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**MAYOR DE BLASIO ANNOUNCES RENAMING OF BEDFORD UNION ARMORY
FOR FORMER CONGRESSMAN MAJOR ROBERT ODELL OWENS**

Facility to include affordable housing, recreational center and nonprofit space for Crown Heights community

NEW YORK—Mayor Bill de Blasio, New York City Economic Development Corporation (NYCEDC), Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams, Majority Leader Laurie A. Cumbo, and BFC Partners announced the renaming of the Bedford Union Armory in Crown Heights for former Congressman Major Robert Owens, who represented New York’s 12th Congressional District for nearly a quarter century. The facility, scheduled to open later this year, officially will be referred to as the Major R. Owens Health and Wellness Community Center.

The renaming honors [Major Owens’](#) towering legacy as a civic leader in Brooklyn, beginning with his post with the Brooklyn Public Library (BPL) where he served as an information librarian. During his near 25-year tenure in Congress, Major Owens was an unwavering civil rights and disability rights advocate, a strong supporter of increasing library and education access for all, and a steadfast promoter of social justice.

“Major Owens left Brooklyn better than he found it, and New York City is proud to honor his legacy with this facility,” said **Mayor Bill de Blasio**. “Generations of New Yorkers will learn, grow, and play at this community center, and they will have a role model of strength and fairness as they do.”

"Congressman Owens was a passionate and life-long public servant, who was committed to strengthening our communities and improving the quality of New Yorker’s lives through his advocacy for education, gun control, and disability rights," said **First Lady Chirlane McCray**. "The designation of this institution could not be more fitting or timely. It will honor his memory and preserve his legacy as a civil rights icon in the heart of the community that he loved."

"Major Owens believed that institution-building was the key to community empowerment and the well-being of every community," said **Chris Owens**. "His vision for the Armory space emerged decades ago and he wanted community participation in the development of the ideas -- which there was. This renaming is a fitting way to remember the Congressman. Major wanted the swords turned into ploughshares, and the new Community Center represents the transformation from an 'oppressive' mindset to one where health and education bring different people together in the pursuit of happiness and community. On behalf of the Owens family, I want to thank Council Member Cumbo, Mayor de Blasio, all of the other supportive elected officials, all of the City agencies, Community Board 9, and the Advisory Committee that have

made the dream a reality. I know that my father is seeing this from afar, but I do wish he could be standing with us today because his pride and his gratitude would fill up the entire space!"

The Major R. Owens Health and Wellness Community Center will soon house a 60,000 square-foot world-class recreation center, with an indoor swimming pool, three hardwood basketball courts, an indoor soccer field, dance and performance studios, a fitness center and areas designated for boxing and archery. The facility will also house 45,000 square feet of space for local community-based non-profits, which will offer enrichment and educational programming such as coding, after-school support, athletic clinics, and camps. The Center will provide year-round space for entertainment and arts events and access for local artists to teach theater, film, and music.

"Major R. Owens' legacy of listening to the needs of the Crown Heights community and advocating for a gathering space and recreational facility that they could be proud of goes back a long way, and now it will be memorialized permanently," said **NYCEDC President and CEO James Patchett**. "We are thrilled today to rename the Bedford Union Armory as the Major R. Owens Health & Wellness Community Center in his honor. Congratulations to the entire Owens family on this important moment to cherish and celebrate Major's many accomplishments in life."

"The Bedford Union Armory, or rather, the The Major R. Owens Health and Community Wellness Center as we now know it, is a reflection of years of dedication from Major Owens, community leaders, and all those who were focused on the bigger picture; those who had the capacity to see how such a space would undoubtedly support and enhance the rich and unique communities within Crown Heights and beyond," said **NYC Council Majority Leader Laurie A. Cumbo**. "The Major R. Owens Health and Community Wellness Center is a true symbol of the culture and legacy of this historic neighborhood. We fought unwaveringly to ensure that this community space would reflect the beauty and history of Crown Heights, and I am proud to be standing here seeing that Major Owens' vision is being brought to light. Our youth will have access to a newly renovated space with an array of after-school programming and year-round activities; a facility in which they too, can create their own cherished memories looking back on them for many years to come."

