

The New Tenants' Voice

IPNTA: 310 Greenwich Street, 39-P, New York, NY 10013. <http://ipnta.org>. e-mail: info@ipnta.org March 2005

Welcome to All Tenants, New and Long-time: Let's Talk About Our Community

By Elissa Krauss

As most of you know, our buildings are transitioning from a Mitchell-Lama (government supported) development to a mixed rent community. Because this transition is almost complete, now seems a good time for some stock-taking, by both long-time tenants and new tenants.

First, a hearty welcome to new tenants! If you moved in since June 2004, you found a different community than we found 10, 15 or 20 plus years ago. Please take a trip back in time with us, before there was a place called "Tribeca," to learn about the IPN community.

The Early Years

IPN was built in the early 1970s with the idea that people—moderate, low and middle income—working at the new World Trade Center would like to live nearby. This area, at the time, was entirely commercial. It consisted of light industry, electrical and plumbing businesses, and a butter and eggs market that dated to the 19th Century.

Many blocks north of the WTC were leveled during and after the WTC construction.

WTC employees weren't interested in a gritty neighborhood with no services that was dark and empty at night. So our three 39-story towers with 1,329 apartments were made part of the Mitchell Lama program, one of New York's most successful housing programs.

Started in 1955, Mitchell-Lama gave private developers magnanimous government subsidies in exchange for providing affordable housing to New York's working and middle class. There were strict income caps on tenants who moved in – but once they moved in they were guaranteed a home.

After the programs were legislatively in place, but before they were actually instituted,

realtor groups lobbied successfully to change its basic purpose. Given their powerful political influence, they got the program to change, so that after 20 years—the owners could buy out of the program—pay off the remaining mortgage—and raise rents to market rates. But that's at the end of this story. Most ML tenants were not aware of the changing time limits.

By 1976 all three towers were filled – by people who moved from all over the city in search of affordable housing. They came from Little Italy and Chelsea, Harlem and Long Island City (before those areas, too, became fashionable addresses) and other neighborhoods across the city. When their old neighbors heard about IPN, they were interested as well. By the early '80s the waiting list for apartments at IPN was closed and the wait for an apartment was more than 10 years.

Pioneers

IPN's first tenants were urban pioneers—people willing to live, given the paucity of affordable housing elsewhere, surrounded by abandoned factories, leveled streets, and commercial activity. There was no supermarket, no park, no school. Streets, some 200 years old, were either broken or unpaved, and without traffic lights.

Creating a Community

Along with a handful of neighboring artist loft dwellers, we built a community from scratch. We lobbied the former Board of Education for a new school. We built Washington Market Park, virtually by hand—it had been an empty lot used mostly as a garbage dump—as a community effort. We also got the City to take it over. Today, Tribeca is a thriving community, whose excellent schools, beautiful parks, and easy access to services are a magnet to those who can afford its spacious lofts and luxury apartments.

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Current Tenant Issues: A Recap of IPNTA And Management Actions

Representatives of IPNTA and management resumed meeting once a month to discuss issues of mutual concern. Following is a brief recap of some current issues:

Security guards: Because several guards

Floor Captains: The Key To Our Success

Our tenant association believes that the more people who get involved in the affairs of our buildings, the better and stronger our organization is. The key to our success—and we have had many—is our most important asset: our floor captains.

Floor captains are your neighbors who have volunteered their services to represent your floor. For floors who do not have a captain, we urge you to volunteer.

Don't be shy, don't be scared. It's not that much work—mostly it's delivering flyers, and occasionally speaking to your neighbors. The more active tenants we have, the less work for everyone. Which means that without a captain, a floor (you and your neighbors) are missing information.

Basic duties include distributing flyers, newsletters, coming to occasional captains meetings, and getting all the latest information via e-mails; you will feel great that you are supporting a great community.

Leave your name/number/email in the tenant box in the lobby and your building VP will contact you. Every floor should have a captain.

are relatively new to IPN, they do not know all the tenants. Please accept that they must stop you before you enter your apartments. Although this may be annoying, it's for the safety of all of us.

Bulletin boards: Management advises that if you wish to post something, please give it to the management office, at 40 Harrison Street. If we tape notices in elevators or on top of bulletin boards, management will remove them. New bulletin boards will go up in the laundry rooms for tenant use. We await our landlord's response to our request to use the bulletin boards near the mailboxes for tenant association notices, as in the past.

