Graduate Helps Brooklyn College Acquire Undeveloped Parcel

FEBRUARY 14, 2011

By SHELLY BANJO

City University of New York's Brooklyn College is about to land the last piece of undeveloped property connected to the 26-acre main campus.

The deal, which the school says it expects to close this month, was made possible with the help of a $2.5 million donation by Murray Koppelman, president and CEO of Manhattan-based Eastlake Securities.

The Brooklyn College Foundation, a fund-raising arm that supports the university, will purchase the 24,000-square-foot property from M.C.P.J.F. Inc., a private-equity company. The plot of land, combined with an adjacent parking lot, will form what the school hopes will become the site of a future school of business.

The acquisition comes amid a larger strategy to address space needs spurred by the increase in the student body by a quarter over the past decade. This month the school will demolish one of its performance arts facilities to make way for a new $75 million arts space.

Over the next few years it also looks to open a graduate school of cinema in a building owned by Steiner Studios at the Brooklyn Navy Yard and build a science-teaching commons.

Other changes include dividing the college into five schools earmarked for Humanities and Social Sciences, Natural and Behavioral Sciences, Visual, Media, and Performing Arts, Education and Business.

"We are in a renaissance, there's no doubt about that," says Karen Gould, Brooklyn College's president. "Students deserve a 21st-century learning environment."

Mr. Koppelman, who helped negotiate the land deal, says his donation was a chance to leave his mark on a college that helped make his career.

Growing up in Borough Park during the Great Depression, Mr. Koppelman sold frozen candy bars on Brighton Beach to help support his family. After working on a Kibbutz in Israel and serving in the U.S. Army during the Korean War, he attended Brooklyn College for free and graduated in 1957.

"I was nothing, I came from being on home relief to becoming president of a firm listed on the New York Stock Exchange," Mr. Koppelman says. "I'm paying back now for future generations to benefit and have the opportunity that I did."

He says the school couldn't establish a business school and attract top teachers without a new building so he began negotiating with the landowners himself.

"The school was dilly-dallying and I'm a make-it-happen person," says Mr. Koppelman, who is also a trustee of the Brooklyn College Foundation. "Finding a piece of property is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, we had to jump on it."
"The school was dilly-dallying and I'm a make-it-happen person," says Mr. Koppelman, who is also a trustee of the Brooklyn College Foundation. "Finding a piece of property is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, we had to jump on it."