Murray Hill Unites Against Proposed 34th Street Transitway: Are Residents Being Sold Out for Federal Funds?

by Marisa Bulzone

Despite numerous meetings and promises that residential concerns will be considered, the Department of Transportation’s plans for the 34th Street Transitway seem to be proceeding apace. No impact studies have even begun, but the project has, as of early July, been awarded an $18-million federal grant.

As it stands, the Transitway would create a two-lane, bi-directional bus lane aligned against one curb of 34th Street. The remainder of the street would be used for one-way traffic, running outbound from midtown: westbound from Sixth Avenue and eastbound from Fifth Avenue (map below).

Plans for the closing of 34th Street to all but bus traffic between Fifth and Sixth Avenues to allow for the creation of a pedestrian mall are, at this writing, still under discussion.

The impact of the Transitway on our neighborhood is clear: access to residential buildings and businesses on one side of 34th Street will be severely restricted and the overflow of traffic onto the side streets north and south of 34th Street will make Murray Hill’s abysmal traffic situation even worse. This plan will result in 35th, 36th, 37th and 38th Streets being the only tunnel-to-tunnel through streets.

What is MHNA Doing? What Can You Do?

There are many less-impactful ways for the DOT to improve bus service on 34th Street, ways that do not radically and recklessly change traffic patterns on already stressed local streets.

Petition Drive: MHNA is working with neighborhood co-op and condo boards and management companies to place petitions against the proposal in lobbies and to inform residents of public forums. **If you would like a petition for your building, please e-mail MHNA at info@murrayhillnyc.org.**

Local and Elected Representatives: We are working closely with Community Boards 4, 5 and 6 to ensure that community concerns are addressed. CB6 has already adopted a resolution supporting our insistence on a detailed Environmental Impact Study and we expect CB 4 (which represents the West Side) to follow suit before the end of July. CB 5 has thus far taken a neutral position. **Watch our website (www.murrayhillnyc.org) for updates on Community Board meetings, schedules and agendas. Strength in numbers at these meetings matters.**

Neighborhood Action: We have a newly established sub-committee of 34th Street residents (both east and west). With them, we are meeting individually with elected officials to voice community concerns. **Call, e-mail, or send a letter to inform our representatives that you oppose this plan. See our list with their contact information on page 6.**

Community Outreach Committee: MHNA has three representatives on the Community Outreach Committee established by Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer’s office. At each meeting, we continue to press our community’s concerns.

MHNA will hold a Transportation Town Hall Meeting on Thursday, September 23, at 7 PM, inviting all elected officials and DOT representatives. This

...to continue to make Murray Hill a highly desirable place to live, work and visit.
From the President’s Desk

Diane Bartow

As our new calendar begins in September, the Murray Hill Neighborhood Association is busier than ever. We are fighting to save this neighborhood from the Department of Transportation’s proposed 34th Street Transitway. (See article on page 1).

We started the campaign with a petition drive and have set up a new standing committee, Concerned Citizens of 34th Street; we have met with co-op boards; and on September 23 at 7:00 PM, we will hold a transportation/traffic meeting.

We have invited DOT, MTA, CB5 and CB6, and elected officials from city, state and federal levels to this meeting. This is your opportunity to ask the questions that need to be answered. The neighborhood risks losing the quality of life we expect and deserve. It’s time to speak up.

Meanwhile, enduring contributions have received official recognition. In honor of our 50th anniversary, Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg proclaimed Sunday, June 6, 2010, as “Murray Hill Neighborhood Association Day.” His proclamation was read on June 6, when we honored volunteers who have given so much to this neighborhood (see pages 20–21). Also, “Taste of Murray Hill” in May and the Open House Tour in June were very successful.

While DOT and MTA meetings have dominated our time, we continue to be active in all areas, from greening to cleaning (the trash receptacle program) to keeping Murray Hill safe. In June, the association received an award from Precinct 17 Community Council for our continuing efforts in neighborhood safety.

Again, quality-of-life issues, specifically transportation and traffic, have consumed us, and they will be the major topic of the season to come. This Association began 50 years ago when neighbors joined to fight the widening of 36th Street for the Midtown Tunnel. Here we are again 50 years later with the biggest battle yet.

We also are still fighting for the restoration of the M1 bus line to Park Avenue. I received a letter from Thomas F. Prendergast, president of the MTA. He states: “The MTA board approved the restructuring of north-south bus service in Manhattan to achieve an annual savings of $3.4 million. This included moving the M1 from Park Avenue to Fifth/Madison Avenues. As a result, there will be more frequent service along the Fifth/Madison Avenue corridors with the M1, M2 and M3 following a single north-south alignment. Based on ridership data, approximately 1,500 week-day customers will need to walk up to two blocks from Park Avenue South to Fifth/Madison Avenues. We certainly understand and appreciate your desire to see that the community receives an adequate level of service and are doing everything possible to ensure that. Given the financial restraints, our customers will have to adjust their travel patterns.” We will continue to monitor this situation.

I look forward to seeing you on September 23. This is your opportunity to be heard. Also, get your neighbors to join the Association: the more members, the louder our voices. We need those voices now.
News from MECA

Manhattan East Community Association  Fred Arcaro, President

The City School Construction Authority is proceeding with its plan to build the future PS/IS 281 on the southwest quarter of 616 First Avenue, site of the former Con Edison power plant. The Board of Education has presented its educational programming for the school to Community Board 6 and will continue to consult with local parents’ groups to address their programming concerns. Contract drawing for construction bids is ready and construction is scheduled to start in early 2011 for completion by early 2014.

Sheldon Solow, the developer of the Con Ed site, seems to be ready to take over control of the project. His son, Stefan Solow, had control while Sheldon was recuperating from an undisclosed illness. Sheldon has fired the Pyne Company, which his son had hired to manage the First Avenue Development Project. Maintenance of the property has included painting steel supports of the First Avenue sidewalk to prevent rusting and cutting back plant growth in the empty lot. Due to market financial conditions, any construction will probably not begin for at least three years.

Plans Proceed for New Bus Routes on First and Second Avenues

The new “Select Bus Service” (SBS), a joint project of Metropolitan Transit Authority and Department of Transportation, is proceeding as scheduled. First and Second Avenues will be resurfaced to indicate dedicated bus lanes. In September and October, MTA will be installing sidewalk vending machines at all newly-installed SBS stops. These prepay machines will take Metro Cards and coins. By late fall, the SBS program will be operational. However, construction of some bike lanes and “bus bulbs” (for bus stops and deliveries) in some locations will be postponed until next year because of limited DOT resources. Plans call for the SBS project to be totally completed by early 2012.

34th Street Bus Plan Raises Serious Community Board Concerns

On May 3, 2010, MTA and DOT made a presentation to the Public Safety, Environment and Transportation (PSE&T) Committee of Community Board Six on its new Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) service along 34th Street. (Go to DOT web site for details of the plan.) There were such serious concerns expressed at the meeting that CB6 unanimously approved the PSE&T Committee’s resolution requesting certain traffic and other analysis be conducted. The proposed Environmental Impact Statement is required to get Federal funding for the project, which is scheduled to be completed early next year. Stay tuned for further news in future newsletters.