"Major Owens left an indelible mark on the borough of Brooklyn, and I was fortunate enough to call him a friend and colleague," said **Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams**. "It is no exaggeration to say that the Bedford Union Armory project's community center would not have happened without his visionary leadership, and his tireless advocacy on behalf of the needs of local residents. Thanks to this dedication, generations of Crown Heights residents and beyond will know his name and learn from his sterling example, as a public servant, community leader, educator, and friend."

"Working to bring Major Owens' vision for the Armory's next chapter to life has been one of the greatest honors of my career," said **Donald Capoccia, Managing Principal of BFC Partners**. "Everyone at BFC Partners is thrilled to welcome Ifetayo Cultural Arts Academy, New Heights Youth, Digital Girl, Inc., James E. Davis Stop the Violence Foundation, Brooklyn Community Pride Center, West Indian American Day Carnival Association, Carey Gabay Foundation and Brooklyn Plaza Medical Center to the Major R. Owens Health and Wellness Community Center,

where they will proudly serve the Crown Heights community just as Owens originally envisioned.”

Owens first entered politics when he was named commissioner of the City’s Community Development Agency in 1968, before entering the New York State Senate, where he served from 1975 to 1982. In 1982, he was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives to replace retiring member Rep. Shirley Chisholm – the first black woman ever elected to serve in Congress.

Following his retirement, Major Owens – then a professor at nearby Medgar Evers College– began to envision a future for the Armory as a full-time community center with recreational opportunities and gathering spaces for the Crown Heights community. Owens spent years engaging with residents, business owners, elected officials, and other local stakeholders – including his students – to help fully understand the needs of the Crown Heights community. Brooklynites overwhelmingly shared Congressman Owens' desire for an institution that would support the vibrant communities within Crown Heights and greater Central Brooklyn.

The Major Owens Recreation Center is expected to open by the end of 2021 with the residential components of the Armory project to open in 2022 and 2023. For more information about the Center, please visit <https://edc.nyc/project/major-owens-center>.

“Few men have ever been so dedicated to their constituents, so committed to just and moral legislating, and so passionate about overcoming the issues of our day as the great Major Owens, my predecessor in Congress,” said **Congress Member Yvette Clarke and Dr. Clarke**. “I can think of no honor more fitting than to name a center for community after a man so devoted to his community. May the Major R. Owens Health and Community Wellness Center serve Brooklyn and Brooklynites half as well as the man it is named for.”

“I would like to thank Council Majority Leader Cumbo, the state's Vital Brooklyn initiative, Economic Development Corporation, and all the community stakeholders who, over the past several years, have made their voices heard in what the neighborhood wanted to see happen with the Bedford-Union Armory community center redevelopment project and its subsequent re-naming in memory of former Congressman Major R. Owens,” said **Former NY State Assemblyman Walter T. Mosley**. “It was the Congressman's vision that we put in place a center of this nature to protect, nurture, and embrace our local young people. We know that today, by embracing this project and the desire of our legendary Congressman Owens, we have taken a significant step towards improving the quality of life for so many Crown Heights and central Brooklyn residents.”

“The advisory committee has worked hand in hand with BFC and community partners to ensure that the new Major R. Owens Health and Wellness Community Center has, and will be responsive to, the needs of the community,” said **Community Advisory Committee Executive Board Justyn Turner Chair and Jose Coello Sr. Vice Chair**. “We are not only excited for the opportunities that this great community space would provide, but we are proud to honor such an implemental and influential leader in our community.”

“There is no other name appropriate for this structure except Major R Owens Health and Wellness Community Center,” said **President of the Ebbets Field Tenant Association Beverly**

Newsome. “This project is a clear reflection of Major Owens life and passion for the community! We are just excited to be instruments of that spirit, helping to develop his dream!”

“The Center at the Armory is going to be an unbelievable resource for the diverse youth of Crown Heights,” said **Executive Director of the Crown Heights Jewish Community Council Rabbi Eli Cohen.** “It is fitting that it should be named for Major Owens, who appreciated the diversity of the neighborhood he represented and was such a champion for its youth.”

"I would like to thank all the elected officials and community stakeholders who worked so hard during EDC's rigorous process to honor the core values of the community," said **former congressional aide to Major Owens Marsha Bornstein.** “Major would be pleased."

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