

Yonkers: Music school to boost arts district plan

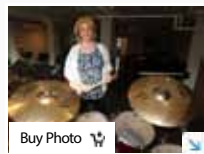
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 **Ernie Garcia**, elgarcia@lohud.com 1:34 p.m. EDT May 9, 2016



Liz Sander, the owner of the new Westchester Center for Jazz and Contemporary Music, talks about the music school's new space at the YoHo artists loft building in Yonkers. (Video by Mark Vergari/The Journal News)

It's progress for the former carpet mill buildings, whose owners want to transform the complex into the Carpet Mills Arts District.



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(Photo: Mark Vergari/The Journal News)

YONKERS - Elizabeth Sander had never been to Yonkers before she began exploring locations for her new music school, but she liked the "vibe."

So Sander and her husband, Paul, began converting a former first-floor cafeteria at the YoHo Artists Studios building at 540 Nepperhan Ave. into the [Westchester Center for Jazz and Contemporary Music](#), a school and performance space whose mission will include reaching out to disadvantaged

children in Yonkers.

"This is an area we can make a difference in," said Elizabeth Sander, 48, of Bedford. "To me it feels more arty than if I was in some strip mall."

When the center opens Thursday with a 2 p.m. performance by Joey Berkley's Bandits, it will be a big step for Sander, who spent \$240,000 renovating the space. It's also progress for the former carpet mill buildings, whose owners want to transform the complex into the [Carpet Mills Arts District](#).

In March, Yonkers officials approved special zoning for the carpet mills buildings. On Tuesday, city officials will hold a ceremonial signing of the new legislation during a reception at 530 Nepperhan Ave.

Only industrial uses were permitted in the carpet mills, which stretch from Lake Avenue on the north to Ashburton Avenue on the south and Nepperhan Avenue on the west to Saw Mill River Road on the east. The former carpet mill buildings date to the late 19th century and produced carpeting until 1954.

The rezoning combines with a parallel effort by the buildings' property owners to create a Carpet Mills Arts District that could eventually result in a complex similar to the Chelsea Markets, a shopping and dining destination in New York City on the ground floor of the former Nabisco cookie factory. The new zoning allows up to 20 percent of the massive buildings' floor space to be used for retail shops, art galleries, restaurants or personal services providers.

YoHo and neighboring buildings already have dozens of artists working in studios, which along with the school will open to the public on Saturday and Sunday as part of [Yonkers Arts Weekend](#).

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The exterior of the YoHo artists loft building in Yonkers where the new Westchester Center for Jazz and Contemporary Music is housed. (Photo: Mark Vergari/The Journal News)

Besides the artsy vision for the former carpet mills, Elizabeth Sander said she was drawn to Yonkers because it's different from other parts of Westchester County.

"I want to be part of a diverse community," she said. "This is not about providing something for the affluent. Nobody will be turned away if they're doing the work."

Enrollment at the school will cost \$145 a month and classes are expected to begin in the summer.

Elizabeth Sander said the city's rezoning of the carpet mill buildings will benefit her business, which will consist of parents dropping off children and then waiting for their lessons to conclude.

"I think it would be great if there were places they could easily go to shop and eat," she said.

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