



The Pullman Artspace Lofts on South Langley Avenue in Chicago consists of two buildings from the 1880s, one seen at left, and new construction on what had been a vacant lot, at right. The lofts are the first new multifamily housing built in the historic community in more than 60 years. (Terrence Antonio James / Chicago Tribune)

Pullman Artspace Lofts complex marks historic community's first multifamily development in 60 years

BY DARCEL ROCKETT

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Cari Romany, 27, was wooed to the new Pullman Artspace Lofts by her mother, a multimedia artist and part-time gallerist. Having lived in St. Louis for the past seven years, moving to be closer to family was an enticing idea for Romany. And the fact that the Pullman complex is a community of artists sealed the deal.

"When I moved in here, my neighbor knocked on my door and introduced herself and talked about her art and my other neighbors across the hall came to talk to me about their art too and things they have going on," said Romany, a saxophonist finishing up a degree in psychology with plans to go into music therapy. "The sense of community is what I really, really like."

Romany, who moved with her 6-year-old and 16-month-old, is among the first tenants in the 38-unit complex composed of studio, one- and two-bedroom apartments. It's a development that's unique not just because of its focus on accommodating working artists, but because it represents the first multifamily housing to be built in the historic community in more than 60 years, according to developers and elected officials.

"We are truly changing the face of this community," said Ald. Anthony Beale, who represents the 9th Ward, where the complex is located. "I'm trying to convince the rest of my colleagues to understand what we've done here and try to mimic it across the city. Developments like this start from the bottom and go up."



Artist Steve Stoltis is seen May 20, 2021, in his live-work space in the Pullman Artspace Lofts on South Langley Avenue in Chicago. (Terrence Antonio James / Chicago Tribune)

The lofts, at 11137-49 South Langley Ave., were created as an affordable housing enclave for artists and their families. Artists live and work in their individual units, with 2,000 square feet of communal space for exhibitions on the first floor.

A 32,000 square-foot center building with an industrial interior and contemporary amenities is flanked by two smaller, free-standing historic buildings with more traditional interiors. The exteriors of the three-story buildings are designed to fit in

with the Pullman Historic District's architecture, complete with mansard roofs and dormers. Architectural firm VOA Associates, now Stantec, designed the project.

All of the apartments are for residents who make 60% or less of average median income, according to Ciere Boatright, vice president of real estate and inclusion with Chicago Neighborhood Initiatives, a nonprofit that revitalizes neighborhoods throughout Chicago. Six of the apartments are for Chicago Housing Authority residents. The \$18 million project is a collaboration between PullmanArts, a nonprofit organization that promotes the Pullman community as an arts hub; Artspace Projects, a Minnesota-based nonprofit that develops artist housing nationally; and Chicago Neighborhood Initiatives.



Ciere Boatright, of Chicago Neighborhood Initiatives, shows the Pullman Artspace Lofts before a May 20, 2021, ribbon-cutting ceremony on South Langley Avenue in Chicago. (Terrence Antonio James / Chicago Tribune)

While it took a year to build, Pullman Artspace Lofts is a concept more than 10 years in the making, made possible by low-income housing tax credits, historic tax credits, financing from the National Park Service and \$2 million from philanthropic partners, Boatright said.

“We took two historic apartment buildings from the late 1800s that have been vacant for a very long time, rehabbed them and then did infill development at a vacant lot; it really speaks to the importance of putting these vacant buildings back in productive use,” Boatright said.

The Pullman area is one of Chicago's most historic locations, established as a company town in the 1880s by George Pullman for the employees of his Pullman Palace Car Co., which manufactured railroad cars including his famous passenger sleeping cars. Sections of the area have been designated historic preservation sites by federal, state, and local authorities. Included are the Pullman National Monument, a part of the National Park System; and the Pullman State Historic Site, owned by the state of Illinois. The Pullman Historic District is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is also a Chicago Landmark District.

As Boatright attests, there is more work to do to in the community. Chicago Neighborhood Initiatives has already broken ground on 30 new historic row homes in Pullman.

When it comes to the nonresidential side of Pullman, work is progressing on the redevelopment of several sites that will

collectively function as a museum, including 12 acres of the Pullman factory site, the famous clock tower, and the first floor of the Hotel Florence — an extravagant Queen Anne-style inn built to host businessmen and dignitaries. Tours of all three sites will be offered to the public Labor Day weekend.

“When you go into the clock tower building there will be a 5,000-square-foot exhibit space, a ranger contact station, a retail area, a multipurpose classroom for school groups and also our administrative offices,” Gage said. “What we expect to be able to present to the public on Labor Day weekend in terms of the factory site experience is a completely new landscaped 12 acres with a parking lot, walking paths, benches and exhibits that will complement the visitor experience that they will have inside the visitors center.”

“Pullman is an incredible example of what a national park can do in a living, breathing community — both to bring to life the stories of the American experience, and to provide that economic opportunity that strengthens communities and makes them more livable,” Joseph Szabo, president of the Historic Pullman Foundation, said.



Nicole Romany, a multimedia artist and part-time gallerist, is seen May 20, 2021, in her live-work space in the Pullman Artspace Lofts on South Langley Avenue in Chicago. (Terrence Antonio James / Chicago Tribune)

Nicole Romany, Cari's mother, understands the strength of community. She said she didn't know much about the history of the Pullman area before moving from Waukegan, but the idea of keeping history going from one generation to the next has always excited her. That's how she was “seduced” to live in Pullman.

“I love when I hear kids inherit the parents' house that was built in the 1800s and they decided to keep it and live in it,” she said. “I like keeping history going. I just love the neighborhood and am fascinated by it.”

That's why she keeps trying to woo her friends to the community as well.

All 38 Pullman Artspace Lofts units are fully leased, and there is a waitlist, Boatright said.

“Everything here is history-making, and it's exciting,” Nicole Romany said.