Both in September: MECA Street Fair and Joint General Meeting

Come to MECA’s annual street fair on Labor Day Monday, September 6, for good eating and fun and local merchants’ fare. Please support the event as this is the only source of revenue for our organization.

Please plan to attend the joint MECA and Murray Hill Neighborhood Association annual membership meeting on September 23. Guest speakers will talk about the proposed 34th Street Transitway Project. MHNA will be sending out notices as to the location and time of the meeting.

If you have not renewed your MECA membership yet, please do so. Please send your dues to MECA (payable to MECA) to 415 East 37th Street, NYC 10016, or MHNA dues (payable to MHNA) to PO Box 1897, NYC 10156-1897. If your renewal form does not indicate that you are a MECA member, please write MECA on the form. Thank you for your continuing support of MECA and MHNA.

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Murray Hill Neighborhood Association
Statement of Revenues and Expenditures with Cash Position
Fiscal Year Ended February 28, 2010 (Unaudited)

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www.murrayhillnyc.org Murray Hill Neighborhood Association
Tell a Friend about the Murray Hill Neighborhood Association

Please enter a new or renewal membership at the level I have indicated below. My check is enclosed, payable to Murray Hill Neighborhood Association.

☐ $35 Individual  ☐ $50 Couple  ☐ $60 Business/Professional
☐ $20 Senior Citizen (age 65+)  ☐ $40 Senior Couple (age 65+)

If you prefer not to be acknowledged, please check here ☐

Member’s Name_______________________________________
Second Name (couples) _________________________________
Address _________________________________Apt  ________
City ________________________State _____ Zip ___________
Phone (Home)_____________ (Work)__________________

If your membership has lapsed and you can’t locate your renewal form, please use the form provided here. We’ll know it’s for a renewal. Otherwise, use the form to introduce a friend to MHNA!

Welcome, New Members

Boblyn Austin
Richard & Ellen Berliner
Ed Dansker & Terri Schaeffer
Ralph & Anne Desiderio
Rita Di Martino
Patricia Frost
John G. Guinan PhD & Barbara S. Guinan EdD
Marc Hendler
Alan Herzog & Marshall Butt
Jackie C. Hill
Thomas Horan & Catherine Spengel
Stephen Koo
Carol Krabbe
Deborah Landey
Jerry Luise
Janice Miller
Eileen C. O’Brien
Della Olsher

David Parries
Robert Renehan
Brooke Richie
Paula J. Riley
Maxine & Terry Schnadelbach
Lillian Seidman & L. Davis
Deborah Shapiro
William Shore
Jerry Sibal & Edwin Josué
Susan Siminow
Dr. Michael L. Sinkin
Phyllis Solomon
David Steiner
Minal Thomas & Charles Banks
Jed Wexler
Carol Winer
Laurie Wohl & Stephen Schulhofer
Donald Woodall

MHNA to Host Transit Town Hall
September 23, 2010, 7:00 PM
Armenian Evangelical Church
152 East 34th Street
between Lexington & Third Avenues

All Elected Officials Invited to Attend
Come and Let Your Voice Be Heard!

Please patronize these new merchant members
East Pacific Pan Asian Bistro  Neighborhood Eats LLC
Evergreen on 38  New York Sports Club
Lexington Plastic Surgeons  2nd Avenue Deli
Michael Christopher Hair Studio

Please remove the following from your discount book.
Chada, 637 2nd Ave.: closed.
Murray Hill Pet Hospital, 47 E 30 St.: no longer participates.

New Discount Booklets
Updated ID booklets are printed in September. This means that members who renew around that time will receive the latest listings in their booklet. As you renew, your booklet will be replaced with the latest version.

However, merchants can join the program any time of the year. They can also update the terms or conditions of the discounts they offer. For that reason, we rely on our newsletter to keep you apprised of the latest additions and changes.

If a lot of changes occur at once, we also provide updates in our regular mailings. Please be sure to read through the items in your mailings so that you can keep your booklet updated.
Letter to the Editor

To Murray Hill Life:

I thought this year's Murray Hill Festival was amazing. I was delighted with all the craftspeople—including jewelry designers such as Susan Helene, who actually lives in the neighborhood and works out at the same health club that I do—as well as the chance to sample fare from local restaurants, such as Silverleaf Tavern and Sarge's.

It was the first time in many years that I felt that I was at a real community event. In addition, there were many booths sponsored by people who are not part of the neighborhood, but who offer goods that are appealing to our community. (I am thinking here of the couple selling New Yorker covers as well as the people selling spices and South African crafts.)

Kudos to all those who organized and worked on the fair. I hope it made lots of money!

A 35th Street Neighbor

(Editor's note: Name withheld upon request.)
Boondoggle on Thirty-Fourth Street

A Commentary by Roy Strickland

Most people associate Manhattan’s 34th Street with Macy’s and the Empire State Building. If the New York City Department of Transportation (DOT) has its way, people will also think of the “Transitway,” a two-lane bus right-of-way connecting the East and Hudson Rivers.

Devised to reduce cross-town commuting times, the Transitway is scheduled to open in 2012. Plans also include widened sidewalks in front of the Empire State Building filled with tourist-friendly tables and chairs.

Not bad in theory—until one looks at the plan’s broader impacts.

That’s because 34th Street isn’t just a “corridor” (a DOT term) for commuters and tourists, it’s a place where thousands of New Yorkers live. And their neighborhoods, Murray Hill and Kips Bay, will bear the brunt of the street’s re-engineering.

The DOT plan will: a) shrink 34th Street in front of the Empire State Building to two bus lanes and exclude all other traffic; b) make all traffic go west from Herald Square to the Hudson, c) make it go east from Fifth Avenue to the East River; and d) cordon off the Transitway with concrete barriers from river to river, creating “an above ground subway,” as DOT calls it.

The last time Manhattan had “above ground subways” they were called “els” (elevated subways) and they depressed values of adjacent properties all over the borough. It wasn’t until they were demolished that avenues like Third, Sixth (now Avenue of the Americas) and Columbus enjoyed renaissances.

Now DOT is asking the people of Murray Hill and Kips Bay to endure the els’ modern-day incarnation while their main street—a lively mix of apartments, mom-and-pop shops, restaurants and services—is cut in two by concrete barriers. For people unfortunate enough to live or have businesses along the north side of 34th Street, conditions will be even worse. The Transitway’s barriers will block direct access between the street and their front doors. (Even the els had the courtesy to be overhead.)

And there are other consequences. Residential streets north and south of the Transitway will have to absorb Manhattan-bound Midtown Tunnel traffic diverted from 34th Street. That means trucks and cars rumbling by homes, schools, day-care centers and houses of worship. Meanwhile on 34th Street, people living adjacent to the Transitway and

See next page please

Elected Officials Representing Murray Hill

Call, e-mail or send a letter to our elected officials. Tell them that you’re tired of our neighborhood’s interests being ignored and that you are against the 34th Street Transitway.

Note that some e-mail contact must be made through a web site rather than direct e-mail. These are noted below.

Senator Charles E. Schumer
757 Third Avenue, Suite 17-02
New York, NY 10017
Phone (212) 486-4430
Visit this web site http://schumer.senate.gov for e-mail access.

Senator Kirsten Gillibrand
780 Third Avenue, Suite 2601
New York, NY 10017
Phone (212) 688-6262
Fax (212) 688-7444
Visit this web site http://gillibrand.senate.gov for e-mail access.

Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney
1651 3rd Avenue, Suite 311
New York, NY 10128-3679
Phone (212) 860-0606
Fax (212) 860-0704
Visit this web site http://maloney.house.gov for e-mail access.

State Senator Liz Krueger
211 East 43rd Street, Suite 401
New York, NY 10017
Phone (212) 490-9535
Fax (212) 490-2151
E-mail directly: liz@lizkrueger.com

Assemblymember Richard N. Gottfried
242 West 27th Street
New York, NY 10001
Phone (212) 807-7900
Fax (212) 243-2035
E-mail directly: GottfriedR@assembly.state.ny.us

City Council President Scott Stringer
1 Centre Street, 19th Floor
New York, NY 10007
Phone (212) 669-8300
E-mail directly: bp@manhattanbp.org

City Council Member Christine Quinn
224 West 30th Street, Suite 1206
New York, NY 10001
Phone (212) 564-7757
E-mail directly: quinn@council.nyc.ny.us

City Council Member Dan Garodnick
211 East 43rd Street, Suite 2004
New York, NY 10017
Phone (212) 818-0580
Fax (212) 818-0706
E-mail directly: garodnick@council.nyc.gov

City Council Member Rosie Mendez
237 First Ave, Suite 504
New York, NY 10003
Phone (212) 677-1077
Fax (212) 677-1990
E-mail directly: rmendez@council.nyc.gov

Bill de Blasio
Public Advocate for the City of New York
1 Centre Street, 15th Floor
New York, NY 10007
Phone (212) 669-7250
Fax (212) 669-4701
Visit this web site http://www.pubadvocate.nyc.gov/contact-us for e-mail access.

Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg
City Hall
New York, NY 10007
Phone 311
Visit this web site http://www.nyc.gov/html/mail/html/mayor.html for e-mail access.
its bus lanes will suffer increased noise and pollution, great for their hearts and lungs.

With $18-million recently awarded the project by the federal government (approximately half of its cost), the Transitway is racing toward reality. Unless the Murray Hill and Kips Bay communities stop the “above-ground subway,” expect more noise and pollution on 34th Street, greater congestion on our side streets and reduction in our quality of life.

Support the MHNA’s efforts by calling, writing or e-mailing the elected and DOT officials listed on page 6. Sign the *Stop the Transitway* petition: for a copy, call 212-886-5867 or e-mail info@murrayhillnyc.org. Write letters to the Murray Hill Neighborhood Association at P.O. Box 1897, New York, NY 10156-1897. Encourage your neighbors to join you in making our communities’ concerns known.  

**Transitway—continued from page 1**

will be a public forum that is controlled by residents and business owners—not the DOT. If you would like to speak, fill out and return the form included in your July mailing. But most importantly, come to the meeting—and bring your neighbors.  

Join us! Sign a petition, contact elected officials, and attend public meetings. Let friends and neighbors know what’s going on. The fight to stop the Transitway is in our hands.  

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**An Autumn Trip to Roosevelt Country**

On Saturday, October 9, MHNA will offer a Day Trip to Hyde Park, N.Y., for a tour of the FDR Presidential Library and Museum and Val-Kill Cottage, where Eleanor Roosevelt resided.

The MHNA bus will leave from Murray Hill at 8 AM for the 90-mile trip to Hyde Park. The Murray Hill group will stop for a full-course lunch en route at the Culinary Institute of America. Once on the FDR campus, there will be a horticulture talk by the head forester. (It is estimated that President Roosevelt was responsible for planting half a million trees in the area. When asked his occupation, FDR often replied, “Tree Planter.”)

Siena College has a more pertinent job description. In July, the Siena Survey of U.S. Presidents judged FDR to be “Best President”—for the fifth straight time—in its poll of 238 presidential scholars.

The cost of this special trip is $85, lunch included. Please contact Marion Weingarten at 212-679-5335 to save your place.
The Morgan Library & Museum
Madison Avenue between 36th and 37th Streets

Albrecht Dürer: “What Beauty Is”, through September 12
The Morgan holds the finest group of drawings in America by the German Renaissance artist, Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528). More than a dozen works by this master draftsman will be on view. Dürer was interested in the harmony between graphic work and beauty: “What beauty is, I know not, though it adheres to many things.”

Mark Twain: A Skeptic’s Progress, September 17, 2010 through January 2, 2011
The Morgan and the New York Public Library hold two of the world’s great collections of manuscripts, rare books and letters related to Samuel Langhorne Clemens, aka Mark Twain (1835–1910). The joint exhibit at the Morgan coincides with the 175th anniversary of Twain’s birth and the centennial of his death; it focuses on Twain’s recurrent skepticism toward a rapidly modernizing America in the late 19th century, particularly the Industrial Revolution. A complementary program of lectures, gallery talks, films, concerts and family fare will run from late September to mid-November.

Anne Morgan’s War: Rebuilding Devastated France, 1917–1924, September 3 through November 21
Vintage photographs and rare silent film footage bring to life the extraordinary work of 350 American women in humanitarian efforts in France after World War I. Anne Morgan, daughter of financier Pierpont Morgan, collected private funds and founded the American Committee for Devastated France. Unable to vote or serve in the military, these women directed the reconstruction of buildings and agricultural production, created a network of nurses, libraries and social centers. They cleverly managed to use the media of film and still photography to publicize their efforts and instigate social action.

At the height of the Pop art movement, 1961–1968, Roy Lichtenstein (1923–1997) created about 50 large black-and-white drawings, conceived independently from his paintings. They illustrate a new consumer cultural image (e.g., baked potatoes and ads for foot medication), as well as a new technique inspired by cheaply printed commercial drawings. The more than 45 examples come from museums and private collections throughout the U.S. and Europe.

Degas at the Morgan: Drawings and Sketchbooks, September 24, 2010 through January 23, 2011
More than 20 drawings by Edgar Degas (1834–1917) from the Morgan’s collections illustrate the artist’s most important subjects from early drawings of scenes of contemporary life and portraits of himself, family and friends to his later studies of dancers.

For information about public programs—lectures, concerts, gallery talks and special events—call 212-685-0008

or visit the Morgan’s web site at www.themorgan.org. Enjoy Friday evenings FREE until 9 PM.

SPECIAL NOTE: The Charles McKim landmark building of 1906, J.P. Morgan’s original private library and office, is undergoing restoration and is closed through October 30.

The New York Public Library
Fifth Avenue at 42nd Street

The NYPL is a great resource, not only for research, but also for art and other exhibits, which display the library’s own extensive collections. There are also a wide variety of lectures, many of which are FREE. And if you haven’t taken the free tour of the library’s history and architecture, it’s time to do so. For information about exhibits, lectures, tours, call 212-869-8089 or visit the web at www.nypl.org

NOTE: Also check the Science, Industry and Business Library (Fifth Avenue at 34th Street) and Mid-Manhattan Library (Fifth Avenue at 40th Street) for their schedule of free lectures and computer classes.

CUNY Graduate Center
Fifth Avenue between 34th and 35th Streets

CUNY will continue to expand its offerings of Public Programs for the Public Mind, a diverse schedule of concerts, lectures, readings, discussions, exhibitions and a new screening and discussion series with leading filmmakers. Following are some examples, now with small fees to cover costs. Order tickets at 212-868-4444 or at www.smarttix.com.

