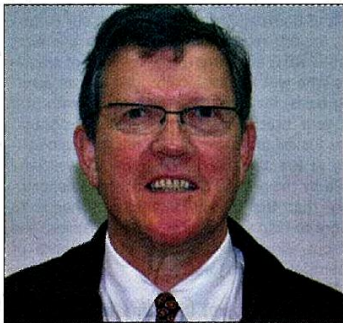
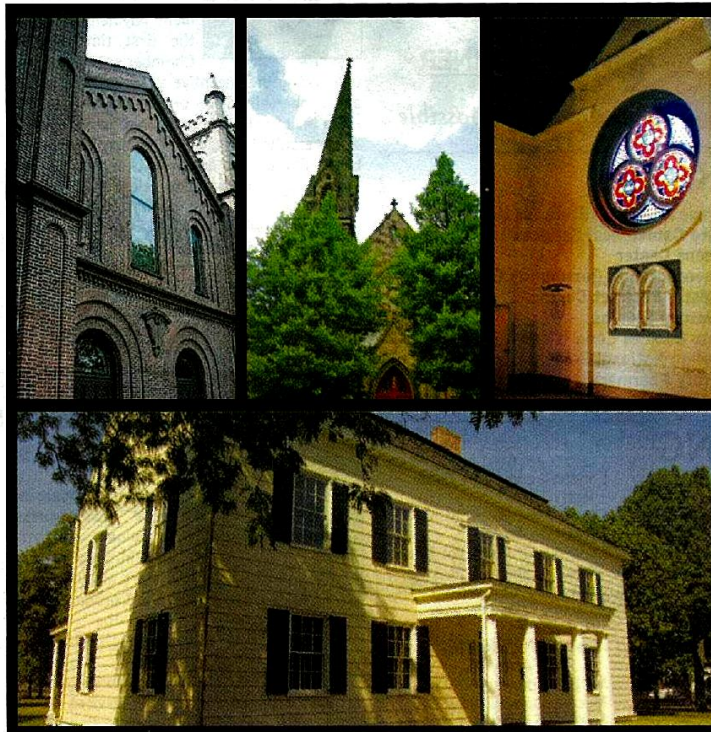


# Greater Jamaica Development Corporation: Receives The Excellence in Historic Preservation Awards



GJDC Director of Planning, Design & Capital Projects Peter Engelbrecht



Landmarks that will be recognized for The Excellence in Historic Preservation Awards program.

**W**hen you walk down the streets of Downtown Jamaica, you'll see more than anonymous commercial buildings that blend in with one another. Instead, you'll see a rich variety of historic buildings that give the Downtown a special character.

Greater Jamaica Development Corporation (GJDC) has helped to restore and preserve some of these buildings. GJDC will be honored this year by the Preservation League of New York State for its work on Prospect Cemetery and the Chapel of the Sisters, located at 159th Street and Beaver Road.

"We are excited to receive this prestigious award," said GJDC Director of Planning, Design, and Capital Projects Peter Engelbrecht, who has been with GJDC since 1974.

The Excellence in Historic Preservation Awards are given annually to honor "notable achievements in retaining, promoting, and re-using New York's historic resources." The Preservation League of New York State states that this awards program "continues a tradition that began in 1979 to acknowledge excellence in the protection and revitalization of the Empire State's historic architectural and cultural resources. By recognizing meaningful accomplishments in the field of historic preservation, the Preservation League hopes to further encourage standards of excellence and to increase public awareness and support for historic preservation throughout the State."

Prospect Cemetery, founded in 1668, is the oldest cemetery in Queens. The Chapel of the Sisters was built in 1857 by the Ludlum family in memory of three

deceased daughters of Nicholas Ludlum, a wealthy merchant. "This chapel, is a beautiful, 19th century Romanesque Revival building that really celebrates the lives of three young women who died prematurely," Engelbrecht said. The Chapel and Cemetery have received landmark status.

GJDC began its restoration effort seven years ago with Prospect Cemetery Association and the New York Landmarks Conservancy. The cost of the project, including the chapel and cemetery, is \$1.7 million. Funding was provided by Queens Borough President Helen Marshall and New York State. The Chapel restoration is nearly complete, and work on the Cemetery will begin this summer. The architect for the restoration was Dan Allen from Cutsogeorge Tooman and Allen Architects. The Chapel will be available for use for community events, meetings, and educational purposes in conjunction with York College. The Chapel is also being considered as the home for York College's Jazz Program performance

space. The Chapel was dedicated last year to Illinois Jaquet, a world-famous jazz musician, in a special ceremony led by Queens Borough President Helen Marshall and York College President Marcia Keizs.

Engelbrecht explained that GJDC – not new to restoration and historic preservation – has worked hard to designate landmarks in Downtown Jamaica and restore them to productive use, which helps the buildings survive and contributes to the growth of the Downtown. "The idea is to blend historic buildings with new development," Engelbrecht said, "Adapting and re-using these historic buildings give Jamaica its richness as a dynamic urban center characterized by the vitality, livability, and accessibility of its civic and cultural assets. This is what makes it so interesting here in Jamaica."

One of many historic Downtown buildings that any visitor should come and see is King Manor, a Federalist-style manor and a former home of Rufus King – a signer of the U.S. Constitution, U.S. Senator, and

outspoken opponent of slavery. After a \$2.1 million restoration, King Manor is a house museum dedicated to the life and work of Rufus King. "It's a very important center for educational tours," Engelbrecht said. "When visitors come to King Manor, they learn about the life of a significant figure in American history, the Constitution, and the history of Jamaica."

Also worth visiting is the newly restored Jamaica Performing Arts Center, located at 153rd Street and Jamaica Avenue. The former First Reformed Church was built in 1858 in the early Romanesque Revival style. The Church's congregation met here until the 1970s, when the building was taken by the City of New York as part of an urban renewal plan, and slated to be demolished for new development. Landmark status saved the church from being torn down. The City's Department of Cultural Affairs led the \$22 million restoration of the building, which was recently honored by the New York Landmarks Conservancy. The Jamaica Center for Arts and Learning (JCAL), a 35 year-old community-based arts institution, will operate the building as a premier performing arts center and multipurpose venue. The new center will house theatre productions, concerts, film festivals, dance performances and arts education. Performance and rehearsal space for other professional arts entities will also be available. The facility will accommodate weddings, banquets and receptions, business meetings, workshops and seminars, and community group events.

Another structure of historic importance in Jamaica is Grace Episcopal Church, located at 155-03 Jamaica Avenue. The current church building, the third to be built on this site, was completed in 1862 and is an outstanding example of English Gothic Revival architecture. Engelbrecht noted that this building has a splendid feature inside – murals created during the Great Depression through the Works Projects Administration (WPA); local artists were given work and produced these murals.

While Downtown Jamaica already benefits from several landmarked buildings, Engelbrecht said that GJDC is seeking to expand the number of such designations. "We are constantly looking for buildings worthy of restoration. Restoring historic landmarks to productive use creates new focal points of community and civic activity, and significantly adds to the renewed sense of energy and creativity that is driving growth and revitalization in Downtown Jamaica."