

# Norwood News

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## Artify Norwood Connects Business With the Arts

February 23, 2015 by Monica Melton

An 'Artify' movement is coming to a neighborhood near you. And it starts in Norwood. The movement is the brainchild of Fernando Tirado, founder of Neighborhood Initiatives and Economic Development Strategies, and Anne Leighton, a consultant to musicians and artists. Together the pair has set out to make Norwood a focal point for all art forms, and a collaborative space for local businesses to take in artists.

Tirado and Leighton suggest that the burgeoning movement is a way for local artists to have a venue while attracting more people to the area, which is a plus for local businesses. To the pair, the trades can be mutually beneficial to each other. "The arts are a way to break the cycle of poverty. I wanted to do something that was both artistic and provide more than exposure for local artists, but a way for them to get paid," said Tirado.

In bringing an arts culture to the neighborhood, Artify Norwood intends to create a demand for local businesses and provide opportunities for residents. The movement will match businesses with artists, who will be compensated for their work by the business owners.

Tirado and Leighton plan to work with the East 204th Street and Bainbridge Avenue Merchants Association to connect artists to businesses. Its lead organizer is Eli Garcia, owner of Beso Lounge, which has welcomed an art scene that's helped increase the restaurant's popularity and demand. "They've had poetry night, comedy nights, live performances and they've become a fixture in this community," he said. "We're pitching it as a marketing concept that giving back to your community and providing a space for artists to make money and perform is actually good for business. It's a draw."

Leighton, working with a number of Bronx artists, sees Artify Norwood as a way for the local artists to get noticed. Leighton notes the movement may have a much broader reach. "There are also possibilities we may hook some of the local arts businesses that already exist with national and international companies as well," said Leighton.

Already there is potential to bridge communities across all of the Bronx and have a transformative effect through art and local business incentives. Leighton has reached out to Ellen Pollan, the deputy director of programming for the **Bronx Council on the Arts**. Pollan specifically works with the south Bronx arts scene. Artify Norwood's premiere event will be a logo design competition at the Mosholu Library on Feb. 21 at 2 p.m. Locals artists are encouraged to come out and submit their designs for a logo that will represent the movement. There is also an upcoming event at Beso Lounge on March 28.

Tirado and Leighton have a number of ideas to make Norwood a destination for the arts including mural spaces, using Williamsbridge Oval Park as a concert venue, and Whalen Park as a place for smaller art events. The duo conceived the idea of the arts revitalizing local business following the economic success of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. A town that saw an economic collapse after steel mills closed, locals began creating venues for art shows a few years later, according to Tirado. "Slowly Bethlehem, PA was able to transform itself into an arts haven. So we're saying let's look at the Bronx," Tirado said.

The Bronx is known as the birthplace of hip hop, but Tirado and Leighton see potential for it to be known for its other art forms. They believe art will draw more people to the neighborhood, which they admit is already a major transportation hub and will promote local spending and artists. This movement will also inspire other communities across the Bronx to incorporate more art, according to Leighton. "Who knows, there may be an Artify Allerton, or an Artify Morrisania, or Hunts Point. We can create this movement that every community has its own Artify," Tirado said.

Artists and business owners can contact: [info@artifynorwood.com](mailto:info@artifynorwood.com) to start a project and get more information. ■



MEET THE PARTNERS behind Artify Norwood—Anne Leighton (left) and Fernando Tirado. The pair has teamed up to help put Norwood's artistic side on the map.

*Photo by Adi Talwar*