

West 104th Street

FEBRUARY 2020

BLOCK ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

How It All Started

The Block Association Celebrates its 50th Year

By Joyce Mann

In 1970 after an attempted mugging on the block, a group of neighbors organized by Carol Goodfriend got together to hire a security guard to patrol the block in the evenings. That was the start of what became the West 104th Street Block Association, which celebrates its 50th birthday this year. Board member Joyce Mann interviewed Goodfriend about those early days, and how the block and neighborhood have changed in the years since.



Carol Goodfriend

Were you New Yorkers originally? Jim, my husband, was born and raised in the Bronx and got his degree in music and philosophy from NYU. I was born in Watertown, Massachusetts, grew up in Northampton, and then went on to Smith College as a music major.

What did you do professionally? Jim and I met when he was the Literary Editor at Columbia Records, where I was an executive assistant. Soon after, Jim was appointed music editor and chief critic of Stereo Review Magazine, a position he held for 17 years. We married in September of 1967, and in 1968 we founded C and J Goodfriend, Drawings and Prints, an art dealership selling Old Master works of art on paper: prints, drawings and watercolors. We still run the business 52 years later.

What brought you both to West 104th Street? In 1968 we were living in a cockroach infested brownstone on West 81st between Columbus and Central Park West when we got a call from one of Jim's writers that the folks below them at 309 West 104th Street were moving out. So we came up to check out Apartment 2C, which was far grander than our digs and would give us room for Jim's thousands of books and recordings. We had very little money but at \$203 a month for 6 rooms and 3 baths we grabbed it. Who wouldn't?

Why this neighborhood? It was cheap! And the building's residents were like us—artists, musicians, actors, and academics. I recall there being a piano on every floor.

How and why did the Block Association officially begin? I was returning home and was suddenly accosted by two boys in the outer lobby of

continued on page 3

Letter From the Block President

It is the beginning of the year... and time to refocus on the good works done by the West 104th Street Block Association (www.bloomingdale.org). A huge thanks to those who have renewed their commitment to us with their recent contributions and membership payments. For those who have not, it is never too late to become a dues paying member of the West 104th Street Block Association.

But don't stop there—your involvement does not have to be just a financial contribution. There are lots of ways to participate and support our block: Join our planting days, birding excursions, Riverside Park maintenance clean-ups, pot luck dinners, and meetings at Ellington in the Park, to name a few. Our e-newsletter, Block Bytes (West 104 Block Bytes) also includes information on additional events. And if you have ideas about other events or activities you'd like to see, speak up, join us, and maybe lead the charge.

We hope to see you all at our annual meeting on March 31. A highlight of this year's meeting will be a presentation on street trees by the New York City Parks Department. During May we are planning on a program on how to save, or perhaps repurpose, our stores on Broadway. We hope to involve public and private agencies to join in the conversation.

Being able to coordinate and participate in group activities and concerns is an outlet that is very special to our urban fabric, particularly on the Upper West Side. Our West 104th Street Block Association has been at the forefront of this for 50 years (yes, this is our 50th Anniversary Year) and has always encouraged everyone – both those living on the block or off – to get involved.

Please join us and contribute to us. See you on the block.

—Steve Zirinsky



Steve Zirinsky on the block

You're Invited to the Annual Block Meeting!

Block residents are invited to the West 104th Street Block Association's annual meeting, which will be held at 7pm on March 31 at The Marseilles (230 West 103rd Street). Hear about plans to celebrate the Block Association's 50th year and learn about local issues affecting our neighborhood. Plus, the New York City Parks Department will make a special presentation on street trees, and highlight some of special interest in our neighborhood.

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WEST 104 BLOCK ASSN FINANCIAL REPORT

DECEMBER 2019

OPENING BALANCE	\$20,837.69
Income	870.00
Dues	830.00
Yard Sale	40.00
EXPENSES	\$4213.75
Guard service	2349.50
Tips	500.00
Newsletter	497.25
Beautification	300.00
Merchandise	529.00
Yard Sale	50.00

CLOSING BALANCE **\$17,617.83**

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Where on this block?



The first person to send Steve Zirinsky an email with the correct location of the architectural detail will win one of the Block Association's new totes! Email Steve at Steve@Zirinskyarch.com.



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Meet Our New Neighbor



A new Riverside Park resident, a bald eagle, was spotted by board member Peter Littlewood in late January around 116th Street.

Crosswalk Construction Project

New pedestrian ramps were installed in early December at West End Avenue and West 104 Streets. “Pedestrian ramp” is the official term for the sloping accessible sidewalk sections provided at corners.

