



El Puente's Green Light District and Southside Merchants Bring Community Together for Southside Connex

By Jeff Mann

This weekend is going to be a busy one in North Brooklyn. Returning events, such as North Brooklyn Boat Club's Rock the Pulaski Concert, WILLiFEST and Taste Williamsburg Greenpoint along with new entries like Brooktober Fest take place all weekend long. This year, Southsiders join the party at the debut of Southside Connex. On Saturdays, September 21st and 28th, Havemeyer Street between South 4th and Grand Streets will be closed to traffic to make way for community celebration. Local merchants will provide their food and wares, alongside music, art, workshops, and other fun, family-friendly activities at the inaugural street festival hosted by El Puente's Green Light District (GLD) and the Southside Merchants Association.

Arts and culture, featuring live public art, the second annual El Puente WEPA! Festival of Southside Performing Arts, an exhibition of local visual artists from the El Puente CADRE (Community Artists' Development and Resource Exchange) and more will be the theme on the 21st. September 28th will focus on movement, health and environment, featuring recycling/composting demonstrations, yoga, cooking demonstrations, martial arts, an environmental art installation, salsa dancing lessons and music. Now in its second year, GLD is a ten-year initiative to sustain, grow and celebrate Williamsburg's Southside community. It seeks to keep the power of transformation in the hands of its resident amid the neighborhood's gentrification, with a focus on arts & culture, affordable living, education, greening spaces, environmental justice, and health & wellness.

"Creating powerful community partnerships to bring about innovation and change is the trademark of our El Puente GLD team," El Puente's Executive Director, Frances Lucerna. "Southside Connex promises to be a dynamic celebration of the creative and entrepreneurial power and potential of Williamsburg's Southside."

Southside Merchants, which is supported by the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce and NYC Department of Small Business Services was formed to create a strong partnership between local businesses in Southside Williamsburg. "This festival allows everyone to shop at local stores and eat at restaurants, providing a boost to the local economy and ensuring that this part of Williamsburg remains a destination, not just over two days, but all year around," said Brooklyn Chamber President and CEO Carlo Scissura.

By uniting merchants and artists, small businesses, local organizations and residents, organizers say Southside Connex provides an opportunity for the Southside to celebrate its culture and community, while learning how GLD and Southside Merchants are strengthening and improving the neighborhood. "Essential to this festival is the celebration of what makes Los Sures unique – our small business owners, artists and musicians and local initiatives like El Puente's Green Light District," said Councilmember Diana Reyna. Southside Connex is part of the NYC Department of Transportation's Weekend Walks program, which seeks to temporarily open our city streets as car-free public gathering places.