

January 2025 | Volume 3, Issue 8

MN Biz Vision: Asian Kaleidoscope

A portrait of Mhonpaj Lee, a woman with long, wavy brown hair, smiling and wearing a white top. The background is a soft-focus indoor setting with white walls and a wooden door.

Features:

**Mhonpaj Lee:
Founder of Mhonpaj
Garden and Inspire
Access Realty**

How SEARS
Redevelopment is
Building a Bicycle-
Friendly Community

This monthly E-Magazine is published by the Asian American Business Resilience Network to highlight Asian American small businesses' accomplishments.

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Asian American Business Resilience Network

VISION

Envision a new reality that addressing historic inequities, and enhancing culturally/linguistically appropriate ways to thrive through resilience, sustainability, and inclusive growth for all members and the communities where they learn, live, play, and work.

MISSION

AABRN radically accelerates the pace of change by disrupting the status quo; providing resources, training, and support; building bridges across diverse ecosystems; and bringing together public health and business networks, in order to achieve sustainable growth along with an equitable future.

PROGRAMS

- Community Engagement and Translation Assistance, especially public health in nature
- Navigate local, state and national resources
- Access digital tools in advancing members' wellbeing
- Provide training to retain a healthy workforce
- Provide technical assistance in business operation and IT needs





FROM HERITAGE TO HARVEST: HOW MHONPAJ LEE BUILT THE FIRST HMONG OWNED CERTIFIED ORGANIC FARM AND FOUNDED INSPIRE ACCESS REALTY AS A BROKER/REALTOR

Interviewed By Meejoo Choi

Mhonpaj Lee is the founder of the first Hmong-owned certified organic farm in the state. Together with her mother, she operates Mhonpaj Garden, cultivating five acres in Stillwater, four acres in Marine on St. Croix, and an additional 22 acres in Hugo. The farm produces fresh, organic produce sold at local markets and through a CSA program, reflecting Mhonpaj's commitment to sustainable living. Recently, she expanded her influence by launching a talk show that explores organic living and Hmong culture. In addition to her work in farming, Mhonpaj is an Inspire Access Realty Broker Realtor with a mission to support new construction homesteads and farmsteads. Before her current career, she held various roles, including aerobics instructor and sushi chef. Today, she is also a licensed real estate broker, real estate developer, and program host on Hmong TV, showcasing her versatility and dedication to uplifting her community.

Rooted in Culture: How Hmong Traditions Shape Her Work

As a Hmong business owner, her cultural roots deeply influence her work and lifestyle. Coming from an indigenous group that values freedom and resilience, she grew up with parents who had humble beginnings but high expectations. Her family's

farming background meant they always had fresh fruits and vegetables. This upbringing instilled in her a passion for preserving Hmong culture, which she initially pursued by focusing on traditional Hmong herbs with her sister during college. Fulfilling her mother's dream, she purchased land, built a greenhouse, and established a certified organic farm, cultivating a variety of Hmong herbs and promoting a culturally enriched lifestyle. Beyond farming, she also works as a real estate agent, helping others embrace a sustainable lifestyle through farming and homesteading.



Building a Business from Scratch with Resilience and Mentorship

Starting her business was a journey of resilience and self-discovery, as everything she accomplished began from scratch. Without formal guidance, she relied on her parents' example of a strong work ethic and dedication to forge her own path. Mentorship played a crucial role in her growth, as meeting mentors in real life proved to be a blessing. For instance, her cousin introduced her to a workshop where mentors helped her learn about building passive income as a financial advisor by managing people's assets. Similarly, her husband's network and her family's farming background in Laos inspired them to learn modern farming techniques in the U.S., such as using high tunnels to optimize tomato growth. Her resourcefulness extended to real estate when she initially aimed to help her brother buy and sell a house but ended up obtaining her license and continuing to work as a real estate broker to help others. Along the way, she sought out smarter individuals, asked questions, and absorbed knowledge, steadily building the connections and expertise that now define her success.

