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From the Memphis Business Journal:

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Former firehouse near FedExForum finally filled

Jul 19, 2017, 11:28am CDT

The historic firehouse at the corner of B.B. King and Martin Luther King boulevards, next to the FedExForum Downtown, will soon be occupied for the first time since it was home to a pop-up bar in 2015.

Memphis Music Initiative (MMI), the diversity-focused music nonprofit, will occupy the building's 10,000 square feet starting in January.



ELLEN COLLIER | MBJ

To take a look at what the firehouse looked like in 2015, click through the slideshow attached to this story.

"I like that it's on the corner of King and King and has a connection to Beale Street, which is the music hub of the city," said MMI executive director Darren Isom. "We wanted something that spoke to the creativity of our organization."

MMI is currently housed in the Memphis Education Fund space on the fourth floor of Crosstown Concourse.

"We wanted to be in a space where people felt welcome to walk in uninvited. That's hard to do when you're on the fourth floor of the building," said Isom.

Benjamin Orgel, whose family owns the building, said he was thrilled to have a well-run nonprofit occupying the space.

"We bought the building because we thought it was an eyesore for FedExForum. ... We want Downtown to look good, and it's not a good look. We were pretty picky on who we wanted to go there," Orgel said. "Having an office user seemed like a perfect use."

Besides setting up their headquarters in the building, MMI is planning to use its increased space to incubate other music and arts organizations.

"You can count on one hand the number of black-led arts organizations in the city," Isom said. "We want to incubate programs that have the opportunity to impact the black and Latino communities ... allowing those programs to grow to have a larger impact."

Isom said his organization has been scouting the city for small, neighborhood-level arts programs worth growing.

To make the historic building ready to house the incubator space and their offices, the nonprofit is planning to invest about \$600,000 in the buildout, according to its broker, Universal Commercial Real Estate's Darrell Cobbins.

"I think the opportunity to really reimagine the building is what they were attracted to," said Cobbins, "[along with] the highly visible location."

MMI is planning to begin renovating the building in August, with the goal of having it ready by the end of 2017.

Self + Tucker Architects is designing the renovation.

Jacob Steimer

Reporter

Memphis Business Journal