Music in Midtown, lunchtime concerts, Thursdays at 1 PM, Elebash Hall. $8; members $6
September 23 and October 7: Chamber Music on Fifth
October 21: Dorian Wind Quintet
November 4: Elebash Piano Trio
November 18: Manhattan String Quartet
December 2: Paula Robison and friends present Arnold Schonberg’s "Pierrot Lunaire" Op. 21

Gotham Center History Forums, Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 6:30 PM $8, members $6
Tues. Sept. 28: Manhattan Projects: The Rise and Fall of Urban Renewal in Cold War New York
Wed. Nov. 3: New York City and the Spanish-Speaking World: Historical/Cultural Connections
Tues. Dec. 7: Ed Koch and the Remaking of New York

The complete schedule of CUNY Graduate Center events will resume in September. For the complete list of public activities, check the web site at www.gc.cuny.edu/events or call 212-817-8215.
NOTE: A new membership program will offer a 25% discount on ticket purchases with other benefits. Various levels of membership, starting at $25, will be available. For information, contact a new web site to be available in September: www.gc.cuny.edu/events/membership.htm or call 212-817-8215.

Scandinavia House
Park Avenue between 37th and 38th Streets
This wonderful local cultural resource offers film series, concerts; exhibits; family/children's activities; holiday events; the fabulous gift shop and Smörgås Chef restaurant, open for brunch, lunch, dinner, snacks, coffee/tea and combination deals with certain films and other events (212-847-9747).

**Film Series: New Nordic Cinema,** Wednesdays, 6:30 PM, Saturdays, 3 PM, $10, $7 (ASF members)

**Special Film Events: Nordic Oscar Contenders,** January 2011, $10; $7 (members)

**Concerts:** For reservations call 212-847-9740 or e-mail event_reservations@amscan.org

- **Skáidi, Jazz bassist and traditional joiker.** Thursday, September 23, 7 PM, $18, $14 (members)
- **Northern Realms Music Showcase, Folk Music.** January 2011, time TBA, FREE with reservations
- **Keyboard Conversations with Pianist Jeffrey Siegel: Concerts with Commentary,** Thursdays, 8 PM; Nov. 18, 2010; Jan. 27 & April 21, 2011. $15, $10 (members); Series pass: $35, $20 (members)

**Lectures and Book Talks:** Thursday, Sept. 30, 6:30 PM; Thurs. Nov. 16, 6:30 PM, FREE

- **Contemporary Scandinavian Reading Series: Scandinavian American Theater Co.,** Mondays, 7 PM, December 6, 2010, January 31, May 23, 2011, FREE.
- **Family and Children's Programs: Blocks, Presented by Theater Tre (3), mime and visual focus,** Sat. Oct. 23, 11 AM, 1 PM. $10, $7 (members). For age 3+.
- **Swedish Christmas Children's Workshop,** Sat. Dec. 4, 1 PM, $7, $5 (members), for ages 5–10.

**Saturday Morning Storytelling with the Hans Christian Anderson Storytellers,** Saturdays, 11 AM, Oct. 9, Nov. 13, Dec. 11, Jan. 8, 2011, FREE, for ages 5+. For information about specific activities and events: Visit Scandinavia House's website at www.scandinavi.house.org. To receive ongoing information, submit your email address by clicking on the right “Join the Scandinavia House e-list and receive weekly program updates.” Or call 212-879-9779. Or stop by in person. Or become a member and get discounts.

Bryant Park
Summer activities continue into September and October: Sunbathing, Ping-Pong, chess, backgammon, petanque, beautiful plantings, food kiosks and the Carousel.

**Jazz Piano at Lunchtime: 12:30–2:30 PM, Monday to Friday, through October 15.** Enjoy a leisurely al fresco lunch to the music of top jazz pianists.

**Word for Word at the "Reading Room" in the park:** through Saturday, September 25, the series includes:
- Tues. Sept. 7, 12:30–2:00 PM, Poetry
- Sat. Sept. 11, 12:30–2:30 PM, Writers Kids
- Tues. Sept. 14, 12:30–2:00 PM, Latin American Poetry
- Sun. Sept. 19, 12:30–2:30 PM, Teens
- Sat. Sept. 25, 12:30–2:30 PM, Teens

**Meet the Birds:** Tuesdays through Sept. 28, 11:30–2:00 PM. Meet at the Carousel to see exotic tropical and local birds in Bryant Park.

**Yoga:** Thursdays, Sept. 2, 9, 16, 23, 30, 6–7 PM, on the lawn; Tuesdays, Sept. 7, 14, 21, 28, 10–11 AM, Upper Terrace.

**Tai Chi:** Thursdays, Sept. 2, 9, 16, 23, 30; Tuesdays, Sept. 7, 14, 21, 28, 7:30–8:30 AM, Fountain Terrace.

**Winter Wonderland:** The Pond's sixth season will open in late October–early November. The free ice skating rink will stay open longer this year.

Visit the web at www.bryantpark.org and sign up on “My Bryant Park” to receive ongoing information; or call 212-768-4242.

Met Life Lobby
200 Park Avenue at 44th Street

**Winter Holiday Treat: Bernard Kaplan Memorial Music Program,** Weekdays, December 8 through 21, two concerts each day, 12–1 PM and 5–6 PM. FREE, with chairs set up. Students in orchestras, bands and choruses from 20 high schools in the five boroughs and surrounding suburbs will perform each weekday in this space, up the escalator from Grand Central Terminal.

**Metropolitan Chapter of the Victorian Society in America**

**Free Lecture Series at the New York New Church, 114 East 35th Street, Tuesdays, 6 PM No reservations required. September 21: Gotham Lost and Found: Uncovering Manhattan’s Forgotten Cultural Landmarks** David Freeland, author of Automats, Taxi Dances, and Vaudeville: Excavating Manhattan's Lost Places of Leisure (NYU Press, 2009), will lead a visual tour through New York City, searching for architectural windows into its 19th- and early 20th-century past. He will explore remnants of forgotten cultural landmarks—Bowery beer gardens, a motion picture studio

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An Enchanting Afternoon with Fred and Rita

by Marion Weingarten

On a sunlit Saturday afternoon in May, members of the MHNA were treated to three outstanding ballets performed by the New York City Ballet at Lincoln Center. Vincent Paradiso, an engaging member of the corps de ballet, greeted us, answered questions and escorted us backstage to learn about the operation of a performance.

Vincent, a native of Westchester County, has been with the company for six years and was appearing that afternoon in “Serenade,” the first original ballet choreographed by George Balanchine in America to the music of Tchaikovsky. It is purely romantic and one of the signature works of the New York City Ballet’s repertoire. Also appearing in the ballet was Darci Kistler, a principal, and the last dancer to be developed under Mr. B’s wing. It was a special treat to see her because she will be retiring at the end of the season after nearly 30 years with the Company.

The next offering was “2 & 3 Part Inventions,” choreographed by Jerome Robbins to the music of Bach. This high-spirited ballet was originally created for the students of the School of the American Ballet.

