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## How a new, full-service health and wellness hub plans to help lift the East Side

Scott Scanlon

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Physical Therapist Marissa Clemons, left, works with Ging Canaf in the Jericho Road medically oriented gym at 1021 Broadway. The fitness center, underwritten by Independent Health, is among a growing number of services available in a new health hub designed to help revitalize the East Side.

Derek Gee / Buffalo News

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More than 100 people have started jobs next door to the Broadway Market, in a repurposed complex that in decades past housed a Sattler's department store and pair of furniture companies.

The newcomers work for 10 social service agencies, whose leaders decided it was time to move into the neighborhood and create a more visible presence for some of the most vulnerable people in Buffalo.

These workers arrive weekday mornings as parents walk their children to school. They often grab lunch and mingle at the market. And they sometimes stop their duties to peer out the new windows in their fourth- and fifth-floor offices, gazing on the Central Terminal, hulking churches, and neat rows of wood-frame houses below.

They have welcomed a modest number of visitors from their Broadway-Fillmore neighborhood in recent weeks, though long for the pandemic to ease so they can make more meaningful connections.

“It really is a family environment,” Melinda DuBois said of the new surroundings. “People are very welcoming and it’s wonderful to look out and see that we can have an impact on people's lives here.”

DuBois has a corner office with one of the most commanding views in the renovated space. She is executive director of Mental Health Advocates of Western New York, one of three nonprofit agencies that since last fall has moved its headquarters from another part of the city into the new East Side health hub at 1021 Broadway.

The others, Every Person Influences Children (EPIC) and the Parent Network of Western New York, also moved for the chance to share space, operating costs, programs and ideas.



Susan Barlow, executive director of the Parent Network of WNY, and Marc Henning, CEO of Learning Disability Association of WNY, have an informal meeting in the Care Management Coalition of WNY's new shared workspace on Broadway.

Derek Gee / Buffalo News

Several leading foundations bankrolled the \$3.4 million cost to remake the long-vacant top floors of the largest building in a complex once known as Market Square, with the strong belief that efforts here could spark more physical, mental and financial wellness in a part of a city largely untouched by a resurgence so noticeable in so many other neighborhoods.

“You can't move a boulder by yourself,” said Esther Annan, program officer with the John R. Oishei Foundation, which gave \$1.2 million, the most of any foundation.

Others supporting the effort include the First Niagara, Peter & Elizabeth Tower, Ralph C. Wilson Jr., James H. Cummings, Patrick P. Lee and Garman Family foundations, as well as Erie County Live Well.

Tara N. Burgess, executive director and CEO of EPIC (Every Person Influences Children) talks about the new mission of the Care Management Coalition of WNY, of which she is currently serving as the president.

## **Building blocks**

The health hub took shape at the start of the third major Broadway-Fillmore transition in the last 75 years.

European immigrants, and their first- and second-generation descendants, built many of the landmarks, businesses, and homes in the neighborhood during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in what many still call Old Polonia.

Many of the structures fell into disrepair by the 1970s, when improved transportation gave most residents the chance to live in newer homes in the more wide-open suburbs.

“When it was Sattler’s over here, when we had all kinds of restaurants, when we had all kinds of banks, when the Broadway Market was booming, the Central Terminal was open, all of that stuff really piqued me to move over into this neighborhood,” said Marva Threat, 65, a West Side native who arrived more than 40 years ago.

Threat and her husband, Mike, who worked in the auto industry, settled on Detroit Street as “white flight” accelerated and Blacks with limited financial means moved into declining housing stock.



The Central Terminal is reflected on an interior window inside Care Management Coalition of WNY's new shared workspace on Broadway.

Derek Gee / Buffalo News

So many abandoned properties got bulldozed by the first half of this century that today the combined number of vacant and rental properties in the ZIP code 14212, north of the Broadway Market, is almost double that of owner-occupied homes.

The blocks surrounding the Broadway Market in all directions have the **lowest median family income in Erie County**: roughly \$25,000 a year.

Threat and several others decided they had enough in 2013. They formed the **Greater Eastside Fields of Dreams Block Club** to address the decay.

“The children had moved, and the elderly were starting to become afraid to walk the streets at night,” she said. “We had more crime than was necessary, so the block club got involved working with community policing, making sure that safety was first.”

The percentage of **Black residents in the neighborhood has fallen** during the last decade, and the percentage of those from Asia, Africa and the Middle East continues to climb.

Many new American immigrants also have left New York City or Buffalo's West Side as they see the East Side as a more affordable place to live and start businesses.

The new dynamic creates challenges and opportunities.

Those with a hand in the new health hub embrace them all.



