

New law helps manufacturer

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A Queens-based pharmaceutical manufacturer will be able to provide more jobs to city residents in the future, thanks to a designation proposed by the City Council and signed into law recently by Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg.

Epic Pharma, located Laurelton, was designated a Regionally Significant Project under the Empire Zone Program on Monday, December 28, when Bloomberg signed off on a bill approving the distinction. This will make the company eligible to receive benefits from the state, including a variety of tax credits, even though it is located outside of a designated Empire Zone.

"To qualify for designation, a business must meet more rigorous employment creation thresholds," Bloomberg said.

The Empire Zone Program, begun in 1986, provides incentives to businesses in areas where investment and job creation are of vital importance to stimulating a disadvantaged community. There are currently 85 Empire Zones throughout New York State, including 11 in the city.

Epic Pharma began a year and a half ago, on a site that operated for years by Sandoz, the generic drug subsidiary of Novartis. When the company planned to close its Queens operations and move production to North Carolina, some of its long-time employees stepped up to purchase the facility and keep Queens jobs alive. A manufacturing contract was signed by Sandoz, and Epic Pharma was born.

"The employees here are people that I know — many single mothers; people whose weddings I attended — who I saw in good times and in bad," said Jai Nerine, executive vice president of Epic Pharma, who spent 25 years working in the



Photo Courtesy of Greater Jamaica Development Corporation

Mayor Michael Bloomberg signed legislation approving Epic Pharma as an Empire Zone Regionally Significant Project. Ram Pottl of Epic Pharma; Councilmembers David Weprin and Leroy Comrie; Nathan Sudakoff, ANS Business Consulting; and Richard Werber of the Greater Jamaica Development Corporation attended the ceremony.

Sandoz facility and who helped start Epic. "For them to go out and make the same money elsewhere wouldn't be easy," he said.

"The whole point was to retain jobs," said Nerine.

When it opened, Epic Pharma had a staff of 165 employees. Since then, it has expanded to employ 200 people, about 85 percent who are local residents, according to Nerine's estimate.

"We continue employing. In the next two years, our target is to create 50 more jobs, which would be nearly 100 jobs in five years," said Nerine.

The money that Epic saves through the variety of tax credits will be directly used to

expand its research and development department.

In addition to actively researching and developing its own pharmaceuticals, Epic Pharma also has a contract to manufacture 1.2 billion units for Sandoz. This is important, as Epic not only employs people with highly educated backgrounds to research positions, it also provides manufacturing and production jobs to 100 workers represented by Teamsters Local 210.

"We don't only provide top-level jobs," said Nerine. "When you develop a new product, once it goes to market, it needs to be manufactured. We also look for people to mix, coat, and package our products."