

Washington, DC - Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today announced that he's secured final approval of \$400,000 to complete the first phase of renovations at the Ritz Theater, Newburgh's last remaining historic theater. The renovation will create a home for performance groups, provide an improved venue for live shows, and offer job training and employment opportunities for local residents. Hinchey requested the funds as part of the fiscal year 2010 Transportation, Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Appropriations bill, which the House approved last week and President Obama signed into law this week.

"The restoration of this iconic theater with an incredibly rich history will provide a wide array of benefits to the community of Newburgh and further strengthen the ongoing revitalization of the city," Hinchey said. "Once the renovation is complete, residents of Newburgh and visitors from near and far will be able to enjoy this historic theater. The restored theater will serve as a regional venue for the performing arts and provide a home for local arts organizations, which will attract additional economic activity to the city."

The federal funds will be directed to Safe Harbors of the Hudson (SHOH), which purchased the blighted Hotel Newburgh property on lower Broadway in December 2002. Since that time, SHOH has transformed the run-down property into beautifully renovated supportive housing, commercial spaces and artist galleries. Under the leadership of Executive Director Tricia Haggerty Wenz and her committed staff, this innovative project has become a unique and successful model for redevelopment-- blending the arts with safe, attractive, affordable housing for formerly homeless, low-income adults and artists. The restoration of this property has helped to bring much needed stabilization to the surrounding neighborhoods.

Specifically, the funds will help complete the first phase of renovations, which involves archaeological work to identify and preserve the historic elements of the theater. The funds will also pay for the demolition of the modern day movie theater that was attached to the theater so that only the original elements of the theater remain in tact and preserved for the community.

Executive Director Tricia Haggerty Wenz said, "All of us here at the Ritz Theater and Safe Harbors are so grateful to Congressman Hinchey for his incredible support and recognition of how valuable this project is to the City of Newburgh. This funding will allow us to launch the first phase of the theater restoration in spring of next year."

The Ritz Theater originally opened its doors on February 13, 1913 as the Cohen Opera House. Nearly every major star of that era played on its stage. Most notably, when it became known as the Ritz Theater, it hosted the stage debut of comedian Lucille Ball and was the site of the first live performance of the "I Love Lucy" show. On December 17, 1941, Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz performed together at the Ritz Theater just weeks after they were married. The renovation would restore the original stage on which these artists performed many decades ago and help to attract nationally-renowned performers to the City of Newburgh.

The Ritz Theater is the last remaining historic theater in the City of Newburgh. Neglect, fire and urban redevelopment efforts claimed the others that previously existed. Over the past few years, SHOH has hosted live performances in the Theater space and more recently, partnered with the Bardavon Theater in Poughkeepsie and the Ulster County Performing Arts Center (UPAC) in Kingston to cooperate in arts programming and development at The Ritz.