

The Travelers Hotel

The Growing Rural Communities Fund

\$1,250,000 Loan

Clarksdale, Mississippi

The town of Clarksdale is famous as a stop along the Mississippi Blues Trail. Every year, a growing number of music fans make pilgrimages through the childhood home of Tennessee Williams, attending seasonal music festivals or visiting its historic locations, before heading to the next destination.

In 2018, NMSC provided low-cost financing to the Travelers Hotel through our Growing Rural Communities Fund. The hotel, which opened in early 2019, will celebrate Clarksdale's rich musical and artistic history while working to transform the local economy by creating a place where art and artists can thrive year-round. The Travelers Hotel will work to make Clarksdale a destination for both artists and art lovers of all kinds, while providing much needed community space and a variety of programming for Clarksdale residents.

"Travelers will be more than a hotel — this is a space designed to support local artists and cultural traditions through year-round exhibitions, performances and events," says Ann Williams, Executive Director of the Coahoma Collective, a non-profit catalyzing arts-driven, community-inclusive revitalization in downtown Clarksdale and sponsor of Travelers Hotel.

The hotel is managed by an artist cooperative. Artists work two to three days a week at the hotel and at its sister property, a general store and garden center called Collective Seed & Supply Co. The artists live above the general store and, with their basic expenses covered, are able to invest the rest of their time in their creative pursuits.

This model is ideal for artists of all mediums with a penchant for hospitality and a love of community, as artists must also commit to working with local partners, such as youth development and arts nonprofits, to engage residents and give back to the community. One of the current artists-in-residence, photographer and playwright Charles Coleman, is currently working with Spring Initiative, an organization providing programming and services for at-risk youth.



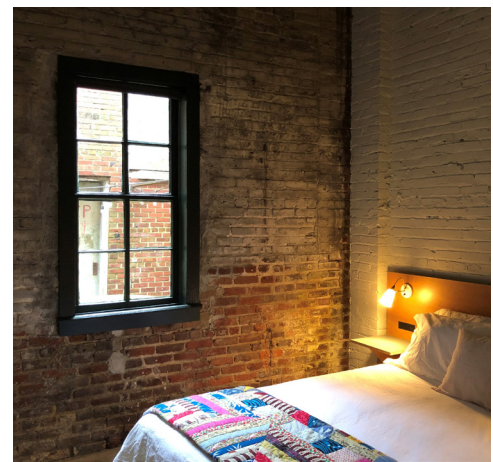
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"My experience in Clarksdale has been insightful and prosperous," says Coleman. "Clarksdale has welcomed me with open arms, and I can't think of any better way to thank the community than by volunteering time to after-school programs like Spring Initiative that benefit the youth. Travelers opens its doors to the community, which has allowed me to interact with Clarksdadians, visitors and tourists. It is a pleasant environment for all and I can't wait to see what the future has in store."

The ultimate goal of Travelers, with the help and support of Clarksdale and Coahoma County, is to build up the local economy by encouraging more investment in the area and spurring local entrepreneurs to open small businesses. Clarksdale native and real estate developer Chuck Rutledge thinks Clarksdale is prime for an entrepreneurial resurgence and believes that having the artists-in-residence engaging with the community will reinvigorate both downtown Clarksdale and the community's entrepreneurial spirit.

"As the Executive Director of Tourism for Visit Clarksdale, it is my absolute pleasure to speak with the Travelers Hotel staff about hospitality and customer service, and to share our collective vision for expanding existing tourism in Clarksdale, Mississippi," says O'Keefe. "There's a lot of potential here - the Travelers team realizes this. It's exciting to watch them grow, and to see the momentum building in this community we all love so much."

Travelers' lobby, which is open to the public, will serve



Travelers' lobby will serve as a community hub, providing gathering space and a small stage for performing artists

"Clarksdale needs people living downtown and businesses to fill in vacant buildings," says Rutledge. "Clarksdale has entrepreneurs, but people don't know where to start. The artists of Travelers can engage the community and use the hotel as an incubator to spin off locally owned businesses."

"When it comes to starting a new business, it can be difficult to know where to start," agrees Williams. "The knowledge and financial gaps are hard to navigate and disproportionately affect entrepreneurs of color."

Bubba O'Keefe, Coahoma County's Director of Tourism, plans to use the hotel to host hospitality and management trainings for other local businesses hoping to attract incoming tourists, which will work to fill in some of these knowledge gaps and bolster the community's small businesses and entrepreneurs.

as a de facto community hub, with places for small and large groups to gather, free wifi, a bar that will be open in the evenings and a small stage to feature local or visiting performing artists. Community members can reserve space for meetings, while the artist cooperative will use the space to host events for Clarksdale and the surrounding region. Collective Seed & Supply Co. will also offer its courtyard as an outdoor gathering space, where hotel guests, artists and community members alike can pass warm evenings together.

Space like this can be transformative for communities with few coffee shops, community centers or other gathering places, allowing residents to converge and discuss the community's history, needs and concerns. While the space can be used for everyday gatherings, Travelers also hopes to host more formal discussions and events.

Plans are already underway to host a reading of the play “A. Hawkins vs. The Town of Shaw” by the critically acclaimed StoryWorks Director Jennifer Welch, based on the true story of a federal court case filed against the nearby town of Shaw during the Civil Rights movement, with a community roundtable to follow.

NMSC is proud to support the Travelers Hotel’s mission to build the local economy, offer community programming and serve as a gathering space for Clarksdale residents and visitors alike. NMSC’s Growing Rural Communities Fund provided a real-estate secured loan with a more flexible structure than traditional financing, allowing Travelers to bring its vision to fruition without compromising its mission to provide impactful community programming on arts, music, culture, business training and beyond.

“This loan enables Travelers to offer meaningful programming instead of just focusing on getting bodies in a bed,” says Rutledge. “A deal like this doesn’t pencil in the traditional sense, but there are great things to be done in this community when financing does come through.”