Needless to say, we were all looking forward to “I’m Old Fashioned,” the tribute to Fred Astaire, also choreographed by Jerome Robbins to the music of Morton Gould based on a theme from Jerome Kern’s song of the same name. The sequences that were danced by Astaire and Rita Hayworth were taken from the 1942 movie, “You Were Never Lovelier.” As the dancers were emulating Fred and Rita on the stage, we were watching Fred and Rita dance on a giant screen above the stage. It was enchanting!
Open House Murray Hill

For five hours on Sunday afternoon, June 13, small walking groups took to the sunny streets for Open House Murray Hill, a self-guided tour presented by the Murray Hill Neighborhood Association’s Preservation & Design Committee. Nearly 150 people attended, following a map and program guide of the Murray Hill Historic District.

Six months in the P&D incubator, the House Tour presented nine locations, including designer apartments and townhouses, artists’ studios, galleries and a landmark church. Those who worked on the Open House committee, led by Virginia Parkhouse, were John Chadwick, Joe Di Domenico, Irma Fisher, Ruth Gelfand and Claire Steffen. Each homeowner and location was contacted about the history of their property and collaborated in writing a paragraph for the program.

After the event’s organizing committee confirmed the participants, the search for ticket takers and docents began. Many MHNA trustees, P&D Committee members, staffers of other neighborhood preservation groups, and friends of friends graciously agreed to work. In return for two hours working on site, volunteers received a free ticket to visit the other locations. Sixty volunteers stepped up to help.

“I think it was the best thing we’ve ever done,” said Debra Taylor, a trustee and a volunteer docent at Busser Howell’s home/studio on East 35th Street.

Registration began at noon at the tour’s northeast base, the Gabarron Foundation Carriage House Center for the Arts on East 38th Street. For many, the Church of the Incarnation at 35th Street and Madison Avenue, on the tour’s southeast perimeter, was the last stop.

Tour-goers visited three single-owner townhouses, belonging to Patricia Nix, Ed and Thayer Hochberg, and Busser Howell and Michael Chapman, including two artist’s studios (Nix and Howell). In addition, visitors enjoyed two interior designer-owned Park Avenue apartments (John Chadwick and Laurie and John Genovese). Many people appreciated the variety of the décor, as well as each homeowner’s cheerful grace in answering questions.

In addition, the Gabarron Foundation, the Amateur Comedy Club, the Morgan Library & Museum and the Church of the Incarnation appeared on the tour. Most of the organizations also had employees available for inside tours, and Comedy Club officers Ned Crabb and Scott Glascock personally directed their guests.

This was the first Murray Hill Tour in more than 30 years. For many years, Greenwich Village, LandmarkWest!, Hamilton Heights, Mount Morris Park, Park Slope, Brooklyn Heights, Clinton Hill, Bedford Stuyvesant, Crown Heights and other historic districts have opened their doors for tours. All the net receipts for this tour will be used to start the process of obtaining landmark designation for unprotected locations in Murray Hill.

The Preservation & Design committee is grateful to all who generously donated their time to make this event successful, as well as to Oak Hill Graphics which printed the tickets, program and publicity mailers.

Sign the Petition to Stop the Transitway!
E-mail us at info@murrayhillnyc.org or call 212-886-5867 to obtain a copy.

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New Wrinkles and Old-Time Spirit at Street Fair

At the 38th annual Murray Hill Festival on Sunday, May 23, the sun peeked through overcast skies to shine on a return to the spirit of Block Parties Past.

Green and white balloons anchored to a mall fence wafted cheerfully in the breeze. A balloon man in green tights, his head wreathed in balloon art, entertained the children. A man with a guitar in his hands, a harmonica around his neck and a tambourine on his thigh rasped out R & B while his wingman kept a hand on the acoustics dial.

Meanwhile, the Chase Bank blue dog mascot delivered high fives (but not tens!), while an irresistible young woman in a banana costume invited passersby to “Kiss me for a free smoothie” at the Jamba Juice booth. And let us not forget the Elvis impersonator, cloaked in white and clad in dark glasses, strolling down Park Avenue from 40th to 34th Street.

The MHNA tables did a brisk business in feeding stomachs (baked goods), minds (books), community activism (the petition against the 34th Street Transitway) and dreams of avarice (raffle).

Two new ideas contributed to the event’s small-town feel: the decision to confine the 91 vendors to the west side of Park, and the “Taste of Murray Hill,” in which 12 neighborhood restaurants offered a small sampling for a dollar or two. The tastees were: Alta Cucina; Black Shack; Blockheads; Curry and Curry; EataPita; HealthSmart; Garden Café at the Kitano; Libretto’s; Sarge’s Deli; Silverleaf Tavern; Smörgås Chef, and Vic’s Bagel Bar.

Of course, there were the ubiquitous sellers of CDs and T-shirts, purses and pashminas, linens and lipstick. As always, there were more jewelry booths—from $2 trinkets to très cher—that you could count. And there were dining choices from A (Aqua Fresca) to Z (Zimex Mexican Food).

But this year there were fascinating additions to the usual fare, from African Sweetgrass Baskets in multicolor pastels (“sold only in museums”) to Elizabeth DeFeo’s Paperie Flora, a one-woman show of exquisite homemade cards and stationery.

And, above all, there was the spirit of neighborhood giving. Paula Gilliam’s Bake Table exemplified this energy: in the talents of Margie Lebenson, Carol Rapoport and Susan Shultz, whom Paula called “my Three Bake Elves,” who did 95 percent of the baking; in the corporate generosity of Starbucks on 36th and Madison, which gave coffee and accoutrements, and in the cash-to-cookies donations for the Baker’s Secret from Lola and Isaiah Gellman, Paula Shaeffer, M. Sladek, Steve and Romi Weingrad, Edith and Lawrence Malkin, William Marquardt, Shirley Mac Leod, Alice Timothy, Diane and Gene Bartow, and Jim O’Neill.

The MHNA tables did a brisk business in feeding stomachs (baked goods), minds (books), community activism (the petition against the 34th Street Transitway) and dreams of avarice (raffle).
The Cherry Blossom Festival Tea at the Kitano, hosted by the Patrons of Park Avenue on Sunday afternoon April 25, celebrated not only the cherry blossoms on Park Avenue but also POPA’s stewardship of trees and flowers in the Murray Hill malls.

The event, also billed as POPA 25th Anniversary Party, drew a hearty crowd for tea and canapés in the second-floor lounge of the hotel at 38th and Park. In a warm welcome to all tea partiers, MHNA President Diane Bartow extolled the contributions of POPA, its current chairman, John Chadwick, and its founder, Irma Worrell Fisher.

The only glitch in the high-spirited affair was the earlier flight of many of the blossoms.

No matter: a repeating slide show highlighted the malls not only in full cherry-blossom array, but year-round as well and there were plenty of sprightly red tulips and fresh green flora on view outside.

Meanwhile, inside, not a single soul left without sharing the tinkling of the piano and the joy of good conversation, food and drink with their neighbors.

Left to right: Luciana and Horst Brakel, Ulli Howe and Alec McCabe.

Photo: Alice Timothy

Right: Troy Ray and Evelyn Kittay

Photo: Alice Timothy

POPA Chairman John B. Chadwick, Jr., and Founding Chair Irma Worrell Fisher

Photo: Alice Timothy

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Local Library Brings Home City’s Budget Debate

On June 24, Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg and the City Council announced a $63 million budget, ahead of schedule and with little of the rancor that bedeviled the long overdue New York State budget. The budget, approved on July 1, was not achieved without pain: trims came in senior centers and day care programs, money for education and adult literacy programs, plus 2,000 city jobs (half through attrition). Also, teachers’ raises were put on hold (but 4,400 teachers kept their jobs).

