

West 104th Street

BLOCK ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

September 2017

SPOTLIGHT

Meet the Gardeners

Three Neighbors Make Green Magic on West 104th St.

At the foot of the block beside the Number 5 bus stop is a beautiful garden. If you crossed to Riverside Park on the uptown side of the street, you saw another on the island that divides Riverside Drive from the service road. Have you wondered who created them and cares for them? It's your dedicated green thumb neighbors Ira and Karen Gershenhorn and Dru Heidle, all residents of 320 Riverside Drive.



Gershenhorn and Heidle

In 1989, Karen and her husband Ira became Park Tenders, the title that the Riverside Park Conservancy gives to those volunteers who care for specific areas. "Being invited to work in the bus stop garden was our welcome to the neighborhood," says Karen. Dru remembers looking down from her window at the gardens before she began lending a hand. "I started planting in the large cement planters in front of 320, then met Ira and Karen and began helping. It was pretty rough looking then—nothing like it looks now."

Using Olmstead's Principles

The Riverside Park Conservancy has strict rules about what can be planted in the park's gardens. These rules follow "Olmsteadian" principles, which discourage suburban garden flora like colorful annuals, invasive grasses or anything edible. Sight lines into the park must be maintained. Nearly all the plantings are perennial, although annuals that re-seed themselves are allowed. The Conservancy provides plants, compost, mulch, large bags for cleaning up leaves and dead plants, and some tools, which are stored in the park's Volunteer House at 107th St. Water and storage for the island garden is provided by 320 Riverside. The bus stop garden gets water from the Tot Lot water connection; Dru uses a hose on a watering cart donated by the Block Association.

Island in the Shade

A decade ago, Karen decided to reclaim the island in front of 320 RSD and received permission from the Conservancy to adopt the area. "There were some plantings near the fence," she recalls, "but those had been neglected and a patchy, muddy area had literally gone to the dogs—and rats. I ripped out all the English ivy and poison ivy, getting a bad case myself, and started planting. I am currently in the process of putting in vinca. Other plants in the

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Join the Hunt and Bag Your Bargains

*28th Annual West 104th Street Block Party,
October 14 – 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM*

Prepare for the hunt!

As you open your front door on Saturday morning, October 14, prepare to join a pack of some 1500 bargain hounds foraging in a wilderness of yard-sale merchandise at the Twenty-eighth Annual West 104th Street Block Party. Adding to the allure of once-in-a-lifetime bargains, you can enjoy live music, a delicious snack, and a chance to win a raffle worth hundreds of dollars.

From 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM, you will find both sides of the street lined with more than 60 yard-sale stalls where neighbors will welcome your bid on second-hand treasures. For more bargains, you can visit



Entertainers include Giglio (at right).

the following stands sponsored by our Block Association . . .

- **"What-A-Bargain."** Dig your way through table after table crammed with pre-owned bargains including jewelry, knick-knacks, kitchenware, toys, unopened personal care products, embroidery kits, and more priced from \$1 to \$20.
- **Book Sale.** Browse a large selection of used volumes, including novels, plays, poetry, history, biography, children's books, cook-books, atlases, and dictionaries, as well as CDs.
- **Silent Auction.** Bid on antiques, vintage collectibles, artwork, theater tickets, household items in their original boxes, services (piano lessons, baking, etc.), and gift certificates from local restaurants and stores.
- **Bake Sale.** Select a delicious family dessert or personal snack straight from the ovens and imaginations of the neighborhood's best bakers.

When you need a break from the hunt, you can enjoy savories from the Bake Sale and tap your foot to live music performed by seasoned New York musicians Foley Road, Joe Giglio and Shailah and the Shaylettes. Don't forget to pick up a ticket for our famous 50/50 raffle. Since 2013, the winner has taken home more than \$1,000. Last year, the grand prize totaled \$1,483.

