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NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Timothy M. Kennedy

Senator Kennedy Announces State Funding as Renovation Plans Are Unveiled for Historic Uptown Theater on Bailey Avenue

TIMOTHY M. KENNEDY February 28, 2014

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New York State directing \$150,000 in Urban Initiatives funding to University District Community Development Association to renovate Uptown Theater.

BUFFALO, N.Y. – Senator Tim Kennedy, D-Buffalo today announced state funding for the University District Community Development Association (UDCDA) that will support major renovation plans for the historic Uptown Theater on Bailey Avenue in Buffalo. UDCDA Executive Director Roseann Scibilia and Ibrahim Cissé, owner of the Uptown Theater,

outlined their plans to renovate Uptown Theater and strengthen its role in the community. Senator Kennedy believes this historic rehabilitation project will provide an economic stimulus for the neighborhood, serving as a catalyst for further community development and spurring additional commercial investment along the Bailey Avenue business corridor.

Kennedy announced the state will direct a \$150,000 grant to the UDCDA, which will inject the funds into renovations at the Uptown Theater. The project will significantly broaden the facility's impact in the surrounding neighborhood. Uptown Theater is located in the Buffalo Promise Neighborhood, and Mr. Cissé plans to partner with the adjacent BPN Children's Academy, the nearby Westminster Charter School and other local groups to host events, provide gathering space and support community improvements.

"Buffalo's Uptown Theater is an important and historic landmark on Bailey Avenue, and this funding from the state will bring new life to this remarkable theater," said **Senator Tim Kennedy**. "By investing in the rehabilitation of the historic Uptown Theater, the state will open up new opportunities to improve the lives of children and youth in the community and help preserve this theater for generations to come. This historic rehabilitation project presents another step forward for the Buffalo Promise Neighborhood. Once completed, the re-opened and revitalized Uptown Theater will support the Promise Neighborhood vision, attract more development to the Bailey Avenue business corridor and help generate new opportunities for job creation and business investment."

"In this community, there are no venues to hold large community events where families can gather for neighborhood meetings, school functions or for entertainment or recreation. The Uptown Theater will fill this critical need for our community. The strongest communities are those that can come together to discuss ways to improve and grow," said **Ibrahim Cissé, owner of the Uptown Theater**. "We also want to give the community a place where they can go to have a good time through stage performances, film viewings, church functions and kids'

plays. For instance, many children here get involved in music classes, but there's no venue for them to perform or hear new music. I want to thank the University District Community Development Association for partnering with us to pursue this grant, and I want to extend my gratitude to Senator Kennedy for believing in our historic rehabilitation project and helping us secure the state funding."

"The University District Community Development Association believes in the future of this community, and we are working hard to support the children, families and seniors who live here," said **UDCDA Executive Director Roseann Scibilia**. "In the Uptown Theater, we see an opportunity to improve a neighborhood, preserve a historic landmark and provide local families with a great place to gather for community events. This project will help spur economic development and encourage new investment in the neighborhood. From day one, Senator Kennedy has understood how important this project was to Bailey Avenue, to our community and to the entire City of Buffalo, and I want to thank the Senator for his unwavering support of this project and our ongoing neighborhood development efforts."

"The University District Community Development Association has a vision for a stronger community, and they continue to work hard to bring their vision to fruition," Kennedy added. "I was pleased to work closely with UDCDA to help secure this state funding, and I want to thank the Western New York Regional Economic Development Council for understanding the importance of this tremendous project. Congratulations and good luck to Mr. Cissé as you prepare to launch this project, and thank you for your commitment to the neighborhood. I cannot wait to see Uptown Theater once again open to the community and buzzing with activity."

Uptown Theater was built in 1926 and was originally known as "The Varsity." This attractive Art Deco-era movie theater served as an anchor for the neighborhood for years before falling into disrepair. Mr. Cissé purchased the theater in 2010 and has invested over \$85,000 of his

own money to renovate the facility, including roof replacement and other structural repairs. However, the 630-seat theater is still in need of significant renovation. State funds will support the installation of a heating and cooling system to make the theater comfortable for year-round use, and funding will help bring the theater in compliance with building codes. The Uptown still maintains its capacity to present film and stage productions with working mechanical systems, a projection room, sound equipment and stage lighting.

The full cost of the rehabilitation project is estimated to be about \$185,000. The project – which is expected to start in July and be completed by February 2015 – will include HVAC installation, plumbing upgrades, replacing doors for energy efficiency, and insulating and restoring the walls and ceiling of the theater. Once completed, the re-opened Uptown Theater will support the resurgence of the Buffalo Promise Neighborhood area, attract more people to the Bailey Avenue business corridor and speed up the development of new businesses in the area.

Through the Buffalo Promise Neighborhood initiative, the U.S. Department of Education has identified this underserved area for strategic large-scale public investment. UDCDA seeks to leverage this development with the state grant funding to inject further resources into this distressed community.

The University District Community Development Association, Inc., a non-profit corporation, offers a wide variety of programs for area youth and senior citizens. They also provide housing-renovation programs to empower residents to improve their lives and their community. UDCDA accomplishes this through collaborations with many stakeholders, including volunteers, government, private funders and community organizations. UDCDA aims to make the University District and its surrounding neighborhoods a safe and more prosperous place to live, learn, raise a family and operate a business.

The \$150,000 state grant was awarded through the Western New York Regional Economic Development Council process, and the funding comes through the state's Urban Initiatives program. The Urban Initiatives program provides financial and technical resources to New York State communities for the restoration and improvement of housing, commercial areas and community facilities in urban neighborhoods. This program provides grants to not-for-profit organizations that have a direct interest in improving the health, safety and economic viability of a distressed urban neighborhoods.

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Senator Timothy M. Kennedy represents the New York State Senate's 63rd District, which is comprised of the town of Cheektowaga, the city of Lackawanna and nearly all of the city of Buffalo. More information is available at <http://kennedy.nysenate.gov>.