Navigating Uncertainty and Balancing Risk

Starting and running a business came with its share of challenges, requiring a balance of risk-taking and careful planning. One significant hurdle was the uncertainty of income—whether it was the possibility of not selling a house, failing a year's crops,

or dealing with a family illness. To mitigate this risk, she and her husband adopted a strategy where one maintained a steady income while the other pursued self-employment, reducing financial vulnerability. Farming, in particular, presented constant challenges and a steep learning curve. She had to relearn how to grow specific crops in the U.S., operate equipment like tractors, and navigate different environments that made some crops harder to cultivate. There were even times when they had an overabundance of vegetables but insufficient markets to sell them. While her mother handled much of the farming, she supported with paperwork and other essential tasks, demonstrating the teamwork and adaptability needed to overcome these obstacles.

Jump In: Advice for Aspiring Entrepreneurs

For anyone looking to start a business in her industry, Mhonpaj's advice is simple: "Go for it!". There will never be a perfect time, so if you're passionate about pursuing something, jump in, try it out, and figure things out along the way. However, she emphasizes the importance of having a solid business plan, especially understanding upfront costs. For real estate, for instance, you'll need to invest in education and have financial resources prepared. Optimism is key, but so is having a plan and finding mentors to guide you. She learned much of what she knows through trial and error—making mistakes, learning from them, and trying again. A good mentor can help you avoid some of those missteps. Lastly, she encourages aspiring entrepreneurs to interview others in the field to gain clarity about their path and ensure it aligns with their goals and values.





Preface: The Asian American Business Resilience Network has teamed up with Asian Media Access to co-develop the St. Paul Sears Site, we will publicize a series of articles to highlight our progress.

Series of SEARS Redevelopment - Article #13

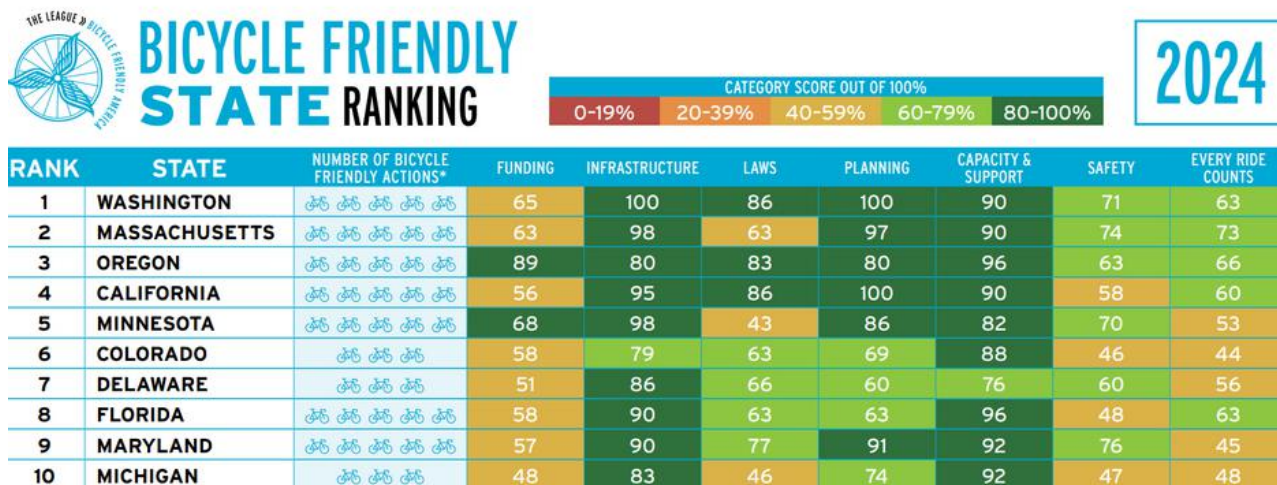
HOW SEARS REDEVELOPMENT IS BUILDING A BICYCLE-FRIENDLY COMMUNITY

The League of American Bicyclists works to create a Bicycle Friendly America where everyone can safely enjoy cycling. Every two years, it partners with state Departments of Transportation and advocates to assess bicycling conditions nationwide. This article examines the 2024 Bicycle Friendly States Report, which evaluates states using seven metrics: funding, infrastructure, laws, planning, capacity and support, safety, and ride impact. It also connects to the Sears Redevelopment Project, highlighting its plans for fostering a bike-friendly environment.

