

NEWS RELEASE: February 6, 2009

**Assembly Member Sam Hoyt Announces
Historic West Side Church Named To
National And State Historic Registers**
Designation will help facilitate reuse.

Assembly Member Sam Hoyt (D-Buffalo, Grand Island) today announced the addition of the Richmond Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church at Richmond and West Ferry to the National Register of Historic Places. The property was added to the State Historic Register earlier this year and is currently being re-developed by its owner, Alleyway Theatre Inc., as the Upper West Arts Center.

Hoyt commented, "This redevelopment project is crucial to the continued stabilization efforts in the West Side and once completed will not only ensure the continued integrity of this heritage place, but will provide a valuable community resource for years to come. The State and National Historic designations are an important catalyst for this process and will bring prestige and attention to this project. Being listed also recognizes the unique intersection of historic preservation, arts and culture, economic development, and urban revitalization that are critical to Buffalo's future."

This historic former Richmond Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church has been a prominent landmark overlooking Frederick Law Olmsted's Ferry Circle on his Richmond Avenue for more than 100 years. Even after the building ceased functioning as a church, it remains a community landmark because of its distinctive Medina Sandstone and stained glass windows, along with its formal composition that features an elegant stone tower.

Currently the Alleyway Theatre, lead by Executive Director Neal Radice, is in the process of renovating this structure for reuse. Once restored, the building will house the Upper West Arts Center, a community-based performing arts and events facility.

Neal Radice said "Once again, Assembly Member Hoyt stepped in at a critical time in the life of this adaptive reuse project to help inject new energy. His encouragement, advice and assistance lead directly to the engagement of an independent project planner and ultimately to the State and National recognition of this architectural and historic treasure."

The nomination of the property to the State and Federal Historic Registers was prepared by Architectural Historian Jennifer Walkowski of Clinton Brown Company Architecture, a Buffalo-based firm which specializes in historic preservation architecture across New York State. Clinton Brown, a leading local preservationist and President of Clinton Brown Company Architecture said "The honor of listing is a result of a rigorous and scholarly process in collaboration with the State Historic Preservation Office to elevate this unique local former church to nationally recognized significance."

Hoyt has secured more than \$320,000 in funding for the renovation project and has worked closely with the Alleyway Theatre to advance this project. Hoyt concluded, "I applaud Neal's vision and hard work to make this Center become a reality. This Center will significantly contribute to the vitality of this community and in a time when our community is facing the decommissioning of several church buildings, this Center will also serve as a leading example of the appropriate community re-use of an historic former church. I am proud to have helped play a role in protecting this historic building and look forward to its re-opening as the Upper West Arts Center."

Assembly Member Sam Hoyt represents the 144th Assembly District.