"When people want to move, what do they look for? They look for businesses. They look for schools. They look for transportation, shops, parks and restaurants their families can enjoy. We also need a quality supermarket." - Marva Threat, president, Greater Eastside Fields of Dreams Block Club Association

Photo provided by Marva Threat

## A revival begins

Urban farms started to dot the Broadway-Fillmore neighborhood in recent years. Meat markets, restaurants and other shops inside the Broadway Market began to reflect the transformation of the neighborhood. The buzz of new retail and residential construction has resumed, to a small degree.

New talk of Central Terminal redevelopment also raises hopes.

The block club Threat leads, and decisions two West Side nonprofit groups made to focus more energy on the East Side, also are key to the transformation.

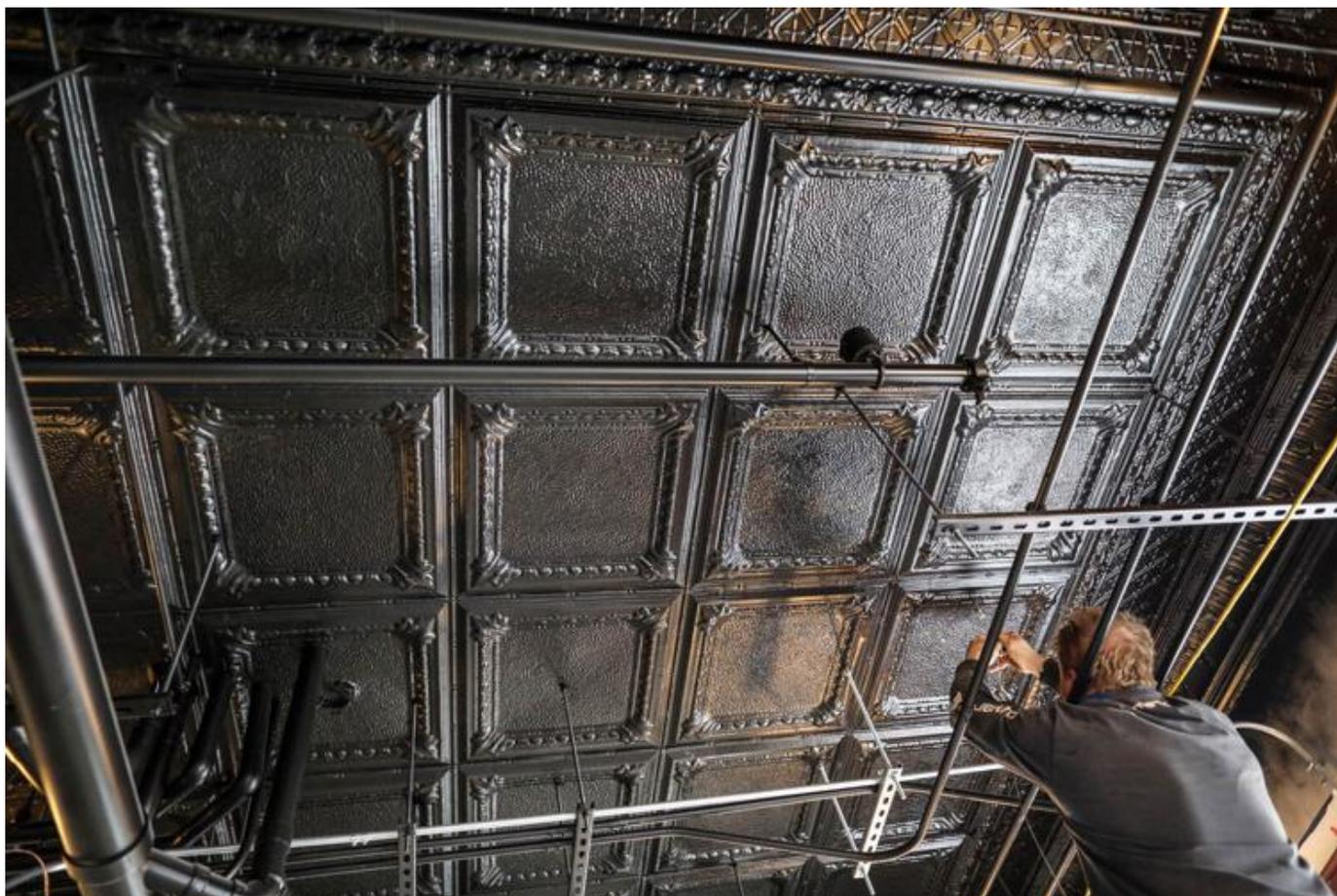
Jericho Road opened a new primary care center three years ago at 1021 Broadway, the first sign something special was about to happen in a space used sparingly since **Sattler's closed in the early 1980s**. It since has added a pharmacy and, with help from Independent Health, a medically oriented gym. It recently opened a dental clinic.

