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A HUB FOR SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS

Finnegans founder Jacquie Berglund has set up shop in an Elliot Park mansion and drawn other socially conscious organizations to work alongside her



PHOTO BY ROBB LONG
Finnegans founder Jacquie Berglund outside the Elliot Park mansion that she runs her business from.

BY MICHELLE BRUCH

Just a few months ago, a stately mansion in Elliot Park was nearly empty.

A failed condo project sent much of the block into foreclosure, and a bank had taken possession of the land at 10th Street and Park Avenue South.

This sad story turned a corner when neighborhood staff members showed the Hinkle-Murphy mansion to Jacquie Berglund, the founder of the nonprofit Finnegans Community Fund. She was looking to move the business out of her condo and into a neighborhood where she could lend some positive energy.

"When I walked up to this building, it was locked in the front so we couldn't get in," she said. "I squished my face against this window, and I looked in here and [I said], 'I love this office!'"

Berglund assumed that she wouldn't be able to afford the space, and she was shocked to learn that only two of the 15-odd rooms in the mansion were occupied. She leased out the old sitting room of the mansion, moved in on New Year's Day, and immediately set to work enlisting other nonprofit groups to join her.

"It's just such a shame to have such a beautiful building sitting here empty," she said. "I would love to buy this building — that's my

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An education endowment fund and two other nonprofits have moved into the mansion

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goal ... and fill it with people that are doing really innovative projects that are all about servicing the greater good."

In the two short months that Berglund has officed in Elliot Park, an education endowment fund moved in next door, a nonprofit coffee business decided to move across the hall in April, and a student-based nonprofit took steps to move into the basement.

"We kind of created a bit of a buzz about it, which is great," Berglund said.

Alex Johnston has started using the mansion's old dining room as a studio to conduct research for his endowment fund and write a play based on educational themes. He likes the idea of creating an incubator for social entrepreneurs. He set up a meeting with staff at Artspace, a Downtown-based organization that works to create and preserve affordable space for arts groups, to see if they might help fill the building.

Jerry Brown is looking forward to networking at the mansion when he moves in this spring. He is launching a new coffee company in which all of the profits are funneled into revitalizing downtown areas in small towns. His business model is similar to Berglund's, and he'll be able to pop across the hall to ask her a question any time of day.

"I can just see all kinds of



PHOTO BY HANNA K. STOEHR

Finnegans has donated \$126,000 to nonprofits across the state working on fighting poverty.

synergy going on there," he said. "That's a very good reason for being in there."

Berglund hasn't always worked in the nonprofit arena.

"I've taken a few detours, but they were all necessary detours," she said.

She lived in Paris for seven years and worked at the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the entity that implemented the Marshall Plan to reconstruct Europe after World War II. The company has become an economic think tank of sorts, and Berglund worked on technical projects in the northern regions of Russia and the Baltic countries.

But she missed Minnesota and

didn't think she was cut out for working in government. She returned here in 1997 and took a marketing job at a restaurant her friend Kieran Folliard was starting up — The Local on Nicollet Mall.

When The Local started blowing its budget on donations without any publicity or cohesive charitable focus, Berglund decided it was time to strategize.

A friend of hers had once mentioned that Folliard was becoming so popular that he could launch his own beer. Berglund decided to give that a try.

After a couple months of convincing, Folliard agreed to help create the beer that became Finnegans Irish Amber. He and

Berglund spent an afternoon at the James Page Brewing Co. sampling 40 microbrews at the bar.

"We wanted Finnegans to be kind of a gateway product. Not too heavy, not too light, not too malty and not too hoppy," Berglund said. "So just real drinkable."

When Berglund decided to focus on the nonprofit full time, Folliard was skeptical about its success but decided to sell her the brand for \$1 — he still has the check and expects to frame it one of these days.

"I think the most extraordinary thing about what she has done is the volunteer base she has built and the extraordinary passion that they have," Folliard said.

"She's like a whirlwind, a dynamo that's blowing around and creates a lot of energy around her, and the great thing is that it's not just scattered energy. It's very focused, so as a result, the difference that they're making in this community is very inspirational. It's fantastic."

The Finnegans line of beer became profitable in 2003, and the company has since donated \$126,000 to nonprofits across the state dealing with poverty.

Berglund said she focuses on poverty because she grew up poor herself. Her mom worked as a waitress and her dad worked as a janitor. He also attended school full time and worked his way up to become a director at Gillette Children's Hospital.

"I just have such an appreciation for people in that situation," Berglund said.

When she moved back to Minnesota, she volunteered at the St. Stephen's shelter on Saturday nights when about 50 men slept on mats on the floor. She had to grab a flashlight and get up at 3 a.m. to wake some of the men for the two-hour bus rides that took them to factory jobs.

"So many of them were working," she said. "I thought, what's going on that these people are working, and they're working super hard, and they can't meet their basic needs? And it just bugged me. This is just wrong. What's wrong with our system?"

Through her work at Finnegans, Berglund has become particularly proud of her partnership with Heading Home Hennepin, an initiative to end homelessness in the county. Finnegans' donations are earmarked as seed money to fund a new program for homeless youth with disabilities.

Berglund is the only full-time staff member at Finnegans, but she has three interns and a large crew of volunteers.

They're currently working on a new product to launch in 2010. (It won't be another beer, Berglund says.)

The volunteers certainly seem to enjoy Berglund's new digs. One of them built her a kegerator for the office, and they fill up at monthly meetings.

"Isn't that fun?" Berglund said. "I just love to come in here every day."