You and your neighbors, of course, make possible this annual

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Contributors to the September Issue:

Barbara Boynton, Caitlin Hawke, Jeff Howitt, Mary Koval,
Nancy Lian, Joyce Mann, Robert Randall, Hanna Rubin (editor),
Larry Stern, Steve Zirinsky

W 104 ST BLOCK ASSN FINANCIAL REPORT

July 2017

Opening Balance **\$11,947.91**

Income

Dues 190.00


Expenses

Guard service 5496.84

Closing Balance (8/31/17) **+6581.12**



Where on our block? The first person to send Mary Koval (mtkoyal@aol.com) the correct location of this architectural detail will win one of the West 104th Street Block Association's new totes or caps!



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West 104th Street Block Association Board

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Gardeners, continued from page 1

area include ferns, Solomon's Seal (the tall, variegated-leaved plants) hellebores and hostas."

The Bus Stops Here

Dru is the main gardener now at the bus stop garden, with much appreciated assistance from Karen. The garden's plantings have evolved over time. Some years ago it had rose bushes, a few hostas, and lots of grass, day lilies and violets. Two flowering pear trees and a cherry tree, now gone, were planted in memory of loved ones by block residents. This tradition has been continued in the form of the lilac bushes and a rose bush now growing in the plot.

Over time, Dru has concentrated on adding flowers and plants that attract bees and butterflies. Fifteen years ago, when she began working on the garden, it did not get much sun. Full sun plants, which tend to be more colorful, were confined to the southeast corner, where phlox and Echinacea bloomed. Then six years ago, a major storm brought down three large trees that had shaded the garden. With them gone, says Dru, "We now had a primarily sunny garden, which resulted in more opportunity for color and interest."

Extreme Gardening

Ira, affectionately dubbed "the rat man" by Karen and Dru for his indefatigable help ridding both gardens of rats over the years, stopped gardening locally a few years ago in favor of more neglected spots, though he will still pitch in from time to time. He works primarily at Hudson Beach, Fort Washington Park, and at various spots along the Hudson River. These areas are neglected he feels, because they are in neighbor-



Heidle in bus stop garden.

hoods that are generally not "pricey."

In the summer the three volunteers spend at least 10 hours a week doing what they all call "extreme gardening"—more if there's a drought that requires heavy watering. Upkeep includes planting, weeding, pruning, removing garbage and dog waste, dividing plants, watching for pest infestations and diseased plants, mulching, raking leaves in the fall and spring, cleaning debris out of the storm drains, etc. They welcome contributions of tools and other garden gear, since they pay for those themselves and they often

wear out.

As official ParkTenders, they also keep an eye out for fallen branches, give directions and answer people's questions about the park and its flora. They continue to have to educate people not to throw garbage into the gardens. That can be the least of their worries. "People will steal plants, and even re-sell them," says Dru. On the positive side, both Karen and Dru are grateful for the thanks of passersby who comment how much they appreciate their hard work in making the neighborhood more beautiful, or the eager questions of children.

In the end, the gardens give each something that they value. "I like to see stuff grow," says Ira. "I love when an area fills in and to see the interplay of flowers and leaves." Dru agrees: "It's very rewarding to see the progress you've made." And Karen sees both personal and communal benefits. "It's meditative, and cheap therapy," she says. "And the birds and the bees help, too. I enjoy making our neighborhood more beautiful for everyone to enjoy." 🌸

To learn more about being a Park Tender, go to www.riversideparkconservancy.org/Volunteer.html.

How the Garden Started

When I walk past the flourishing gardens at the entrance to Riverside Park at 104th Street now, it's hard to remember what the area looked like in the 1970s. Back then, aside from a few trees, nothing except patches of crabgrass grew on the bare rocky soil on the east side of Riverside Drive. It was just a place where people walked their dogs. A few neighbors tried some gardening experiments, but vandalism and dog waste soon killed off most flowering plants. Those were the days of the Wild West Side, so if an expensive donated plant survived, sooner or later it was likely to be dug up during the night and carried off to parts unknown. We tried tougher plants like day lilies, morning glories and forsythia that nobody was interested in stealing. A few such experiments succeeded. For more than three decades a crab apple tree planted in honor of the late Peter Jackson, a long-time doorman at 320 RSD, thrived and flowered profusely each spring.

