

The Park West Tenant

Vol. 32, No. 3

The Newsletter of the Park West Village Tenants' Association

Summer 2007

WHERE WERE YOU WHEN THE WALL FELL DOWN?

It was 7:00 p.m. July 25th. A shock reverberated through Park West Village. The retaining wall abutting 784 Columbus Ave. had collapsed and residents were evacuated until 2:00 a.m. However, people in the "P" line could not return for one week.

Immediately after the collapse, local politicians, the media, and the Police and Fire Departments were out in force. A Stop Work Order was issued by the Department of Buildings at all three construction sites until such time as certain conditions would be met to satisfactorily complete the remedial work.

Preceding the collapse, there were multiple dynamite blasts accompanied by an extended period of pile driving on the other side of Columbus Avenue. Both the developers and the Department of Buildings (DOB) are now conducting forensic investigations to try to determine the cause of the retaining wall collapse.

For now, residents in the "P" line of 784 Columbus will be compensated for their inconvenience by a cash amount of \$400 and an Amex gift card of \$250. As a follow-up, Assembly Member Daniel O'Donnell and Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer have actively pursued a response from city officials.

Several hundred residents met on August 13th at the Children's Aid Society (Columbus Ave. and 104th Street) sponsored by the PWVTA for an update and discussion on the construction failure, and how tenants and owners can contribute and give support. Suggestions included:

- **Keep up the vigilance on violations**, reporting them to 311 whenever they occur. If you see any work — except that allowed for shoring-up of the foundation and retaining wall of "808 Columbus" — report it.
- **Become active in the PWVTA** — join committees such as Legal, Quality of Life, and Communications.
- **Pressure the developers to take out insurance** guaranteeing a home for displaced tenants over a lengthy period of evacuation.

Dedicated members of the PWVTA have given their best efforts in trying to influence the owners to include some consideration for the welfare of the residents of Park West Village in their plans to change the face of our community.

CONSTRUCTION FAILURE

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Retaining wall collapse at 784 Columbus Ave.
Photo by Nina Berman July 25, 2007

SELF DEFENSE AMIDST CONSTRUCTION

How to Keep Healthy and Sane During Construction was the topic engaged by City Health and Environmental Protection officials, two PWV construction managers, and 50 affected residents at a June 20 Health Forum organized by PWVTA and the Coalition to Preserve West Park North.

The widespread impact of current construction on breathing, eyes, skin, rodents, and of noise was articulated by residents of PWV and the wider neighborhood. The effectiveness of the hundreds of 311 complaints made over the past months was acknowledged

SELF DEFENSE

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NEW RGB GUIDELINES NUMBERS

On June 26th, the NYC Rent Guidelines Board adopted guidelines for rent-stabilized apartments renewing leases between Oct. 1, 2007 and Sept. 30, 2008:

For Apartments:

- 3% for a one-year lease renewal
- 5.75% for a two-year lease renewal
- 10% sublet allowance

CONSTRUCTION FAILURE

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To mention a fraction of the effort we've expended: we have met with and tried to involve our local politicians; on numerous occasions we have met with the owners to present them with alternate plans for construction, put together at our expense; we've been participants in the monthly meetings of the Construction Coordinating Committee under the auspices of CB7, headed by District Manager Penny Ryan, representatives from the DOB, EPA, Police and Fire Departments, Health Department, elected officials, Peter Rosenberg (Project Manager for the construction), and employees of Gotham and Tishman Construction Companies; and we've continually presented our concerns regarding the construction to CB7.

Despite reassurances on the part of the owners, nothing stays or changes their course. Their plans continue to call for loading docks on 97th Street, no indication of change in their plan to point the vents in the direction of the residents. In communion with this city's administrators, developers ask — and they receive.

At a press conference August 15th at Columbus Avenue and 97th Street it was shocking to hear Council Speaker Christine Quinn's description of the lax current rules for blasting: the awarding of three year permits, regardless of how conditions might change, no mandatory supervision on site, and much more. She said it has been plain luck that there haven't been any major blasting disasters in the City.

A new bill, to be introduced in the City Council next month, will tighten current regulations, increase inter-agency communication, and begin a wide-ranging community notification plan when blasting in a neighborhood.

Nevertheless, the wall collapse could be viewed as a blessing in disguise. Fortunately, no one was hurt, but it pointed-up to the politicians and the media just how serious the concerns of many Park West Village residents really are.

But politicians and the media have a very short attention span. We have to keep up the momentum. We have to grow in numbers, pay our dues, keep after the politicians, reminding them that we are a force to be reckoned with and maybe we can come out of this with some impact on the people who have the power to change our lives.

