

# The Columbus Dispatch

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## Artists' pad faces closure

Milo Arts owner losing building he created as live-work space for artists to sheriff's sale

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**Debbie Gebolys**  
THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

An inner-city artists' haven faces an uncertain future because the building the group lives and works in is set to go to a sheriff's sale on Jan 5.

Milo Arts Center might be the only place to combine artist studios and living quarters in central Ohio. Real-estate investor Richard Mann created it in 1988 in a former elementary school on the North Side.

Milo Elementary School was built in 1894 at 617 E. 3 rd Ave. and later expanded. As Milo Arts, it holds 39 live-work spaces for visual artists, writers and musicians. Classrooms transformed into studios and lofts rent for \$300 to \$1,000, which is no longer enough to make ends meet.

Mann said he had been losing \$15,000 a month until recently. Before that, he was losing \$10,000 a month.

He said he hasn't made a mortgage payment on Milo Arts this year.

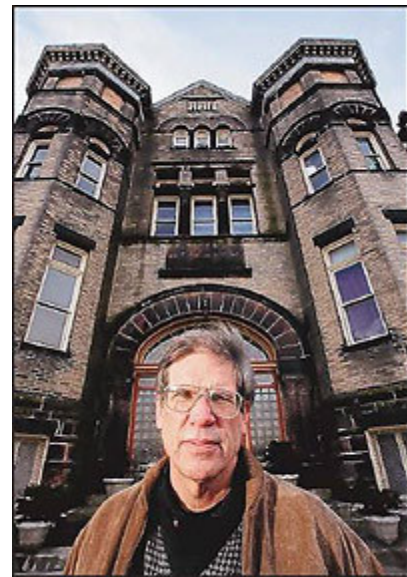
"It happened very gradually," Mann said yesterday. "It takes time to dig a hole, and we kept believing we could turn it around."

Mann has been smacked with 10 civil lawsuits from lenders this year. Lenders Sky Bank and JP Morgan Chase Bank won Franklin County Common Pleas Court judgments totaling more than \$560,000 against him for defaulting on mortgages. When Mann was close to the breaking point, Bayview Loan Servicing, of Coral Gables, Fla., sued him for defaulting on a \$461,326 mortgage.

Bayview filed foreclosure, setting the stage for the



Painter Jason Mann, 30, a resident of the Milo Arts building for three years, hopes the future owner will continue to operate the building as low-cost studios.



Real-estate investor Richard Mann created Milo Arts Center in 1988 in this former elementary school on the North Side. He said he hasn't paid the mortgage this year.

sheriff's sale.

Milo artists say they knew that Mann was in financial trouble but didn't know many details until someone slipped announcements of the sheriff's sale under their doors one day this week.

Carpet sculptor Pat Durkin, one of the three artists who asked Mann to create Milo Arts, said this isn't the first time that Mann has faced adversity.

"The building seems to have nine lives," Durkin said. "Every time something comes along to squash us, it all works out."

But Mann isn't as optimistic.

"This is a constant cash hog," he said.

In 2000, Columbus code inspectors ordered the building vacated after determining it didn't have appropriate fire-protection systems. Artists were later allowed to return, but several moved out. Fireprotection upgrades and other expenses related to the code inspectors' citations eventually cost Mann \$1 million.

In the past year, he said he cut his staff and sold some of his other apartment buildings in the University District and Near East Side to buy more time to reverse his losses.

A fire in one studio a few years ago left more damage than he could afford to repair, and the space is vacant. Two other studios also are empty, and Mann has slept on the floor in one of them for the past year.

"I've come to the place where someone else needs to try this," he said. "My rosecolored glasses have fallen off, finally, probably 10 years later than they should have."

Painter Jason Mann, no relation to Rick, said he's seen the nature of artists change in his three years there.

"There are not too many people who are producing (art). Maybe 10 of us," he said.

Still, he's optimistic that a future owner would continue to operate the building as low-cost studios.

Durkin said he knows "it's always been pushing an elephant uphill" to keep the building going.

Still, "I can't see this building being boarded up and vacant," he said. "It would be a nightmare."

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