

Bull's Head banking branch open

'It's something the community needs'

Justice Marbury

Rochester Democrat and Chronicle USA TODAY NETWORK

Rochester's Bull's Head neighborhood has long coped with under-investment and broken promises on the economic-development front. Now, a new place to do banking in the neighborhood has arrived, as part of what is poised to become a new wave of investment in the West Main Street-area neighborhood and its people.

In June, Gov. Kathy Hochul announced a \$23.6 million project to create a Bull's Head Empowerment Center on Clifton Street to house a mix of public and private initiatives and businesses.

Well ahead of that, though, ESL Federal Credit Union took steps to build a new branch in Bull's Head at 835 West Main St. That branch is now open for business, having begun business Monday, Sept. 29.

The following is an interview with Alma Torres, Bull's Head ESL Federal Credit Union branch manager, and Patricia Cruz-Irving, ESL corporate communications specialist, who share information about the impact of the new branch.

Their answers have been lightly edited for clarity and length.

What does your role as branch manager consist of?

Torres: As the branch manager, I oversee a group of employees' day to day operations —very big on customer service — making sure that every member that walks in and out of the building is pleased with the service that they received.

Why did ESL decide to place a branch in the Bull's Head neighborhood?

Torres: ESL made a commitment to the city of Rochester to do three new branches within the area of the city. We did Lake Avenue, Goodman and then Bull's Head was going to be the last of the three.

This area has been very underserved for a very long time with no banking access. I think the closest bank they have is Citizens, and it's inside of a storefront. So, not having access to a driveup ATM, I think it's something that the community needs and will benefit from.

ESL does focus on adding branches to areas for residents and businesses that are most in need. So, not having banking accessible to this area it's like, "Why not bring it here and give the community the same opportunities that we have in the suburban areas?"

We are the first business here as a part of the Bull's Head Redevelopment Project. We don't know what's coming or what they're going to do with the rest of it, but I do think that that shows the commitment ESL has to the area with being able to say, "you know what, let's build a building and let's give them everything that every everyone else has, too."

What are some of your hopes for this branch as it pertains to providing banking access to

the area?

Torres: This location is a full-service bank branch. We will be doing everything from business to personal retirement planning for a future generational wealth. Everything that ESL stands behind, Bull's Head will have all of it, so there's no limited access to the area.

The Bull's Head location will actually start off as a bilingual location, which I think is big for the community. The location will also have 24-hour service to everything in the lobby and our drive-up ATM.

Are there any opportunities or programming hosted by ESL for the community to take advantage of?

Torres: As a whole, ESL does offer a lot of things for business owners. We do a lot of Business Drops where we actually go to the business and learn more about what we can do to offer it. When a business member walks in, they don't know all that we offer. As employees, that is our job — to give them the knowledge on the services and products that we do have, getting out in the community and telling them what ESL is about and what we can give them.

Cruz-Irving : We also have the community impact part of ESL, which is our charitable foundation. Through their organizations in the community, nonprofits can apply for grants. If it falls within our strategic framework and part of the application process, we have a very giving program, which is important for nonprofits to know that we take applications year-round.

Can you tell me more about the ESL Business Drops?

Torres: Either the branch manager or a branch employee goes out to the community — just introducing ourselves, which we have been doing a lot of that in the past week and a half that we've been here. We go out and give our contact information. You don't necessarily have to bank with ESL. We just let you know we're in the area. If you have any questions and we can help you, you're more than welcome to stop in.

This week, we have been very successful just touring the area, stopping in, giving our information, so we hope that it brings the business members in the area and see what we have to offer them. We are already a part of the Genesee Business Corridor — it has monthly meetings that happen. We do plan to be attend those as well. We work with a lot of community members who are already they have the knowledge of what ESL can do, and they have reached out to make sure that we're included in the areas.

Cruz-Irving: We've been working **See BRANCH, Page 2E**

Alma Torres is the branch manager at the new Bull's Head ESL branch on West Main Street in Rochester. She describes her role as 'making sure that every member that walks in and out of the building is pleased with the service that they received.' JUSTICE MARBURY/
ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE

Branch

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with the 19th Ward Community Association for several years now. We're actually working on a project

that we haven't yet publicized.

Is there anything that I didn't ask or mention that you feel is important to add?

Cruz-Irving : Coming here to Bull's Head is about more than just bringing an ESL branch for our services.

It's really to help revitalize this community — this neighborhood.

There's a community mural right in this conference room that is absolutely beautiful. We partnered up with a local artist, Shawn Dunwoody, who's very well known, and he actually just started the installation today — and it's pretty much done.

This was a collaborative effort where we worked not only with him, but it represents the voices of the community because we reached out to neighbors and residence and asked them, "what does the Bull's Head neighborhood mean to you?"

They shared that feedback with Shawn, and then he put this together to represent those voices. Once you see it, you're just like, 'wow.'

It's the first time we've ever done something like this for an ESL branch. We felt that for Bull's Head — all of our branches are very important, for sure — but because Bulls Head has a certain history to it that is unique, that's why we were thinking, what can we do to help bring people together, to let them know that we're here to continue to recognize the beautiful history that is Bull's Head.

Bull's Head ESL Federal Credit Union branch information

The branch officially opened its doors for business to the public on Monday, Sept. 29.

Location: 835 W Main St, Rochester, 14611

Hours: Monday and Thursday (9 a.m.-5 p.m.), Tuesday-Wednesday (9 a.m.-4 p.m.), Friday (9 a.m.-6 p.m.), Saturday (9 a.m.-1:30 p.m.)

Areas served: Bull's Head, 19th Ward, the Jay Orchard Street Area Neighborhood Association (J.O.S.A.N.A.) neighborhood Branch phone number: 585-336 – 1000

As a Rochester native, Justice Marbury entered the world of journalism to create work where voices like hers were heard—the voices of minority communities.

Marbury covers small businesses, neighborhood concerns, and the interesting people who live in Rochester neighborhoods. Contact her on Instagram @justice_marbury and by email at jmarbury@gannett.com .