716 Ministries, started nearly two decades ago as Westside Ministries to fix blighted homes, changed its name several years ago and broadened its mission to train, build and serve in other parts of the region.

“We've seen some stabilization in the West Side without displacing the people we serve,” said Jeremy Hazelton, executive director of the nondenominational group. “That's a big deal, so we feel like we've got a little bit that we can bring to the table in Broadway-Fillmore.”

Its workforce development programs feed workers into several trades, including its own light residential and commercial contracting company, which has handled lots of renovations in the neighborhood, including most in the new East Side health hub. Its facilities management wing maintains the entire building.

By fall, **716 Ministries** also will operate a new, 3,000-square-foot **Three Stories Coffee and Café**, with a child play space, on part of the first floor; **34 Group**, a construction company owned by NFL Hall of Famer Thurman Thomas, continues work on the space.



An electrician installs fixtures to the antique ceiling in an area under construction at what by fall will become Three Stories Coffee and Café on the first floor of the new 1021 Broadway health hub.

Derek Gee / Buffalo News

The café will have a soft opening this summer. It hopes to funnel as many as 20 people in its programs into part- and full-time jobs there. Small-batch, direct-trade coffee from around the world, roasted at the 716 Ministries commercial kitchen at headquarters on 14<sup>th</sup> Street, will be served.

“1021 Broadway in general has been a big hub for us, too,” Hazelton said. “We often tell people, ‘We don't hire people to build houses, we build houses to hire people. We don't hire people to sell coffee, we sell coffee to hire people.’”

## **Momentum builds**

Leaders of the other nonprofit groups in the complex continue efforts to introduce themselves to their new neighbors in more meaningful ways.

Four lead the charge as board members of the Care Management Coalition of Western New York.

Tara N. Burgess, executive director of **EPIC**, serves as board president. DuBois is the vice president; Susan Barlow, executive director of the **Parent Network**, is secretary; and Marc Hennig, CEO of the **Learning Disabilities Association of WNY**, treasurer.

Kenneth Houseknecht headed **Mental Health Advocates** until he retired last fall and DuBois replaced him. He and the other three worked more than five years with Jericho Road and community foundations to create a plan to turn the complex into the kind of health hub that will unfold with greater purpose in months to come.



Parent Network of WNY Executive Director Susan Barlow collaborates with Felicia Grassia in their section of the Care Management Coalition of WNY's new shared workspace on Broadway.

Derek Gee / Buffalo News

The Mosaic 569 Foundation, founded by Jericho Road board member Mark Herskind of Baillie Lumber, bought eight interconnected properties on the site for \$482,000 on behalf of Jericho Road, to encourage the process.

The regional collaborative holds the lease on the top two floors and has subleased all but about 600 of more than 27,000 square feet of space.

Tenants include two regional state offices that support those with intellectual and developmental disabilities, the Buffalo Urban League, Spectrum Health and Human Services, the Center for Self-Advocacy and Algonquin Sports For Kids.

“People who come into this building usually come in with a cup of need,” Barlow said. “They might need one thing when they walk in the door, but the reality is, they probably need a lot of other things. We're full service and whatever needs our community has, either we're going to meet them or we're going to connect them to someone who can.”

The upper floors, like all five in the hub, promote interaction. They include shared workspaces and conference rooms, and a new community kitchen. Freshly painted walls and new computer technology, furniture and windows set the mood. Several small rooms and pockets allow for greater privacy.

“Our vision is really shared services, shared staff, shared programming,” Burgess said. “We talk all the time about how this made perfect sense in February of 2020 and it makes even more sense now.”



Aleshia Transou, team leader at Project Hope, meets in her office in the Care Management Coalition of WNY's new shared workspace on Broadway.

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Hennig is pleased to bring into the hub his LEAD 716 program, which provides academic enhancement to children diagnosed with lead poisoning.

DuBois and Barlow are collaborating on a grant to expand the MHA Nurtured Heart program, which teaches parenting skills.

The MHA and EPIC look to combine on a preschool program.

“We’d really like to see child care, legal resources and senior services here, too,” Burgess said.

## **Summer dreams**

Parking already is getting harder to find at and around the new hub. The new neighbors have reached out to leaders at the Matt Urban Center and Broadway Market to find out how they can help lift the neighborhood.

There are plans to make the hub a community centerpiece, as well, including the greenspace at Kent and Clark streets, where the collaborative plans to host health fairs, career fairs, farmers markets, story times, fitness events, art fairs and family festivals.

Burgess said she also looks forward to a 6,500-square-foot building along Lombard Street on the same property adding to services, including workforce development.

