



**Preservation  
League of NYS**

## East Harlem South / El Barrio Reconnaissance-Level Historic Resource Survey Receives a 2022 Excellence in Historic Preservation Award

*This award from the Preservation League of NYS recognizes the best in the field of historic preservation*

### Contacts:

**Katy Peace, Director of Communications, Preservation League of New York State**  
[kpeace@preservenys.org](mailto:kpeace@preservenys.org) | 518.462.5658 ext. 17

**Matthias Helfen, Communications & Neighborhood Engagement Manager, Ascendant Neighborhood Development Corporation**  
[helfenm@ascendant.nyc](mailto:helfenm@ascendant.nyc) | 855.756.8326 ext. 706

---

**EMBARGOED UNTIL 6:30 P.M. MONDAY, NOVEMBER 7**

[\(images\)](#)

**Harlem, NY, 11/7/22** — The *East Harlem South / El Barrio Reconnaissance-Level Historic Resource Survey* has been named one of this year's Excellence in Historic Preservation award winners. Since 1984, the League's annual Excellence Awards program has allowed us to shine a light on the people who are using historic preservation to make all our lives better — through exemplary restoration projects, indispensable publications, individual action, and organizational distinction.

**Additional information about the 2022 Excellence Award winners, including interviews, videos, and more, can be found on our website:** <https://www.preservenys.org/excellence-awards>

"We are thrilled that the *East Harlem South / El Barrio Reconnaissance-Level Historic Resource Survey* has been recognized by the Preservation League with this award," said **Chris Cirillo, Executive Director/President of Ascendant Neighborhood Development (AND) and Member of Landmark East Harlem (LEH), which co-sponsored the project.** "The extraordinary work of our preservation consultant, Marissa Marvelli, has raised the bar on historic resources surveys. Focusing on culture and community, the survey prioritizes people over buildings."

The region of southern East Harlem, beginning north of East 96th Street, reflects a multi-dimensional history of land development, class, immigration, self-determination, and community. This Manhattan neighborhood, commonly referred to as El Barrio, is unique in that it remains home to a predominantly working-class and multi-ethnic population. The Historic Resource Survey of El Barrio helped determine that it is the cultural history of the neighborhood that is central to the community's identity and its significance. Research was driven by pertinent social themes rather than architectural expression. Community surveys and conversations characterized the neighborhood using words such as "community," "culture," "family," "food," and "home," pointing to core values of the region.

**Through discussions with community members and leaders, the survey's author, Marissa Marvelli, stated there was "unanimous agreement that [El Barrio] is nationally significant as the cradle of the Puerto Rican diaspora."** Underscoring this sentiment were the remarks of other individuals who stated that East Harlem was historically the "anchor place of the first and largest Latinx migrant/immigrant wave to the United States." This fact demonstrates the importance of this work not only to Manhattan but to the nation.

Ascendant Neighborhood Development (AND) has been a force for equitable neighborhood development and preservation in East Harlem since 1988. Through its fiscal sponsorship of the local preservation organization Landmark East Harlem (LEH), AND provided the necessary resources for undertaking this survey. This section of East Harlem had never been comprehensively surveyed, thus marking the *East Harlem South / El Barrio Reconnaissance-Level Historic Resource Survey* as a pivotal document for AND and LEH's preservation efforts and the future of preservation in the neighborhood.

Aside from guidance provided by Linda Mackey at the State Historic Preservation Office, the survey benefited greatly from the input of community leaders including Walter Roberts, Executive Director of Hope Community; Melissa Mark Viverito, former Speaker of the New York City Council; Marina Ortiz, poet and founder of East Harlem Preservation; Xavier Santiago, Chairperson of Community Board 11; Ana Chireno, former Director of Government & Community Affairs at El Museo del Barrio; and David Nocenti, former Executive Director of Union Settlement. These interviews along with the 80 responses to a community questionnaire that was part of the survey work helped to ground the observations made and kickstarted necessary but often bypassed engagement with community members about cultural heritage values and preservation.

Published in early 2022, this survey has already garnered interest and support. During a community conversation hosted by LEH, members of the neighborhood underscored the importance of this document as a critical resource for preservation efforts. With its list of recommended actions and 31 identified individual resources suggested for local designation consideration, this survey provides a roadmap for AND and LEH's future preservation advocacy in the neighborhood. It also aligns with the East Harlem Cultural District proposed by Assemblymember Edward Gibbs.

The survey's grassroots approach ultimately found the need for more intensive-level survey work and includes a total of seven recommended actions as next steps to further document El Barrio's cultural heritage. While currently considered a unique approach, AND and LEH hope that a community-centered and grassroots survey technique will become the norm in preservation efforts. With a 2022 Preserve New York grant from the Preservation League, AND/LEH plan to bring the lessons learned from the East Harlem South / El Barrio survey to the northern portion of the neighborhood.

"Cultural resource surveys like this one typically focus almost exclusively on the built environment – the historic architecture and the history of those spaces," said **Preservation League President Jay DiLorenzo**. "What makes the El Barrio document unique is the more holistic approach the team took to incorporate the cultural history and intangible heritage into the overall view of the district. This forward-thinking approach can serve as a model for communities across the state."

The East Harlem South / El Barrio Reconnaissance-Level Historic Resource Survey was funded in part by a 2021 NYS Council on the Arts-funded Preserve New York grant from the Preservation League of NYS.

Recipients of the Excellence Award represent the very best of what the League stands for and supports in historic preservation. They exemplify best practices in the field and demonstrate how preservation is integral to building stronger neighborhoods, boosting local economies, tackling the affordable housing crisis, mitigating climate change, opening our eyes to overlooked history, and saving the places that are special to all of us. Our shared cultural heritage grounds us and unites us. The Excellence Awards celebrate those who work so hard to protect that shared heritage.

#### 2022 Awardees:

- **Gowanda Hollywood Theater** | Gowanda, Cattaraugus County
- **Opendore Restoration** | Sherwood, Cayuga County
- **Art's Cafe** | Springville, Erie County
- **The Pavilion at Fort Ticonderoga** | Ticonderoga, Essex County
- **The Church of St. Luke & St. Matthew Exterior Restoration** | Brooklyn, Kings County
- **Edgemere Development** | Rochester, Monroe County
- **Rehabilitation of the Little Theatre** | Rochester, Monroe County

- **Steve Jordan** | Rochester, Monroe County
- **East Harlem South / El Barrio Reconnaissance-Level Historic Resource Survey** | Manhattan, New York County
- **Cochecton Pump House** | Cochecton, Sullivan County

*The 2022 Excellence in Historic Preservation Awards are sponsored in part by Mr. Robert A.M. Stern, FAIA | Robert A.M. Stern Architects, LLP.*

### **About the Preservation League of New York State**

Since its founding in 1974, the Preservation League has built a reputation for action and effectiveness. Our goal has been to preserve our historic buildings, districts, and landscapes and to build a better New York, one community at a time. The Preservation League of New York State invests in people and projects that champion the essential role of preservation in community revitalization, sustainable economic growth and the protection of our historic buildings and landscapes. We lead advocacy, economic development, and education programs across the state.

Connect with us at [preservenys.org](https://preservenys.org), [facebook.com/preservenys](https://facebook.com/preservenys), [twitter.com/preservenys](https://twitter.com/preservenys), and [instagram.com/preservenys](https://instagram.com/preservenys), and [youtube.com/c/PreservationLeague](https://youtube.com/c/PreservationLeague).

###