

afternoon. The building, which used to be a furniture store, is the first of at least four other spaces to be offered rent-free to artists as part of the Arts on South project.

"It's creative reuse of the first order," Benson said.

Arts on South is the result of a collaboration among several South Street property owners, longtime residents, business owners, and the South Street-Headhouse District. The artists are responsible only for paying utilities; the district covers liability insurance costs.

Philadelphia real estate developer Howard Lander, who co-owns the building at 734 South, said around 200 artists had applied. See **SOUTH STREET** on B5



Artist Alden Cole with one of his works, a lamp that was made of found objects.



Randy Dalton greets Neil Benson outside the South Street storefront that serves as artists' space. Benson brought back an old neon sign to incorporate into his work.

APRIL SAUL / Staff Photographer

# Artists hope to draw more people to South St.

**SOUTH STREET** from B1  
applied to be part of the program since it was announced in January.

The goal, Lander said, is to "re-create the buzz and excitement" of South Street in the 1970s, when it was a destination for artists.

He and partner Richard Rothman used to rent the space for \$7,000 a month and expect to lose \$100,000 annually by housing the artists. Still, Lander said, the anticipated increase in foot traffic and the boost in energy they hope the project will bring to South Street made it a worthy investment.

Retail- and restaurant-heavy South Street was hit hard by the economic downturn, according to organizer Bill Curry, cofounder of Copabana at Fourth and South. Curry also cited the recent city streetscaping project,

which shut down sections of South Street.

He hopes the program ushers in "a second arts renaissance" in the neighborhood while also giving business to merchants.

"We're all hanging by a thread, but hopefully this will help," Curry said.

Organizer and local author Joel Spivak, whom Curry refers to as a South Street pioneer, said they would give certain artists space in the back of storefronts where visitors can watch them work.

Spivak also has several of his own pieces on display at 734 South, including a wall hanging made with parts from an old, rocket-shape tricycle.

Developer Steve Giannascoli said that if any of the buildings are sold or rented, the program would find new space for the artists. He

hopes new vacancies open up in less-expensive properties off South Street to serve as more permanent homes for the artists.

"It's not making money for anyone involved in it, but ... it's something positive," Giannascoli said.

The gallery at 734 South St. will be open tomorrow from 3 to 6 p.m. Regular hours for all the galleries will be Wednesday through Sunday, 3 to 8 p.m.

As many as seven galleries are set to open by March 15. The artists now housed at 734 South will be on hand to present their pieces, which were made with found objects such as crushed soda cans, toy train tracks, and bicycle parts.

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