

Local Cloth is moving to the River Arts District this spring! Our new community-centered space at 408 Depot Street, #100-110, will feature products from throughout our Blue Ridge Mountains fibershed (100 mile radius around Asheville) and bring attention to the rich offerings of our region's designers, farmers, artists and makers. The new Local Cloth space will feature a classroom, studios, dye lab, and exhibit and retail space showcasing locally sourced items, to serve fiber artists, students, enthusiasts and the general public.

It has been a decade-long dream for our local fiber advocacy group to independently steward our own space. Born out of another Asheville-based nonprofit, HandMade in America, Local Cloth has faithfully followed the needs and trends of the community all along the way. From 1995-2015, HandMade in America helped the communities of Western North Carolina transition their economies from the mills that once dominated the landscape, to a thriving economy based on the arts, culture, and history unique to the region. In 2011, in the midst of a recession, Judi Jetson, Director of Economic Development at Handmade, and a fiber enthusiast, weaver, spinner and dyer, met with regional fiber artists to listen to their challenges, hopes and aspirations. She saw a need to connect local fiber artists with local fiber farmers, and brought a group of artists and farmers together to discuss ways to grow the local fiber economy, and Local Cloth was born. Local Cloth's founding members developed a model of the fiber supply chain, identified the gaps, formed a nonprofit in 2012, and started undertaking projects. The first projects were designed to educate the public about the local fiber economy, including a Farm to Fashion exhibit, Textile Study Group, Project Handmade Fashion show, a Fiber Farmers Forum, and a map of the Blue Ridge Mountains fibershed (later published as the WNC Fiber Trails Guide).

By 2015, Local Cloth had a growing membership and an increased demand for education in the fiber arts, and they took their first step to a brick and mortar space by signing on as one of the four anchor organizations at The Refinery Creator Space, managed by the Asheville Area Arts Council on the South Slope. In the new space, the non-profit offered more than 50 workshops, interest group meetings, sales and exhibits each year, and tripled its membership.

By 2020, when COVID hit, the organization went virtual along with the rest of the world, and transitioned its programs temporarily online. The non-profit also took time out to reassess, survey membership, and create a new vision for the future. Local Cloth's programs had begun to outgrow their space, and the current desires of the membership were clear: community and connection had come to the forefront, and a physical space large enough to meet the diverse needs of all parties, from new students, to working professionals, was the dream.

“This move is about our membership,” says Judi Jetson, “Having more to offer them. Studios, an expanded classroom space, exhibit and retail space, and a common area for socializing and networking” were cited as the need. “At our board retreat last year, we also decided we wanted to do more community outreach. At our new location, we will be part of the River Arts District and adjacent neighborhood, and more available to the public than ever before. We want to be actively immersed in the local community. Accessible, with foot traffic. As of June 1, we'll open, with set hours.”

There are at least 500 fiber artists - more fiber artists per-capita than any other place in the United States - and more than 200 fiber farmers in western North Carolina. Local Cloth has done the work of bringing them all together over the last 10 years, catalyzing a strong local fiber movement, and has ambitions to nurture future generations of artists and farmers with their new community space. Our network is growing. Local Cloth now serves as an Affiliate of the internationally renowned organization Fibershed, representing the Blue Ridge Mountains fibershed. The Fibershed Affiliate Program connects us to an international grassroots network that promotes the development of regional fiber systems communities, including economic and non-economic growth, in the form of building relationships and new global networks. On a local level, we are also proud to be a designated Education Center of the Southern Highland Craft Guild. In other news, we recently launched an online marketplace, Shop Local Cloth (shoplocalcloth.org), to support our mission to bring climate-benefitting fiber to our regions closets, gardens, and studios. We plan to expand our marketplace, with a dynamic store front in our new space, where members and passers by alike can see (and feel!) what our regional fiber community has to offer.

We will begin offering workshops at the new Local Cloth space as of May 1, with exhibits, retail sales and resident artists arriving during summer months. A Grand Opening is planned for June 12, 2021 during the River Arts District 2nd Saturday Art Walk.

For more information about Local Cloth: www.localcloth.org