Strengths and Opportunities in 2024 Rankings: Infrastructure and Strategic Planning

Minnesota ranks 5th in the 2024 Bicycle Friendly State Ranking, showing its strong commitment to supporting cycling. The state performs well in key areas, including infrastructure with a high score of 98%, and strategic planning at 86%, showing a focus on building cycling-friendly infrastructure. Its capacity and support for cyclists are also strong, with a score of 82%, and safety measures are good at 70%. However,

areas like laws (43%) and Every Ride Counts (53%) need improvement. By addressing these issues, Minnesota can strengthen its position as a leader in cycling and improve its ranking.



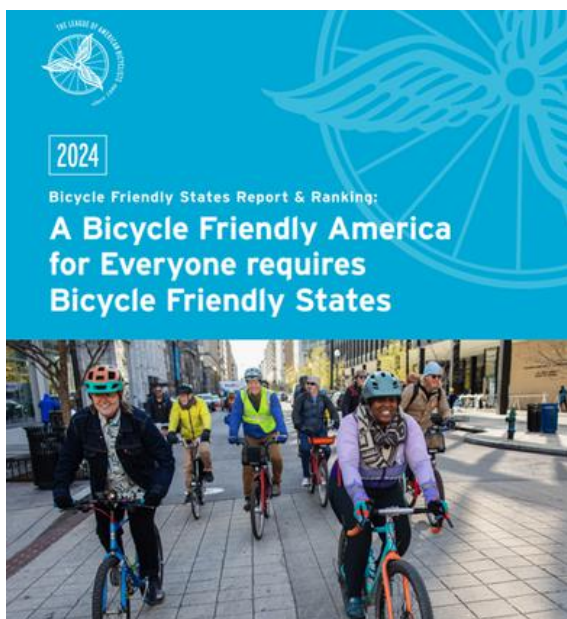
Minnesota's 'Laws' Metric: What's Measured and Areas for Improvement?

The "Laws" metric evaluates the legislative framework that supports bicyclist safety and rights, highlighting critical elements such as safe passing laws, protections against harassment, and penalties for drivers involved in bike-related crashes. It also examines requirements for incorporating bicycle infrastructure into transportation planning, such as Complete Streets policies, while ensuring the equitable enforcement of traffic laws. Additional considerations include helmet regulations, penalties for distracted driving to protect vulnerable road users, and clear definitions of bicyclist rights, such as lane use and protections against dooring. Minnesota's 43% score in this category underscores significant gaps in its legal framework, including the lack of comprehensive safe passing or vulnerable road user protections, limited or inconsistent helmet laws for younger riders, and challenges in the equitable enforcement of traffic laws. Addressing these issues by adopting stronger legal protections, ensuring fair treatment of bicyclists, and aligning policies with national best practices would demonstrate a greater commitment to fostering a safe and equitable environment for cyclists.

Community Actions to Improve Minnesota's Bicycle Laws

While Minnesota has made significant strides in creating a bicycle-friendly environment, its 43% score in the "Laws" category underscores the need for targeted improvements to its legislative framework. Addressing these gaps requires a multifaceted approach. At the public level, communities can play a vital role by raising awareness about bicyclist rights and safe driving practices through campaigns and

encouraging voluntary helmet use, especially for children, via partnerships with schools. Engaging in policy discussions and attending public hearings provides opportunities to advocate for stronger bicycle safety measures, while community reporting tools can help identify and resolve unsafe road conditions or behaviors. By taking these proactive steps, Minnesota can enhance its legal framework, promote equitable enforcement, and ensure a safer, more inclusive environment for all cyclists, positioning itself as a national leader in cycling accessibility and safety.



Effort Building a Bike-Friendly Future: Minnesota's Sears Redevelopment in Action

The Sears Redevelopment Master Plan is actively advancing Minnesota's goals of promoting active transportation and enhancing cycling infrastructure. With dedicated bike lanes, multi-use paths, and pedestrian-friendly streetscapes, the project demonstrates how transit-oriented development is reducing car dependency while fostering healthier, more sustainable lifestyles. Current features, such as enhanced connections to green spaces, public transit hubs, and Saint Paul's established bike routes, complement Minnesota's existing strengths in infrastructure and planning. The integration of zero-emission mobility options, including bike and e-bike sharing programs, further highlights the state's leadership in innovation and environmental responsibility. These initiatives are already creating safer and more accessible cycling environments, serving as a model for urban developments across Minnesota.

