

West 104th Street

MARCH 2023

BLOCK ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

Making It Work

The block's newest supers talk about managing older buildings and what they love about West 104th Street.

By Joyce Mann

Carlos Santana has been the superintendent of 315 Riverside Drive for four years, but he has coveted that position for almost twenty. He worked with the former super's sister in the Dominican Republic, and when he came to the U.S. in 2008, he was so impressed by the building and the job he told his friend "I will be the super of this building one day." And fourteen years later, his wish came true.

Carlos says that he had always been very handy. In the Dominican Republic, he worked in construction and with computers and could fix almost anything. After a very rough start in the U.S., alone and with no connections, he gradually worked his way up job by job, first in Washington Heights and then in the Bronx. There were months when he slept in the streets and didn't know where his next meal was coming from, but he persisted because he knew his future lay here.

When he began to work at 315 Riverside Drive, he realized how much he liked the building and the neighborhood. He marveled at how clean the block is and how kind people are. "They listen to you and treat you with respect," he said. "That does not happen everywhere, believe me." He also is a fan of the park. "I love it; I go there as often as I can."

In thinking about his responsibilities as a superintendent, he said his most important job was taking care of the elderly residents in the building. His own father had been severely injured on the job in his youth and spent the 50 years before his death bedridden, so Carlos has a soft spot in his heart for the disabled and elderly. "Helping people makes me so happy" he says with a smile.

Maintaining an older building has challenges. "The plumbing, especially in the winter," he says, can cause problems. It's very old. Fortu-

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315 RSD's Carlos Santana

Letter from the President

By Steve Zirinsky

Writing this annual letter allows me to reflect on the Block Association—what it is and why it matters. Having a block association is still rather unique in New York City. Not every block has the opportunity for its residents to really get to know each other and work together toward common goals for the block. And to participate in the various activities that we organize.

I am proud that our Block Association has created a real community. One where residents don't just recognize one another. They know one another. And they care about one another.

As a member of our community and a block resident, I encourage you to take part in our activities and events, and if there is something new you would like to see added, please contact me. You can reach me at Steve@zirinskyarch.com. But be careful – you may be asked to take charge!

I also encourage you to sign up for Block Bytes on the Block Association's website, www.bloomingdale.org, if you have not done so already. Block Bytes is where more timely social activities and announcements get posted.

As you all know, we have been focused on the rodent situation on our block, waging war on the rats. The new garbage pails we distributed have been helpful. And the new garbage pickup times being instituted by the City should also help. But every building must join the fight—which is a daily one. While there seem to be more rat holes than before, we seem to be seeing less rats. Only time will tell whether that is true.

I look forward to meeting our new and old members and residents. And encourage all of you to get more involved in the block as opportunities arise.

See you on the block!



Zirinsky and Buddy.

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WEST 104 BLOCK ASSN FINANCIAL REPORT

JANUARY 2023

OPENING BALANCE	\$25,180.69
Income	2787.23
Dues	2524.99
Contributions	118.11
Credits	182.24
EXPENSES	5717.96
Guard Service	4275.03
Rodent Control	1337.75
Accounting	105.19
CLOSING BALANCE	\$22,247.95



Details, Details

Answers to Our Local Architecture Quiz

How did you do on our quiz celebrating the beautiful details on buildings between West 107th Street and West 102nd Street between West End Avenue and Riverside Drive? 1. Completed in 1930, 315 Riverside Drive's ornamental ironwork has a classic Art Deco design. 2. The elegant Beaux Arts façade of 905 West End Avenue boasts decorative shields. 3. Dating back to 1902, the decorations on 330 Riverside Drive, one of the neighborhood's few remaining mansions, were made of carved limestone. 4. An entrance column at River Mansion, also built in 1902, on 106th and Riverside. 5. The top of the entrance pillar at the 1907 Schinasi Mansion, at 351 Riverside Dr. At left: A fierce neighbor at 925 West End Avenue.

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nately, I can fix anything.” He added that while many supers are obsessed with the boiler room and consider that the most important part of the job, for him it’s keeping after the people who walk their dogs on the block but don’t properly dispose of their dog waste, and helping the block’s security guard keep the block safe. On his own time, he’s passionate about being out on and in the water. “Anything having to do with the sea: boating, swimming, diving, spear fishing, jet skiing,” he says. “I have been doing all these since I am 8 years old.” He returns to the Dominican Republic every year, where he is able to enjoy all these activities.

“After a long struggle,” he says, “I have a beautiful life here: a job I love, a wonderful wife and a son and daughter, and they are all American citizens, too. I am very lucky.”

