
DAILY NEWS

Southern Blvd. Merchants Hope to be the Bronx's One-Stop Shopping Destination

By Corinne Lestch
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Southern Blvd. may soon be a one-stop shopping destination.

The first-ever merchants' association for the winding artery that stretches from Belmont to the end of the Bruckner Expressway is striving to bring business back where the Bronx once burned.

A new website, www.southernboulevard.org, was unveiled last week as part of the marketing strategy. It shows available retail space, a listing of current businesses and services, and a map.

"We really wanted to help the merchants be able to promote their district to existing community members, as well as new members moving into the neighborhood," said Kerry McLean, director of community development for Women's Housing and Economic Development Corp.

"This is one of the fastest-growing neighborhoods in New York City, and there's a lot of new housing development we've been tracking, because retail follows rooftops."

The merchant association includes nearly 100 businesses - clothing, shoe and hardware shops, 99-cent stores, delis - mainly along a 1-mile stretch of the boulevard between E. 174th St. and Westchester Ave. at Simpson St.

When Jebel Ceesay was thinking about opening JB Collection Clothing about six years ago, he checked different spots across the city until he finally realized Southern Blvd. was "going to grow more than [a street in] any other borough."

"The point is that the community is growing right now, and there's high demand," said the African-born Ceesay, who also serves as the association's president.



Merchants on Southern Boulevard hope to make the shopping stretch a destination for Bronx residents.

"We have people that go outside of Southern Blvd. and spend billions of dollars a year that could have been spent here."

Fashionably dressed local residents Jason Lynwood and Gary Lopez, both 24, said they prefer shopping in SoHO at stores like American Eagle and Hollister.

"That's what they need to do," said Lopez, when he heard about the new association. "It would be a big investment."

Business owner Anthony Cabezas, 42, said he is trying to capitalize on this young, hip, urban demographic.

He runs the graffiti art shop Da Bakery, at 1700 Southern Blvd., where people can design their own T-shirts.

"We're just trying to stimulate the area and bring people across [to] where they can say, 'If you walk through [this] store, you honestly feel that you're in downtown SoHo,'" he said.