In conclusion, the Sears Redevelopment's commitment to connected streets and bike-friendly roads aims to further enhance Minnesota's legal framework, promote equitable enforcement, and create a safer, more inclusive environment for all modes of transportation, positioning the state as a national leader in cycling accessibility and safety.



MEARSHEIMER: U.S. CAN NO LONGER STOP CHINA'S RISE

By Joel Wong | Board Member of Silicon Valley Community Media

In an exclusive interview with [MediaUnlocked](#) in Beijing, Professor John Mearsheimer discusses the intensifying security competition between the US and China.

Political scientist John Mearsheimer argues that the U.S.-China rivalry is primarily a power struggle, not an ideological conflict. He criticizes framing it as democracy versus authoritarianism, arguing this distracts from the core geopolitical competition.

Mearsheimer believes U.S. efforts to contain China's rise are increasingly ineffective due to shifting global power dynamics. While a full-scale war is unlikely, he identifies several potential flashpoints, including the South China Sea, Taiwan, and the East China Sea, where tensions could escalate.

Key takeaways:

- **Power Struggle:** The rivalry is driven by China's ambition for regional dominance and global influence, similar to the U.S.'s historical role.
- **Ineffective Containment:** U.S. attempts to curb China's economic and technological growth may prove insufficient.
- **Risk of Crises:** While large-scale war is unlikely, repeated crises in flashpoints could increase the risk of conflict.
- **Long-Term Rivalry:** The U.S.-China competition is likely to persist for decades, characterized by rivalry rather than cooperation.

This summary highlights the core argument of a power struggle, the challenges of containment, the potential for crises, and the long-term nature of the US-China rivalry.

December 01

TURKISH FESTIVAL OF MINNESOTA

The Turkish American Association of Minnesota hosted a lively celebration of Turkish culture, featuring traditional dances, music, cuisine, and art. Workshops on Turkish coffee, marble art, henna painting, and pre-wedding customs delighted attendees, and the event concluded with a performance by Turkish pop icon Rafet El Roman. Photo Courtesy: Turkish American Association of Minnesota



December 23

HEART OF THE BEAST

Community members and artists from In the Heart of the Beast Puppet and Mask Theatre came together on a snow-covered hill in Powderhorn Park, South Minneapolis, to celebrate the winter solstice. Photo Courtesy: In the Heart of the Beast Puppet and Mask Theatre



December 26

AYYAPPA MANDALA PUJA EVENT

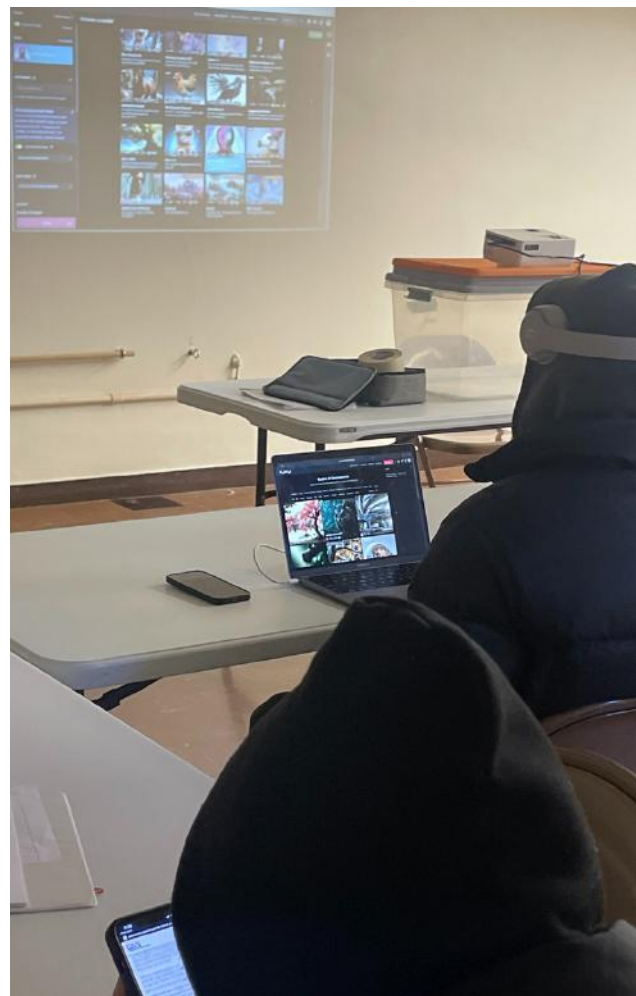
Hindu Society of Minnesota hosted an Ayyappa Mandala Puja and the event was filled with devotion, unity, and spiritual joy as devotees came together to celebrate this sacred occasion. They were incredibly grateful for the overwhelming participation and support from the community—it truly made the event special. Photo Courtesy: Hindu Society of Minnesota



