

View from the Window

A Homesteading Update

UHAB
URBAN HOMESTEADING
ASSISTANCE BOARD

Volume IV, Issue II

Spring 2011

Victory at Borinquen Court

This March, tenants at Borinquen Court in the South Bronx have more to celebrate than just the end of winter. The residents of the 145-unit building for seniors and people with disabilities, subsidized by the Department of

The battle for ownership at Borinquen Court began over three years ago, when tenants' calls for repairs and services were repeatedly going unanswered by their manager, the for-profit Foxy Management.



Members of Borinquen's Tenants Association enjoy their new community space

Housing and Urban Development (HUD), succeeded on March 1st in making the Manhattan-based non-profit group West Side Federation for Senior and Supportive Housing its new owner. UHAB's Organizing & Policy department has been working in the building since late 2008 to help ensure that the new owner is capable of renovating the building, preserving affordability, and working with the tenants.

WSFSSH promises to make \$8 million of repairs to the building, a number which has residents (nearly) doing cartwheels considering how long they've been waiting for repairs.

Conditions fell to such a low point that HUD put the building into foreclosure to force a change of ownership. In the two years in which Foxy was in charge, even after HUD announced the foreclosure, building conditions continued to deteriorate. Herbert Pressley, has lived for over a decade in a unit with a leaky roof and windows. "I have to wake up, empty this bucket, empty that bucket, and the first is full again. I tell them, and they do nothing. They say they'll come right up, but nothing." Mr. Pressley also recalls trash cans lining the corners of the community room, catching rain water that came in

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

- A Message from Andrew Reicher** 2
- Coming Home to Clarendon Road** 2
- Victory at Borinquen Court (cont'd)** 3
- Jen Kaminsky: Writing for Shelterforce's 6 x 6 Competition** 4
- Brick by Brick: Join Our Campaign to Preserve Affordable Housing** 4

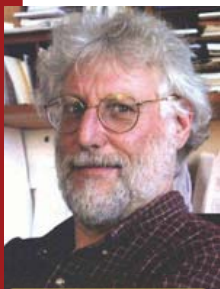
through holes in the ceilings and cracks in the foundation. Frustrated with the lack of response from Foxy Management, the residents started to organize and look for a new (non-profit) manager with the help of UHAB and Tenants & Neighbors.

Mario C. Leiba, a resident of Borinquen Court for 9 years, remembers why he joined the Tenants Association when the opportunity first arose. "I saw so many bad things around the building- I wanted to help. I wanted justice." Mario and ten other like-minded residents took action, and formed a bilingual Tenants Association which acted, alongside non-profit groups, to ensure that all voices were heard, and that residents' needs were being met appropriately. The resounding message heard by the TA at Borinquen Court? Get a

Continued on Page 3 →

A Letter from the Executive Director

Dear Friends,



Andrew Reicher
Executive Director

While we continue our campaign against predatory equity, as well as assisting TIL buildings and HDFC co-ops, we are also creating new co-ops through our development pipeline.

For the residents of 2310 Clarendon Road in Brooklyn, their many years of working together to create an HDFC co-op has paid off. This 27-unit building, once in foreclosure, is now owned by the

will provide the appropriate level of services. After much struggle, this 145 unit building, comprised mainly of seniors and people with disabilities, has a happy ending.

As always, UHAB's work continues thanks to your help and support.

Peace,



Andrew Reicher
Executive Director

Coming Home to 2310 Clarendon Road

This March, residents of the new HDFC co-op at 2310 Clarendon Road celebrated the start of a brand new era in their building: one based on cooperation and community. The 27-unit building in the Flatbush area of Brooklyn has seen an epic change since it was left in foreclosure by its previous owner: hallways are well lit and filled with greenery. Security cameras can be seen throughout common spaces. A refinished basement hosts a laundry room, office, and community room open to all. The residents came together to plant a garden in their front yard. And, most importantly, the majority of residents at Clarendon are now owners and not renters.

UHAB's Jaz Lancaster has worked in the building since 2006, and has seen a drastic rise in resident participation since that time. "I went around

and knocked on doors, scheduled meetings, and made it clear that UHAB was a consistent and positive presence in the building," she noted.

Once participation increased, Jaz conducted a series of 14 trainings back-to-back, culminating in the first board election in 2007. "Once they organized, they did a lot with their building," she noted. "Even during construction, when they faced a lot of warranty issues, they stayed on track and moved forward. That's where a lot of buildings get stuck. And now, they keep their building together really well: all residents participate in cleaning public spaces, they have plants in the hallways- everyone pitches in and it works."

The building's President of the Board, Merlyn Moore, has lived at the building in the Flatbush neighborhood of Brooklyn for over 20 years, and remembers the building when tenants had to chip in money to buy heating oil, and open



Tenants celebrate becoming shareholders

their apartment doors using only the dim glow of community flashlights. "We came from scratch," she noted during this March's share distribution party. "Today is a memorable day, coming this far. Being able to see what we were fighting for all these years. I'm so happy."

Treasurer Betty McBride had similar feelings of the building's progress: "Oh, I'm so delighted this day has come! I've been here for 2 years, so I came on the gravy train, so to speak. They've all been through so much, and I'm just so glad that we've reached this point together: we're shareholders!"



Victory at Borinquen Court

← *Continued from Page 1*

new managing agent that would help the residents, rather than harm them. “We didn’t want a manager to come into the building and just take our money,” noted Manuel Colon, Vice President of the Tenant Association. “We wanted to get a non-profit to run the building, because we can’t go back to how it was before. We expect a better life, a quality life. And that’s what we all deserve.”

