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Notes from editor (not for publication):

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HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

69A finds new digs at 134 Elliot

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For now, the name will stay the same

####END SUBHED####

TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

Days before the lease was to run out at 69A Elliot Street,
the community space there known by its address has found a
new home at 134 Elliot St.

And it's bigger. And better. And cheaper.

"It's awesome," says Coordinator Lisa Marie, and you can
see her smiling through the phone. "It's humongous and amazing
and beautiful."

11 The new space is owned by dermatologist Dr. Rebecca
12 Jones. Her practice is in a building where she rents space across
13 the parking lot.

14 “I have a lot of friends who are very engaged in
15 supporting the community and they had told me about 69A, and
16 I just feel like things are so hard for everybody and the more
17 support we can give our community, the better, so I figured it was
18 something I can do,” Jones tells The Commons of her decision to
19 rent the space.

20 A year ago, artist Katie Bachler and her husband, Scott
21 Berzofsky, took out a one-year lease at 69A Elliot to “make a
22 community space.”

23 Bachler and Berzofsky tapped into their savings to do so
24 in the aftermath of the national election and last year’s
25 contentious local debate over “acceptable community conduct.”

26 Without knowing the exact contours of how the space
27 would actually be used, the former owners of Avenue Grocery
28 did know they wanted to restore a community gathering place in
29 the same spirit of the community convenience store that they
30 briefly ran on Western Avenue in 2017 and 2018.

31 Amid the final dismantling of the state’s motel program in
32 July for those who were unsheltered and the already acute
33 homelessness epidemic in the region, 69A Elliot Street became a
34 safe space for all, offering free coffee, tea, water, wi-fi access,
35 various gear and supplies (including tents, sleeping bags,
36 flashlights, and clothing), restrooms, music, and a social milieu.

37 Marie is over the moon at how things have resolved
38 since she learned the center would have to relocate.

39 “It was really nice in our other space, but we had
40 outgrown it a while ago,” she says. “Rebecca was kind enough to
41 let us be here, and it’s awesome.”

42 The center is on the first floor at 134 Elliot, in the space
43 formerly occupied by the Restless Rooster restaurant.

44 Many people have suggested new names for the space,
45 but Marie says for now it will remain the same.

46 "For right now we're going to keep it as 69A," she says
47 with a smile. "But someone today said, 'just put a plus after it.' So
48 lots of people have suggestions and we're looking at them all."

49 In the larger area, the group will have more room to do
50 new things, and Marie is planning to start a men's recovery group
51 soon and later, a women's recovery group.

52 "We're going to have areas so we can have more private
53 conversations if needed, and an area for trainings. Today, we had
54 certified CPR training here," she says.

55 Folks can go to the center to get warm, eat, chat, get hot
56 coffee or hot chocolate, and get some warm clothing.

57 Marie says the center is still gearing up for two meals a
58 day so they will probably serve only lunch only for now, adding
59 breakfast later. They're also not using the space's stove because
60 most food is brought in cooked, "which is amazing," Marie says.

61 Loaves & Fishes brings food Tuesdays and Fridays and
62 others do so throughout the week but hot cooked meals are
63 welcome any time.

64 Although the center serves from 70 to 130 people daily,
65 Marie says it's "great to have even one pan for about 30, 35."

66 The center is open 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday through
67 Friday. If you'd like to offer a hot meal, call or text 413-418-8227.

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BIO/COATTAIL:

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LAST ISSUE IN WHICH THIS FILE CAN BE RUN:

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LINKS:

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VIDEO:

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LOGLINE (SOCIAL MEDIA):

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