



DEPARTMENT FOR THE AGING
Edwin Mendez-Santiago, LCSW, Commissioner

DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS
Kate D. Levin, Commissioner

—FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

City Launches SM(ART)S: Seniors Meet the Arts

Department for the Aging, Department of Cultural Affairs and City Council partner on largest municipal initiative to connect seniors to the arts

NEW YORK, NY – February 4, 2008 – Department for the Aging (DFTA) Commissioner Edwin Méndez-Santiago, LCSW, Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA) Commissioner Kate D. Levin, and City Council Members Domenic M. Recchia and Maria del Carmen Arroyo, today announced the launch of *SM(ART)S: Seniors Meet the Arts*, a \$1 million City-funded initiative to bring cultural organizations and senior centers together to enhance senior participation in the creative life of the City.

Selected through a competitive application process, 57 cultural organizations will partner with more than 150 senior centers in neighborhoods across the five boroughs to provide a variety of hands-on programs, such as jewelry design, storytelling, circus arts, horticulture, blues cabaret, creative writing, intergenerational theatre, and cinema. Joining the Commissioners and Council Members at Rubin Museum of Art (RMA) were Council Member James Vacca and RMA Co-founder and CEO Donald Rubin, along with older New Yorkers from DFTA senior centers and leaders from participating cultural organizations.

“The Department is committed to developing opportunities for older New Yorkers to enjoy creative exploration as part of vital and healthy aging,” said Commissioner Méndez-Santiago. “SM(ART)S promotes senior participation in the arts and at the same time helps senior centers throughout the City strengthen their programming and transform themselves into activity hubs where seniors can connect to a rich array of wellness programs. The Department is pleased to be part of an initiative that helps older people live full, productive and creative lives.”

“We know that creative engagement plays an important role in sustaining quality of life for seniors, and nonprofit cultural organizations have been at the forefront in developing programs that meet their needs,” said Commissioner Levin. “Collaboration among community organizations builds healthy neighborhoods, and we are delighted to partner with the City Council to extend the reach of the cultural sector to benefit more New Yorkers than ever before.”

“I am elated to see New York City's local senior centers partnering with committed cultural organizations that will improve the quality of life for our senior citizens,” said Councilmember Domenic M. Recchia, Jr. Chair, Committee on Cultural Affairs and Libraries. “Our seniors benefit from access to the arts, and I am proud to have been able to work with the Department of Cultural Affairs and the Department for the Aging to make this program part of the cultural offerings of New York City. I would like to thank my colleagues at DCA and DFTA, and the City Council, who have worked so diligently to turn this ambitious program into a reality that will benefit thousands of people across the five boroughs.”

Enhanced senior center programming for older adults is a key component of DFTA's ongoing modernization efforts. By 2030 one-fifth of New York City's population will be over the age of 60, with seniors outnumbering school-aged children. In response to this "longevity revolution," the Department is re-envisioning the future of aging services, including services provided at over 320 senior centers citywide. Senior centers, or Healthy Aging Centers, will become hubs that promote social, physical and mental wellness, offering diverse programming, including disease prevention programs, exercise classes, civic engagement activities and creative opportunities.

Numerous studies have demonstrated that creative engagement improves physical coordination, memory, and quality of life for seniors. In anticipation of the "longevity revolution," nonprofit cultural organizations are upgrading facilities and implementing programs tailored to the needs of older audiences.

Strengthening the linkages among cultural organizations and all of New York City's communities is a priority for DCA. In developing SM(ART)S, Commissioner Levin and Councilmember Recchia modeled the new program after the successful City-funded Cultural After School Adventures program (CASA), established three years ago, which links cultural organizations with school-aged children.

This morning's announcement included demonstrations from Bindlestiff Family Cirkus Co-founders Stephanie Monseu and Keith Nelson. Bindlestiff presents its unique hybrid of vaudeville and circus to theaters and schools across New York City and around the world. Through SM(ART)S, Bindlestiff will partner with seniors from the Bay Senior Center, providing interactive circus arts programs that integrate music and movement, while also improving balance and motor skills.

Today's kickoff was hosted by Rubin Museum of Art on *Free Seniors Day*, which provides free admission, guided gallery tours, film screenings and Shop and Cafe discounts to senior citizens the first Monday of each month. Since opening in 2004, RMA has focused on access initiatives for all audiences, providing sign language and touch tours, assisted listening devices, and wheelchairs for impaired visitors. After today's program, seniors enjoyed customized tours of the Museum's renowned Himalayan art collection.

Examples of Cultural and Senior Center Partnerships

Bronx – Pregones Theatre, dedicated to performance of original musical theater and plays rooted in Latino cultures, will partner with six Bronx-based centers, including the Melrose Mott-Haven Senior Center. Pregones teaching artists will conduct interactive workshops focused on poetry recital, storytelling, and choreographed movement, culminating in a performance exchange to offer seniors the experience of performance on a professional stage. Seniors will also attend Pregones Theatre Mainstage musical performances.

Brooklyn – Artichoke Dance Company specializes in movement that echoes the dynamism of human relationships. The Company will offer seniors at Ft. Greene Senior Action Senior Center dance-theatre classes focused on improvisation exercises, incorporating verbal and movement improv, group song, and poetry. Classes will culminate in a special performance by seniors for family and friends.

Manhattan – Music from China preserves, develops and promotes Chinese music to audiences throughout the US and internationally through performance and education programs. Working with City Hall Senior Center and its predominantly Chinese-American population, Music from China will engage seniors in the Chinese performing arts through hands-on workshops with professional artists and musicians. Through performance, seniors will also conduct an intergenerational sharing of Chinese cultural heritage.

Queens – Queens Botanical Garden presents unique programs that promote environmental sustainability and celebrate the rich cultural connections between people and plants. The Garden will partner with the United Hindu Cultural Council Senior Center to present *Seeds for Seniors*, hands-on horticulture workshops that culminate in the creation of a take-away — such as a mini-greenhouse, terrarium, or dish garden. These workshops will allow seniors to develop new skills that they can apply in their own homes. *Seeds for Seniors* is targeted to reach individuals who may benefit from the therapeutic aspects of plants, gardening and community interaction.

Staten Island – The recently-restored St. George Theatre is a cultural center for the Staten Island community. Partnering with Mount Loretto Friendship Club Senior Center, St. George Theatre will bring seniors on-site for a *Night of Theatre*. Through interactive workshops, Mount Loretto seniors will study the history of the iconic 1929 theater, document memories of early theater experiences with a resident historian, and take in performances.

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