Around 1980, Kathy Draine, a young lawyer and 320 RSD board member, drafted a proposal to the Parks Department for an official volunteer garden. The plan received a friendly hearing from Riverside Park supervisor Charles McKinney, a neighbor.

With official sanction, the gardens then expanded to the west side of Riverside Drive, and the late Dina Levitt sponsored the planting of three trees—two ornamental pears and a crab apple—in memory of her husband Saul, a Pulitzer Prize winning playwright. The expansion project was a big undertaking: over a weekend some 20 neighbors hacked out holes in the almost impenetrable macadam and planted dozens of seaside roses and other varieties. The holes had to be deep because, to prevent theft, each rose bush was tied with chain to a cement block buried beneath it.



A bigger garden required a lot more maintenance. Fortunately the garden had two loyal and hardworking caretakers, Ira and Karen Gershenhorn. They planted bulbs and bushes, pulled endless weeds, enriched the soil and installed fencing. After a number of years they were joined by Dru Heidle, and together they have introduced many varieties of flowering annuals, perennials and shrubs. As evidence of their dedication, some plants that were put in the ground more than 40 years ago—seaside roses, day lilies, a crab apple, yellow iris, forsythia, holly and columbine—continue to bloom year after year.---Robert M. Randall 🌸

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- Pain Creams
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- Hydroquinone 6% Fading Cream
- T3 - T4 Thyroid Hormone Capsules
- Nitroglycerin .2% Ointment for Anal Fissure
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Hello to HI NYC

Local hostel welcomes neighbors as well as travelers to its landmarked building.

By Caitlin Hawke

Hostelling International New York City, or HI NYC for short, is a neighbor worth knowing. Housed in a now-landmarked building at 891 Amsterdam, the hostel is a vibrant chapter in the HI USA national network of hostels. It has cultivated ties to the Bloomingdale neighborhood, and now hosts local history and community groups, as well as putting up travelers from around the globe.

The story of the 1883 building spans a huge chunk of the city's history. Built as the Association Residence for the Relief of Respectable Aged Indigent Females, it operated for 90 years before closing. Then during the infamous blackout of July 1977, the shuttered structure was set on fire. Neighbors recall looking out of their windows onto a completely darkened city except for this surreal hotspot with flames raging through the roof.

Pam Tice, a former executive director of the hostel and a Bloomingdale Neighborhood History Group (BNHG) planning committee member, is probably the person most well-versed in the building's history. She will participate in an October 4th BNHG presentation about the building and Hostelling International NYC alongside the hostel's head of community outreach, Emily Gallagher, and her colleagues Ben Puterbaugh and Indigo



Designed by Richard Morris Hunt, the hostel's Victorian Gothic building was designated a landmark in 1983.

Goodson. It's free and all are welcome to attend at 6:30 p.m. in the hostel's ballroom.

But before you head over to that talk, here's a chance to discover a little more about HI NYC, which since 1989 has occupied the building. The red brick behemoth, which takes up most of a city block and one of the largest private gardens in Manhattan, was saved from demolition, according to Tice, by a coalition of Columbia students and neighborhood activists before being reinvented by a local community development corporation and American Youth Hostels.

Currently run by George Finn, the hostel belongs to a network of 50 hostels across the U.S. HI NYC is a magnet for world travelers, bringing hundreds of urban explorers to our streets every week. But HI NYC isn't just a bed in a port. Thanks to its community outreach and education teams, the hostel is a vibrant hub of activity for New Yorkers and an educational nonprofit, too. For example, the hostel has partnered with Bloomingdale Aging in Place and members help out in the hostel kitchen and cook cultural meals with New York school kids. And the build-

ing has become the go-to place for the Bloomingdale Neighborhood History Group's standing-room only presentations each month. These are free and open to history-loving neighbors.

HI NYC also offers experiential learning programs, many of which are co-led by neighborhood volunteers. The aim is to offer an alternative to a traditional tourism experience by providing opportunities for engagement. Since 2016, some 30,000 travelers and community members have participated in 1,000 education and engagement programs offered by HI NYC. Programs Great Hostel Give Back where, in exchange for a free hostel stay, travelers commit to a certain number of service hours to benefit the community around the hostel. In its Community Expressions program, travelers and NYC high school students exchange their views about city culture and dine together. Many of the students who participate have never met a person who lives in another country.

