Newsday

is planning to check out The Band Perry and O.A.R. this weekend on LI.

Artists have days to apply for live-work space in El Barrio

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An interior view of a gallery in construction on the 1st floor of Artspace P.S. 109 in upper east Manhattan on July 9, 2014. (Credit: Yeong-Ung Yang)

Travel deals

Artists, writers, musicians, fashion designers and other creative New Yorkers can apply for a few more days to live and work in a restored 116-year-old neo-Gothic school in East Harlem's El Barrio section.

The school is being transformed into Artspace PS109, which will house apartments and studios for 90 low-to-moderate-income individuals and families. People should be able to move in by the winter. Applications are being accepted through Monday.

"I'm so excited to see this place in El Barrio," said poet Jesus "Papo" Melendez, 64, who lives nearby in a crowded apartment with his extended family and was among the first applicants. "It could mean a new lease on life for me."

Artspace PS109, at Third Avenue and East 99th Street, is a five-story former elementary school on the National Register of Historic Places. The building was structurally sound but neglected after being closed in the 1990s due to disrepair and mechanical breakdowns.

Renovated the past two years, its transformation into live-and-work studios and apartments is nearing completion.

"We have a rich history of creativity; colorful murals and cultural centers are everywhere," said Matthew Washington, chairman of El Barrio's Community Board 11. "What we need desperately is affordable housing, and Artspace will help to fill that gap."

Artspace PS109 is the newest of 35 such makeovers in a nationwide string of affordable housing created by Artspace, a Minnesota-based nonprofit developer. PS109 is the third Artspace project in New York State, after ones in Buffalo and Patchogue.

While a few Artspace buildings, like the one in Patchogue, were built from scratch on land donated by the municipality, most Artspace projects are renovations of abandoned schools, warehouses or factories in rundown urban areas.

Makeover redesigns often take their cues from the building's previous function, but cutting-edge technology is a priority. For the Artspace PS109 project, recycled scowling gargoyles and a newly burnished copper steeple accent its resurfaced facade of ash-blond brick.

Decorative details strongly suggest its schoolhouse connection, with blackboard wall inserts and student light fixtures that hearken back to its late 19th-century vintage. But 21st century features abound, including low-flow faucets and bamboo flooring. Several Long Island subcontractors for hardware, plastering, and cleanup work were employed in the renovation.

The project, at 215 E. 99th St., is a partnership between Artspace, which purchased the property for $1 from the city in 2012, and Operation Fightback, a community developer in El Barrio, in cooperation with the city Department of Housing Preservation and Development. The project received $24 million in federal low-income tax credits.

Rents, which follow guidelines of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, range from $494 for a 500-square-foot one-person studio to $1,022 for a two-bedroom 1,000-square-foot apartment suitable for up to four occupants. Amenities include on-site laundry, community garden and resident gallery.

For details, go to artspace.org/PS109. There are no application or broker fees, but approvals are subject to a lottery, background and income checks plus an interview with a selection committee judging an artist's dedication to their craft.