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A Portage Park 'Pearl': Music, Tech Hub Highlights Booming 'Hood, Rahm Says

By Heather Cherone ([//www.dnainfo.com/chicago/about-us/our-team/editorial-team/heather-cherone](http://www.dnainfo.com/chicago/about-us/our-team/editorial-team/heather-cherone)) | July 13, 2016 7:35am

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Mayor Rahm Emanuel, second from right, and Ald. John Arena (45th), right, help cut the ribbon Tuesday on the Hangar, a film and video production facility. [DNAinfo/Heather Cherone]

PORTAGE PARK — The future of Chicago's entertainment industry is taking shape in an overlooked industrial corridor nestled along the Kennedy Expressway in Portage Park, Mayor Rahm Emanuel (<https://www.dnainfo.com/chicago/people/rahm->

emanuel) said Tuesday.

Emanuel, joined by Ald. John Arena (<https://www.dnainfo.com/chicago/people/john-arena>) (45th), celebrated the first birthday of 2112 (<http://www.2112inc.com>), which bills itself as Chicago's only music and technology business incubator. Its name is a homage to the legendary Rush album.

"I don't think anyone would know this is here," Emanuel said. "This is definitely a pearl in the oyster of Chicago."



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Mayor Rahm Emanuel celebrates the first birthday of 2112, a music and technology business incubator.

[DNAINfo/Heather Cherone]

The incubator — launched as an offshoot of Fort Knox Studios (<http://www.fortknoxstudios.com>) — is designed to help entrepreneurs get their businesses off the ground by providing everything from workspace to offices and mentoring and educational programs, said Kent Nielsen, the facility's co-owner.

"This is fertile ground for Chicago's creative community," Nielsen said.

The complex includes 92 practice rooms, six recording studios, instrument repair and a fabrication shop for building out studio furniture, cabinetry and sound proofing in what used to be a factory that manufactured televisions, company officials said.

Fort Knox and 2112 have 1,500 employees, officials said.



Employees work at 2112 in Portage Park. [DNAINfo/Heather Cherone]

Emanuel lauded Arena for helping Fort Knox — a riff on its address at 4255 N. Knox Ave. — open its doors in 2011, after making sure rockers turning their amplifiers up to 11 wasn't going to disturb nearby homeowners.

"Ald. Arena has been a tireless advocate for this area," Emanuel said. "He has been focused on this like a laser."

But Arena acknowledged he wasn't sure it would work at the beginning.

"I wasn't sure if these guys were aging rockers who didn't care if they woke the neighbors, or serious businessmen," Arena said, to laughter. "I'm glad it was the latter."

The Knox Avenue industrial corridor — which is also home to Lake Effect Brewing Co. (<https://www.dnainfo.com/chicago/places/lake-effect-brewing-co>) — is booming, Arena said.

Now in his second term as an alderman, Arena has worked to transform Portage Park and Jefferson Park — and in particular the Six Corners Shopping District (<https://www.dnainfo.com/chicago/places/six-corners-shopping-district>)— into an arts and culture mecca and reverse decades of economic stagnation and fill empty storefronts.

"This is something the whole city can be proud of," Emanuel said. "2112 is ahead of us as a city."

The event at Fort Knox Studios marks a high point in the relationship between Emanuel and Arena, who was one of the mayor's most vocal critics during his first term in office. Since winning re-election in 2015, Arena has supported the mayor on a number of high-profile issues, including voting to support the mayor's 2016 budget (<https://www.dnainfo.com/chicago/20151030/edison-park/rookie-alderman-casts-lone-far-nw-side-no-vote-on-budget>), which included the largest tax increase in Chicago history.

Emanuel and Arena helped cut the ribbon Tuesday on the next phase of Fort Knox dubbed the Hangar, a 7,200 square-foot facility for film and video production and photography.

Plans in the works for 2112 and Fort Knox Studios call for a 30-seat classroom and a coding boot camp, officials said.

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