And that just scratches the surface of this neighborhood gem. Check out the program on October 4th. You won't regret it! ✿

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Block Security Guard Update

Our security guard, Osbourne Thomas, intervened to prevent an accident earlier this summer. An inebriated man walked up West 104th Street to West End Ave, apparently to hail a cab. He ventured into traffic and Osbourne steered him back to the curb and helped him safely into the cab.

A block security guard does much more than patrol the streets. He assists block residents, keeps an eye out for buildings within the block association, including 895 and 905 on West End Avenue, and most importantly, he is a comfort to residents who know he is there if they need him. The results of our survey last year showed us how important a security block guard was to you. We thank those residents who have paid their dues for their contributions, which go directly to supporting the block guard.

Winner of May Newsletter Photo Contest

Terrill Jory, a resident of our block, successfully identified the mystery photo as the corbel supporting a window ledge at 895 WEA (104th Street side.) He won a block association cap. Look for our photo in this issue. You could be the winner of a tote bag, t-shirt, or cap!

Upcoming September Events

Wednesday, September 13, 6pm: The Bloomingdale History Group Walking Tour. Join historian Jim Mackin for a historic tour of the Upper West Side and the Bloomingdale Neighborhood. Meet at the Hostelling International at 891 Amsterdam Street at 103rd. RSVP at 212-966-9774.

Sunday, September 17, 11am-4pm: Free Electronics and Textile Recycling Event at 110th and Amsterdam: Electronics accepted: Computers and peripherals (monitors, printers, faxes/scanners, keyboards, mice, wires, etc.); TVs; stereo and A/V equipment, VCRs, DVD players; cell and wall phones. Textiles Accepted: Clean textiles, including clothing and shoes, handbags, blankets, sheets, curtains, towels, etc.

For more information, contact the Lower East Side Ecology website at <https://www.lesecologycenter.org/>

Saturday, September 23, 10am to 5pm: Straus Art in the Park. Join artists and musicians in Straus Park (Broadway at 106th Street.) FREE. (Rain date: October 14)

Saturday, October 21, 4pm-8pm: Martin Brothers Annual Fall Grand Tasting, at Martin Brothers Wine & Spirits, 2781 Broadway.

The Truth about Dogs and Trees

Let's face it, a street tree bed is a challenging environment in which to garden. Street tree gardeners must use all their skills to combat de-icing products, soil compaction, and litter in these small patches of public greenspace. Plus, tree bed gardeners confront another stubborn problem: dog waste.

"I saw someone lift her dog over my tree guard to relieve itself on the flowers in my tree's bed," a Flatbush gardener reports. "And when I politely said that I garden there, the dog's owner replied with a smile: 'Oh, don't worry, he's watering your plants!'"

This gardener's frustration points to a hard truth that many dog owners don't realize: dog waste is not harmless or beneficial to trees and other plants.

Besides making soil truly unpleasant to garden in, dog urine doesn't "water" plants; it actually does the opposite—it can starve plant roots of water.

How does dog urine harm plants?

A spokesperson from the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation explained it this way:

When dog urine is added to a tree bed, the extra salt can create a crust on the soil, which makes the soil almost impenetrable to water. Salt also draws out water from tree roots, further compounding water loss and simulating the effects of drought.... These problems are exacerbated because dog urine attracts more dogs to do the same.

Tree pits are very limited in water, air, soil, and nutrient availability. The soil is also very compacted, which further intensifies these limitations and damages.

With nowhere for the salt to go, it simply builds up in the soil.

It's important for gardeners, too, to understand that dog urination habits are an important form of socializing for dogs. It's a canine's way of posting on social media: I was here! And we all know that once a tree is urinated on, it becomes the local hot spot for new postings!

Again, because there are more dogs than tree beds, this compounds the problem and can eventually lead to the tree's bark being "burned" off by urine.