SELF DEFENSE

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by the officials. The Department of Health (DOH) and Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) officials, the construction managers, and representatives of our "electeds" all took notes and have followed up. Numerous suggestions were discussed.

Dr. Nathan Graber of DOH noted that construction dust comes in large particles, exhaust dust and fumes in smaller particles, and that both can temporarily irritate nose, eyes and throat, as well as exacerbate existing lung conditions.

He advised residents to keep their windows shut during construction hours. Use air conditioners set for exhaust or recycle (**not** intake or fresh air) and wash or change the filters monthly.

To remove dust in the apartment, use a damp mop or cloth, don't sweep; and if your vacuum can take a HEPA filter, they are often effective in diminishing dust.

Gerry Kelpin and Humberto Galarza described DEP's enforcement mechanisms under the regulations for air quality and the noise legislation (updated July 1.) Fugitive dust should be controlled by frequent watering down of both site and trucks and the use of gravel to tamp the dust. Exhaust emissions should be contained by reducing idling and the use of ultra-low-sulfur fuel. Construction hours are limited to and enforceable as 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. DEP and the 24th Precinct have issued many violations re: construction on this site.

Construction Managers Moe Aziz (Gotham) and Val Norets (Stellar) discussed measures they have taken and will take to try to improve the situation for residents. Gravel is used, but there is so much traffic that it's often buried or gets carried away. Watering down can be (and has been) extended, but mud can create problems. Gotham reports ultra-low-sulfur fuel is used by all their trucks. Further suggestions are welcome.

Anne Wangh of 788 demonstrated the \$41 "ear-muff" ear phones she purchased online which she finds effectively shuts out construction noise (tel: 1-800-334-9291).

NYC surprisingly has not yet published an "advisory" for citizens on protecting themselves during construction and will now prepare one. Meanwhile, additional suggestions made at the Health Forum can be seen in a fuller report at www.preservewpn.org or www.pwvta.org.

In a press release issued on July 27th, Lois Hoffmann, the President of the PWVTA said, "There has been no regard for the community's interest, and frankly, no regard for the potential tenants of the commercial space, or the eventual residents of the buildings under construction. We want this project to be entirely rethought from the perspective of sustainability, proportion, and place in the neighborhood."

PLAYING CAT AND MOUSE

I have lived in Park West Village for over three decades. Six weeks ago a mouse ran from my kitchen into my living room. I have never had a mouse in my apartment in the entire time I have lived here. I immediately went to a nearby store, purchased a box of mousetraps and placed them where the mouse had been seen. Two weeks later the traps were empty!! Then, while getting ready to leave for vacation I was startled to see a small mouse again in the living room. I COULD NOT KNOWINGLY LEAVE A MOUSE IN THE APARTMENT!

I ran after the mouse and eventually caught it, but it was clear that this baby probably had a mother, brothers and sisters nearby. After I reached my destination, I retrieved a message that the mother mouse had been caught in one of the traps. Relieved, I enjoyed the remainder of my vacation. I returned home two weeks later with the rest of the empty traps still in place. I wasn't home two hours when I saw a mouse come out of the living room radiator. Using packing tape, I occluded all the radiator vents as a temporary measure until the management office opened on Monday. But, success was to be denied.

All of a sudden mice were coming from a small opening adjacent to the radiator and from behind furniture by the terrace. That entire Sunday was spent playing "cat and mouse" with the mice. At the end of the day a total of six mice had been caught. Together with the two mice previously caught a total of eight mice were caught in my apartment.

Park West Management was responsive. I was given a box of mousetraps. A major hole was located inside and outside the radiator. These holes were occluded with steel wool. Another major opening in the baseboard behind the furniture by the terrace had to be cemented. The holes have been repaired and the mice have disappeared. However, the holes only facilitated expression and illuminated the rodent problem in the building. In sharing my experience with my neighbors I have come to learn my experience is not unique. Others shared their mouse stories and stories of others they had heard including a new mother with an infant who had caught more than eight in her apartment. Tenants in the other two Columbus Avenue buildings share similar stories.



In conclusion, I would suggest that everyone have their radiators, pipes underneath both bathroom and kitchen sinks and bathroom vents checked for holes that can accommodate mice. Remember, mice are invertebrate rodents and as such can squeeze

through very small openings. It's clear there has been for some time and continues to be a major rodent problem in all three Columbus Avenue buildings.

Submitted by a 788 Columbus Ave. resident

Make 311 Work for You!

