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### **Makerspace Event Brings Together Makers, Hackers, DIYers**

*Nearly 70 North Country residents gather to explore shared space opportunities*

Saranac Lake, NY - If you've never heard of a makerspace, or you're not sure what one is, you are not alone. These shared creative spaces are cropping up all over the country and have gained much attention in business, political and research circles. On November 9th, nearly 70 local makers, business owners, and educators gathered at Saranac Lake's Pendragon Theatre to explore the region's active "culture of making" and how it can be further cultivated in North Country communities.

A group of regional partners convened the exploratory meeting to identify existing makerspace initiatives and encourage regional collaboration between interested individuals and groups. The Adirondack North Country Association (ANCA), the Adirondack Foundation, the Saranac Lake Chamber of Commerce, GreatRange and the Hub on the Hill helped facilitate the gathering, which was designed to identify resources and existing initiatives as well as encourage regional collaboration.

"We wanted to approach this meeting in the same collaborative spirit that leads to successful makerspaces," said ANCA's Jacob Vennie-Vollrath. "There are many existing and budding makerspaces right here in the North Country. Provide an open space with the right tools for creative, energetic minds to interact, and innovation will happen."

So, what exactly is a makerspace? According to the meeting's presenters, it depends. The purpose and layout of each makerspace depends on the particular needs and goals of those who use it. Central to the concept is a sharing of space, technology, equipment, knowledge and expertise.

There are a number of existing and developing makerspace groups in the region meeting different needs in their communities. Several were represented at the meeting, including Northwood School Innovation Center of Lake Placid, which focuses on technology and education, and the Hub on the Hill, a community food processing and marketing facility in

Essex, NY. Bluseed Studios of Saranac Lake, which offers space for making various arts and crafts, is another local example of what makerspaces can look like.

Seth Putnam, Library Media Specialist at Saranac Lake High School, spoke to meeting attendees about what makerspaces can be as well as some of the innovative and economic benefits that they can offer rural communities. Putnam believes shared creative work spaces could help retain and attract talent to the region. “This kind of makerspace culture facilitates keeping young people’s interests alive,” he said. “For rural areas, this means holding on to folks that graduate from our schools, but also drawing others in.” Putnam believes the rural makerspace scene benefits from cross-generational interaction and collaboration that can attract people from diverse backgrounds to the area.

Doug Haney of Saranac Lake agrees. Haney is a partner in GreatRange, a group of Saranac Lake professionals who collaborate to take on large and diversified projects. He believes makerspaces can provide the space and resources for developing fulfilling careers in rural places. “Makerspaces provide physical tools and an environment for creative collaboration,” he said. “It’s a lifestyle-focused career trend which allows people to live in a place that inspires their individual passions.”

Meeting participants were able to bring their energy and creativity to the table in breakout discussions that dug more deeply into their diverse interests and experiences. Discussion groups explored how makerspaces play a role in local economic development and education and how existing and aspiring makers can utilize regional makerspace networks and public spaces such as libraries.

Johnny Muldowney, Executive Director of the Saranac Lake Chamber of Commerce, facilitated a discussion that focused more specifically on developing makerspaces in Saranac Lake. He was impressed by the enthusiasm and ideas that came out of the conversation. The group of 12 Saranac Lake area residents talked about what a makerspace could look like in their town -- whether it should be one large shared space or a network of smaller spaces. They addressed practical issues like leadership, membership and economic viability. They also stressed the importance of public access and providing spaces that area youth can utilize to pursue their creative interests.

“Saranac Lake, like other North Country communities, has been building momentum over the last several years to create and support local businesses, particularly in the arts,” Muldowney said. “We see makers of all kinds doing what Adirondack residents have done for generations -- using their creativity and ingenuity to create livelihoods and enrich their communities. The makerspace culture represents a real boon for creative and industrious folks in rural areas where infrastructure and support are otherwise limited.”

For more information about makerspace networks in the region or to get involved in a makerspace near you, visit <http://www.adirondack.org/makerspace>. ###