



## Huge community art project will transform Stapleton this fall

By: Vincent Barone



The president of the Historic Tappen Park Community Partnership plans to transform Stapleton into a huge art project this fall to celebrate the cultural diversity and artistic verve of the historic North Shore neighborhood.

Partnership president Kamillah Hanks, one of seven winners of the Small Business Services and New York City Economic Development

Corporation's Neighborhood Challenge grant, plans to pump the \$70,000 she received back into the community.

The funding will be used in the neighborhood to put on the Partnership's "Illuminate Stapleton" project, which will be a year-long series of light-based art activities and installations along a one-mile corridor between Stapleton and Tompkinsville.

"It's going to be a coming out party for Stapleton," Ms. Hanks said. "This is going to be about connecting to the waterfront—a perfect marriage between the old and the new."

It's the first time in the Neighborhood Challenge grant program's three-year history that funding has been designated to Staten Island.

The tight-knit Stapleton community will also be highlighting some of the Island's most unique businesses, like 5050 Skatepark and SI MakerSpace. Both have taken claim of empty Front Street warehouses that stare down a massive condominium being built across the street as part of the city's new Stapleton waterfront.

With developments like the New York Wheel and Empire Outlets poised to change the face of the North Shore, Ms. Hanks is hoping to preserve the richness of Stapleton.

"We all love the developments coming to the North Shore, but after all the pomp and pageantry swirling around these plans, a fear is starting to set in," Ms. Hanks said. "There's a concern about gentrification and property value. There are a lot of people concerned about their rent going up."

That's why, Ms. Hanks said, her community decided it needed to define itself. She wrote and submitted a grant application to the Small Business Services and New York City Economic Development Corporation for their joint "Neighborhood Challenge," competitive grant initiative.

"I put my heart and soul into that grant," she said. In it, Ms. Hanks wrote of the disconnect between the coming waterfront developments and the people who already live there.

"With Staten Island's North Shore waterfront currently undergoing a \$3 billion redevelopment lift, existing neighborhoods in those surrounding areas, including Stapleton, are beginning to feel the pinch," she penned. "With 21 percent of its residents living below the poverty level, 30 percent vacancy rate in its commercial district, and a dense artist community, there are growing concerns of being 'disconnected' from the new developments emerging along the waterfront."

Stapleton's earliest colonial settlements date back to the early 1800s, when it became the popular destination for local elites like the Vanderbilts, Van Duzers, Outerbridges and Wards. Cornelius Vanderbilt grew up on a

on a farm facing the bay on a site now occupied by the Paramount Theatre on Bay Street.

The legacies of these early aristocrats have been preserved through the remaining architecture in the neighborhood, like the lavish Victorian homes built by beer moguls on St. Paul's Avenue. But in today's Stapleton, Ms. Hanks cherishes the food above all else.

"From Sri Lankan to Italian to Spanish—you can see the world through dining in Stapleton," she said.

Ms. Hanks said that her project has received support from many local officials, including State Sen. Diane Savino, Councilwoman Debi Rose and Borough President James Oddo.

"I am thrilled that the Historic Tappen Park Community Partnership has been selected as one of the winners of the neighborhood challenge initiative by NYCEDC and the SBS," Ms. Rose said. "Their innovative project, Illuminate Stapleton, will shed light on the emerging artist community from Stapleton to Tompkinsville while beautifying our neighborhood surroundings."

Ms. Hanks said Illuminate Stapleton will hinge on community collaboration and will focus around the pillars of the neighborhood, like the masterfully renovated Stapleton Library and, naturally, Tappen Park.

The Historic Tappen Park Community Partnership will be offering more details on the event at the first of two information sessions on Thursday, January 29, 2015. The meeting will be held at 11:30 a.m. at SI MakerSpace. Local artists, businesses and Stapleton community groups are encouraged to attend.