



FROM: **WEEKSVILLE HERITAGE CENTER**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**WEEKSVILLE HERITAGE CENTER CELEBRATES COMPLETION OF ITS TRANSFORMATIVE
EDUCATION AND CULTURAL ARTS BUILDING IN CENTRAL BROOKLYN**

***A Dramatic, New Gateway to New York's Only Historic Community
of Free African Americans and a Dynamic Center for Education, Programming and Research***

BROOKLYN, NY (December 11, 2013) – The leadership and staff of Weeksville Heritage Center (WHC) today joined Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz and Department of Cultural Affairs Commissioner Kate D. Levin, along with other government officials, community leaders, leading figures in the arts, local school children and supporters to cut a ceremonial ribbon marking the completion of Weeksville's new 23,000 square-foot Education and Cultural Arts Building. The striking, award-winning and sustainable gateway to the grounds of the original 19th century community of free African Americans will enable Weeksville to significantly expand its education, programming and research capabilities and elevate its standing as one of the nation's leading centers for African American history and culture.

Designed by the acclaimed firm Caples Jefferson Architects, the light-filled building features state-of-the-art exhibition, performance and educational facilities, and provides a green oasis for visitors and the local community. The main lobby will lead to a 700 square-foot gallery for changing art shows, a lecture and performance space for 200 visitors, classrooms for visiting groups and community education and a resource center for visiting scholars. Administrative offices are to be located on the second floor, and the cellar will include archival storage space as well as a studio for recording oral histories.

Sustainable design and construction elements, from its seven drywells for on-site storm water filtration to its 48 geothermal wells for heating and cooling, as well as structural elements incorporating recycled content, earned the building LEED Gold-certified status, making it the only LEED-certified building in Central Brooklyn.

Outside the building is a new 1.5 acre interpretive landscape designed by Elizabeth Kennedy Landscape Architects. It includes a micro farm and heritage-based botanic collection with plantings authentic to

19th century Brooklyn, and is highlighted by “Sugar In My Bowl II,” a new sculpture by artist Chakaia Booker commissioned through the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs’ Percent for Art program.

Funding for the \$34 million project was provided by the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, the City Council and the Brooklyn Borough President’s office. Design and construction for the new building were managed by the New York City Department of Design and Construction.

“Today, we celebrate not only the completion of this beautiful, new building, but the fulfillment of a vision for Weeksville Heritage Center as a nationally-significant center for African American history and culture,” said Timothy Simons, chair of the Weeksville board of directors. “Weeksville is a unique and essential part of the story of the African diaspora, and this new facility will dramatically expand our ability to not only preserve that history, but also activate it through exciting and innovative programming. We thank Mayor Bloomberg, Borough President Markowitz and the many city-wide and Brooklyn borough officials who have made this day possible.”

“Brooklyn has the largest African-American population of any county in America that is not its own city—and the borough was also home to one of the first free African-American communities in the nation—so it is indeed fitting that Brooklyn lead the way in creating the Weeksville Education and Cultural Arts building, a state-of-the-art center for African-American culture and history,” said Borough President Markowitz. “Joan Maynard’s dream—that children of every ethnicity would learn the inspiring story of these early, freedom-fighting Brooklynites—will finally come true with the opening of this exciting new resource for education and the arts, and I was thrilled, along with Mayor Bloomberg, to be able to support it.”

“The Education and Cultural Arts Building and Chakaia Booker’s ‘Sugar in My Bowl’ Percent for Art installation add transformative elements to the historic campus, providing a platform for education and cultural programming that highlights and preserves such an important part of New York’s storied past,” said Commissioner Levin. “As the organization continues to grow partnerships and expand programming opportunities, we look forward to welcoming even more visitors to this wonderful cultural asset in Central Brooklyn.”

“Inspired by Joan Maynard and the founders of Weeksville, we knew that we had to not only preserve this historical treasure, but continue to tell the story of the African American experience and write entirely new chapters with the help of the next generation,” said Pam Green, WHC’s former executive director. “The future of Weeksville is bright and the possibilities of what we can accomplish with the help of this remarkable new home are thrilling.”

“The new Weeksville Heritage Center is the best of both worlds: it’s a 21st century museum and educational facility that also pays homage to the historic, 19th century homes located on the site. The new center includes a host of environmentally-sustainable features, including geothermal heating and cooling systems, as well as one-and-a-half acres of beautifully landscaped grounds. We’re proud to have worked closely with the architects and our partners at the Weeksville Heritage Center and the Department of Cultural Affairs to deliver this high-quality, multi-purpose facility that will serve our city well for generations to come,” said David J. Burney, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Design and Construction.

When the Education and Cultural Arts Center opens to the public in the spring of 2014, WHC will become the first African American historic site to operate a contemporary arts center for the “Study of Freedom and Self Determination” and the first center dedicated to generating knowledge about freedom and 19th and 20th century African American, Caribbean and African history. It will give the community unprecedented access to performing arts, contemporary exhibitions, and public research training in self-documentation, all inspired by the legacy of the free African Americans who founded the community 175 years ago.

ABOUT WEEKSVILLE HERITAGE CENTER

Weeksville Heritage Center (WHC) is a multidimensional museum dedicated to preserving and interpreting the history of the 19th century free African American community of Weeksville, Brooklyn. Using a contemporary lens, we activate this unique history through the presentation of innovative, vanguard and experimental programs. Weeksville advances its mission through history, preservation, visual and performing arts, ecology and the built environment.

For more information, visit www.weeksvillesociety.org.

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