Loving the Neighborhood

“I didn’t choose to be a super; it chose me, I think” says third generation superintendent Jamie Grima, who has been at 895



895 WEA's Grima

West End Avenue for nearly a year. His father, grandfathers on both sides and all his uncles were supers. He himself had been a super for nine years at a building on Prince and Mulberry Streets but with a 6-year-old daughter, he and his wife felt the neighborhood was not family friendly. “There were mostly college kids and bars, and there were no elementary schools in the neighborhood. Even the post office was a 16-block walk away,” he says.

By contrast, they love this part of the Upper West Side. “Everyone is friendly. It’s safe and quiet, even at night, with the security guard, and we have easy access to everything we need—the park, the subway, buses, stores, even the post office.” This year was his family’s first time at the annual Yard Sale, and they loved it. Although he spent his early childhood with his parents and grandparents in New York, when he was 8, they returned to their home island of Gozo, just north of Malta. Natives speak Maltese, a language derived from a medieval Sicilian Arabic. Jamie graduated from high school there, got married and then decided to move back to New York with his wife Cathia because the tiny island was “just too quiet.” Even the island’s convenience stores closed at 7pm. Cathia, a teacher’s assistant, commuted an hour and a half to work in Malta, including a ferry ride on waters that were often choppy. “Imagine that you lived on the Upper West Side but worked on Staten Island” he said.

When he got back to New York, Jamie took a course to learn

more about air conditioning, refrigeration, plumbing and electrical skills, all very necessary for being a super in an older building which he laughingly called “the city of leaks.” He feels his most important skill is being able to take any work problem in stride. “You must be calm and never panic,” because if there is a problem in one apartment it probably involves others, “so you have to know how to properly assess the problem so you can determine its source.”

In his spare time Jamie is a huge soccer fan, especially of Manchester United. He also loves family time and the chance to visit new places. In nice weather, he, his wife and daughter and a few other families go to one of their favorite places—Silver Mine Lake, part of the Harriman State Park complex—where the kids play and they have picnics, barbeques, hikes and just relax.

Liking the Job

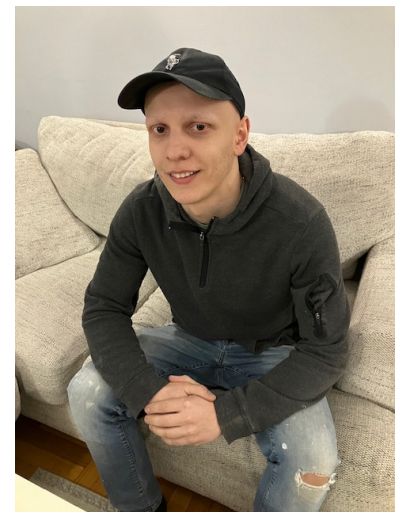
Arben Pllumaj has been the superintendent at 308 West 104th Street for the last three years. Arben grew up in Albania, where he lived until he was 18. He is the step-son of the previous super, learned the tricks of the trade from him and took over after his stepfather retired. He also received help and advice from Dino, the superintendent at 309 West 104th Street, who hails from Kosovo. The building has 34 rental units. Since the building has only one or two bedroom apartments, “when the people start having bigger families, they leave,” Arben says.

He is the building’s only staff. “If there is an emergency, like with the elevator, I am the one who has to come and fix it, so on weekends I don’t go too far,” he says. “Fortunately I live with my older brother, Armando, who is a plumber and he helps me out from time to time.”

Arben likes his job, “except maybe doing the garbage, but even that is okay,” he says. “I started out in construction, so I like anything having to do with repairing and building, that is the best part for me.” And the worst part? “The rats on the street,” he says. “308 is free from them but seeing them outside is not pleasant.”

Though he likes the block and the neighborhood, he still misses Albania. “It is a small country, close to the mountains and the sea and nature. It is very beautiful. The U.S. is a good country, but you have to work too much to get by. In Europe the pace of life is slower. But here there is more opportunity.”

In his free time Arben enjoys going out with friends to small coffee shops and restaurants. He is a soccer fan, having played a bit for pleasure when he lived in Europe, and would like to travel back to Europe or especially Australia if given the chance, “because of all the nature there.”



308 W. 104th Street's Pllumaj

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Where Is This?

Take our architectural detail quiz and see how well you know the neighborhood.

West 104th Street is now part of a historic district that was created in 2015. Cited for architecture ranging from single-family dwellings to grand apartment buildings, this part of the Upper West Side has a distinct character and many notable buildings. Take our quiz to see how well you know the beautiful details and decorations that can found from West End Avenue and Riverside Drive between 102nd and 107th Streets. (See answers on page 2.)

