

Washington, DC - Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today announced that he's secured House approval of \$400,000 to assist in the restoration of the Ritz Theater, Newburgh's last remaining historic theater. The renovation will create a home for performance groups, create an improved venue for live shows, and provide job training and employment opportunities. The funds, which were approved last night, are included in the fiscal year 2010 Transportation, Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Appropriations bill.

"Restoring this landmark theater will provide very positive benefits to the Newburgh community and help to further anchor the ongoing revitalization efforts in this area of the city," Hinchey said. "The renovation of this historic theater, including the restoration of the original full-scale Broadway stage, will be the capstone on the visionary and ambitious redevelopment of the former Hotel Newburgh property by Safe Harbors of the Hudson. Once returned to its former grandeur, this theater will become an important regional venue for the performing arts and serve as a home for local arts organizations."

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 need stabilization to the surrounding neighborhoods.

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 and partner in arts programming and development at The Ritz.

Now that the House has acted, the Senate needs to take up its own version of the fiscal year 2010 Transportation, HUD Appropriations bill.