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Overloaded Power Strip Causes Five Alarm Queens Fire

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New York - Lilian Castillo lost what felt like her second home last week after a five-alarm fire, caused by an overloaded power strip, engulfed a Jackson Heights building. Castillo was a former student at the Queens Community House Adult Education/English Classes for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program and is currently an employee for the nonprofit organization.

QCH, which provided four of its programs at the Bruson Building, located at 74-09 37th Ave., lost its home when the building's third and fourth floors went up in flames the evening of April 21. Various other organizations, businesses and Plaza College were also housed inside the building.

"When I came to this country from the Dominican Republic, Queens Community House was the first place that welcomed me," Castillo said. "It was where I met the people who became my friends. I feel as if I lost my second home in the fire."

The Jackson Heights site was home to QCH's Adult Education/ESOL program, which provides free intensive English and citizenship classes; immigrant services, providing assistance with citizenship and other legal residency needs; a CASP program, helping youth who have obtained a diploma through a non-traditional high school apply to and succeed in community college; and its Queens Center for Gay Seniors, the borough's only senior center primarily serving an LGBT older adult population.

Also lost in the fire was a computer lab that was used by all four programs, which aided about 300 residents daily.

"The Center was full of many special, shared memories from the past decade," Program Director John Nagel said. "Photos, awards, artwork...all gone."

QCH has been able to secure some space at the Sunnyside Community Services for its Adult Education English classes. It's Queens Center for Gay Seniors will operate out the QCH's Kew Gardens Community Center.

According to the FDNY, nine people sustained minor injuries as a result of the fire, including seven firefighters and a police officer.

The cause of the fire was determined to be electrical due to an overloaded power strip, according to the FDNY.

Written by Angy Altamirano

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