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## Renaissance Center getting closer to opening in Utica

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**Observer-Dispatch**

Posted Oct 27, 2011 @ 06:51 PM

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UTICA — More than two years ago, the Neighborhood Investment Association purchased the former Teamsters building at 7 Rutger St.

On Thursday, that building's doors were opened with a ribbon-cutting ceremony, but what will be a multicultural center called The Renaissance Center wasn't quite ready for business.

The first floor foyer – which will be a multicultural museum – boasted borrowed art from Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute representing varying cultures.

“We hoped to have it ready by now,” NIA founder and board President Kay Lanaux said before the ceremony. “We will do one floor at a time.”

Soon, organizations such as the Mohawk Valley Somali-Bantu Community Association and Mohawk Valley Latino Association can use the second floor for office space, afterschool programs and English as a second language classrooms. A second floor space already is filled with dozens of chairs and desks to be used for those purposes.

“We're in the process to being ready to have people move in Nov. 1,” interim Chief Executive Officer Joe Fariello said.

But that can't happen if the group doesn't secure funds to cover the historic building's operational costs.

There were no specific fundraisers planned besides the annual NIA Renaissance Ball, which took place in February this year, Lanaux said.

Attending legislators, city council members as well as city Mayor David Roefaro and Oneida County Executive Anthony Picente said they would do what they could to support the center.

“We cannot exist in a beautiful historic building like this with just talk,” Lanaux said. The building – built in 1977 – is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. “We could use from a penny on up.”

NIA purchased the building from Michael Cancilla for \$210,000 in July 2010. Cancilla had purchased the building in 2008, from Coolidge Rutger for \$150,000.

Eventually, the four floors in the building will act as a community center that will fill the hole left from the closing of the Cosmopolitan Center in 2008, members said.

The hope is the center will be a multi-purpose space that will be self-sustained by renting out the third-floor space as a catering and banquet facility.

Lanaux said groups already have asked to use that space, which would give the center much-needed revenue.

“We will use the fees for operational expenses, but we won't allow the people in until we are operational,” she said. “We want to speed up the wait, but we have to take each step as required.”

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