# Clay Studio Business Plan

## General Description

### Statement of Purpose

To provide RiverArts members and the community with a pottery studio for classes, workshops, and individual work with clay.

### Programs and Services

RiverArts Clay Studio located at the Arts at Still Pond Station is a major asset of RiverArts which provides the area's only pottery studio. Classes and workshops are held at various times throughout the year – primarily in Fall, Winter, and Spring – as arranged with individual teachers. Currently, Marilee Schumann is the only teacher offering classes for the Fall. A workshop is also scheduled with Simon Leach. Rick Bysyger has offered classes recently and anticipates doing so again. Registration and advertising for classes is currently handled centrally by RiverArts.

The Clay Studio also offers Open Studio. Historically, this was time specifically scheduled in a series of approximately 3-hour blocks, usually on a weekday and a Saturday, when students could come into the studio and practice techniques learned in class and work on projects. A teacher or the Clay Studio Manager was present but no class instruction was given. There was a charge for Open Studio. However, this has evolved into unscheduled, unmonitored access to the pottery studio by current and former clay students who access a hidden key and let themselves into the studio to work independently. It is essentially free time. There is a charge for firing and glazing work, and that is paid for on site through an honor system. The kiln is operated periodically on no set schedule by the Clay Manager, teachers or, on occasion, by some students. Some students sell the work they make during this free time in RiverArts gift shop or independently in the Chestertown Farmers market.

The Clay Studio has also been the venue for summer Art and Nature Camp. This was run by the Clay Manager under an arrangement and remuneration separate from her contract as Clay Manager.

### Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats

The first meeting of the RiverArts Clay Studio Business Plan Committee focused on a discussion of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and vulnerabilities of the Clay Studio.

The following were perceived as major strengths:

- Inexpensive rent of $1/year
- Location, which provided a good facility in beautiful surroundings
- Enthusiasm and interest of the community of teachers, students, and potters who use the Clay Studio
- Only clay studio between Easton and Elkton
- Excellent local teachers
- Excellent equipment
- Open studio availability
- Competitive class pricing

The following were perceived as major weaknesses:

- Location away from town, "in the middle of nowhere"
- Low population density in area translates to a limited number of students
- Lack of supervision during open studio time results in potential liability issues, too easy access through hidden key availability, and inconsistency in accounting of glazing and firing charges
- Firing and glazing charges are too cheap
- Maintenance and clean-up is inconsistent
- Management, financial oversight and decision-making lines are not clear
- Environmental concerns centered on disposal of waste clay and glazing materials
- No student class evaluations and no mechanism for teacher input

The following were perceived as opportunities:

- Raise price of classes by $15 to cover the cost of first 25 lbs free clay with class
- Bring in renowned teachers from outside the area for workshops to attract students
- Aggressively advertise and market the clay studio in surrounding areas
- Hold special weekend events – e.g., raku weekend, beginners workshop – to bring in more people
- Offer other types of classes at the Clay Studio, e.g., children's, glass, metal, jewelry

The following were perceived as threats:

- Insufficient students and class offerings
- Pricing ourselves out of existence
- Losing a major teacher
- No clear schedule for firing
- Liability issues: too easy access, environmental issues, unsupervised firings

## Business Plan

### Operational Plan

The Clay Studio program needs to be substantially energized if it is to continue. Supervision of the actual operation of the Clay Studio must be tightened: Open Studio should be restored to scheduled, paid time with a monitor present (that monitor could be the Clay Studio Manager, teachers, or volunteers, but someone should be present during this time). Each open studio session should run for 4 hours and should be offered 3 times per week: one weekday session, one weekend session, and one evening session. Class registration would include one weekly open studio session during each week of class. In addition, consideration should be given to offering studio access for a reasonable quarterly fee of $100. All clay students and open studio and quarterly fee users should sign and receive a copy of a policies, procedures, and waiver of liability form which should be promptly drafted.

A determination needs to be made as to who is responsible for solicitation, scheduling, marketing, and registration of classes at the Clay Studio. Currently, the Education Committee is handling class registration but it is unclear who, if anyone, is responsible for solicitation, scheduling and marketing of classes. This has led to some confusion as to who is responsible for what aspects of planning classes and the necessary follow through. There needs to be clarity on who is responsible for contracts between

RiverArts and the teachers and guest speakers at the Clay Studio, and copies of contracts should be shared with the Clay Studio Manager and the Executive Director.

The Clay Manager should establish a firing schedule which can be augmented by special arrangement. Instruction in firing should be provided to any students deemed authorized by the Clay Manager, in consultation with class instructors, to be competent to operate the kilns.

Procedures signage is posted at the Clay Studio. A policies and procedures manual also exists but is not routinely available. The manual should be located and made readily available. Clear procedures for the collection of fees for open studio, materials, glazing and firing should be established, posted, and enforced. All classes should include an initial discussion of policies and procedures and distribution of a statement of policies and procedures to students.

**Management**

Until recently, operation of the Clay Studio was under the direction of the Clay Manager. That position is currently vacant. To ensure proper operation of the Clay Studio, the position of Clay Manager should be more clearly defined, the hours, duties and responsibilities firmly established, and the position filled. Supervision of the actual operation of the Clay Studio must be tightened, as per the Operational Plan described above. The management team of the Clay Studio should consist of the Clay manager, teachers, and volunteers/monitors.

**Clay Studio Budget Assumptions**

The class schedule is aggressive, but unless the studio is used to its maximum, there is little reason for RiverArts to continue the studio's existence for a few artists. It is our belief that the Studio needs strong direction and new class ideas.

Currently, it doesn't appear that the fees being charged cover the actual costs of products and services at Clay Studio—either for the classes or products sold. Therefore, in structuring the attached budget, there are recommended increases in nearly every category.

**Budget Recommendations**

Increase the cost of classes across the board:

- 8 week classes should be increased from $230 to $250
- Workshop attendees should be charged on average $75 for members and $100 for non-members

The cost of clay should go from the present $12 to $15, and porcelain from $20 to $22

The cost of tools should include a 25% markup

The fee for firing should increase to a minimum of $3.00.

Open Studio use needs to be more cost effective. Class registration should include one weekly open studio session during each week of class at no additional charge. Any open studio use beyond that will be at a charge of $7.00 per session.

**End Notes – Moving Forward**

The Clay Studio is a wonderful asset of RiverArts, offering a facility to area potters who do not have their own studio, organizing classes and workshops at various levels, and fostering a community of students and teachers working with clay. Proper management and support of the Clay Studio will strengthen its area appeal and allow it to prosper, but it needs time under stricter and more energized management to determine whether it can break even and, hopefully, operate at a profit. A Task Force to design and implement enhanced programming and an involved Clay Studio Committee to provide continuing oversight can enhance operations. We also recommend a feasibility study be conducted to look at the possibility of future acquisition of the Arts at Still Pond Station facility once the Clay Studio and RiverArts are on a more firm financial footing or, alternatively, the possibility of moving the clay studio to a more central location.