

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Press Contact: Rebeca Ramirez, [rebeca@myrtleavenue.org](mailto:rebeca@myrtleavenue.org), (718) 230-1689, (917) 860-9686

Twitter Handles: @MyrtleAveBklyn / @MBlaiseB / @NycBIDs / @SBSNeighborhood

## **Michael Blaise Backer Announces Departure from Myrtle Avenue Brooklyn Partnership to Join NYC Department of Small Business Services**

March 27, 2014, Brooklyn, NY- Michael Blaise Backer announced at this morning's quarterly board meeting of the **Myrtle Avenue Brooklyn Partnership** (the Partnership) that he will be stepping down as Executive Director at the end of April to serve as a Deputy Commissioner at the **NYC Department of Small Business Services (SBS)**, overseeing the **Neighborhood Development Division**. He will also be stepping down as the co-chair of the **New York City BID Association**, the membership association of the 69 business improvement districts in New York City. The Partnership, comprised of the Myrtle Avenue Revitalization Project LDC (MARP) and the Myrtle Avenue Brooklyn Business Improvement District (BID), oversees the economic revitalization of the 20+ mixed-use blocks in Fort Greene, Clinton Hill, and Wallabout, Brooklyn. The Partnership's Executive Committee will be meeting next week to begin transition planning.

Under Blaise's leadership, the non-profit partnership became one of the leading community-based local development corporations in NYC. He successfully transformed one of the most dilapidated and disinvested commercial corridors near downtown Brooklyn into a thriving neighborhood business district that maintains its historic "Main Street" character. During his 11+ years at the Partnership, Blaise expanded the organization's budget from \$255,000 to \$1.2 million. He was instrumental in lowering the retail vacancy rate from over 20% to less than 5%, recruiting over 100 retail businesses (that are still enjoying their tenure on the avenue), while maintaining a 71% minority- and woman-owned business rate and a 95% locally-owned business rate. Blaise also worked closely with community stakeholders, elected officials, and city agencies to spearhead Myrtle Avenue Plaza, a \$7M capital project to reconstruct the streets and sidewalks on four blocks of Myrtle Avenue between Hall Street and Emerson Place. The NYC Department of Design & Construction (DDC) has announced that construction on the 25,000 square feet of new pedestrian space will begin by early summer 2014.

*"Blaise has been critical to the growth, development, and great success of MARP and the BID,"* said Pratt Institute President Thomas F. Schutte, who has chaired the boards of MARP and the BID since their inception. *"He's inspired and led key neighborhood initiatives and community planning programs that have ultimately improved Myrtle Avenue with tremendous results. We wish Blaise the best and know he will excel in his new role."*

As Deputy Commissioner of the Neighborhood Development Division at the Department of Small Business Services, Blaise will be responsible for overseeing, developing and delivering innovative and impactful programs and services that support the agency's network of 69 Business Improvement Districts, as well as other community-based organizations that work to improve business conditions in commercial districts throughout the five boroughs. He will also work with dozens of Local Development Corporations, merchants' associations, and other neighborhood development organizations through AvenueNYC, a competitive grant program that helps improve commercial districts in low-to-moderate income neighborhoods.

### **About the Myrtle Avenue Brooklyn Partnership**

The Myrtle Avenue Brooklyn Partnership works to restore the "Main Street" of the Fort Greene, Clinton Hill, and Wallabout community to a bustling, economically vital, neighborhood commercial corridor that provides entrepreneurial, cultural, recreational, and employment opportunities for all those who live, work, study or visit the area. To revitalize Myrtle Avenue, the partnership provides programs in commercial revitalization, business attraction & retention, facade improvement, historic preservation, arts & culture, marketing, local tourism initiatives, small business technical assistance, environmental stewardship, community food security, and urban planning and advocacy for the neighborhood and its small businesses. The Myrtle Avenue Brooklyn Business Improvement District (BID) provides supplementary sanitation, graffiti removal, marketing, and beautification services. These programs aim to attract shoppers and new businesses to Myrtle Avenue, to spur local job development, to improve the built environment and the infrastructure along the avenue, to protect and maintain historic properties, and to improve overall quality of life for the neighborhood's shoppers, merchants, and residents.

For more information visit: [www.myrtleavenue.org](http://www.myrtleavenue.org)

### **About SBS Neighborhood Development Division**

The SBS Neighborhood Development Division helps ensure the success of commercial districts throughout New York City by working with organizations to invest in streetscape improvements, property development, and business attraction. Their goal is to ensure the vitality of the city's commercial districts by creating opportunities for small businesses and the communities they serve. For more information visit: <http://www.nyc.gov/sbs>