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Project Renewal breaks ground in Harlem

The usual response of community boards to social service agencies seeking to build housing for the homeless is, "Not in my back yard." But on July 18, the nonprofit Project Renewal threw a party for Community Board 9 to thank them for their visionary support of a new affordable/supportive housing project slated for the neighborhood. The party was held in St. Nicholas Park in Harlem at the 141st Street entrance - a block from the site - and featured live music, giveaways and a brief awards ceremony.

When Project Renewal, a 35-year old organization that provides comprehensive help to homeless New Yorkers, first approached Community Board 9 with the idea of turning the empty lot at 642 St. Nicholas into a 94-unit apartment building for low-income and formerly homeless people, the board was skeptical. They grilled the group with questions as to the prospective tenants.

"They wanted to make sure the low-income apartments would really be affordable," said Edward Geffner, the organization's executive director. "They wanted to ensure the building would provide homes for people who need it the most...It was amazing."

Thirty-three of the 94 apartments at 642 St. Nicholas will be set aside for low-income individuals from the neighborhood. The building will also provide resources to the community, including a vocational resource room, a computer lab, and community spaces.



From left: George Goodwill, chairman, Community Board 9; Fernando Ferrer, president of the Drum Major Institute, Project Renewal board of trustees; The Hon. Robert Jackson, councilman, 7th Congressional District; Edward I. Geffner, executive director of Project Renewal; Vincent Morgan, staff assistant, Rep. Charles Rangel; Kimberly Hardy, deputy commissioner of development, HPD; Alan Belzer, chairman of Project Renewal board of trustees; Barbara Johnson, community liaison, Manhattan Borough President C. Virginia Fields.