



Crain's New York Business

City to launch culinary incubator

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The Harlem-based facility will aid aspiring entrepreneurs when it opens next summer in La Marqueta, a city-owned retail market on Park Avenue.

The city announced today a plan to build a Harlem-based kitchen incubator that will help aspiring entrepreneurs launch bakeries, catering firms and other food manufacturing businesses.

The 4,000-square-foot facility will be built in La Marqueta, a city-owned retail market underneath the Metro-North rail line on Park Avenue. It is expected to be completed by next summer.

“The Kitchen Incubator will help people with small, artisanal and ethnic food businesses to make the transition from working in their home kitchens to using fully equipped, professionally managed and licensed facilities,” said Seth Pinsky, president of the New York City Economic Development Corp., which put out a request for proposals for companies interested in managing the facility. The RFPs are due by Sept. 2, 2009.

The City Council, led by Speaker Christine Quinn, spearheaded the initiative and is providing \$1 million to build the kitchen at La Marqueta.

There are currently only four other culinary incubators in the city: Urban Horizons Kitchen in the Bronx, which is run by the Women's Housing and Economic Development Corp., or WHEDCo; and Mi Kitchen es su Kitchen, which manages three incubators in Manhattan, Brooklyn and Long Island City, Queens, and is headed up by Katherine Gregory, who started the business 12 years ago.

Ms. Gregory's kitchens have approximately 75 tenants under contract, and she says she receives about six queries a day from prospective clients.

“Starting a business in an incubator eliminates the need for intense capital investment,” said Ms. Gregory.

She estimates that a food entrepreneur could start a business with as little as \$10,000.

Urban Horizons Kitchen currently has two tenants, Rasol Empanadas and Munchies Cookies, a vegan manufacturer. It has had about 20 tenants since it was built in a former hospital eight years ago, said WHEDCo's president, Nancy Biberman.

“Demand for the space ebbs and flows, but I think in this economy, small business operations are probably the only things available for people who have lost work,” Ms. Biberman added.

The city’s incubator won’t be able to help people who are now unemployed now, since it won’t be ready for tenants until next summer.

Food manufacturing is a \$5 billion industry in the city, employing 19,000 people.