Toilet overflows: If your toilet is overflowing, and a plunger doesn't help, reach behind the toilet (at the bottom) and shut off the valve—turn it all the way to the right. This will stop the water until maintenance arrives. The maintenance and security hot line number is 212-376-4161. If it's an emergency, please make that very clear, or it will be treated as any other repair request. The regular maintenance number is 212-233-1163.

New windows and terrace doors: New and significantly improved windows and terrace doors have been installed at 310 Greenwich, 80 N. Moore, and some town houses, and are currently being installed at 40 Harrison. We urge you to make sure workers use HEPA vacuums as they remove the windows. The Environmental Committee worked diligently with management to come up with an appropriate protocol after we discovered asbestos in the window tracks through our own testing.

If you see HEPA vacuums not being used,

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How to Register a Complaint

The first step in reporting any problem—maintenance, security, tenant issues—is to call the appropriate number: For maintenance: 212-233-1163. After expressing your complaint, ask for a job number. For management (e.g., tenant or neighbor issues): 212-962-3530. For security (late night/hot line): 212-376-4161.

When calling about an emergency, make sure maintenance or security *understands* it's an emergency, especially at night for floods, pipe breaks, security issues, etc.

If you have no success after a reasonable amount of time, then call IPNTA by leaving a note (*not calling*) in your lobby box, or emailing Info@IPNTA.org, with your contact numbers, and a brief summary of the problem. We also urge you to copy the IPNTA of any written notices you send to management.

If we don't know about it, we cannot help. So put it in writing, but only if you need our help.

Contact: Tenant lobby boxes or Info@IPNTA.Org

Welcome to All Tenants, New and Long-time

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As the surrounding community changed from abandoned and commercial to renovated upscale residential, IPN tenants remained a cross-section of New Yorkers – bringing diversity to overwhelmingly white and wealthy Tribeca.

We are: White, Black, Asian, and Hispanic; singles, families and retired people. One-quarter of IPN households are headed by elderly people, living on pensions and/or social security. The majority of our children go to local public schools. We are teachers, transit workers, journalists, secretaries, cab drivers, government workers, artists, designers, and social workers. And, we are a very stable community. In the year 2000, more than 50% of IPN's tenants had lived here for more than 20 years (twice as long as the average length of residence for the rest of Manhattan).

We remained a solid working class community: Our median household income in 2000, according to the US Census Bureau, was about \$45,000; compared to a median household income for the rest of Tribeca of over \$100,000.

Community Leaders

IPN's residents are also an activist community. The IPNTA has represented tenants' interests since the early years. Recently, we played a crucial survival role in the days following the terrorist attack four blocks from our doorsteps. In fact, IPN was chosen by Johns Hopkins University as a quintessential example of how an American community can come together to survive an emergency. Without government assistance, but working closely with management, the IPNTA organized tenants to get food and water, therapy, and medical assistance to all of IPN residents including homebound elderly and disabled.

How We Saved Our Homes

A year and a day after the terrorist attacks, on September 12, 2002, IPN's current owner told the IPNTA that he was about to purchase IPN and remove us from the Mitchell-Lama Program.

He planned to raise rents to market rates, which would have forced many of us out of our homes. A successful organizing campaign here

and throughout the city helped bring the landlord to the bargaining table. The landlord's representatives and the IPNTA hammered out an agreement to protect long time residents' homes.

Today there are three groups of tenants living at IPN: (1) Long-time residents whose income is less than 90% of the metropolitan area median income and who are eligible for government issued "sticky vouchers." They pay 30% of their income for rent and the federal government pays the remainder of an approved "reasonable rent" averaging from \$1,700 for studio apartments to \$3,800 for two bedroom apartments.

(2) Long-time residents who are not eligible for vouchers who pay rent that is based on their old Mitchell-Lama rents plus annual or bi-annual increases equal to the New York City rent stabilization increases. Their rents currently range from approximately \$500 per month to \$2000 per month depending on household and apartment size.

(3) Finally, there are market rate tenants who pay whatever rate the landlord believes the market will bear.

During this transition many who lived here for years moved. Some feared they would lose their homes if negotiations failed. Others had various legal issues, and could not afford the new market rates.

We estimate that about 75 apartments became vacant during 2004 as a result of the transition from Mitchell Lama to market rates. Those 75 apartments are the ones available to new tenants.

