

Community celebrates Kenmore Rehabilitation Project

What makes this a community, and not just a neighborhood? Well, for instance, Councilman Andrew Eristoff taking, in his car, Assemblyman Steve Sanders and President of the GSID Sylvia Freedman to a CB 6 meeting, right after the official part of this celebration. We work together, for common causes.

The celebration was to thank the community for working together in salvaging the Kenmore Hotel and to commemorate the start of its rehabilitation by HSI (Housing and Services, Inc.), the non-profit housing developers who bought it two years after the US Marshalls seized it in 1994, under the Federal forfeiture laws. The reception was hosted by Arlene Harrison and Jane Crotty, two of the moving spirits who organized the community and political support for the rehabilitation project.

The Kenmore has an interesting cultural history. Built in 1923 as the Kenmore Hall Hotel, a genteel poor clerks' residence of 641 tiny rooms, like a Y, it was taken over by the plumbing subcontractor, Morris Jarcho (he invented the Siamese connection) in 1927, when the

general contractor went broke. Morris' MD brother was the husband of Susan Wallenstein, aunt of a young unemployed author, Nathan Weinstein, who had changed his name, to Nathanael West.

LOOKING AHEAD



by Wally Dobelis

Uncle Morris employed his nephew as the assistant manager for three years, 1927-1930, and Nat's sister's Laura's fiancée S.J. Perelman as well as Nat's friends Quentin Reynolds, Max Bodenheim, Mike Gold and Dashiell Hammett (who made Laura's dog Asta famous in *The Thin Man*) had free use of any unmade empty rooms (was *The*

Maltese Falcon conceived on the dirty sheets in the Kenmore?). West and his friends eventually, in 1930, moved to the more glamorous Sutton Club Hotel on East 56th Street, another of Uncle Max' foreclosures, and Kenmore continued as the dingy genteel SRO.

Nathan Weinstein was a strange rebel, a dreamer and fable maker who led a kind of Dadaist life. Son of Polish Jews with a German cultural heritage, Max and Anna (nee Wallenstein) Weinstein, he, as a youngster, could make up the most convincing stories for his younger cousins. A voracious reader, he was a careless scholar and had to forge his De Witt Clinton high school diploma to gain admission to Tufts College, in Medford, MA. There he was asked to resign within a year, due to excessive cuts. But by some fortuitous event, more likely machinations, West obtained the transcript of a namesake, Nathan Weinstein, with Harvard transfer credits, and used it to gain admission to Brown University, from which he legitimately graduated in 1924.

After two years of make-shift jobs, in 1926 he had a 3-month sojourn in Paris,

the expatriates' Mecca. Before the trip he legally changed his name to Nathanael West. All through his school years he had projected himself as Nathanael von Wallenstein Weinstein, with the Schillerian Thirty-Year War general as a putative forebear. Now, with the new name, he had a new job, running a hotel on East 23rd Street, earning a decent \$35 a week, with free keep and plenty of time to finish his surrealist novel, *The Dream Life of Balso Snell*.

When the book was published in 1931 by the avant-garde booksellers David Moss and Martin Kamin, as the last book in a series they had taken over, Robert McAlmon's printed-in-Paris *Contact Editions*, West had a literary standing, and proceeded to write *Miss Lonely-*

hearts, about an advice to the lovelorn columnist, published in 1933 by the established Horace Liveright firm.

With two books to his credit, in 1936 West joined his brother-in-law S.J. Perelman in Hollywood and wrote successful low-budget scripts for Republic Studios, while completing a black-comedy novel about Hollywood, *The Day of the Locust*. In 1940 he also married the beautiful rebel Eileen McKenney, about whom her sister Ruth had written a book, 1938, *My Sister Eileen*, and a stage play, to open in December 24, 1940. True to his German baron persona, West was hunter, and drove to Mexico for a duck hunt. On the way back, December 22, the young

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Kenmore Hotel partnership celebrated in Park

More than 100 business leaders, elected officials and local activists attended a reception in Gramercy Park last Wednesday night to celebrate the partnership of community and that of a non-profit group in the rebuilding and renovation of the blighted Kenmore Hotel.

The partnership, between local leaders and Housing Services Inc. (HSI), became reality this past spring when HSI took control of the deteriorated hotel from the US Marshal's Service. The building was seized from owner Tran Troung because he allowed drug dealers to operate with impunity and because he let the hotel crumble.

HSI gained control of the hotel with a combination

city, state and federal assistance, coupled with bank loans.

