

# Bringing art to the heart of a community

## Local business finds creative way to lessen garbage

By Tessa Platek  
The Durham Voice

“One man’s trash is another man’s treasure” may seem like the perfect slogan, but it falls short of what the Scrap Exchange actually does. The Scrap Exchange takes one man’s trash and spins it into treasure for the whole community.

The Scrap Exchange has been reducing waste and fostering creative visions since its opening in 1991. The organization collects materials from businesses and residents and allows artists, educators, and others to repurpose them in creative ways.

“It’s a lot of fun seeing kids being creative and people finding the things that they need for their projects, and practicing reuse,” said Amy Schmiemann, a cashier and greeter at the Scrap Exchange.

The Scrap Exchange has a gallery with reuse art collections, as well as multiple creative spaces in which visitors can take classes to develop artistic skills and design their own works of art. Creative programs are offered for children, students, adults, and anyone looking to acquire a new skill while engaging with their community.

“We schedule events out in the community to raise awareness about creative reuse and the importance of it, trying to help the community rethink materials through our creative programming,” said Anna Graves, outreach and education manager for the Scrap Exchange.

While the Scrap Exchange is currently expanding its reach through community awareness, it’s also simultaneously expanding its physical location. Since the organization’s founding, the nonprofit has relocated multiple times. Today it’s centered in part of the Lakewood Shopping Center, an area that will someday be transformed into the completed vision of what is to be known as the Reuse Arts District. One of the organization’s long-term goals is for the Reuse Arts District to become an exemplary model for reuse centers around



Sira Camotta creating a work of art at the Scrap Exchange. (Staff photo by Tessa Platek)

the world, evolving into the National Center for Creative Reuse.

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“First you have this business that for 27 years has been growing, growing, growing, growing, and showing that it’s a profit center and that it can serve a community in all kinds of aspects,” said Diana Shark, the marketing and special events coordinator for the Scrap Exchange. “The Reuse Arts District is an expansion of that idea, and showing what exactly creative reuse can do for a community. It can recreate a part of the community. The National Center would highlight all of that and give you steps on how to do exactly the same thing over and over again.”

The Scrap Exchange plans on transforming its section of the Lakewood Shopping Center into such a vision for creative reuse by revamping old spaces and creating a space for art and community interaction. The first step in their renovation plan is to lease out all of their newly refurbished commercial spaces in order to finance further refurbishments.

“It’s mostly nonprofits at this point, and ones that are doing good work in the community,” said Shark.

While ongoing fundraising occurs, the Scrap Exchange has already started the process of creating the Reuse Arts District by building a thrift store. The thrift store had its soft opening last December, with plans for the grand opening scheduled for April 20-21. The event will include both a celebration and another edition of the Scrap Exchange’s popular “DIY Fest”.

A portion of the space at the thrift store will eventually include many home goods previously sold in the creative reuse arts center’s retail store, freeing up large amounts of space in the art center. This will allow for the construction of more creative spaces, such as the planned maker space and artist studios.

The ultimate vision for the Reuse Arts District is to transform what was a battered, dilapidated space into a space that feels like a home for everyone in the community.

As Diana Shark said, “Even things that you think of as litter can be recreated into something beautiful, and so we can do that too with communities.”

Visit [scrapexchange.org](http://scrapexchange.org) for more information about the Scrap Exchange, including upcoming events, volunteer opportunities, and plans for the future.

**The Scrap Exchange**  
**Lakewood Shopping Center**  
**2050 Chapel Hill Road**  
**Durham, NC 27707**

**919-688-6960**

**Hours: 11 am – 7 pm Sunday –**  
**Friday / 10 am - 7 pm Saturday**