New Neighbors: Please Join Us

Today, all IPN tenants share a common landlord, a common community and common concerns. If the repairs are not timely made, or security is not maintained, or elevators break down, we all suffer. A strong tenants' association that works cooperatively with management has been a key to our successful, stable, and thriving community – for all its members. Please join us in continuing to maintain the IPN community as a model to which others strive. Please join the IPNTA—the Independent Plaza North Tenants' Association.

Current Tenant Issues: A Recap of IPNTA & Mgmt Actions

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stop them and tell them to use it. There is a supervisor on site, off and on, and an engineer who checks to see if everything is functioning properly. You will also need to follow after them with a good vacuum.

If you have pets, you will need to find a safe place for them while the workers do the installation. Many people put their small pets in the bathroom, leaving the door closed the

entire time. Others feel it's better to remove them the entire time. Expect a lot of banging, noise and the apartment is completely opened to the outside.

Other issues include the entry gate at 310 Greenwich, and its narrow opening, recent flooding and constant water shutoffs, and a new security monitor system, not yet completed, which will be a tremendous improvement over the old system.

Greening of Greenwich: New Chance for Your Own Brick

As you walk along Greenwich Street, do you notice the names on the printed bricks? That was a community effort several years ago to raise money to improve the street.

But not everybody had a chance to participate. For all of you who were disappointed that you never got your names in for the bricks, we have good news: It's not too late!

Sponsors of the greening, Friends of Greenwich Street, are accepting new applications. Use the coupon at the right.

IPN tenants have the first opportunity to immortalize themselves and their families with their names on bricks, which will be placed on the other side of Harrison on Greenwich Street. After IPN, sponsors will open it up to the rest of Tribeca. So please get your forms in as soon as possible.

An idea for additional bricks: You can chip in with neighbors for a memorial brick for IPN friends, pets, or children who have moved on.

 ___ 1 brick: \$150 ___ 2 bricks: \$250
 ___ 3 bricks: \$375

Please print clearly in block capital letters. Bricks can be engraved with up to 3 lines of text with up to 13 characters per line. Punctuation marks and spaces are considered characters.

Only proper and legal company names are allowed, no slogans.

Brick One

Line 1
 Line 2
 Line 3

(For additional bricks or orders, just photocopy this page. Or write to Friends of Greenwich Street for full-page coupons.)

Make tax-deductible checks payable to Friends of Greenwich Street, PO Box 247, New York, NY 10007

Independence Plaza North Tenants Association Board of Directors & Advisors

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Senior issues	June Grancio
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Lease Extensions Now Offered to L.A.P. Tenants. Get Your Lease in Quickly

L.A.P. tenants (residents of IPN who do not qualify for vouchers and who are not paying free-market rents) who signed their leases for a ten-month initial period have been receiving their lease extensions for the next period. The new rents will begin July 1.

Although the landlord's statement specified you have 20 days (from the date you receive the extension form) to get the lease back to the office, Stellar Management has agreed that this is an error. According to our contract, we actually have 45 days to comply. In any case, it cannot hurt to get them in soon.

Some tenants have asked IPNTA whether it's better to sign a one-year or a two-year lease. Unfortunately, we cannot tell, because we will never have our extensions renewed before Rent Stabilization hearings and decisions are made in the Spring.

Briefly, if you sign a two-year lease now, you will be paying more for the first year, but you will ultimately be paying less (perhaps a half percent) over the entire two year period.

If you sign a one-year lease, you will pay

Time to Renew Membership For 2005

IPNTA's annual membership drive has begun. If you haven't already renewed, or joined, please do so today. We remain the tenants' strongest, most effective advocate.

Further, we are well-known and respected beyond IPN—having participated in rebuilding lower Manhattan, resurrecting the business community, engaging in efforts to improve air quality and the environment, and so much more.

Membership is \$20 per person (not apartment); or \$10 per senior. (We're also accepting extra donations to our defense fund.)

Make checks payable to IPNTA, and put in lobby tenant boxes, with name and apt clearly marked. No cash in boxes, please.

less during the first year, but slightly more (again, perhaps a half-percent) during the second year. At least this is the situation so far. But this may change for future leases depending on the next decision of the Rent Guidelines Board.