The new budget preserved caseworker rolls in children’s services, saved 25 fire companies (and 400 firefighters’ jobs), made no cuts to the NYPD, kept all swimming pools open, and took 10 branches of the New York Public Library off the chopping block.

With the salvation of the Kips Bay Library at 446 Third Avenue (31st Street), our neighborhood felt the exhilaration of successful protest and the grace of the city’s revised budgetary plan.

On May 10, the NYPL began its “Don’t Close the Book on Libraries” Internet and print campaign to fight the mayor’s proposed $37 million cut. In the first four days, NYPL received 7,600 letters and $55,000 in donations. By June 21, 130,000 letters and untold donations had made an impression.

City Council Speaker Christine Quinn replied to all concerned citizens with an e-mail acknowledgment. More important were preservation of a five-day schedule and a reduced slate of programs at 91 NYPL branches. At Kips Bay, this meant continuing such classes as reading and arts and crafts for toddlers, jewelry-making and films for teens, language and interviewing skills for adults, introduction to computer basics and tips for doctors’ visits for seniors.

“You read about 50 senior centers closing,” said Gloria Weiner, who frequents the Kips Bay Library. “So you think: senior centers or libraries? It’s a tough question. But the diversity of the neighborhood is reflected in the library. It is so, so special.”
In Remembrance: This spring the Polish Consulate on 37th Street and Madison Avenue became the focal point for a country in mourning after President Lech Kaczynski, his wife Maria Kaczynska, and 94 other high-ranking officials and dignitaries of the Polish state were killed in a plane crash near Smolensk, Russia on April 10. President Kaczynski was part of an official delegation commemorating the 70th anniversary of the massacre of more than 20,000 Polish officers by Soviet secret police in Katyn forest. The floral tribute remained for several weeks and included a condolence note and flowers from MHNA left by Enid Klass.

Photo: Sami Steigmann

Ivy Leaguers Show Green Thumbs

On Saturday, May 15, members of the Ivy League met to work on the annual planting of ivy in the tree beds on Third Avenue between 34th and 39th Streets. Those attending were: John Chadwick, Sarah Goodhart, Alice Matsumoto, Shirley Mac Leod, Matthew McKeon, Barbara Paddock, Virginia Parkhouse, Marilyn Ringel, Matt Roberts and Octavia White.

Planting ivy and caring for Murray Hill trees can be fun, as John Chadwick and Sarah Goodhart prove.

Photo: Sami Steigmann

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Joyce Mendelsohn: Preservationist With Portfolio

Joyce Mendelsohn is a historian by genetics, training, profession, proclivity and passion.

The granddaughter of Russian Jewish immigrants who settled on the Lower East Side, Joyce moved seamlessly from the elementary school classroom to teach New York City history and architecture for twelve years at the New School. She was the first director of education at the Tenement Museum and has conducted countless walking tours and lectures about city neighborhoods. The Henry Street Settlement House, where she has volunteered, celebrated the 350th anniversary of Jewish culture in America in 2004 and presented Mendelsohn with its first Annual Lillian Wald Award in honor of its founder.

Also in 2004, Joyce and Virginia Parkhouse, as co-chairs of the Murray Hill Neighborhood Association’s Preservation and Design Committee, helped to extend historic district status to include the south sides of 36th and 37th Streets in the final steps of a 25-year MHNA campaign.


She was recently elected president of the Metropolitan Chapter of the Victorian Society, whose mandate is the preservation of nineteenth-century and early twentieth century heritage (1837–1917). She says in all sincerity: “So, that will keep me busy.”

Obviously, Joyce is not one to let grass grow under her feet: “No, I don’t like grass growing. When I go away, I like to be in cities. Beaches and mountains last about 30 minutes for me…”

It seems only fitting then that on May 24 Joyce Mendelsohn received the Mickey Murphy Award for Lifetime Achievement from the Historic Districts Council for her commitment to New York City preservation efforts. Her reaction?

“O.M.G.,” she said, using the kind of youthful argot that must have endeared her to elementary school students decades ago. “I was astounded and thrilled. I love H.D.C.

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Happy 50th Anniversary MHNA

because it’s so grass roots, and it’s all-volunteer … like the Murray Hill Neighborhood Association. H.D.C. is one of the three top preservation organizations in the city, with the Municipal Art Society and NYC Landmarks. They all are dedicated to helping local groups get landmark status.”

She continued, “The commendation reads: ‘An ardent and dedicated advocate for the preservation of many neighborhoods and buildings across New York City.’ It doesn’t get much better than that.”

Finally, she says, “As I’m getting older, I’m becoming more of an activist.”
Faces of Murray Hill

Jim O'Neill: Doctor, Art Collector and—Finally—Full-time Resident

By Ravelle Brickman

When Jim O’Neill decided to buy a pied-à-terre in Manhattan nearly 20 years ago, convenience was his top priority. As chief anesthesiologist at Southside Hospital in Bay Shore, he wanted a fast commute to Long Island. Murray Hill, with its proximity to the Midtown Tunnel and the LIRR, was a perfect choice.

Even when he moved his practice to another hospital, in Peekskill, he kept his studio apartment at Lexington Avenue and 36th Street.

Gradually, the Philadelphia-born doctor became aware that his accidental choice—dictated by the rigors of reverse commuting—was in fact a brilliant discovery. “I fell in love with the small museums—the Morgan Library, Scandinavia House—and the renovated Grand Central Terminal,” he said. “I felt that I had been dropped into another world. The juxtaposition of Yeshiva University and Opus Dei, the plethora of small restaurants—as good as any in the city—and the sense of vitality all made it a wonderful place to live.”

In 2007, Jim decided to move full-time to Murray Hill. Times were changing. Elective surgery was shifting away from hospitals, making it possible to have an office-based anesthesia practice. Pulling up stakes, he arranged to perform anesthesiology for Lexington Plastic Surgeons and bought a large apartment in the building where he had lived part-time for so many years.

“Finally,” he said, “after years of splitting my belongings between city and suburbs, I was able to house my art collection in one place.” The collection is an eclectic one, ranging from antiques—mostly bought at flea markets in New York—to contemporary paintings purchased on trips to Italy. There are autographed photos of Lindbergh, pottery from the 1920s, memorabilia from the Lusitania and the Titanic, and sculptures made of plaster or wood.

The most striking of these is a life-size chess piece, a sorrowful knight whose feet are planted in a tiny garden. Other figures include a wooden bishop from a church in New Orleans and a peasant rescued from a church in Venice.

Religious art plays an important role in the doctor’s life. Moving to Murray Hill full time has allowed him to discover the many churches in the neighborhood, including the landmark Church of the Incarnation, with its Tiffany windows and sculptures by Saint-Gaudens. “The entire neighborhood evokes a sense of spiritual comfort,” he said.

Jim credits the move to Murray Hill for his return to Catholicism and points to Father George Rutler, pastor of the Church of Our Saviour, as his source of inspiration. “His sermons helped me reassess my life and priorities,” he said. As part of that reassessment, he finds time to do volunteer work for the Missionaries of Charity and attends lectures at nearby colleges.