The reception, co-hosted by Jane Crotty, director of community relations and economic development for Baruch College and Claire Haaga, president of HSI, was held at the home of Arlene Harrison, president of the Gramercy Park Block Association.

Haaga said the takeover of the hotel couldn't be possible without the help local leaders, who convinced city and state officials to support their purchase and rehab of the property. In addition, she credited the 13th Precinct police for helping to eradicate drug dealing and criminals, most specifically Police Officer Scott Kimmins, who

patrolled the building and made numerous arrests.

Haaga said they will work to make the hotel an asset to the community and will make the blighted history of the building a distant memory.

Haaga recalled on July 9, when Mayor Rudolph Giuliani called the Kenmore purchase, "an example of government at its best, a unique and unprecedented partnership between federal, state and local government working in partnership with the private sector."

Both Crotty and Harrison received credit for their support - Crotty for her work with the business community, and Harrison who gathered residential support for the takeover.

"Claire came to this community in the best possible way, she came very early with her plan, she came often and she came honestly with full disclosure," Harrison said. "She truly set a standard for how any provider should approach a community."

While leaders celebrated the partnership, HSI officials conceded there would be a long road to recovery for the hotel, which is need of millions of dollars in rehab.

Only recently, HSI was able to evict one of the self proclaimed tenant leaders who was occupying five apartments. A second tenant leader Sal Martinez, was arrested recently for setting a fire in an elevator and then videotaping it. That case is still pending.



Captain Richard Heegan, Det. Owen Hughes, Claire Haaga, and Captain Steven Anger share the good news



Dan Garodnick, Judith Evans of Gramercy Park and Jane Crotty of Baruch College.



Councilman Andrew Eristoff, with little Eliza and father Michael Rockefeller, and Arlene Harrison



Councilman Antonio Pagan, State Senator Catherine Abate, and retired pastor of Epiphany Parish Msgr. Harry Byrne.



Wally Dobelis, Councilman Andrew Eristoff, Arlene Harrison and Rev. Tom Pike of Calvary St. George wish HSI well.



Assemblyman Steven Sanders expresses support for the Kenmore rehab.

PHOTOS BY TERRY MURPHY

The Kenmore Bulletin

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WELCOME TO THE NEW KENMORE RESIDENCE

from Madeline Garcia, Residence Manager

After three years of hard work on the part of both tenants and management, we are all excited that the rehabilitation of the new Kenmore Hall has reached completion. As we approach the end of the renovation I would like to take this opportunity first to thank all our tenants for their cooperation and support during this difficult renovation and second to update the tenants about our plans for Kenmore Hall. We have a busy time ahead of us, as the final touches are put on the building, new residents finish moving into the building, and established residents become acclimated to their new surroundings.

Once complete, the Kenmore will have 326 studio apartments, a large community room, library, and

exercise room on the second floor for the use of all tenants. There will also be a lounge or laundry room on alternate floors, on-site management offices, and resident services offices on the second floor. The resident service staff will provide all tenants with the following services: recreational activities and events, linkages to community-based organizations, employment, educational and vocational programs and tenant volunteer programs. Look for a monthly calendar of activities taking place at the Kenmore. Copies will be posted throughout the building, and will also be available from the staff. Classes, meetings, and recreational activities will all take place in the building at regularly scheduled times. Special events at Kenmore

Hall and in the community will be announced as they approach.

To ensure tenants' well-being and safety the front desk is staffed 24 hours a day. Also, your continued assistance and cooperation will be an instrumental tool in helping us make your home safe and secure.

For now, get to know the members of the Kenmore staff. Their offices are located on the second floor. They can be a wealth of information about the building, the services available to residents, and the neighborhood. And, of course, get to know your neighbors, the Kenmore's residents.

I look forward to the opportunity to serve and assist you.

Who's Who in Gramercy Park

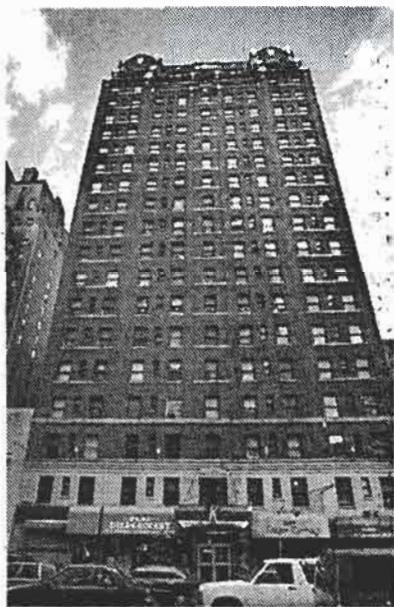
**An Interview with Arlene Harrison,
President of the Gramercy Park Block Association**

If there's one person in Gramercy Park that every resident should get to know, it's Arlene Harrison. Harrison is, in many ways, the eyes, ears, and voice of the community. She is a tireless crusader for her neighborhood and a friend to anyone working to make Gramercy Park a better place to live and work.