Tenants Seek Rent Rebate for Gas Cutoff

Our tenant association, the IPNTA, is requesting a temporary rent rebate to compensate for the loss of gas over several weeks at 40 Harrison Street.

After experiencing a cutoff of gas, resulting from a serious gas leak which was the owner's responsibility to repair, IPNTA wrote to Stellar Management requesting a temporary reduction in rent and rebate for the period of time when residents of 40 Harrison Street were required to have their gas turned off.

We received a response that Stellar needs more time to respond to the request.

We believe we are legally entitled to this rebate, because we were paying rent for services not provided.

As of this writing, we have not received a response from management. We will keep you posted.

General Tenants Meeting

COMING UP SOON: Date to be announced.
Topics of discussion: The security of enhanced vouchers and organization of enhanced voucher tenants;

Organizing for the upcoming rent stabilization hearings.

We will also distribute information about above.

Keep up with the news also through your Captains and Vice Presidents.

IPNTA is only as strong as it's active members.

Next newsletter: IPNTA report on Citizens Emergency Response Team (CERT) training, designed for disaster preparedness.

Tenants Sue Landlord: An Update

By Elissa Krauss

In March 2004 the IPNTA and Independence Plaza Associates entered an historic agreement designed to assure that all legal tenants at that time would remain at IPN after the transition out of the Mitchell-Lama program.

(Originally, around 300 tenants received letters from the owners' attorneys stating that there were questions about their papers. With much IPNTA Transition Committee assistance, this number dropped to 150, and finally to 20. We needed to find an attorney to work with them, and participants had to chip in to pay attorney fees.)

Under that agreement, tenants who did not qualify for federally subsidized vouchers would get leases based on their last Mitchell Lama rent.

Unfortunately, in September the IPNTA was forced to sue IPA for not living up to its side of the agreement when the landlord tried to retroactively increase 16 tenants' "last Mitchell Lama rent" without any basis for doing so. For three other tenants, the landlord refused to allow them to transfer to larger apartments despite the fact that their rights to transfer had been vested under the Mitchell Lama program.

After spending years of hard work, thousands of hours, and tens of thousands of dollars to protect our homes, it was disheartening, to say the least, when we realized that we had to go to court to enforce the agreement. Things went from bad to worse when several of the lawsuit tenants were suddenly charged retroactively for thousands of dollars of illegal arrears; some faced illegal eviction notices.

Finally after five months, we had our first day in court on February 28. Judge Marcy Friedman devoted several hours talking to our lawyers and to the landlord's lawyers. She worked through the lunch hour and came out to the courtroom to introduce herself to us to ask the tenants who were there to introduce themselves.

Among those she met were Philip and Gertrude Stein, both in their 80's, and Ed Rosner, also retired, who have lived at IPN for nearly 30 years. Also present were Anna Leah Braudes and Feliz Ortiz. Both were promised that they were "next on the list" to transfer to larger apartments (Felix was actually shown and agreed to accept an apartment) but no transfer happened.

Although nothing was resolved at this conference, we left the court feeling buoyed by the Judge's clear interest in our cause and her willingness to work hard at it. The next court date is March 28. We are optimistic about the outcome!

Improving Our Community Through the TriBeCa Partnership

By Geoffrey Wiland

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I have always wanted to do something about the homeless problem in our neighborhood. I have both selfless and selfish reasons. Selfless because I feel for the homeless and would like to improve their quality of life. Selfish because this will also improve our quality of life. There is a way that we can do both.

A not-for-profit neighborhood organization, the TriBeCa Partnership, provides job training and employment for the homeless. Their approach is a "work/learn program which provides education and employment readiness training to recovering homeless individuals through workshops and hands-on community improvement projects."

Participants work seven days a week on community improvement projects, such as street and sidewalk maintenance and refuse removal. Participants receive vocational counseling, basic computer skills, job placement, and many other services.

So how can we help them, and by doing that, help ourselves?

TriBeCa Partnership has a trash receptacle program that we can join. They will either add a trash receptacle or replace one of the small city provided trash receptacles near our building with a larger modern container, and they will empty it biweekly. The container will have a plaque indicating IPTNA support for their program. Our contribution can be as small as \$1000 annually. I suggest that we raise this by recommending voluntary contributions of \$25 per participant. Wouldn't it be nice to have a larger, better maintained trash receptacle, so that the ice cream wrappers, candy and coffee cups do not end up on our streets?