January 04

AI/AR/VR TRAINING COURSE

Our AR/VR Training Cohort provided participants with an immersive learning experience, exploring the history, technology, and applications of AR/VR across industries. The program offered hands-on training with cutting-edge hardware and software, while equipping attendees with valuable skills in 3D modeling, UX/UI design, programming languages like Unity and Unreal Engine, and the integration of AI for enhanced AR/VR solutions.



January 04 ~ 05

KAREN TRADITIONAL NEW YEAR CELEBRATION

The Karen Culture Organization of Minnesota hosted a vibrant Karen New Year celebration, honoring Karen culture with traditional performances, delicious food, and community connections. The event featured numerous dance performances, music, and local vendors. Photo Courtesy: The Karen Culture Organization of Minnesota



January 11

SCIENCE MUSEUM

Our partner, Asian Media Access has hosted a successful performance during the African American in STEM Day at the Science Museum!



January 12

VIETNAMESE TET NEW YEAR AT THE BURNSVILLE CENTER

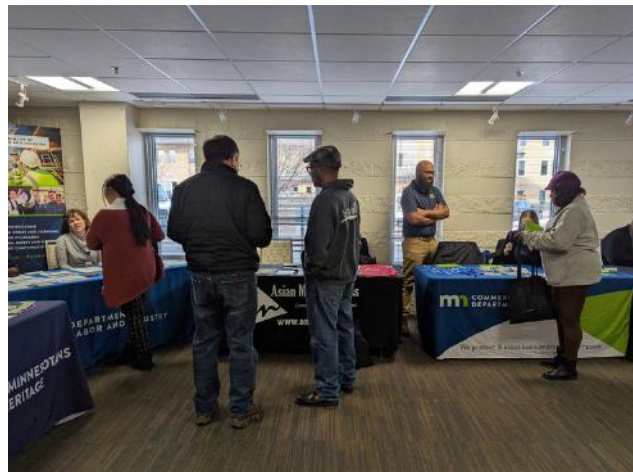
The Vietnamese Community of Minnesota transformed Burnsville Center into a vibrant celebration of Vietnamese Tet New Year, showcasing their rich cultural heritage. Jointly we distributed gifts to children of all ages, spreading joy and happiness.



