

# Progress, potential in Southeast Queens

*Business advocates say demand is there for retail, restaurants to thrive*

by Michael Gannon

Editor

Longtime advocates for the Jamaica business community met with their target audience on April 19.

Jamaica Revealed brought real estate brokers, property owners and current and potential business owners to Southeast Queens for what amounted to a sales pitch touting what sponsors say is an untapped economic boom waiting for retailers and restaurateurs to tap into it.

The morning consisted of a combination buffet breakfast and workshop at the JFK Corporate Square office on Sutphin Boulevard, followed by a trolley tour of what sponsors said are 15 desirable yet vacant locations in the neighborhood for potential retail business.

"The average household income within one mile of [downtown] Jamaica is \$62,500; within three miles it is \$73,000," said Laurel Brown, executive director of the Jamaica Center Business Improvement District, one of the sponsors of the event.

"We want to showcase all the opportunities that Jamaica has on the table," she said.

Other sponsors of the breakfast and tour included the Sutphin Boulevard and 165th Street Mall business improvement districts; the Greater Jamaica Development Corporation and the city's Department of Small Business Services.

About 60 people attended. Justin Rodgers of the Greater Jamaica Development Corporation said they were expecting 16 brokers, but may have had close to 20 with walk-ins.

"In the next several months, there will have been about 700,000 square feet of new retail completed or started," he said. He also said the site of the meeting will, by some time in 2014, be a construction site, with plans for a limited-service hotel.

He said there still is no developer, as the cor-



Simone Price, left, of the Sutphin Avenue Business Improvement District, and Laurel Brown of the Jamaica Center BID make their sales pitch to brokers, property owners and both current and potential business owners during last week's Jamaica Revealed presentation. PHOTO BY MICHAEL GANNON

poration and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, which owns two-thirds of the existing property, must both sign off on any proposal.

Rodgers and Simone Price, executive director of the Sutphin Avenue BID, said full-service, sit-down restaurants are the most glaring example of an industry that is greatly underserving the demand in the area.

"Applebee's opened on Jamaica Avenue [in 2010], but that's it," Price said. "We have

done the research to show how much people in the area eat out, but they're going to Brooklyn and Nassau County."

She and Brown said, to paraphrase the movie "Field of Dreams," that if business people build it, people will come to Jamaica to eat out, shop for clothes and electronics, and take advantage of nightlife.

Police in the 103rd Precinct have said recently they are flooding officers into the

business corridors in and around Downtown Jamaica to simultaneously deter crime and help businesses thrive.

Price said though some of the area has a reputation for high crime, a thriving business community with diverse offerings that keep people on the street is exactly what is needed to drive the criminals away.

"It brings a lot of eyes to the street," she said.