The ramps are part of a program to upgrade corners throughout New York City (there are 162,000) so that the streetscape meets current accessibility standards. The program came about as the result of a lawsuit against the City seeking to make the public way more accessible. When the City lost, the Department of Design and Construction (DDC) was commissioned to create the program, which follows Department of Transportation standards.

The quality of the work at this intersection will be reviewed by DOT. Additionally, the dark tint used for the concrete and the corresponding pedestrian ramp pad color (which is intended to be a contrasting shade) will also be reviewed. Dark pigmented concrete is intended to be used in certain landmark districts that have continued sidewalk regulation.

However, not all landmark districts have regulated sidewalks. There is a list available at the Landmarks Preservation Commission that makes this distinction. Those landmark district sidewalks with cobbled streets or stone sidewalks are generally regulated by LPC oversight. In other districts, such as ours, where the streetscape materials are not considered distinctive, the sidewalks are not regulated.

It appears that the contractor believed the sidewalk color regulations applied to our district (the Riverside-West End Historic District Extension II). Stay tuned—the concrete has not cured on this story yet.

—Steve Zirinsky



How It All Started continued from page 1

my building. One either had or pretended he had a gun and asked for my money. I screamed and pushed past them back onto the street, where another group of teenagers I knew from the block were hanging out. Hearing me, they tore down the block and chased the boys into Riverside Park. Someone called the police and after that the afternoon was a blur. I was three months pregnant.

Who came up with the idea of hiring a guard and who paid for it? The night of my mug-ging we got together with another couple in the building—Aldis and Rennie Browne. They contacted the Kaufmanns, the couple who owned the brownstone next door. We all decided we needed to hire a guard to patrol the block six to seven nights a week from late afternoon to midnight. We all plunked down the initial cost until we were able to enlist other folks on the block to help. The Block Association was created to allow us to collect dues (around \$5-15 a month I recall) or any amount folks could afford to contribute so we could continue to pay for the guard and produce a newsletter.

What were the block association's original goals? Safety! In the 1970s the city was almost on fire and very dangerous. Muggers could race down the stairs into Riverside Park at 103rd and escape. Drugs were rampant. A woman who lived on the fourth floor of 308 West 104th would sit by her window every night with a whistle and blow it loudly every time she heard a disturbance on the street. Window sashes would fly up all over the block, and folks would yell and call the police. Incredibly enough, gunshots were not unusual on our block. People who did not live here then don't understand how very dangerous it was.

Were all the buildings on the block then rentals? When did that begin to change? Everything was a rental then. But because of our block association and the guard, the building owners saw that the neighborhood was becoming safer, so they began the process of turning the buildings into coops in the late 1970s and '80s. New stores opened, local

legislators rallied to pay for improvements, and community minded folks and local schools got involved. It was a snowball effect.

As a classic example, in 1977 during the famous blackout, we could hear breaking glass of storefronts on Broadway, yelling, screaming for hours and hours, but we felt safer because we had our security guard. Then, in 2003, during that blackout, there was none of the loud yelling, breaking glass, shouts that we heard back in 1977. The neighborhood had dramatically changed.

What do you hope for the future of the block? The continuation of safety for all, the enhanced connections with neighbors, support for good lighting, tree plantings and block beautification. I especially love the Yard Sale for the sense of community it brings the block. One of the most important contributions is our newsletter. For 50 years it has tied us together as a community, keeping us informed and caring about one another. 50 years ago we lit a spark that became the West 104th Street Block Association, but so many wonderful people through the years have contributed to keeping our block safe and beautiful and still do.

Any final thoughts? Yes. There is nothing more fundamental to New York City than the communities it creates whose purpose is to help each other and better our mutual quality of life. People living on West 104th Street should feel very, very proud of what was begun here and how it influenced and ultimately changed the character of this entire area. People should feel privileged to contribute their dues and their time to maintaining what was begun 50 years ago, because there's nothing better than community.

Pasta with a Purpose

Pisticci Restaurant is on a sustainable mission
By Sharon Waskow



Pisticci owner Michael Forte; left, Pisticci is the first carbon-neutral NYC restaurant.

As Upper West Side restaurants go, it's hard to beat Pisticci. at 125 LaSalle, for its fresh and savory Italian menu and cozy ambience. Though that may be all most of us want in a restaurant experience, dining at Pisticci not only rewards your appetite but also helps the planet. Owner Michael Forte recently shared how he and his wife Vivian challenged themselves to create a restaurant that would “do well while doing good.”

