

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. To order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers visit <http://www.djreprints.com>.

<http://www.wsj.com/articles/food-charity-gets-a-new-home-1433811360>

U.S. | NEW YORK | NY REGION

Food Charity Gets a New Home

The only thing missing is Joan Rivers



The new headquarters of God's Love We Deliver, in SoHo. PHOTO: KEVIN HAGEN FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

By **MELANIE GRAYCE WEST**

June 8, 2015 8:56 p.m. ET

Over the past decade, as the nonprofit organization God's Love We Deliver increased the number of free meals it provides to seriously ill people, it faced a problem familiar to every space-crunched New Yorker: To grow, do you move or renovate?

On Tuesday, it will unveil its expanded, renovated SoHo home at the corner of Sixth Avenue and Spring Street.

More than double the size of its previous brick building, and at a construction cost of about \$28 million, the six-story, 48,500-square-foot headquarters is named for fashion designer Michael Kors, who donated \$5 million for the renovation.

The new building has a sunlit kitchen, upgraded professional offices, education space with demonstration kitchen, enclosed loading dock, showers, laundry room, a clubhouse-like volunteer lounge and a rooftop herb garden with views of the city. The roof doubles as an event space.

During a tour of the building last week, Karen Pearl, the organization's president and chief executive, was adding to her mental to-do list: Tiles need to be installed in the bakery, kneelers are needed for the rooftop garden, and a microwave needs installing.

Pending city inspections, the plan is to move some 83 employees in and turn on



CEO Karen Pearl PHOTO: KEVIN HAGEN FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

the industrial kitchen and bakery in coming weeks. The organization has been operating out of a temporary facility in Brooklyn since September 2013.

“I don’t sleep,” said Ms. Pearl. “I’m very excited. And, of course, I think about all we have to do.”

God’s Love provides nutritious free meals to seriously ill people living in New York City and parts of northern New Jersey. When the organization was founded in 1985, it primarily served people with AIDS.

Second to its mission is companionship for clients, who are mostly over 50 and receiving Medicaid. The charity said it cooked and delivered 1.3 million meals last year.

“We’ve worked really hard to make sure that anyone who needs us knows about us and can find us,” said Ms. Pearl.

Because of that, demand for meals has grown 94% in the past 8½ years, said Ms. Pearl. The old building, purchased from the city, simply became too small, she said.

So the organization embarked on a real-estate search, and considered moving out of the city or separating the kitchen from the administrative space, said Scott Bruckner, the organization’s board chairman and a senior managing director at Macquarie Capital.



Eighty-gallon pots installed for food production. PHOTO: KEVIN HAGEN FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Because of use restrictions on the land and the building, the charity couldn’t sell its real estate or raze its old headquarters, he said. The new building is built up and around the remaining steel, retaining wall and foundation of the old building. The city provided \$8 million toward the renovation. The rest came from individual, corporate and foundation donations.

“The kitchen is appropriately sized for us to move very quickly to two million meals annually, and more,” Mr. Bruckner said.

With seven walk-in refrigerators, six industrial freezers, five blast-freezers and five 80-gallon soup kettles, volunteers will be able to increase output and store

food for emergency situations. The new facilities also have more space for bulk goods, allowing the organization to economize purchases. A generator will help to ensure that power is continuous and food doesn't spoil, said Ms. Pearl.

Yet for all of the improvements, the space lacks one major thing: Joan Rivers.

Ms. Rivers, the actress and comedian who died in September at the age of 81, had been a cheerleader for the organization for 25 years. She was a board member and volunteer, delivering meals on Thanksgiving.

She motivated thousands of volunteers, said Ms. Pearl. Melissa Rivers, Ms. Rivers's daughter, has succeeded her on the board.

As Ms. Pearl walked through the new bakery dedicated to Joan Rivers, she held back tears. She still has to stop herself from imagining Ms. Rivers walking through the door.

"It's really hard for us to have big organizational events without Joan," Ms. Pearl said. "She was always here."

Write to Melanie Grayce West at melanie.west@wsj.com

Copyright 2014 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. Distribution and use of this material are governed by our Subscriber Agreement and by copyright law. For non-personal use or to order multiple copies, please contact Dow Jones Reprints at 1-800-843-0008 or visit www.djreprints.com.