

Next piece of Valley section is announced

Financial firm contributes \$825K through state program to project

By John Zucal Managing Editor

The effort to transform part of the Valley section of Orange and West Orange into an arts-themed district continued last week with the introduction of plans for a performing arts center. State and local officials were joined by corporate representatives as funding for the Luna Stage project was announced at the proposed Valley Road site. Some of the funding will come from a state program which provides tax credits for corporations which wish to invest in redeveloping areas.

Housing and Neighborhood Development Services has organized much of the work toward turning historic but long vacant buildings into arts-themed sites. The non-profit organization, which also works on rehabilitating residential properties, previously purchased the building which will be remodeled. The site, at 555 Valley Rd. in West Orange, also is projected to house three artist's studios, a restaurant and a township police substation. It originally was to be known as the Arts Incubator, a "home for the arts," as HANDS officials put it in early 2008. The site was expected to could accommodate a variety of arts — theater, dance and video production.

HANDS will get \$825,000 to assist in the Luna Stage renovation. Luna Stage is a regional theater company based in Montclair but will move to the redeveloped building as its new home.

That funding comes from the N.J. Neighborhood Revitalization Tax Credit program, in which corporations which provide funds it to non-profits are eligible for tax credits. JPMorgan Chase provided \$1 million for the Luna Stage project and the recently completed Ivy Hill Preschool Center in the Vailsburg section of Newark.

The visual arts was the key theme early in the decade as attempts began to revamp the Valley section from an area of long vacant warehouses into residential and retail areas with the Highland Avenue train station as a key selling point.

With HANDS serving as the conduit for much of the incoming funding, the project has progressed through the decade to create a gallery, printer and retail space within the rehabilitated buildings.