

POSTINGS

A New Home For the Seamen's Society

The purpose of the renovation being undertaken by the Seamen's Society for Children and Families on Staten Island is to save money, but the goal of the design is to provide a comforting atmosphere for the clients.

So, for example, a meeting room meant for parents whose children have been placed in foster care will adjoin a garden. "When children are being taken away, that is a stressful time, and we hope the garden will help," said Vincent MacDermot, the architect for the project. The society expects to move into the renovated building at 50 Bay Street, within walking distance of the St. George Ferry Terminal, in the spring of 2006.

The 158-year-old society, which has offices and programs in Staten Island and Brooklyn, was established to care for the wives and children of sailors lost at sea, or those, who, said Gerard McCaffery, presi-

dent and chief executive, "found themselves in Tahiti and decided to stay."

The organization's original name was the Society for the Relief of Destitute Children of Seamen, but in the 1940's it broadened its mission to include abused and neglected children in the population at large and changed its name in 1998. It currently serves about 7,500 children a year, 500 of whom it has placed in foster care.

Two years ago, the society paid \$1.2 million for the unoccupied building, which was built in 1925 and was used at one time by the City University of New York College of Staten Island, near its current premises at 25 Hyatt Street.

A \$4.5 million gut renovation will add 5,500 square feet to the existing 24,500 square feet of space in the building and provide rooftop gardens with views of the harbor. The re-configured interior will include a playroom, a computer lab for children, a center for teenage mothers, rooms where teenagers can learn to take care of babies and abused women can be counseled, a social room and medical and psychological facilities.

"Where we are now with 30,000 square feet of office space, we are paying \$500,000 in rent and would pay 3 percent more next year," Mr. McCaffery said. "In our new building, our property costs will be cut in half."

"Had we been unable to afford the rent in 10 years, we would have had to relocate," he said. "This insures our ability to remain in this area for long time to come. When you've been around for 158 years, your time frame is different."

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Vincent MacDermot/MacDermot Studio

ON STATEN ISLAND

A rendering of the planned Seamen's Society headquarters.