

Exploring Asylum Hill – Fresh Start's New Home

Fresh Start Pallet Products is a nonprofit business started in 2015 in the back yard at Grace Lutheran Church. The idea was to help people who wanted to work and earn a living but who were outside of consideration by mainstream employers. They were mostly men who wouldn't be considered for a job because they didn't have a work history, or had too great a gap in their history. Their reasons varied, but for all of them, the result was the same. A steady stream of rejection because they didn't fit the mold of what employers were looking for, and a steady erosion of self-esteem and self-confidence.

It started almost by chance with Louisa Barton-Duguay and Lee Whittemore when they found some used shipping pallets behind a neighboring apartment building and thought they could build benches for passersby to sit on.

The impetus for change came when Pastor Rick Kremer came to Grace as their new Pastor.

Before his life as a Lutheran pastor, he had a successful life in corporate America, so the idea of turning this back yard project into a self-sustaining business seemed obvious.



To a person of faith, the next two years would be both highly gratifying and not at all surprising. When it was clear that the outdoor production could not continue through the winter, Rev. Don Hamer from nearby Trinity Episcopal offered the Church basement as a temporary home for the fledgling project.

In the interim, a board has been formed, partners in the endeavor have gathered,

501c3 status has been applied for and in short a lot of progress has been made.

The greatest step forward is this move from the basement of Trinity Church, which was never designed to be a manufacturing facility to Veeder Place, which clearly was designed for that purpose.

Just this month, Fresh Start at Veeder place was a stop on the Hartford Blooms tour. In the several years of its existence, several hundred hand made pieces of furniture have been created and several lives have been transformed. Men who needed work skills and a reference to show they've gotten them have succeeded and moved on. But most importantly their self-confidence has been restored. The pallets that have been pulled from the landfill are a plus as well.

For photos of the new facility at Veeder Place, the staff and the old location go to:

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/Rabva4cgy8dxsyiX2>