1



2



3



4



5



New Tastes Coming Your Way

Columbia U Area Sees an Expansion in Food Offerings

By Hayley Elaszcz



Clockwise from left: Tom's Diner, made famous by Seinfeld; Kyuramen is part of a chain; Miznon will offer Israeli street food; Omonia Café has lavish cakes as well as traditional Greek honey cookies and other pastries.

The area around Columbia University is perhaps best known for its selection of fast-casual lunch staples (along the lines of Sweetgreen, Chipotle, and Dig Inn), as well as the Seinfeld-famous Tom's Diner. However, the neighborhood is getting a refresh with some new and exciting options, transplanted from other parts of the city and the world.

From Broadway in Queens to Broadway in Bloomingdale: I was excited to see a new location of the classic Astoria bakery Omonia Café. While this decadent spot has operated in Astoria since 1977, the location at 108th just opened this year. Here, you can find winning mashups like the baklava cheesecake (exactly as it sounds, this treat is flaky baklava layered with creamy cheesecake, \$9), as well as more classic Greek pastries like spanakopita. While the Astoria Omonia complex houses a full sit-down restaurant, bar, and café, this Upper West Side version is smaller, with bakery treats and a few counter seats. There is also ice cream and coffee at this location.

A Solid Choice for a Cold Winter Day: We have a new Ramen restaurant in town! Kyuramen is a chain with 120 locations in Asia (according to its Instagram bio) and several in the U. S. It serves a selection of Shouyu, Shio, curry, and vegetable ramens (\$18-20). The location on 108th – right next to Fumo – is one of seven in New York.

Israeli Streetfood Close to Home: We are also getting a location of Miznon, an Israeli streetfood restaurant with locations in Israel, France, the United Kingdom, Austria, Australia, and Singapore. The only American locations are in New York (at Hudson Yards) and Boston, including the upscale sit-down sister restaurant North Miznon. Soon (sometime this spring, according to signs outside of the business), we won't have to trek downtown to get delicious pita sandwiches. My personal favorite is the Lavan (cauliflower and tahini, \$14), while my boyfriend loves the cheeseburger in a pita (\$15).

A Rice Destination: Finally, the West Side Rag reports that the same area – Broadway and 113th – will soon be home to a location of FIELDTRIP. According to the FIELDTRIP website, it was founded by a James Beard Award-winning chef, JJ Johnson, who designed the menu around rice, an ingredient that "connects us all and can be found at the center of tables around the world." True to its global influences, FIELDTRIP rice bowls include diverse rice varieties including Jollof Basmati Rice, Coconut Sticky Rice, and Carolina Gold Fried Rice, topped by an array of sauces and vegetables (\$10-25). I personally can't wait to grab lunch when it opens.

In our neighborhood, we sometimes struggle with empty storefronts or the proliferation of large chains that take out small businesses that we know and love. But new options can also be exciting, and I'm happy to see that restaurants that have thrived in other parts of the city are moving to the Upper West Side. It's perhaps a sign that we have a strong market here for good food; between the hungry college students and those of us who just like a good takeout meal, I'm sure that these restaurants will find a welcoming home here.



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Holiday Food and Toy Drive Nets Results



The Block Association's second annual December food and toy drive drew contributions from up and down the block. Organized by Peter Littlewood, each of the four corner buildings had a drop-off box, and 320 Riverside Drive allowed residents from other buildings to leave their donations in the lobby.

The contributions yielded 10 boxes of food and 10 bags of toys. The Block Association partners with City Harvest on the food collection. The charity redistributes donations to food pantries and soup kitchens around the city. The toys are distributed via a city agency to women's shelters.

A Regal Roost

A pair of red-wing hawks took a rest on the 309 West 104th Street water tower recently, adding a touch of avian glamour to a winter afternoon. There are several pairs that make their home in the neighborhood.



104 on 104

A longtime block resident celebrates a milestone



Lenore Taussig celebrated her 104th birthday February 7. She was born in Berlin in 1919, and came to America early during the Second World War. She has lived at 320 Riverside since 1951, maintaining a gemütlich atmosphere of European culture and gentility, with many paintings, books, musical scores and furnishings that remind her of the world she was forced to leave and enjoying her view of the Hudson River every day! Her husband, Walter Taussig, was associate conductor of the Metropolitan Opera until his death in 2003. —Nancy Lian



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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 (now via Zoom). 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

Contribute to the Newsletter

Interested in writing or photographing for the West 104th Street Block Association newsletter? Have suggestions about what to cover in the neighborhood? Want to share block news, suggest a profile, send a photo? Please send an email to Hanna.Rubin@verizon.net. Your ideas are welcome.

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Please send to our vice-president, Mary Jo Gennaro, 315 Riverside Dr., Apt. 7C, NY NY 10025 or leave with one of the following:

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