What if my dog won't "go" anywhere else? Many dog owners believe that

their dogs simply can't resist peeing on that tempting square of earth. However, "You really can teach your dog to eliminate at the curb," says Maureen O'Brien, devoted dog owner, avid street tree steward, and Brooklyn Botanic Garden educator. "Guide your dog away from the tree bed. Be consistent, reward, and praise lavishly. The dog will learn."

With greater education and awareness, perhaps this point of conflict really can begin to bring dog owners and gardeners onto the same page to protect the City's plants and street trees. After all, healthy greenspaces benefit everyone—human and canine! 🌱



(Reprinted with permission of the Brooklyn Botanic Garden.)

Yard Sale, continued from page 1

celebration through your participation and generosity. Although the Yard Sale is a few weeks away, you can start to prepare today. Cull your library shelves, dust off the little used items in your drawers and closets, review your favorite dessert recipes, and consider your options...

Vending Slot Rentals:

Relieve apartment clutter and earn extra cash. Reserve one or more 10 x 10 foot vending spaces where you can display your gently used clothing, jewelry, and household items.

Please log onto www.boomingdale.org/vendor.htm or call Gary Wasikow at 212-932-9082.

"What-a-Bargain:" Please pack your donations in bags marked "Block Party," and arrange a delivery time by contacting Joyce Mann at joycemann2@gmail.com or 212-721-6341. Back-up phone numbers: 516-238-4609 or 516-330-5397. (Please, no exercise or computer equipment.)

Book Sale: Please pack your donation in bags marked "Block Party," and leave them with the 320 RSD doorman between September 23 and October 12. (Please, no textbooks, journals, magazines, theses,



Unusual finds at last year's block party.

LPs, or books about baby care, computers, or self-help.)

Silent Auction: Please contact Hanna Rubin at 212-865-4579 or Hanna.Rubin@verizon.net

Bake Sale: Please call Alex Grannis at 212-316-1644 or Lynn Max at 212-666-3129. (Kids, you have a special table!)

Donate your time: Do you have an hour? Lend a hand at the Silent Auction, 'What-a-Bargain', Books Sale, Bake Sale, or set up and break down. Please contact Mary Koval at

mtkoyal@aol.com or 917-969-1984.

One-hundred percent of your donations benefit our neighborhood. One-hundred percent of your purchases help ensure a safe, well-maintained block with a helpful guard, seasonal flowers, and trees providing summer shade.

(Editor's note: This event, formerly known as a "yard sale," has undergone a name change to conform to the Street Activity Permit Office's classification scheme. Residents can remain confident that this alteration will not diminish their enjoyment.)

See you at the Yard Sale on October 14! ☀

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 We fully support Fair Housing, both in the spirit and the letter of the law.



Board members Lynn Max and Mary Jo Gennaro display the new block association totes and caps at the Spring Planting Day last May. Visit the block association table at the Yard Sale to purchase yours!

NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES

BLOOMINGDALE AGING IN PLACE (BaiP) Bloominplace.org

BAiP is an intergenerational volunteer network of neighbors working to help older residents to continue living at home safely and comfortably. BAiP sponsors social and cultural activities, provides educational tools, and a helping hand for those in need through its **Neighbor-to-Neighbor (N2N)** program.

The latter takes the form of providing help going places, running errands, light shopping, accompaniment at home or outdoors, and information. If you want to contact N2N for this kind of assistance, or to talk about volunteering, e-mail: N2N@bloominplace.org, or call: 212.842.8831 to leave a message with your contact information. Either way, a BAiP member will respond promptly.

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The block association board
meets once a month.

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attend the meetings.

Please let us know if you would
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send you an invitation.

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If you're ever coming home at night and you'd like to have an escort, please don't hesitate to call Osbourne Thomas, our security guard. He has a special phone for these times, and he will come to meet you either on West End Avenue or Riverside Drive and walk with you to your home.

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Suggestions for the block: _____

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Please send to our treasurer: Barbara Boynton: 905 WEA, #71, NY, NY 10025 or leave with one of the following:

M. Koval: 895 WEA, 6D

G. Waskow: 320 RSD, Apt. 8G

M. Mann: 309 W. 104, Apt 3A

J. Howitt: 315 RSD, Apt. 8C