

BRONX NEWS

Ice the deal for rinks at armory

For decades, people of the Bronx have been searching for a perfect fit for one of our crown jewels, the Kingsbridge Armory. Bronxites and our neighbors from across the city should feel that the armory is being used by the community, that that usage complements the surrounding neighborhood, and that the development brings good, well-paying jobs to local residents.

The Kingsbridge National Ice Center, a proposal for which I publicly announced my support in late August, is that project. Not only will the KNIC proposal be a good neighbor to the people of the Bronx, the developers of this proposal have made strong commitments on local hiring, "living wage" jobs and community programming featuring a strong education component.

The Kingsbridge National Ice Center would bring a total of nine regulation hockey rinks to the Kingsbridge Armory, featuring a 5,000-seat showplace arena as its anchor, making it one of the largest ice sports centers in the world, if not the largest.

Economically speaking, KNIC will be an important economic engine for the Bronx and the city, in more ways than the originally proposed retail mall ever could. According to a March 2012 study by HR&A Advisors, prepared by the KNIC developers, transforming the Kingsbridge Armory into the greatest ice sports center in the world would have a net new economic impact of \$1.3 billion on New York City.

In addition, the report finds that the proposal would complement existing business in the area, such as the adjacent Fordham Road shopping district, rather than

redirect spending from existing businesses to new businesses.

That report also notes that the project will create a total of 1,850 construction jobs citywide, including 890 in the Bronx, as a direct result of construction at the Armory itself and 1,300 as a result of visitor spending and new economic activity.

More than 170 permanent, full-time jobs will be created at the KNIC, as well as 380 elsewhere in the Bronx, as a result of visitor spending and new economic activity. These new jobs will have no negative effect on the Fordham Road shopping district, while a taxpayer-funded, climate-controlled mall would have led to its demise.

Our borough is known for being the home to baseball's greatest team, and over the next few years will see a PGA-Tour-quality golf course and a state-of-the-art tennis center take root in the Bronx. Why not add to that a world-class ice sports center that would help the Bronx stand at the forefront of athletics for the entire region and that will provide a much-needed economic shot in the arm for our borough and our city?

More than just economic opportunity, this facility will offer incredible educational and fitness initiatives that will shape future generations in this community. Imagine, one day we could see the next Mark Messier or Sarah Hughes coming from right here in the Bronx. KNIC will mean a world of new possibilities for our youth here in the Bronx and in the entire City of New York.

The KNIC will generate commerce, tourism and education opportunities for our borough, and it is clearly the right choice for the Bronx.

Ruben Diaz Jr. is Bronx Borough President.

BE OUR GUEST



Ruben Diaz



Members of award-winning debate team at Bronx High School for Law, Government and Justice will visit First Lady Michelle Obama on Monday. From l., Starr Arroyo, Stephanie Nyame, Yaira Brito, Ashley Mejia and teacher Erik Fogel. Photo by Bryan Pace

No debating this program's value

BY CORINNE LESTCH
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

IT ALL started because one teacher decided to make debate mandatory in his history class at the Bronx School for Law, Government and Justice.

On Monday, four of Erik Fogel's students at the Concourse Village school will represent their debate team in a special visit with First Lady Michelle Obama at the White House.

It was one of 12 after-school programs to win the 2012 National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award, which includes a \$10,000 award.

"We were like, 'No, I don't think they would choose us out of everyone else,'" said Ashley Mejia, 16, a sophomore. "(Fogel) said, 'Just try, you never know what might happen.'"

Student Starr Arroyo was selected to speak in front of the First Lady.

The 15-year-old sophomore said she looked up different speeches by Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor, from which she drew inspiration for her own address.

"My speech is about the need for education, because personally, I think kids don't feel it's important to go to school," she said.

After the success of the school's debate teams — which won city championships the last two years in a row — Fogel, with other volunteer teachers and staff, started the NYC Urban Debate League last September.

Between heavy fundraising and word-of-mouth advertising, about 400 students at 40 schools citywide are now involved in debate.

"From 3 p.m. to midnight, I write grants at the McDonald's on Mosholu . . . that's how we've been able to hold free citywide debate tournaments for any student," said Fogel, 34, a Teach for America grad origi-

nally from California. "A lot of these schools can't afford coaches, supplies, airfare, and we want every student to have a debate team. It's one of the best, most rigorous academic opportunities out there."

Last month, the debate league became a nonprofit with the help of Manhattan-based law firm Brown Rudnick LLP — which assisted them pro bono.

"We want to fundraise for a free summer debate camp and send kids to national championships," Fogel said.

The Bronx students recently debated the best way to rebuild the transit system after Hurricane Sandy, and how to reduce global warming.

They practice their speeches backwards, sometimes with pens in their mouths.

"It's just incredible to see kids want to argue and think and talk about these issues all day long," said Fogel.

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