

## Artists finally find home in EastSide Cultural Center

### New Year's Eve party will mark facility's opening

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OAKLAND — After a decade of working out of inadequate or overpriced rental space, a collective of community organizers and artists will finally make their new home in a building of their own at the EastSide Cultural Center. The cultural center is located in East Oakland's San Antonio district, one of the city's most ethnically diverse neighborhoods. The EastSide Arts Alliance, a grass-roots organization founded in 1999, owns and operates the facility.

And to celebrate the center's opening, the community is invited to attend a special New Year's Eve Party at the facility at 2277 International Blvd.

The festivities begin at 9 p.m. Sunday and cost is \$10. Featured entertainment will be tenor saxophonist David Murray and the Freedom Now Band.

The event also will be a celebration of the 70th birthday of Bobby Seale, former Black Panther Party chairman and a member of the center's advisory board.

"It's a natural entity that needs to be here to bring the community together," said Elena Serrano, a member of the EastSide Arts Alliance.

"There's a lot of tension between black and brown and old and young and we need to provide a gathering place to build a healthier and stronger community."

The EastSide Cultural Center operates mainly from support by philanthropic organizations and private donors.

Recently, the Oakland City Council voted unanimously to approve a \$249,000 loan to the EastSide Arts Alliance.

The alliance will offer its grassroots programs in the renovated space. The 6,000 square-foot building is decorated with bright colors and offers a stage for music concerts, video screenings and town hall forums.

Organizers say the goal of the center is to become an urban model for self-sufficiency and revitalization to the economically challenged area.

As a result, the center has partnered with the Affordable Housing Associates to provide 16 units of housing and two live/work storefronts for community-based businesses in the center, and there are plans to host a people's bookstore and cafe in the future.

During the last 10 years the EastSide Arts Alliance has moved to four different buildings in a five-block radius. The last site was one room inside a 2,000 square-foot storefront.

The alliance organizes the annual Malcolm X Jazz Arts Festival in San Antonio Park. The event brings out Oakland's diverse ethnic community.

Now at the center's expanded facility young people can participate in a range of workshops including dance, theater and hands-on art-making classes.

The community also will have opportunities to meet and interact with some of the center's advisory board members who often come to perform and lead workshops.

Some of the members include other former Black Panther Party members such as Emory Douglas and Angela Davis. In addition, many Asian and Latino activists serve as advisory board members.

Greg Morozumi, a founding member of the EastSide Arts Alliance, said he has been working with the group for years to find a permanent space.

The hope is that the center will become a cultural institution, he said.

"We want to transform and empower the community," Morozumi said. "The community will always have a forum to speak out and experience different intersections of the community in a safe space."

For more information about the EastSide Cultural Center, visit, <http://www.eastsideartsalliance.org>

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