

focus on

PROJECT TO WATCH

# The Center for Culinary Enterprises

Long-vacant West Philadelphia supermarket to become culinary incubator

By Rachel Cieri

Foodies of Philly, take note: The Enterprise Center is out to find the next Bobby Flay or Stephen Starr with its latest project — The Center for Culinary Enterprises.

Scheduled to break ground this spring, this new culinary incubator will provide a business home and commercial cooking space to dozens of the city's "informal entrepreneurs" struggling to run baking, catering or food-cart businesses out of their homes.

"The number one type of informal industry, based on our research, is food, at least here in Philadelphia," says Greg Heller, managing director of economic growth and community revitalization at The Enterprise Center's commercial arm, the Community Development Corporation (TEC-CDC).

The Center for Culinary Enterprises (CCE) will be one of just a few culinary incubators in major cities across the U.S., but it will be the only one attached to an entity with 20 years of experience in small business development. TEC-CDC combines a multitude of resources, including a capital lending

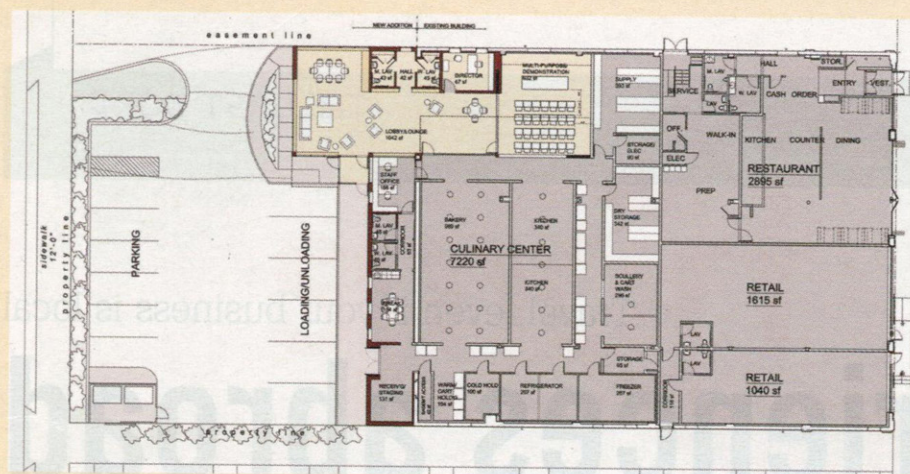
corporation and its Retail Resource Network, to help disadvantaged business owners get on their feet.

"We think that a number of informal entrepreneurs will be able to take something that was a supplemental income business and turn it into something that's viable and can become their primary source of income and can create new jobs and stimulate the local economy," Heller says.

CCE will be built into the façade of a West Philadelphia supermarket that has been vacant for nine years. Neighbors had identified the massive structure as an eyesore to this active commercial corridor, saying it was bringing down the other businesses.

"When you take an anchor building like this on a commercial corridor and bring it back to life, it's a huge benefit to everyone else on the corridor," Heller says. "It's the kind of thing that will attract people who might not have come otherwise. It will bring publicity to the corridor."

When the project is complete, the only



part of the original structure remaining will be its front three walls.

"The building is basically a shell," Heller says. "We'll be taking down the back wall to do about a 15-foot extension, and it's going to need a whole new roof."

The new roof will contribute to the renovated building's LEED certification, creating solar harvesting and storm water retention capabilities. The rest of the building will be gutted, ridding it of old asbestos tiles and adding a loading dock, three shared-use commercial kitchens, a 36-seat multimedia "e-kitchen" classroom, a demonstration kitchen and a computer lab.

Because 70 percent of food entrepreneurs are baking, CCE will include a large industrial baking kitchen for high-volume production, and the other two kitchens will be outfitted for smaller-scale catering. All three will have large amounts of storage space because of the need to keep raw and finished products onsite.

The e-kitchen will be the product of a partnership with WHYY, a local TV and radio affiliate, which is helping to outfit the classroom so entrepreneurs can record digital cookbooks and watch chefs from across the world teach lessons in real time. The space will also be available for rent to outside organizations for educational programming such as cooking lessons, nutritional workshops and classes on the food industry.

But the incubator is just one part of

CCE's multi-faceted purpose. The site will also be home to two retail spaces for community food businesses, an urban mini-farm and a full-service restaurant with a management program for high school students.

The restaurant will be called Little Louie's Barbecue, and it will be an extension of TEC-CDC's YES (Youth + Entrepreneurship = Success) program for high school students. The in-school and after-school program trains about 100 students per year to create their own business plans. Little Louie's will supplement that training with real-world experience as the kitchen staff, servers and cashiers, resulting in a food-handling certificate.

The 12,500-square-foot facility is estimated to cost \$5.2 million and will be made possible by a diverse mix of private, corporate, government and foundation investors. In its first year, CCE is expected to create 82 new jobs, and the project's creators hope the small businesses that result from the incubator will bring their products beyond the local economy to regional and national markets. TEC-CDC has already begun talks with local institutions, like the University of Pennsylvania, to secure contracts for these small businesses that could help them grow to the next level.

"I think this is going to have a tremendous transformative effect on this corridor that will be great for all the business along it," Heller says. **CEO**

**Address:** 310 S. 48th Street, Philadelphia

**Description:** Philadelphia's first culinary incubator, local food retail space, multimedia "e-kitchen" classroom and full-service restaurant with a high school training program

**Website:** [www.philafood.net](http://www.philafood.net)

**Estimated cost:** \$5.2 million

**Architect:** Friday Architects/Planners

**Parking:** Transit-oriented development with minimal parking (10-20 spaces)

**Groundbreaking date:** Spring 2011

**Completion date:** Spring 2012

