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Monday, February 12, 2007

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## Dateline : Thursday, January 18, 2007

Work At Home, Or Close To It

By Phil Guie



Tired of being cooped-up in the apartment all day, writing that grant proposal or performing that computer-related research?

If you work in the neighborhood, but yearn for human interaction, The Change

You Want To See located at 84 Havemeyer Street might just be the change you've been looking for.

Noel Hidalgo, who has been involved with The Change You Want To See since it opened five months ago, described it as "an office with cafŽ culture," and said that it appeals primarily to freelancers.

"Those working from home [can] find that such scenarios drive them bonkers," he told the Star during the site's open house last Friday, "so they can really get into collaborative work environments."

As currently situated, the space accommodates professionals who want to be around people, share discussions, and potentially network. But those paying rent to the space also get the amenities of a standard office, including a printer, scanner, internet access, and use of a separate meeting room.

This style of arrangement - a shared work environment that facilitates collaboration and community - was dubbed "co-working" by Brad Neuberg, a Columbia University computer graduate who relocated to San Francisco and began renting out his home/office to others.

Since Neuberg put his big idea into practice, co-working has reportedly gained popularity in metropolis like Tokyo and Paris. Hidalgo, an activist, organizer, and social entrepreneur, said he

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has been spearheading an effort to educate others on alternative office environments such as co-working.

"There is a wealth of alternatives beyond just renting cubicles in the office of a building," he said. "There are shared desk spaces, there are offices in lofts."

The property manager of 84 Havemeyer Street, Beka Economopoulos, happens to live in a loft located above the shared office, although she also uses the downstairs occasionally.

When the office is open, Hidalgo said everyone works on their own projects, yet the space does not feel isolating, unlike how traditional cubicles might seem.

"In the work space, you are around others who are working," he said, "[but] you can also share conversations."

In addition, he pointed out that networking opportunities abound in the cordial atmosphere. "You have people here with different technical backgrounds," Hidalgo said. "There is cross-pollination, and it's nice."

According to Hidalgo, The Change You Want To See came about after Economopoulos, a Greenpeace organizer by day, co-founded the Not An Alternative arts collective, which has a gallery in the same building. At that point, the ground floor was changed to accommodate artists and freelancers.

Besides Hidalgo and Economopoulos, other open house attendees included Phil Leif, a fashion and technical consultant for Gucci who stopped in to see what the buzz was all about, and Erik Blanc, another Greenpeace organizer. Blanc said that he has worked out of The Change You Want To See since last September.

Although there is no formal application process, Hidalgo - who recommended web resources [wiki.coworking.info](http://wiki.coworking.info) and [nyc.coworking.info](http://nyc.coworking.info) for anyone seeking information on collaborative office environments - implied that personal chemistry among users of the space is important, and noted that co-working may not be for everyone.

"First and foremost, this is about communication and conversation, and building relationships," he said. "When you're freelancing, you don't have those opportunities when you're working out of the house."

However, the space suits its current users nicely. "Some people want a shared cubicle, while some want to work out of a cafe," Hidalgo said. "But for the work that we do, we want to have something more private. Also, we enjoy each other's company."

**PHOTO CAPTION:** Hard at work are (l. to r.) Noel Hidalgo, Phil Leif, Erik Blanc, and Beka Economopoulos in the co-working space at The Change You Want To See. (Note the wood against the back wall. Economopoulos, who manages the property, said that shelves will be going up within the next few weeks.

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