Getting the residents’ voices heard regarding their management needs was a tough job: political and economic red tape abounded. The Tenant’s Association went through a grueling process of interviewing several groups to decide on who could best manage their building. After several interviews and tours of buildings managed by the interviewees, the tenants chose the

group, the Neighborhood Association for Intercultural Affairs (NAICA) in partnership with Foxy Management, began vying for the building against the tenants’ wishes.

In July of 2010, Borough President Ruben Diaz, at the request of the Tenant’s Association, came out to Borinquen Court to settle the confusion. Both NAICA and WSFSSH were there, and the Borough President asked what the tenants wanted. The residents voted in favor of the West Side Federation for Senior and Supportive Housing to manage them, 82-4. “We took our building from the politicians, and gave it to the tenants,” remarked Mr. Colon. After the meeting the Borough



ganizing. The tenants in this building knew exactly what they wanted and were willing to unite and fight for it, even though it was a long and tedious campaign with many obstacles. The tenants are so happy with the outcome and now get to have an active voice in their building. This is why I do this job.”

Now, though WSFSSH has only been manager for three weeks, tenants are already seeing changes in the building. In the community room, Mr. Colon pointed out a line of holes running through parts of the floor. “Those used to be bars from the floor to the ceiling – every time we met in here, they made us feel like we were in a prison.” Now that they’ve been removed, he already sees more people using the public space.

There are some big plans in the works for Borinquen Court. Soon the ground floor will be home to various social services offices, which will host a social worker to assist the residents, a long time goal of the Tenant Association. Borinquen Court also has a lunch room and outdoor space that hosts a lunch program for the elderly and disabled.

The residents are more than delighted that WSFSSH is working beside them to make their building reach its potential. As TA member Remigio E. Adariguana noted, “What we wanted- people working together- it’s here. It’s already here.”



The Tenants Association of Borinquen Court is made up of ten volunteer residents from the building.

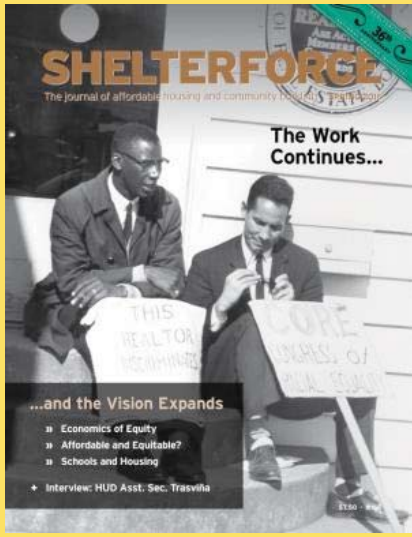
West Side Federation for Senior and Supportive Housing.

WSFSSH is a twenty-five year old community-based, non-profit organization responding to the urgent need for senior housing in New York City. Its mission, to provide safe and affordable housing with supportive services within a residential setting that enhances the independence and dignity of each person, was right on target for the residents of Borinquen. However, this still was only the beginning of the struggle. Another

President publicly stated that he would support the tenants and the organization they chose to run their building.

On March 1st, the tenants’ hard work finally paid off, when through the collaboration of HUD and New York City government, WSFSSH was able to purchase the property. Kerri White, a tenant organizer from UHAB, worked with Borinquen tenants for over two years through this process. “This is the perfect example of what can come from tenant or-

Jen Kaminsky Reflects for Shelterforce's 6 x 6



NHI's Shelterforce, a publication showcasing community development work across the country, is turning 36 this year, and to celebrate, they are running a "6 x 6" competition for young community developers.

The contest is made up of 36 final nominees who submit "360 words on how they've seen the community development world change during their time in it, and how they think it ought to change in the next 6 to 36 years."

UHAB Project Manager Jen Kaminsky was nominated and

chosen as one of 36 finalists. Having worked in the community development field for ten years, Jen wrote her essay on the growing trend toward utilizing market-based mechanisms to develop affordable housing and enhance community development. She states that while these new approaches allow community developers to compete within the greater real estate environment, "they do little to reform the overarching systemic issues of poverty and precariousness that affect so many."

In addition, Jen also notes that she has also "seen a growing movement toward alternative market or solidarity economy efforts" like community land trusts and shared equity homeownership. "Renewed interest in these models and practices has the potential to reorient the community development movement away from marginalization and towards greater relevancy within the larger economy."

Jen is a long time fan of Shelterforce, which she has read

throughout her career to "understand the breadth of work going on, as well as best practices in the field."

Jen welcomed the chance to reflect upon her work from an external perspective, explaining that often she is too immersed in



Jen Kaminsky, nominee for Shelterforce's Anniversary "6 Under 36" Competition

the work to have time to step back and reflect.

Shelterforce's final "6x6" will be published in Shelterforce's 2011 print anniversary issue. All 36 finalists' essays, including Jen's, can be read online at www.shelterforce.org.

For just **\$10** you can buy a virtual **help New Yorkers stay in their homes.** Join **UHAB** in the fight against **Predatory Equity.**



Join our campaign! Visit www.uhab.org to buy your brick & help us preserve affordable housing!

Help create and preserve affordable housing cooperatives...

Donate Today!



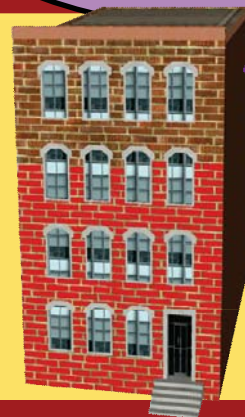
www.uhab.org



(212) 479-3324



120 Wall Street
20th Floor
New York, NY 10005



help us reach 500 bricks!