

A new building, a new home for p:ear

SERA Architects and Fortis Construction assist organization dedicated to homeless and transitional youth

BY NATHALIE WEINSTEIN

The corner of Northwest Flanders Street and Sixth Avenue will soon be filled with the sound of instruments and the smell of oil paint as p:ear, an arts organization for homeless and transitional youth, prepares to move into its new home.



Previously located in the cramped lobby of the Cornelius Hotel, the nonprofit's new digs are a far cry from the cramped and chaotic space at Southwest Park Avenue and Alder Street, according to Sarah Dougher of p:ear. Designed by SERA Architects, the two-floor, 5,200-square-foot space is open and airy with large casement windows, a high industrial ceiling and movable walls to allow space flexibility. P:ear serves 30 to 60 homeless and transitional youth per day, engaging them in arts activities such as painting, learning musical instruments and photography. The nonprofit also offers GED mentoring and recreation activities such as rafting.

"Now we have places to do things," Dougher said. "I like how warm and clean it is; it's not sterile at all."

Designer Susan Blaire, interior designer Christina Tello and junior job captain Jessamyn Griffin have worked on the project for the past year and a half as part of SERA's participation in the 1% program, which challenges firms to dedicate 1 percent of their staff work hours to pro-bono work. General contractor Fortis Construction also participated in 1%, and donated its project fee, project management time and preconstruction services. Fortis' subcontractor, CE Snodgrass Construction Inc., donated labor and other services.

SERA worked intimately with p:ear during the design phase to create a space that would meet the needs of the arts organization, putting in almost 720 hours of pro bono work. An open gallery space will provide space for the kids to work on projects and will be rented out by p:ear for parties and business meetings in the evenings. Steel doors close off the music room for jam sessions and swing wide open for performances.

"The room is acoustically treated," said Dougher. "It was really loud at our old space."

Doors at the bottom of the towering cabinets along the space's walls conceal rolling carts for art storage and provide ample space for donated art materials. Other features include a dark room, lofted staff offices and a kitchen with a communal table. SERA utilized nontoxic building materials such as low VOC paints, Marmoleum cork floors and formaldehyde free paints, as well as purchasing from the Rebuilding Center, which sells recycled building materials.

The \$520,000 space will begin serving kids on Sept. 2. With its new home in place, p:ear will now focus its campaign on buying its new building to secure a permanent home, according to executive director Beth Burns. Having already raised \$192,000, p:ear will hold a preview fundraiser on Sept. 3 from 6 to 9 p.m. to raise the additional funds.

"I love the potential of this space," said Burns.