

Seniors to get SM(ART)S

City to connect seniors to the arts

BY NOAH ROSENBERG

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"Seniors don't just want to play bingo and dance anymore," said City Councilmember Domenic Recchia at Manhattan's Rubin Museum after a crowd of senior citizens swept past him to take in the exhibitions upstairs.

Recchia had just finished announcing the launch of SM(ART)S: Seniors Meet the Arts - along with Department for the Aging Commissioner Edwin Méndez-Santiago, Department of Cultural Affairs Commissioner Kate D. Levin and fellow councilmember Maria del Carmen Arroyo.

The \$1 million city-funded initiative has cultivated a partnership between 57 cultural institutions and over 150 senior centers across the five boroughs. The goal, explained Méndez-Santiago, is to get seniors - a population that will outnumber school children in NYC by the year 2030, Levin noted - "involved with city life on all levels."

Méndez-Santiago, a proponent of "vital and healthy aging," explained that the engineers of SM(ART)S do not harbor a one-size-fits-all mentality with regard to creating relationships between senior centers and cultural institutions. Instead, they encourage innovative collaborations.

Inside Broadway, veterans at introducing children to musical theater, have partnered with 17 senior centers under the new SM(ART)S initiative. Seniors from centers such as Steinway Senior Services, Young Israel of Queens Valley and the Florence E. Smith Senior Center will have the opportunity to participate in weekly one-hour workshops with an end-goal of a jointly created musical.



Michael Presser, Executive Director of Inside Broadway and Council Member Domenic Recchia at the SM(ART)S press conference

"Everyone loves Broadway," exclaimed Inside Broadway Executive Director Michael Presser, who noted the transition from working in classrooms to working with seniors would be a smooth one since most seniors grew up with musical theater.

Levin, who called the initiative a "mating of the minds," regarded the new collaboration as progress toward a much-needed transformation in seniors' community involvement.

While a transformation is certainly in order with SM(ART)S, it seems the initiative also does its part in cultivating a bit of nostalgia among participants.