

Historic Jamaica chapel reopens after restoration

151-year-old building refurbished to house performance space, renamed after jazz great Jacquet

BY IVAN PEREIRA

When Nicholas Ludlam built the Chapel of the Three Sisters in Jamaica in 1857, he wanted to create a lasting memorial to his three deceased daughters, his descendant Cate Ludlam said.

Over the decades that followed, however, the Romanesque Revival structure and Prospect Cemetery, located in the rear, went through a long period of decay and were forgotten by the public.

"Every day, hundreds of students would pass this building and did not know its significance," Parks Department Queens Commissioner Dorothy Lewandowski said about the chapel located within York College's campus.

Last week the chapel

was successfully restored to its former glory and reworked to keep the memory alive of another Queens legend.

Lewandowski, Cate Ludlam, and Borough President Helen Marshall were among the many guests on hand Sept. 23 for the reopening of the restored chapel, which will now be called the Illinois Jacquet Performance Space.

Over the last year, a team of restorers overseen by the Prospect Cemetery Association, led by Cate Ludlam, was hard at work, clearing the overgrown shrubs, cleaning the dirtied walls and repairing broken stained glass windows.

"I was shocked to see the grounds," Ludlam said. "What we see here



Photo by Ivan Pereira

Marcia Keizs (from l.), Borough President Helen Marshall, City Councilman Leroy Comrie, Cate Ludlum, Dorothy Lewandowski, Deputy Parks Commissioner Wint Aldrich, Greater Jamaica Development Corporation Chairman Lamont Bailey and New York Landmarks Conservatory President Peg Green cut the ribbon to the renovated Chapel of the Three Sisters.

today is when people with foresight work together, they can accomplish anything."

Calls for renovation began around 1999, and thanks to a grant from Marshall and help from

the Greater Jamaica Development Corp., work began in April 2007, according to the nonprofit group

New York Landmarks Conservancy.

Although the chapel still contains many religious images, including carved Psalm passages on its walls, it will be adapted for a more artistic purpose by York College. Students and faculty will be able to use the building as a multi-purpose performance space for all types of shows that will be open to the public, York President Marcia Keizs said.

The space is dedicated to famed jazz saxophonist Illinois Jacquet. Jacquet, who lived in southeast Queens, performed dozens of hit tunes, including the sax solo "Flying Home." The musical number was played for the audience as the guests cut the ribbon, officially opening the space.