



Puerto Rican culture to have a new showcase

By Antonio Olivo
Tribune staff reporter

Humboldt Park has long advertised its ethnic heritage with two Puerto Rican flags, 50-ton steel sculptures arching over Division Street.

Now, even as soaring rents and home prices threaten to push out its shrinking Puerto Rican community, the Northwest Side neighborhood is planning a 25,000-square-foot museum meant to further define it as the Puerto Rican capital of the Midwest.

The Institute of Puerto Rican Arts and Culture, which broke ground Monday, will be the only museum in the U.S. mainland dedicated exclusively to the Caribbean island's heritage, its officials said. Other Puerto Rican museums outside the island, such as El Museo del Barrio in New York City, have recently begun to include work from throughout Latin America.

"We are going to be the premier museum outside of Puerto Rico," said Ald. Billy Ocasio (26th) at a ceremony in front of the landmark Humboldt Park Stables, where \$7 million in renovations will convert that Queen Anne-style building into

the institute. "It is a national museum where people are going to come and visit from all over the country."

There are about 151,000 Puerto Ricans in the six-county Chicago area.

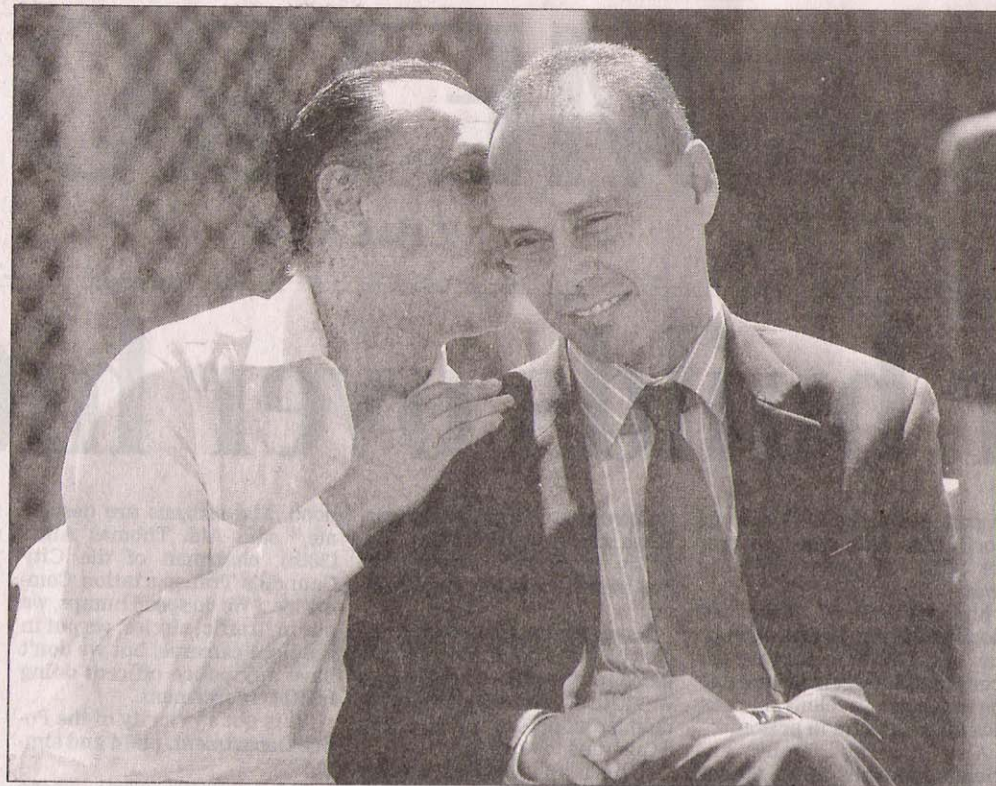
Expected to open in the fall of 2007, the museum is the latest in a series of developments that emphasize Humboldt Park's Puerto Rican identity.

Earlier this year, the Midwestern office of the Puerto Rican Federal Affairs Administration—the equivalent of a consulate for those newly arrived from the U.S. territory—moved onto Division Street from its former downtown headquarters.

On Tuesday, a formal dedication is scheduled for the newly built Teresa Roldan Paseo Boricua Apartments, a Division Street building of senior apartments whose architecture resembles that of Old San Juan.

Such changes are proof of how far the Humboldt Park area has progressed since the days when it was known as a place of poverty and government neglect, said U.S. Rep. Luis Gutierrez (D-Ill.), who attended the groundbreaking.

During the 1980s, for instance, the Humboldt Park Stables site



Tribune photo by David Klobucar

Chicago Ald. Billy Ocasio (left) and U.S. Rep. Luis Gutierrez on Monday appear together for the groundbreaking of the Institute of Puerto Rican Arts and Culture in Humboldt Park.

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—Ald. Billy Ocasio (26th)

was used by the city as a garbage transfer station, he said.

"It's almost as if, 20 years ago,

they were saying you don't deserve our respect," Gutierrez said. "Today, we're saying you must respect this place. Not only must you respect it, we'll show you the most beautiful parts of our community, the arts and the culture."

Jorge Felix, the museum's program director, said the institute will feature artists from Chicago, Puerto Rico and other parts of the country.

The building will include a

theater, performance space, a central courtyard and two floors of exhibition space. Much of the work will be interactive, incorporating multimedia technology, he said.

Among the themes for a first exhibit: gentrification.

"This is an issue that is going to be hard to get away from," Felix said.

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