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**EDUCATION**

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## Historic Pitkin Theater To Be Transformed Into Charter School

By: Roger Clark

Brooklyn's historic Loews Pitkin Theater, which has sat in disrepair for 40 years, will be transformed into a school.

In the next 18 months, construction crews will be working to redevelop the space into a kindergarten through eighth-grade charter school.

There will also be 65,000 square feet of retail shops.

"We came to the property about four or five years ago and fell in love with the location, fell in love with the building, and started immediately trying to figure out how we can put the building into service back into the community," said POKO Partners President Kenneth Olson.

The Pitkin opened in 1929, offering both movies and stage shows.

"I have a lot of great memories here, met a lot of girls here, you know, when we were teenagers. It was just great," said former usher Howie Schlectman. "I would've worked for no pay."

The last movie shown was in 1969. Since then, the property has sat mostly abandoned. With the roof mostly gone, years of rain pouring have taken their toll on the once-ornate interior.

"It laid so many years with nothing in it," Schlectman said. "Might as well do something."

While the inside will be gutted for the renovations, most of the historic exterior will remain intact.

"It is significant because of its size, it's significant because of its history, it's significant because of its character," said Olson. "And that's the impact that it had on the community, that's the impact it is going to have on the community going forward."

The charter school, which is already in operation at another location in Brownsville, is run by non-profit Ascend Learning. Its president, Steven Wilson is a fan of the old building.

"It needed to have a new, important purpose, and for it to be a college-prep charter school for the city is a great new role for this building in the community," Wilson said.

Brownsville residents who spoke with NY1 seemed to agree.

"A school is good so children can get a little education," said one local resident.

"A movie theater you are going to pay, you are going to leave," said another. "Education is going to stay with you for a lifetime."

The developer says this \$43 million project is expected to be complete in 18 months. Students would begin attending school here in early 2012.