



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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**To schedule interviews and other media requests,  
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## **FIRST UPDATE SINCE OWNERSHIP OF FORMER ALBANY YMCA SET FOR AUG. 5 PRESS BRIEFING**

Continuing a legacy of service and community collaboration, First Israel A.M.E. Church will announce the new name and plans for its 71,000-square-foot facility in downtown Albany, after less than a month of ownership.

The preliminary update will be given as part of a brief press briefing scheduled for Thursday morning at 9:15 a.m. in front of 274 Washington Avenue in Albany and will give insight to the new partnerships being formed to fully utilize the building.

The community building includes two gymnasiums that take up more than 12,000-square-feet; a 1,000-square-foot furnished Teen Center, indoor track located in the basement, and several offices.

As part of the agreement between the YMCA Board of Directors and First Israel A.M.E. Church, the building will continue to be the home for the Y's Teen Center as well as its Saturday night gang prevention program. Senior basketball night on Fridays and the Black & Latino Achievers Program will also continue at the building.

The building is also currently in use as a site where the Albany District Attorney's Office sends people to work off community service hours, the Children's Place Summer Day Camp, the Smart Start Employment Readiness program, and a new Capital Region program known as Career Pathways that focuses on recruitment, credentialing, training and placement of young adults in college-connected careers.

Career Pathways seeks to assist the target population of 18 to 24-year-old young adults who, for the most part, have completed their high school years without benefit of diploma or G.E.D., 80 percent of which will be responsible for a young child. The program, which transitions participants to the world of gainful employment with power and success, opened administrative and program offices at the 274 Washington Avenue building in early July to compliment its services offered at The Senior Maureen Joyce Community Center at 340 First Street.

"Located at the confluence of six of Albany's neighborhoods, near major college campuses, and close to many of the resources and services with which we work, this faith-based, community center provides the perfect setting for our transformative engagement with these young Albanians," said Rev. Dr. Maurice Drown, Career Pathways Project Director. "We look forward to being a part of this dynamic center of health and caring in the heart of our city. The building is the perfect launching pad for careers that contribute."

According to Capital Region Gang Prevention Coordinator Ron "Cook" Barrett, the Saturday evening Gang Prevention Program that began in May 2000 has attracted close to 10,000 youth since its inception.

“Housed at 274 Washington Avenue, the building is located in an area that helps serve youth from the Arbor Hill and West Hill neighborhoods. The building provides ample space for the 150 to 200 youth that take part in the program weekly.

“Reverend Smart and the First Israel A.M.E church have continued to support this very important program and collaborate with the Albany Gang Prevention Program, to ensure our youth have a positive outlet on Saturday evenings,” said Barrett. “I would like to thank the Reverend and the church for their continued commitment to the community and to the youth of Albany, for providing a building, which has been a centerpiece for our youth programs in the past, and for years to come.”

Work on the phased reopening of the building began shortly after the May announcement by the YMCA to shutter the building because of low membership numbers.

The church closed on the building on June 26, for the sale price of \$1. Since receiving the keys on June 30, a team of volunteers from First Israel Church have been cleaning and renovating the interior each week, as well as landscaping the front lawn, mulching and beautifying the building’s external façade.

An open house, ribbon cutting and tour are scheduled for Sept. 25.

Current spaces available for lease/renovation include a 5,150-square-foot Olympic size pool along with a whirlpool and storage area, a 2,886-square-foot area that was once used as a pool, 3,040-square-foot of racquetball courts, and several offices/meeting spaces.

For general inquiries, building representatives can be reached at (518) 813-9733 between 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday through Friday.

#### **ABOUT FIRST ISRAEL A.M.E. CHURCH:**

Located at 361 Hamilton Street, First Israel African Methodist Episcopal Church serves the diverse populations within the Capital District through spiritual, religious, community and educational programs.

Israel A.M.E. Church has always been active in the community. The Albany Chapter of the NAACP was founded at the Church. In 1989, the church became a part of an urban church cluster ministering to the inner city. These five churches – Emmanuel Baptist, First Presbyterian, Israel AME, Trinity United Methodist, and Westminster Presbyterian – comprise the FOCUS churches. These FOCUS churches reach out to the homeless, the poor and the needy with food, lodging and educational programs.

Current ministries include The Grace Green Library, soup kitchen and food pantry, historical preservation, after-school tutoring, and several others that concentrate on such areas as homeownership, higher education scholarships, family life, wellness, overseas, media, missionary, hospitality, and social action.

Founded in 1809, the history of Israel A.M.E Church parallels that of the National A.M.E. Church. People of African descent were attending the Methodist Episcopal Church on State Street in Albany, NY when they were asked to pay pew taxes. They left the Church and formed the Free African Society that evolved into Israel A.M.E Church.

The present church, designed and built in 1854 by Reverend Thomas Jackson, served as a station on the Underground Railroad during the Civil War. Abolitionists, including Frederick Douglass visited Israel Church. Other historic facts include how Harriet Tubman slept on the east wall of the basement and several areas in the church that have been labeled as hiding places for slaves. The church is on the National Historic Register as the oldest black church in upstate New York.

For more on the church’s history, services and events, visit [www.first-israel-ame.org](http://www.first-israel-ame.org).