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Key West artist Corryn Leigh Young, right, and her mother Madeline discuss Young's drawings themed, "Family of Strangers," on Thursday on the first floor of The Studios of Key West.

The Studios reinvents itself in three stories

BY GWEN FILOSA
Key West Citizen

The dust has settled at The Studios of Key West, the local arts nonprofit that spent a year and a half renovating the three-story building downtown it bought for \$2.2 million in 2013.

Spacious, bright and now tripled in size, The Studios drew at least 300 people Thursday night at a party thrown to celebrate the fact that the interiors — all three floors — are finished after a massive fundraising drive that raised more than \$3 million.

"We are now here forever, for generations to come," said Rosi Ware, chairwoman of the nonprofit's board of directors.

"We have control of our future because we own the building."

The Studios left the historic Armory building in July 2014 when its lease ran out. Now, they have dedicated classrooms, artist studios, a first floor gallery and a 200-seat auditorium on the second floor.

On Thursday evening, 13-year-old Emerson Fariss of Key West played several numbers on a used baby grand piano as his contribution to the nonprofit where he has attended summer art camp.

"They texted me," Fariss said, in between songs by Bruno Mars and Enya.

The Studios aren't finished with all they intend to do at 533 Eaton St., a

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Key West artist Judi Bradford, third from left, talks about her art work in her studio at TSKW on Thursday evening.

Studios

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1950s-era art deco building built by the Florida Keys Masons as its headquarters.

By January 2016, the nonprofit plans to have the exterior redone. Bluish-gray paint will replace the pink stripes on the outside and other touches, such as sconces and accents in coral and turquoise, are planned.

The rooftop garden is in the works but isn't expected to be completed for another year, Ware said.

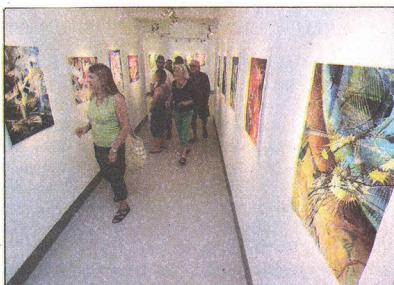
"We're open for business, that's what this is," said Jed Dodds, executive director of the arts nonprofit, as visitors began arriving in droves.

All were welcomed, and the crowd was significantly varied, said Dodds and Ware, who helped work the door handing out champagne or water to visitors using The Studios' main entrance off Eaton Street.

"We had people from all walks of life," Ware said. "This is a gift to the community."

The Studios now has the space to meet demands for programs, classes, exhibitions, concerts and various events, its directors said.

"This isn't just an art center," Dodds said. "It's



MIKE HENTZ/The Citizen

Eve Kling checks out visiting artist Colin Goldberg's "Techspressionism" art that lines the hallway walls of the third floor.

also a community center, and I think in order for it to succeed, it has to be a living, breathing, working place. It's not just a place to come and passively look at things. It's a place to be a part of it, and get your hands dirty and talk to artists."

"We're ready to showcase some of the best things Key West has to offer," said Elena Devers,

the nonprofit's deputy director.

Artist Pam Hobbs, who has a studio in the new building, said a friend from Fort Myers who recently visited said it all as he walked around the new digs in awe.

"He just kept walking around going, 'This is Key West? This is happening in Key West?'" Hobbs said.

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