In 2002, with a background in plumbing and construction and no prior restaurant experience, the Fortes set out with a simple goal: “To create a neighborhood restaurant, the type we enjoyed going to.” Early on, the owners offered profit sharing and flex-time hours to employees. As testament to this act of good will, Pisticci has had the same chef and many of the original kitchen staff for the past 17 years.

As nature lovers and wilderness trekkers, the Fortes already had an interest in environmental stewardship. But it was seeing Al Gore’s film *An Inconvenient Truth* that convinced them they had to do more. They joined the Green Restaurant Association, which evaluates restaurants for the environmental soundness of their business practices. This process involves a soup-to-nuts review of all the restaurant’s invoices for goods and services. For instance, the Association tallies the number of LED lightbulbs, how much furniture is made from reclaimed wood, how sustainably food scraps are managed and whether kitchen equipment is energy saving. Each factor has a number that is tallied to determine a rating. Pisticci now proudly holds the highest rating from the organization. It is also Bcorp certified, which means it’s a business that makes a positive impact in environmental terms in the world. Pisticci is the first restaurant in NYC to be 100% carbon neutral and hopes one day to actually be carbon negative.

But there’s more. To lower their carbon footprint, Pisticci buys energy from New York State ESCO certified wind-power producers on the national grid. And strong effort is made to contribute as little organic waste as possible to landfills. Table scraps are deposited into a bin out back. In the bin, fat, lively worms wriggle through the scraps and their castings create a rich, loamy soil. This soil is used to fertilize the vegetables grown on Pisticci’s Full Circle Farm about 45 miles north of the city. Yes—they also have a farm and you will eat these vegetables at Pisticci during the growing season.

The next time you plan to eat out for lunch or dinner, consider Pisticci. It offers unique opportunities to support a local green business, to eat well and to help the planet.

Sharon Waskow is co-leader of It’s Easy Being Green, a Tri-Bloomingdale climate education and personal action group. Contact us at itseasybeinggreen.uws@gmail.com to get involved or to receive our monthly newsletter.

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Gilded Age Glamour-Part II

Riverside Drive's Mansion Neighborhood Is Next-Door

By Gil Tauber

(In the September issue, Gil Tauber looked at the early days of Riverside Drive, conceived by Frederick Law Olmsted as a prime residential location for wealthy New Yorkers. While the Drive never achieved the chic and allure that Olmsted envisioned, the area saw its share of mansions built in the Beaux Arts era, and several remain. In Part II, Tauber discusses some of the noteworthy mansions north of our block.)

As Riverside Drive swings north toward 110th Street, there are a handful of mansions that survived the apartment house boom of the 1920s. Those between 105th and 106th Street are the subject of Daniel J. Wakin's recent history of that block, *The Man With The Sawed Off Leg*, which chronicles the lives of some of the block's most famous—or notorious—residents.

Part I of this article described the houses to the south of what today is the New York Buddhist Church. The house just north of the church, No.333, was designed by Janes & Leo around 1901. It was bought by David Canavan, a successful builder. By 1945, it was divided into apartments. Saul Bellow lived there for a time in the 1950s. A few years later, Duke Ellington, who had already acquired No. 334, bought it. Although the Duke didn't live there, he used 333 for studio and office space. By the time his heirs sold the buildings in 1980, the adjacent stretch of 106th Street had been renamed Duke Ellington Boulevard.

SWANK ON SPEC

Nos. 334, 335 and 336 were designed as a group by Hoppen & Koen and completed in 1902. They were built "on spec" by a leading developer of posh residences, the firm of Steward & Smith. No. 334 was purchased in 1909 by Jokichi Takamine (1854-1922), who lived there with his American wife, their two sons and a number of servants. Takamine, a biochemist and entrepreneur, is best known today for isolating adrenaline. By 1933, No. 334 was a rooming house. It was in that period that it served as the hideout for a gang of armed robbers, including the man referred to in the title of Dan Wakin's book.

Julia Marlowe was one of the most famous actresses in America when she bought No. 335 in 1903. She starred in over 70 Broadway productions, mostly of Shakespeare, but also of such contemporary plays as the 1901 *When Knighthood Was in Flower*. (It was later made into a film starring another block resident, Marion Davies.) In 1906, she sold the house to Anna and Lothar Faber, of the Eberhard Faber pencil dynasty. 336 Riverside Drive was the home of Raymond and Minnie Penfield. He was president of the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company. After 1947, it was converted into apartments. The singer Nina Simone is said to have lived in one of them.