If you see or hear a violation at the Columbus or Amsterdam Avenue construction sites:

- (1) Call 311, and be sure to get a complaint #
- (2) Send an email to CALL311@earthlink.net to add your complaint to our list.

QUALITY OF LIFE SURVEY

The Quality of Life Committee distributed a general condition survey to all tenants at PWV. Your response to the survey will enable PWVTA to better help identify areas where essential services are not being adequately provided by PWV Acquisition LLC management.

Please assist the committee and yourselves by returning the completed surveys to your floor captain or Building Representative. If you need another copy of the survey, please call the PWVTA Hotline at 212-662-2610 or send an email to Quality@pwwta.org.

FREE A/C CLEANING!

No, the headline above is not a misprint! Due to all of the dust and dirt particles in the air from the construction sites on Columbus Avenue — and now the construction site on Amsterdam Avenue — management will clean your air conditioner, free of charge.

If you are renting your apartment from PWV Acquisitions (whether or not you own your A/C or rent one from management), call the management office and schedule an appointment for an air conditioner cleaning. Don't delay – call today!

HISTORY CORNER

St. Jude's Chapel at 19 West 99th Street was a center of community activity from the early 1900's until its destruction in 1957 to build Park West Village. Its choirs, nursery, pediatric clinic, young adults programs, sports teams and sewing school vitalized the neighborhood.

A stone to honor that history was laid in PWV on April 22 near the former chapel site, with some of the former parishioners in attendance. St. Jude's was a mission of St. Michael's Church at Amsterdam and 99th Street — now celebrating its 200th anniversary. For more info, see their exhibit and website: www.saintmichaelschurch.org

TENANT INCOME CERTIFICATION

Several tenants have received income certification forms from the DHCR. All rent stabilized tenants should be aware that after their rent reaches \$2000 per month, the landlord is entitled to seek income data. If the annual household income exceeds \$175,000 for 2 consecutive years, an apartment can be de-stabilized.

Tenants must respond either by supplying the data requested, or by asserting that their legal rent is still below \$2000. **Failure to respond could result in the loss of your apartment.** If you have questions or need assistance responding to DHCR, please call the Hotline at 212-662-2610.

WANTED!

The PWVTA is looking for a new **Legal Committee Chair** and a **Fundraiser**. Volunteer today and make a difference in our community! Please call the Hotline at 212-662-2610 for more information.

The PWVTA Executive Board usually meets on the third Monday of the month. Any member of the Association is welcome to attend the meeting. If you have something to contribute, call the PWVTA Hotline at 212-662-2610 in advance to be put on the agenda under new business.

WELCOME ASSOCIATE MEMBERS!

The PWVTA welcomes the support and participation of the condo owners of Park West Village who have joined us!!!

www.PWVTA.org

Some 23 PWV residents have volunteered to help build our new website, review its use and appearance, and increase its value for all our neighbors & online visitors. You can help our Web Subcommittee: **WebMatters@pwvta.org**. Working with the PWVTA Communications Committee, we welcome your ideas, information, suggestions, and photos: **Communications@pwvta.org**.

PWVTA is also starting an email list so we can quickly notify residents with important news and alerts. To join this new list, write to: **Communications@pwvta.org**.

Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer is setting-up an email distribution list to facilitate direct and regular communication between his office and the residents of Park West Village as issues arise. If you would like to be part of the list, please send your email address to Jessica Silver, Community Affairs Liaison, at jsilver@manhattanbp.org.

CORRECTIONS to the list of Executive Board members printed in the last issue of this newsletter. The correct spelling of the PWVTA Vice President's name printed as "Francine Brower" is Francine Brewer; and Susan Jarvis should be added as an Alternate Building Rep for 372 CPW.

Produced by the PWVTA Communications Committee.

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JOIN YOUR NEIGHBORS – RENEW NOW!

PLEASE RETURN THIS MEMBERSHIP / ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIP COUPON TO YOUR BUILDING REPRESENTATIVE OR MAIL TO:

Park West Village Tenants' Association
P.O. Box 20339, Park West Finance Station, New York, NY 10025-0339

Name: Building: Apt.: Phone:

Rent-stabilized tenant Market-rate tenant Renting from private owner Owner Email:

Check for 2007 membership dues enclosed, **payable to PWVTA**. \$40. Other*: \$.....

Check for 2007 associate membership dues enclosed, **payable to PWVTA** \$35.....

Check includes additional contribution to Legal fund. Amount:

*If you cannot make full \$40 payment of your annual dues, please pay what you can.

Your membership card will be delivered to you.