Last spring, he joined hundreds of neighbors at the Murray Hill Festival. “It was the best street fair I’ve ever attended,” he said, adding that the great thing about it was the presence of so many vendors who had a stake in the community. “There were local restaurant chefs, jewelry designers who live on my block, bankers, bakers and political candidates. It reminded me that Murray Hill is a real community, and that I’m lucky to have found it.”

Ravelle Brickman is a business writer who teaches public relations at NYU.
Community Briefs

Williams Club Leaves Murray Hill  The Williams Club, a fixture at 24 East 39th Street since 1924, vacated its two connected brownstones off Madison Avenue on June 1. The club moved in with the Princeton Club of New York on West 43rd Street between Fifth and Sixth Avenues.

The economic downturn “made the cost of maintaining such an independent facility, including hotel and restaurant operations, financially impractical,” wrote Jeff Urdang, President of the Williams College Board of Governors, on the club’s website. Mr. Urdang noted that the club was established in 1913 by Williams College alumni, including Herbert Lehman (Class of 1899), a future governor of New York.

“For many years Williams has been the only school of its size whose alumni maintained a separate club,” Mr. Urdang’s statement continued, “but the Williams Club was too small to survive independently. There is a sense both of sadness and the end of an era, but the move to the clubhouse of the Princeton Club will allow the Williams Club to focus on the core elements of our mission and to better serve our members.”

Cosette Closes  William J. McClure, our neighbor on 33rd Street, reported that Bernard Massuger, the owner of Cosette, the little French brasserie at 166 East 33rd Street, retired in May and closed the restaurant. In the last few years, both the owner and staff had seemed to show fatigue in food and service at this cozy (15 tables), unassuming place. Still, its closing is a great loss to those who like intimate French bistros with good, simple fare, whose staff treat you like family—which means they alternately lavish you with affection or ignore you like, well, family. In mid-July, Burt Rubin discovered that a bistro named Le Parisien had moved into the space. (See their ad, page 3.) The phone number remains 212-889-5489.

Free Concerts at Tudor City  Want to enjoy an outdoor concert in a small, secluded park above the United Nations? For free? You couldn’t go far wrong if you visited the Concerts at Tudor City Greens. The concerts in this leafy glade are organized and hosted by the singer and actress Raissa Katona Bennet, who lives in Tudor City. There are two concerts this fall, both on Tuesday at 6 PM: September 7 (rain date: September 8) and October 5 (rain date: October 6). – Ravelle Brickman

Inventor Gets Nod From Golf Organization  Burt Rubin reports that his invention—the “golfers15”—has received the United States Golf Association’s seal of approval or, as Burt puts it, “has been found to be in conformance with the standards set by the U.S.G.A.”

You might remember that this pocket-sized device includes seven tools needed in a round of play: 1) a fitted concave ball cleaner, 2) ball marker, 3) retractable fork for repairing greens, 4) club face cleaner and groove cleaner, 5) tee holder, 6) club stand, and 7) cigar holder.

Why, then, is it called the golfers15? “The name comes from the fact that golfers are only allowed to carry 14 clubs in their bag during a round and,” as Burt wryly adds, “7 was taken.”

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Charlotte Klein, who first showed her chops as a journalist at UCLA where she became editor of *The Daily Bruin* in 1943, found her most impressive voice in what would become a 50-year career as a gender-bending public relations executive in New York. Above all, she would not forget the hallmark of the best in both professions: never get in the way of the story and make sure the spotlight shines foremost on your subject.

Milestones in Ms. Klein’s career featured the curiosity, creativity and innate sense of fairness that she first learned at home and burnished in a dual sociology/psychology degree in college. Her career is a Who’s Who of leadership: She was one of the first women to become an executive VP in the male-dominated world of PR; she twice started her own agency, Charlotte Klein & Associates; she worked to build public support for the fledgling state of Israel; she helped to found the U.S. Women’s Hall of Fame in Seneca Falls, N.Y.; she marched down Fifth Avenue for women’s rights with Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem and Bella Abzug; and she lectured in Ethics and Public Relations as an adjunct professor at NYU.

Most recently, the Public Relations Society of America recognized her accomplishments with a retrospective. “Lessons on the Big Idea and Public Relations: Reflections on the 50-Year Career of Charlotte Klein,” by Diana Martinelli, PhD, Widmeyer Professor in Public Relations at West Virginia University, and Elizabeth Toth, PhD, Chair of Department of Communications, University of Maryland, was published in the Winter 2010 edition of *Public Relations Journal*. And whatever she did, Charlotte made sure that “the big idea” was the focus; she stayed resolutely in the background.

In like manner, the subject of this article is not Charlotte per se, but the irreplaceable (if unseen) role she played in publicizing the production and reception of the first anthropologically correct African-American doll produced and sold by the Ideal Toy Corporation in 1951. We surmise that it was Ms. Klein’s phrase “equality of quality” that guided the publicity and coverage about the doll, named “Saralee,” who was designed to give little children—black and white—respect for African-American heritage.

In this endeavor, Charlotte secured the tireless, courageous leadership of Eleanor Roosevelt and kept the names of two young white women in the forefront. Sara Lee Creech was the woman who originated the idea and took 1,000 photographs of little children at play in her hometown of Belle Glade, Florida, to guide the renowned sculptor, Sheila Burlingame, who cast the doll’s head. The second, Maxeda Von Hesse, was a writer and human relations consultant in New York.

Predictably, Charlotte tried to keep quiet her crucial role in authenticating little Saralee. The indomitable Ms. Klein took a prototype of the doll onto a subway bound for Harlem—and immediately received this candid indictment from an African American woman: “She’s too gray; she looks like a dead baby.”

Mrs. Roosevelt, with unerring sense of what (and who) is right, convened a “color jury,” including Dr. Ralph Bunche, Bernard Baruch, Jackie Robinson and his wife Rachel, the author Zora Neale Hurston, the educator and civil rights leader Mary McCloud Bethune, and Winthrop Rockefeller. (Martin Scorsese would have approved of godparents like these.)

Introduced in time for the 1951 Christmas holiday season, Saralee—“made with the best vinyl, authentic features, eyelids that moved and an irresistibly sweet expression”—appeared in the Sears Roebuck catalog and had brisk sales for several years. (Mrs. Roosevelt herself bought 500 dolls to present as gifts.) Ms. Klein made sure news of Saralee’s birth appeared in *Newsweek, Time, Life* and major newspapers.

As for Charlotte’s Saralee: she spent her days in the New York apartment on East 36th Street. Then, in October 2009, Charlotte and Betty Travis drove up to Hyde Park, N.Y., and donated Saralee to the FDR Library and Museum, where the doll will be exhibited once the museum’s renovations are completed. “We miss her,” Charlotte and Betty said somewhat wistfully. “She’s been with us for so many years.”
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On Sunday, June 6, Serge Restaurant was filled to bursting with past-and-present Murray Hill Neighborhood Association presidents and trustees, city politicians and community leaders, who gathered to celebrate the 50th Anniversary Volunteer Recognition Awards.

Serge himself added a touch of savoir-faire behind the bar at his bistro on Madison between 32nd and 33rd Streets. With a Gallic shrug, he even agreed to serve drinks softer than wine, while waitresses kept up a steady parade of delicious hors d’oeuvres.