The corner house at 337 Riverside Drive is the only one that proclaims

itself a mansion. The words "River Mansion" are carved over its entrance, which is on 106th Street. It looks grand, thanks to its corner lot and its elegant design by Robert D. Kohn, but is somewhat smaller than it appears. It too was built by the firm of Steward & Smith. By the 1930s it was a rooming house. It remained so until 1970, when it became the John Mace Music School. In 1978 the Seagram heir Edgar Bronfman, Jr. bought it with his then-wife Sherry Brewer, who still owns it.

35 ROOMS AND LOTS OF MARBLE

In 1907, the tobacco magnate Morris Schinasi decided that he wanted a fine house on the Drive. The subway, completed in 1904, had spurred a building boom on the Upper West Side. Existing mansions were already being demolished and replaced by apartment houses. Nevertheless, Morris acquired the lot at the northeast corner of 107th Street and commissioned William Tuthill, the architect of Carnegie Hall, to design the 35-room white marble mansion at 350 Riverside Drive.

Morris Schinasi (1861-1928) was born into a very poor family of Ottoman Jews. As an unschooled boy in Turkey, he was sent to work as a caretaker in a Jewish cemetery, but was fired because he was unable

to read the names on the tombstones. At 15, he went to Alexandria to work for a Greek tobacco merchant. In 1890, with a thorough knowledge of the tobacco business, he emigrated to the U.S. He exhibited his patented cigarette rolling machine at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. That invention alone would have made him a millionaire, but he and his brother Solomon went on to establish Schinasi Brothers, the world's largest manufacturer of Turkish tobacco cigarettes. Morris never learned to read and write. When asked what he might have accomplished if he had not been illiterate, he said that he would have been a very competent cemetery caretaker.

The Schinasi mansion had various owners. In 2013, it was sold for \$14 million to Mark Schwartz, a Vice Chairman of Goldman Sachs. Since then, it has undergone extensive renovation, including a near-total replacement of its marble façade, steps, gateways and balustrades, which had been badly eroded after a century of exposure to the elements.

Just north of 350 Riverside Drive, and separated from it by a generous side yard, are twin houses numbered 352 and 353 Riverside Drive. They were designed in 1900 by Robert D. Kohn, the architect of 337 Riverside Drive as well as the Broadway building of Macy's Department Store. Kohn's client was Adolphe Openhym, a wealthy silk merchant. Among other things he was Treasurer of The Ethical Culture Society, whose building on 64th was also designed by Kohn. After the buildings were completed in 1901, Openhym leased out 353 as an income property and occupied 352 with his wife and two sons. It has had several subsequent owners but remains a single-family home. Its twin, No. 353, is now a 10-unit coop.



No.350 sold for \$14 million; actress Julia Marlowe owned No.335.



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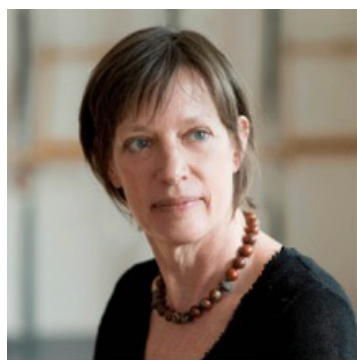
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Prepping for spring

Block association board members and helpers plant tulips

An early snowfall made spring planting more of a challenge this past December. Board members Alex Grannis, Lynn Max and Larry Stern got an assist from Steve Max and two professional helpers, Chris and Carly, as they planted. The block association planted more than 1000 “tulips on fire” bulbs.



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POLICE REPORT

The 24th Precinct holds a monthly Community Council meeting the **third Wednesday of each month at 7pm at the Precinct building on West 100th Street**. Starting in February, the meeting will be streamed live on Facebook and Twitter. Attendees usually include police officers and residents, representatives for local politicians as well as from the District Attorney's Office. The West 104th Street Block Association also sends a representative.

At the January meeting, the Precinct reported that crime statistics are up slightly from last year but are still down significantly from historical numbers. There has been one murder since the new year began. On January 2nd, a man identified as Steven Gadsden was shot and killed by his nephew Cardell Gadsden near the intersection of West 107th and Manhattan Avenue. After leaving the scene, the suspect returned and turned himself into police.

On January 11th, there was a gun and drug bust on 207 West 102nd Street that included guns with extended magazines.

The police also discussed the CAT (Combat Auto Theft) program, one of their auto theft prevention sticker programs. With this particular program, cars can get a sticker that will allow the police to pull the vehicle over if they see it being operated between the hours of 1am and 5am. Contact the Precinct for details about obtaining a sticker.

—Peter Littlewood

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.
 We enjoy having residents attend the meetings.
 Please let us know if you would like to attend one and we will send you an invitation.
 steve@zirinskyarch.com

Call for Safe Escort Home With Block Guard

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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