

REAL ESTATE WEEKLY

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Builder putting in All Star performance for youth project

Aragon Construction is renovating the headquarter space for the All Stars Project — one of the country's leading inner-city youth development organizations — located at 543 West 42nd Street.

Aragon's Andy O'Connor is administering the management for the 32,000 s/f renovation.

The project was initiated due to the aging building infrastructure and a heating, cooling and ventilation system that no longer met the needs of All Stars' live stages and theaters, rehearsal rooms, production facilities and staff offices. When complete, the new space will be a state-of-the-art educational and performing arts facility for thousands of poor and minority young people.

All Stars vacated their headquarters in August, when Aragon began construction. In addition to installing an upgraded HVAC system, Aragon is renovating the entry and lobby of the space and rebuilding the existing storefront facade, which had been in disrepair.

All elements of the design were conceived to express the developmental approach and history of the All Stars Project.

The new entry, exterior wall and lobby will welcome everyone: the marquee and lobby ceiling, for example, is one continuous plane that spatially helps make a seamless transition from the street to the interior, while the lobby

is being transformed into an open theater where performances can be staged and viewed from the street.

In keeping with the All Star's motto, "Everyone is an All Star", a three-dimensional seventeen foot high star will be embedded into the exterior wall and entry, visible to everyone that passes by.

"The open theater in particular supports All Stars' practice of continuous performance and keeps the All Stars stage on the street, where volunteers have been for the past 26 years," says Douglas Balder of Douglas Balder Design & Planning, who is not just the architect, but also an active volunteer, fundraiser and Board member with All Stars since 1984.

Spatial needs, sound and equipment access were design challenges that required creative solutions on Aragon's part.

"The Board of Directors' mandate to minimize the loss of program space challenged the team to make use of the high ceilings and locate equipment over the floor while not compromising the space," says Aragon's O'Connor.

"We inserted the mechanical systems into an existing floor plan with no modifications while new and existing systems had to be carefully coordinated." Four air conditioning units, structural steel, piping, and the new exterior wall comprised the very precise design package. "Aragon's creativity and skill working within



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these constraints has insured that the conceptual design intent will be met," notes Balder.

The project is scheduled to be complete at the end of January 2008 and the All Stars expect to move back into their space from a temporary location in Midtown, in the spring of 2008. The All Stars Project will then host a yearlong series of grand opening festivities.

"The uniqueness of the All Stars is that it is a grass roots project and after

many years of establishing our programs, we needed a bridge to connect all that we are doing," says Gabrielle L. Kurlander, president and CEO of the All Stars Project. "The new center is that bridge."

Said Aragon president and founder Alex Getelman, "It has been uplifting to be able to work on such an important facility, one that helps our communities grow and connects people from all walks of life."