The cocktail party was a star-studded Who’s Who of MHNA. Here was Minor Bishop, former trustee and architect emeritus, and there was immediate past president, Steve Weingrad, with his wife, Romi, a former trustee. Over there were current trustees Enid Klass, Maria Mireiter and Erlinda Nelson, with her husband Alex.

Here was New York State Assemblymember Brian Kavanagh, who arrived to share space with the former trustees Skip and Susan Schultz (who, regrettably, left their dog Freckles at home). There was Bob Cohen, a former MHNA treasurer, and, over there, Barbara Sagan, the current treasurer. Meanwhile, trustee Marion Weingarten, who organized the event, finally rested.

President Bartow began her remarks by painting an ambling word picture about neighbors who have given so much to shaping the community’s heritage and character: “There’s Virginia Parkhouse … doing her thing in the malls, and there’s Ed Curtin, my first doodle partner in meetings, and there’s Irma Fisher: ‘Ms. Park Avenue,’ and Shirley MacLeod—we were green before it became fashionable—who called Steve Weingrad 25 years ago about hoops to keep dogs from the trees. . . .”

The president then read a special proclamation from Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, procured with sweet but indomitable persistence by trustee Charlotte Klein. Bartow referred back to the first proclamation that MHNA received from a Mayor of the City of New York, in 1976. “It looked like the Declaration of Independence,” Diane said.

If so, the 2010 version (see previous page) is more like the Constitution. Mayor Bloomberg commends “this tight-knit community” for its commitment to “quality of life while preserving the cultural heritage of this section of Manhattan.” He ends the 300-word encomium by naming Sunday, June 6, 2010 as “MURRAY HILL NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION DAY.”

Last but not least, President Bartow handed out special bronze stars on long green ribbons to everyone, with a proclamation of her own: “I present you with your medal of honor for service to your neighborhood.”

That was worth a toast of its own, and Serge must have been happy to see that most of the glasses were filled with bubbly. 

Photos: Sami Steigmann
Empty Storefront Doubles as Art Gallery

By Ravelle Brickman

One of the most depressing signs of an economic downturn is the sight of empty storefronts, their windows bare except for the posters bearing the stark words “FOR RENT.”

While hardly unique to Murray Hill, the disappearance of once-familiar shops is particularly painful in this neighborhood where Mom and Pop owners have long been considered “family” to most residents. In an effort to brighten up at least one corner of the community, a real estate management company called Stonehenge has teamed up with various organizations to provide exhibit space for artists and performers.

Last spring, they chose Chashama, a nonprofit arts group, to mount a light and sound installation in the empty storefront of a former drugstore at Lexington Avenue and 33rd Street. The show, called Archaic Cycles, was created by Brooklyn artists Maxwell Langhurst and Ellery Samson and was on view 24 hours a day, seven days a week for four weeks.

“The art may not have been everybody’s cup of tea, but it was better to see creativity at work than to look into an empty storefront,” said William J. McClure, a longtime resident of the Stonehenge apartment building at 141 East 33rd Street.

The idea of providing amenities instead of eyesores was the brainchild of Michael Stern, who joined Stonehenge eight years ago as director of Lifestyle Programming. Previously an event planner, Michael began with lobby parties for tenants, and then forged important partnerships with community groups. In Murray Hill, where the company owns and operates three buildings, Stonehenge also provides financial and creative support for Patrons of Park Avenue.

“I want tenants to understand that lifestyle—whether it’s smelling the flowers in the mall or attending a concert at a local church or school—is more important than bricks and mortar,” Stern said. “I want people to say ‘my building’ or ‘my community’ when they talk about the neighborhood.”

The emphasis on community gets strong support from Stonehenge’s founders, Ofer Yardeni and Joel Seiden, who emphasize that a building is part of the Manhattan landscape. According to Lesley Schultz, lifestyle coordinator, the company is committed to making sure that its tenants are kept up to date on street closings, park festivals and exhibitions like the one at Lexington and 33rd.

“The installation of art in a vacant space serves not only the tenants of that building but the community at large,” she said, adding that “it allows the tenants to take pride in what their building is doing.”

Ravelle Brickman is a business writer who lives and works in Murray Hill.
Monument on Channel Island of Jersey

On May 9, Sami Steigmann, Murray Hill Life’s prolific photographer, was invited to lay a wreath on Jersey in the Channel Islands to honor Holocaust survivors. Last year while giving a walking tour in New York for Big Apple Greeters, Sami met Angela Trigg, a Jersey native. They found they had much to share: Jersey survived Nazi occupation during World War II; Sami and his parents survived internment in a labor camp in the Ukraine.

Sami Steigmann, in suit, back to camera, lays the wreath, accompanied by Angela Trigg.

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Steve Weingrad: Reflections of a Two-Term President

Stephen A. Weingrad has lived in the same house on 35th Street since 1962. He has worked in the same suite of offices in the Empire State Building since 1966, when he founded the law partnership of Weingrad & Weingrad with his father, Samuel. He and his wife Rosemary (Romi) have been married for 40 years. And Steve Weingrad is the longest-serving MHNA president on record. Obviously, this guy has legs.

Now a grandfather and winding down at Weingrad & Weingrad, Steve has found himself “dabbling in art.” His office is a veritable showplace for works from Guido Reni to Keith Haring, which he places on loan or consignment with interested clients. He also seems relaxed and comfortable in his “retirement years” as he makes the rounds of MHNA 50th anniversary events.

Just how long Steve Weingrad served as president is subject to debate. Is it 23 years, as Diane Bartow has said many times in applauding his service? Or is it 15 years over two terms that a review of historical files reveals? Whatever, he has written a long story of community leadership.

“He continues: “The problems of a community are repetitious. You have crime problems, sanitary problems, traffic, parking, pollution, prostitution. They’re the same problems, and you deal with them depending upon the intensity and the location.”

Also, Steve says, the tenor of the debate never changes. “There were always complaints: ‘the garbage cans are too big; the dogs are too close to the tulips; the iron hoops should be round instead of pointed; the sanitation people should come on Monday not Thursday….’”

Weingrad shrugs. “My training as a lawyer is to listen to what your client has to say whether you believe it or not, and then you formulate a plan. You don’t prejudge.”

He still has regrets about one plan that got away: the Mary Murray Ferry Boat Restaurant and the Augmentation of St. Vartan’s Park.

“Minor Bishop drew up an inspirational rendering,” Weingrad says of his architectural partner in the MHNA proposal to the city. “Over the Midtown Tunnel entrance and exit, there would be a concrete parking structure,” Steve explains. “People would leave their cars at the tunnel; then jitneys would take them into Manhattan. And the Mary Murray Ferry Boat Restaurant was to be berthed at 34th Street and the East River.”

Alas, the Mary Murray was prone to leaking and “the only thing of substance that came out of it was the restaurant now on 28th Street,” Weingrad says, referring to the Water Club overlooking the East River. “The city took my idea and Minor Bishop’s plan and just moved it down a few blocks.”

When asked if he has any final thoughts for Murray Hill, Steve Weingrad answers presidentially, if somewhat enigmatically: “I think the neighborhood should aspire to continuing the constant battle.”

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