

New life for deadly corner



Photo by Bill Parry

The Jackson Heights community is looking to reclaim space that has been marred by violence. Photo by Bill Parry

By Bill Parry



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Seth Taylor talks with a resident about a new plaza in Jackson Heights designed to make the area safer. Photo by Bill Parry

A Jackson Heights business leader is trying to calm a neighboring community following two homicides in broad daylight last month.

“There was fear and concern here — everyone was locking their doors and business suffered,” said Seth Taylor, the executive director of the 82nd St. Partnership Business Improvement District. He took the initiative to create Community Plaza on a concrete section at 90th Street and Roosevelt Avenue, the spot where one of the victims died.

On Monday, Taylor and his team set up 10 small tables and 30 chairs in the unused space at the base of the No. 7 subway station allowing for people to read the paper, have a cup of coffee and meet up with friends.

“We wanted to reclaim it and revitalize it for the community and it seems to be working,” Taylor said Tuesday afternoon.

The project was endorsed by City Councilwoman Julissa Ferreras (D-East Elmhurst), who said “the community engagement with the 90th Street plaza was an exceptional idea from the 82nd Street Partnership.”

Community Plaza will be open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. and the partnership is providing supplemental sanitation as well as planning for live music and other programming in the future.

“There’s a lack of outdoor amenities in this neighborhood: no benches, poor signage, poor lighting and that’s some of the things we’re trying to change to make it more inviting,” said Taylor.

“Considering that two murders recently occurred in this area, the reclaiming of this space couldn’t come at a better time,” Ferreras said. “What our community desperately needs right now is to feel we can work through whatever issues arise and be more united for it.”

Ferrera went further, saying “the formation of the Jackson Heights-Corona Business Improvement District would greatly assist our community in taking a major step in the right direction.”

For the last year, the 82nd Street Partnership has been doing outreach to promote a potential expansion along the business corridor of Roosevelt Avenue, explaining the costs and benefits of a BID to local businesses, in an effort to push the BID eastward.

“If these businesses vote their support and are willing to make an investment, we’ll submit it to the city to create a much larger BID, one of the largest in the city,” Taylor said.

The 25-year-old 82nd Street Partnership is made up of 170 commercial businesses and 40 property owners. A larger bid would consist of 800 commercial tenants, 400 property owners and an area that stretches 1.7 miles: Roosevelt Avenue from 81st to 104th streets as well as Junction Boulevard from 35th Avenue to 40th Road.

Taylor, who previously did local economic development in Downtown Brooklyn and Union Square, believes it is strength in numbers, saying, “The larger the BID the better to bring down the cost of services.”

He added that it brings businesses together, creating an agent for change in the area.

Taylor explained that 75 percent of the 82nd St. Partnership’s ground level businesses are family- and immigrant-owned. They make an annual investment that allows for services that curb crime, litter and graffiti.

There is opposition to the expansion among some small business owners. In early September a group calling itself Roosevelt Avenue Community Alliance protested against the plan, saying it would lead to increased rents and taxes and would displace immigrant-owned businesses. They also contended it would encourage chain stores to move into the neighborhood.

Businesses in the expansion area will get a chance to vote and join in when the ballots go out later this year.

“As we do more outreach and more stakeholders learn of the plan, they see it as a positive plan for the neighborhood,” said Taylor