

Programs Transforms Empty Storefronts



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Empty
storefront
windows can

become blights in a small downtown, but they can also provide an opportunity to tell a story.

The Storefront Project is an attempt to transform these detractors into attractions. The first demonstration can be found in the windows of the former Daily Record pressroom on Main Street.

AmeriCorps volunteers Zoe Fahy and Justin Gasper undertook the project, which chronicles the history of Central Washington University dating back to its origins as the Normal School.

Fahy and Gasper are based out of the HopeSource office, but Fahy said the purpose of AmeriCorps service is to be involved in a multitude of community efforts.

“The idea is to always be giving something back to the community, not just when you’re in the office,” Fahy said. “We’re here to serve the community in a lot of different ways.”

She said the project got off the ground with the assistance of the Ellensburg Downtown Association and the Kittitas County Chamber of Commerce.

Fahy said the storefront was an excellent way to become immersed in some of the history of the community and meet people she might not have otherwise met.

“We met with all the people at Gallery One, Sadie Thayer at the Kittitas County

Historical Museum, all of the librarians at Central Washington University,” Fahy said. “This brought us in to contact with a lot of interesting people.”

Chance to display

Fahy said most of the artifacts on display were in storage so this is a chance for people to see the historic items.

There are antique toys, a school bell and historic homework assignments.

Fahy said they also transcribed old postcards written from some of the early-day normal

school students and have those on display.



Fahy said there are a lot of stories to be told in the

community, but that the history of education seemed to be a natural place to start.

When they started the project, Fahy part of the motivation was to give CWU a presence downtown, and during the course of the project the CWU Foundation ended up opening an office a couple storefronts down from the space.

Fahy said she has a background in choreography and performance so she understood the challenge of staging something in a large space.

“I knew it would be a lot more difficult than we thought it would be,” she said with a laugh.

She said she and Gasper enjoyed putting the project together, and that they received considerable help in terms of donation of materials and people volunteering time.