Harrison is the founder and President of the Gramercy Park Block Association, a grassroots group of community residents that is dedicated to crime prevention and quality of life issues. Working in close partnership with the officers of the Thirteenth Precinct, the Association provides safety programs for the community, as well as acting as a voice of advocacy for neighborhood interests. Arlene's particular interest in crime prevention makes her especially attentive to the improvements taking place at the Kenmore, improvements that she believes will make the Kenmore a community asset. "I am thrilled and excited about HSI coming in and rehabilitating the Kenmore," says Harrison, who has been a friend and advisor to HSI as a member of the Community Advisory Board and the community resident who organized neighborhood support for the project.

A neighborhood resident for over 25 years, Arlene witnessed the

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Associated Press

Resident Profiles: Joan Jones

If you haven't already met Joan Jones, you'll know her when you see her; she's the one who's always smiling. Maybe it's because she's from New Orleans, where, Joan explains, people are more friendly than they are in New York. Or maybe it's because she has something special to smile about. Either way, her smile is the first thing you notice when you look at the 49 year old artist. "If you expect people to give you a 'good morning', the first thing you have to do is say it yourself," Joan says, as she sips coffee in her new room at the Kenmore.

She is surrounded by her belongings, some of which are still packed in boxes, and her artwork. A miniature swingset, complete with two people on the swings, and several tiny jazz musicians adorn the windowsills. Joan is a sculptor with a gift for turning metal into truly life-like figures. "My artwork moves with the wind; it's fluid because sheetmetal is so flexible," she explains.

Joan began her artistic career as a welder in New Orleans. Often the only woman in a man's field of work, Joan was distinguishable not only because of , but also because she was good at what she did. She worked as a welder in New Orleans and Mississippi, and went on to become a welding instructor -- the first female instructor her company had ever had.

Eventually, however, Joan found that despite her capabilities, many people in the business would not accept her. "It was difficult to be a black woman, with these long dreadlocks, working in a man-dominated industry. It got to the point where I couldn't get jobs." When she could no longer find work as a welder, Joan says, "I asked God to show me something I could do. That's when I started making things out of metal." She was sculpting for six years before her work was noticed by a local politician, whose campaign

deterioration of the Kenmore. "As the Kenmore went from modest respectability to complete squalor," Arlene says, "people went out of their way to avoid the building. It was a blight on the community. No one wanted to walk down that block because the Kenmore was a magnet for crime." Harrison remembers that despite the dedication of the officers of the Thirteenth Precinct to clean up the Kenmore, the building remained drug- and crime-ridden. Now, after three years of rehabilitation, Arlene feels that the building has improved dramatically. Since 1996, Harrison says, "HSI, under Claire Haaga's direction, has really turned the Kenmore around. The change of direction has been monumental, and we look forward to the continued progress of this important project in our community."



The staff of Kenmore Hall

she had worked on some years earlier. He suggested that she show her sculptures in the New Orleans Jazz Festival. "I never considered myself an artist, but one day someone told me that what I was making was art, and I realized that I was one."

People noticed her work at the Jazz Festival, and her career as an artist took off. Her work began to show up in galleries and was sought after by collectors. She also began teaching sculpting to children. Joan loves teaching art to kids because, "Children are better at learning than adults. Their minds are open. If you teach them about safety procedures, you can be sure that they'll turn around and remind you when you're not following your own lessons. Kids will be the first ones to say, 'Hey, you forgot to put on your safety glasses.'" She also enjoys teaching kids because,

"Not only does it show them that they can find something to do that they really love, but it also teaches them a skill -- welding -- that they can really use someday."

Joan moved to New York in July where, she says, there are more opportunities for artists. She plans to begin teaching again as soon as she gets settled into her new surroundings, and also plans to take some classes for herself. "It's time," she says, "for my career to really get off the ground."

When I asked Joan how she feels about living in the Kenmore, she replied, "Oh, I love it! The building looks great. It's brand-new and 23rd Street is right in the middle of everything that's happening in New York. I feel lucky to have the chance to be here."

Well, Joan, the feeling is mutual -- the Kenmore is just as lucky to have you.