Threat is encouraged about what she sees and hears in the neighborhood. She stressed that community buy-in will be key to success.

She hopes those who would help will listen – especially during a pandemic that has stirred more doubts.

“When people want to move,” Threat asked, “what do they look for? They look for businesses. They look for schools. They look for transportation, shops, parks and restaurants their families can enjoy. We also need a quality supermarket.

“There's going to be some kind of movement in this area,” she predicted. “It probably never will be the way it was, but it would be something to get caught up with the rest of city. We've got Canalside. We've got Larkinville right around the corner from us. Why can't we be like that?”



Sam Mattle, CEO of the Center for Self Advocacy, participates in a remote meeting in his office in the Care Management Coalition of WNY's new shared workspace on Broadway.

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## **Broadway-Fillmore gets new neighbors**

The organizations below recently established offices at 1021 Broadway, joining the Jericho Road Broadway Community Health Center, Independent Health Medical Oriented Gym at Jericho Road, Kaleida Health-managed Broadway Pediatrics, and Western New York MRI. A new Three Stories Coffee and Cafe run by 716 Ministries is scheduled to open by fall.

**\* EPIC – Every Person Influences Children; 332-4100**

**Executive director:** Tara N. Burgess

**Staff on-site** (total for agency): 14 (25)

**Mission:** To help families, schools, and communities raise children to become responsible and successful adults. Provides year-round programming in parenting education, youth services, family engagement and professional development.

\* **Mental Health Advocates of Western New York;** 886-1242

**Executive director:** Melinda DuBois

**Staff on-site and for agency:** 34

**Mission:** To promote mental health and wellness in the region and support individuals and families challenged by mental illness. Provides pro-bono legal services, peer and child and family support groups, emotional skills training, prevention and early intervention programs for students, workplace mental wellbeing programs.

\* **Parent Network of WNY;** 332-4170

**Executive director:** Susan Barlow

**Staff on-site** (total for agency): 20 (24)

**Mission:** Provides parent, family and professional training on special education, disability and family engagement topics. Its website is packed with hundreds of family friendly fact sheets and resources. Family support specialists – many of whom are parents or caregivers of people with disabilities – work with families in building skills, finding resources, preparing for meetings, education and much more.



Susan Barlow, executive director of the Parent Network of WNY, and Marc Hennig, CEO of the Learning Disability Association of WNY, have an informal chat in a private interview in the shared space at the new health hub.

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## **Learning Disabilities Association of WNY; 874-7200**

**Leaders:** Marc Hennig, CEO; Carol Pearce, intake coordinator

**Staff on-site** (total for agency): 4 (100)

**Mission:** Conducts community advancement, outreach and intake services, as well academic enhancement through its **LEAD 716 program**.

**Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) Regional Office; 800-487-6310**

**Director:** Ellen Hardy

**Staff on-site** (total for agency): Will vary (118).

**Mission:** Provides support services for families that care for loved ones who live full-time in the family home, as well as employment support, job coaching, job matching, and vocational training. Providers also deliver Medicaid-funded long-term care, clinical and residential support services.

**Self-Advocacy Association of New York State;** 560-9307

**Regional coordinator:** Sophia Roberts

**Staff on-site:** 3

**Mission:** Run by and for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to provide peer-to-peer training and advocacy.

**Spectrum Health and Human Services;** 539-5500

**CEO:** Bruce Nisbet

**Staff on-site** (total for agency): 12 (400)

**Mission:** Assessment and connection to clinical services for those experiencing mental health or substance-related problems. Peer support and linkage to all Spectrum Health programs.

**Center for Self-Advocacy;** 768-1795

**Executive director:** Samuel Mattle

**Staff on-site** (total for agency): 2 (7)

**Mission:** Peer-led self-advocacy organization supporting those with intellectual and developmental disabilities to live independently and productively. Provides peer-to-peer travel training, support and self-advocacy.

**Algonquin Sports For Kids**

**Executive director:** Ryan DiNuzio

**Staff on-site: 3**

**Mission:** Empowering youth through sports by providing access to everyone, creating safe environments for play and coach training.

**Buffalo Urban League;** Helpline, 250-2478

**President/CEO:** Thomas Beauford,

**Staff on-site** (total for agency): 12 (70)

**Mission in the building:** Implementing Project Hope, a crisis counseling program offering services to Covid-19 survivors through June 16 in their homes, shelters, temporary living sites, or houses of worship.

*\* Moved headquarters to the building*

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I have covered a variety of beats and editor positions in South Florida, Syracuse and, since 2004, my home Buffalo Niagara region. Since 2013, I've been editor of WNY Refresh, which focuses on health, fitness, nutrition and family life.