

THE DAILY RECORD

WESTERN NEW YORK'S SOURCE FOR LAW, REAL ESTATE, FINANCE AND GENERAL INTELLIGENCE SINCE 1908

What's next for the Telesca Center?

Now that the Telesca Center for Justice sign has been lit, and the Partnership for Equal Justice solicitations are winding down, what is next?

The answer is that the Telesca Center is moving into the next phase, when the true synergies envisioned through the co-location of the legal services providers and the Monroe County Bar Association and the Foundation take hold. These steps will be taking place in parallel. Planned physical improvements include renovation of the lobby, and upgrades to the reception area on the Eighth Floor and to the Rubin Center for Education on the fifth floor.

At the lobby, renovation plans are far along. Renderings have been prepared by Bergmann Associates, along with the program description and cost estimates. Plans include removal of the escalators, new finishes, installing tributes to Judge Telesca and Hanna Cohn, and permanent recognition of the donors to the center. Those plans are nearly ready for implementation and can happen as soon as funding is committed, which appears very likely.

The physical improvements will make for a much more spacious and efficient entrance area that also will be a more welcoming space for clients as well as those who work in the center or attend meetings there. They also will ensure the center lives up to its name — a Center for Justice, not just an office building.

At the reception area on the eighth floor — legal services clients' first stop — trained intake personnel direct clients to the appropriate provider lawyer or staff member. The current reception facilities already are outgrown. They need to be updated to ensure confidential discussions can take place, and that clients can feel comfortable discussing their legal problems. There needs to be adequate capacity and flexibility to serve the many clients who visit each day, as well as the children who accompany many of them.

The area for physical improvements is the Rubin Center for Education, on the fifth floor. The area accommodates up to 125 people for regular continuing legal education programs, community programs, social events, speakers forums and many other events, but could benefit from improved sound systems, video conferencing support, better seating and other technological improvements. Funding is being discussed, but is not yet in place.

There also is talk of having the Rubin Center serve as the home for an Upstate Judicial Institute for training town justices, and possibly other judges, through the Office of Court Administration, but plans are not yet firm. Such a facility would reduce

travel expenses for the court system and make continuing education and other meetings for judges based Upstate more efficient, and take less time away from their active work on cases. It would be a natural complement to the existing Judicial Institute in White Plains.

Securing funding involves four steps. The Partnership for Equal Justice solicitations are nearly complete, but not done yet. The \$2 million goal has not been met, although more than \$1.8 million has been pledged. The final commitments are still being made, and solicitations should be completed by year's end, or soon thereafter.

Some pledges need to be collected, and follow-up work on that already is being done. As funds are obtained, they will be distributed, both to the provider agencies and to the Foundation, to provide permanent endowment funds to support legal services.

Fourth, as the campaign draws to a close, it will transition to provide ongoing support of the Foundation's 1892 Campaign and other efforts. The MCBA recognizes that the Foundation is a critical part of the MCBA, and it will continue to be an MCBA objective to ensure significant, ongoing effort goes into fundraising for the Foundation to benefit its ongoing support of legal services as well as educational and bar-related activities.

Beyond physical improvements and fundraising, the real work and opportunity are in the continuing programming and operational improvements for the members of the Telesca Center for Justice. Many aspects of that work already are underway, and have been for years. For example, the executive directors of the legal services providers and the MCBA regularly meet for joint planning and coordination, as do their office managers. There is shared use of support space such as the conference rooms, the Nixon Board Room and the Rubin Center for Education. New computer support can help with scheduling client interviews, case assignments, case management, volunteer recruitment and many other aspects of the daily work of the organizations.

It is likely we will see a Web site for the Telesca Center for Justice, providing the public with information on its background and links to each of the participant organizations. Several other collaborations and synergies are being discussed as well.

It is exciting to see the momentum surrounding the sign lighting at the Telesca Center for Justice and to realize that momentum can be transformed into additional improvements to the center and its stakeholders. What is already a national model for collaboration among legal services providers and the MCBA will

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Daily Record
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continue to grow and thrive, and the opportunities are boundless.

We cannot predict today the full scope of the activities of the Telesca Center for Justice in future years. What we do know is that the center will be even stronger. It will be deeper and more synergistic in its programming. It will reach legal services clients even better. It will encourage and support MCBA members looking for

ways to provide *pro bono* service, and it will be an ever more powerful tribute to a great cause — ensuring equal access to justice, so that there truly can be equal justice under law.

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