January 16

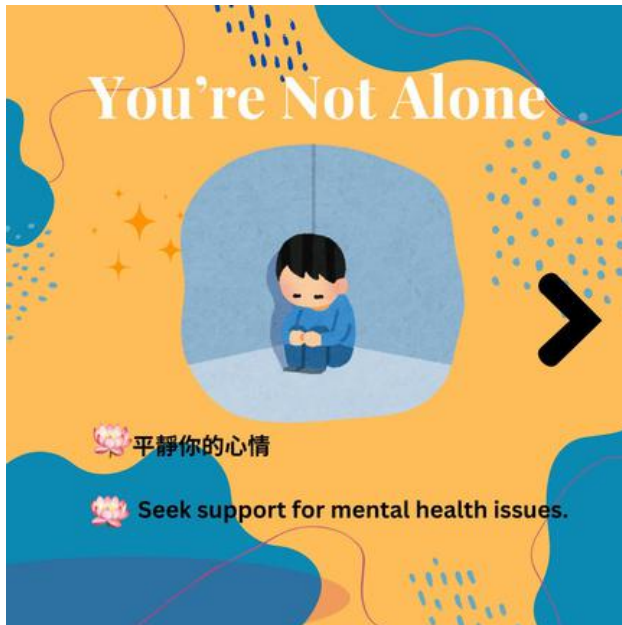
MLK COMMUNITY CONFERENCE AT THE METRO STATE UNIVERSITY

Metro State University proudly hosted the 39th Annual State of Minnesota Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration, uniting advocates, educators, students, and community members for a day of impactful conversations, performances, workshops, and activities. Jointly we hosted a table at the event, providing attendees with valuable educational resources.



MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS FLYERS

Asian Media Access has created a set of mental health heritage story cards. If you are in need of crisis support contact the text line by texting MN to 741741.







Thinking about starting your business?

Sign up today for the FREE 4 two-hour weekly online classes.

INCENTIVE \$200

Get \$100 on the first day and \$100 for completing the class.
 *Get \$1000 support when you develop a business plan.

Lead Instructor: Poh Lin Khoo, CEO, Khoo Consulting LLC

Cohort #2 Schedule:

January 14, 2025	5:30 PM - 7:30 PM	Orientation with \$100 sign up bonus
January 21, 2025	5:30 PM - 7:30 PM	Entrepreneurship 101
January 28, 2025	5:30 PM - 7:30 PM	Entrepreneurship 101
February 04, 2025	5:30 PM - 7:30 PM	Entrepreneurship 101 with \$100 completion bonus

Future Cohort Schedules with dates TBD:

- Cohort #3 - Mar/Apr (Minneapolis location TBD)
- Cohort #4 - May/Jun (Online)
- Cohort #5 - Jul/Aug (St Paul location TBD)
- Cohort #6 - Sep/Oct (Online)

SIGN UP NOW!



https://forms.gle/jyhCTE4fXaqBESRA6

*Visit website for details about eligibility and business plan criteria.

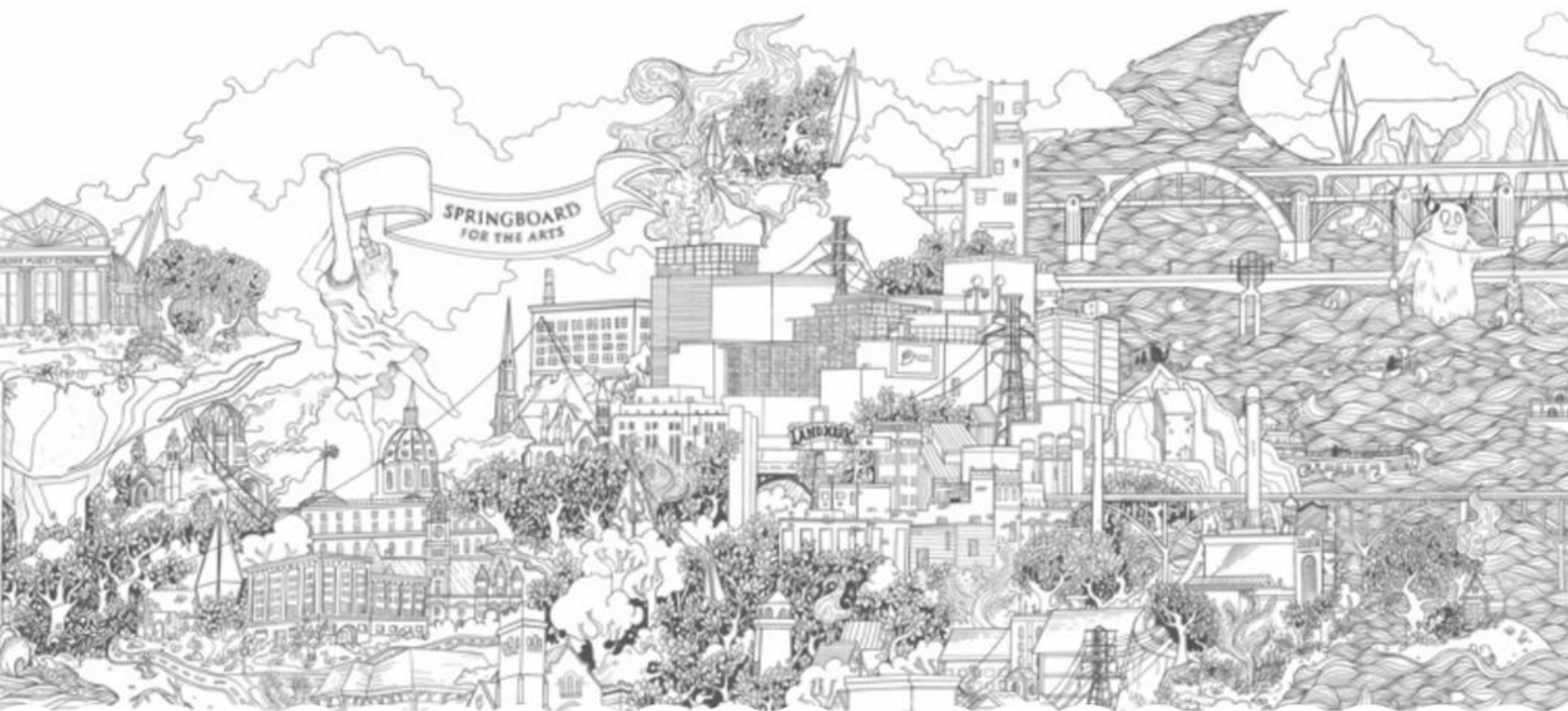
For more info: info@aabrn.org www.aabrn.org

