

Bank branches out, gives building to arts

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Tuesday, April 5th 2011

It may not look like much now, but an old bank branch on E. Tremont and St. Raymond's Aves. is about to become a cultural mecca in the Bronx.

Officials Monday celebrated the donation of the two-story brick building as the new headquarters of the Bronx Council on the Arts.

"This is one of the biggest days that [we] could celebrate," said BCA Executive Director Deirdre Scott.

Mayor Bloomberg called the new space, donated by JPMorgan Chase, "a really big deal."

"[This] will make an enormous difference in the Westchester Square community," he said, "while allowing the organization to expand its programming and serve even more artists, arts organizations and audiences."

The 5,200 square-foot building is valued at \$850,000.

"We believe it's important for us to give back to the communities where our employees live and where we do business," said Charles Scharf of JPMorgan Chase. "We're pleased to be able to help our neighbors by putting this building to good use."

Arts Council officials estimated renovations would be completed next year, in time for the organization's 50th anniversary. The new building effectively doubles BCA's current space on Hone Ave. in Morris Park.

The new space means a renaissance for the community, said Maria Romano, who heads the arts council's Bronx Writers Center.

"When the light goes on for a public event, it won't be on just here but in the entire neighborhood," she said. "We will be part of the revitalization of this community."

The new headquarters creates an exciting opportunity to both continue and expand programs for emerging artists and the public, Scott said.

"It's a major milestone but it's part of what I see as our evolution," she said.

Rep. Joe Crowley (D-Bronx, Queens) and City Councilman James Vacca were credited for pushing this deal through.

"No community can survive without having an appreciation for the arts," Crowley said. "This community is full and rich with history and its greatest days are yet to come."

Vacca chimed in with a bold prediction.

"When you think of the arts, you're going to be thinking of the Bronx," he said.



Deirdre Scott, Executive Director of Bronx Council on the Arts, talking at the press conference announcing the gift of a 5,200 square foot building to the Bronx Council on the Arts by JPMorgan Chase.

Photo: Florescu for News