ENTREPRENEURSHIP 101

Sign up today for the FREE Entrepreneurship 101 classes at the Brookdale Library, consisting of four 2 hours sessions. We are currently accepting residents from the BP/BC area only.

The cohort begins on January 14th. 200 Incentive to sign up and complete the 4 weeks cohort. \$1000 in support for developing a business plan (limited to 3 participants per cohort).

Sign up today at: <https://aabrn.org/entrepreneurship-101/>



Springboard for the Arts Calendar of Events - Professional Development

- January 16, 2025 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm - Springboard on Ice: Open Skate Day
- January 21, 2025 6:00 pm to 8:30 pm - Work of Art: Time Management
- January 23, 2025 6:00 pm to 7:30 pm - Ask Me Anything: Preserving Your Artistic Legacy Through an Artist Archive
- February 4, 2025 6:00 pm to 8:30 pm - Work of Art: Portfolio Kit

Learn more and register at: <https://springboardforthearts.org/events/>

Additional Resources

- Get connected to Artist Career Consultants here:
<https://springboardforthearts.org/professional-growth/career-consultations/artist-career-consultants/>
- Work of Art Toolkit: <https://springboardforthearts.org/woa>
- Handbook for Artists Working in Community:
<https://springboardforthearts.org/artists-working-in-community/>

Tax Tips from the IRS



- [Here's what taxpayers need to know about business related travel deductions](#)
- [Companies who promise to eliminate tax debt sometimes leave taxpayers high and dry](#)
- [Get an Identity Protection PIN.](#)
- [Tax Resources for Members of the Military](#)



JAN
21
11am~12pm

Networking for Fundraising and Market Access

Business Webinar

[LEARN MORE >>](#)

JAN
22
4pm~6pm

Chamber Connect

Business Webinar

[LEARN MORE >>](#)

JAN
23
1pm~2pm

The Power of Community: How to Build a Values-Aligned 7-Figure Business

Business Webinar

[LEARN MORE >>](#)

JAN
28
5pm~6pm

How to Transition to Entrepreneurship Full-Time

Business Webinar

[LEARN MORE >>](#)



FEB

5

12pm~1pm

Strategies for Entrepreneurs in Consumer Retail

Business Webinar

[LEARN MORE >>](#)

FEB

7

12pm~1pm

Top AI Marketing Tools for 2025

Business Webinar

[LEARN MORE >>](#)

FEB

13

12pm~1pm

Collaboration Powers Lasting Change

Business Webinar

[LEARN MORE >>](#)

MAR

13

12pm~1pm

Continuous Experimentation Strengthens Data Models

Business Webinar

[LEARN MORE >>](#)



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