

DAILY NEWS

NEW YORK'S NUMBER ONE NEWSPAPER

NYDailyNews.com

Friday, October 9, 2009

See Page 4



Gentrification is
a good word in this
rapidly transformed
neighborhood

JEANNE NOONAN

THE CHELSEA WAY

For a federally subsidized housing complex, the Fulton Houses in West Chelsea have a top-dollar real estate location.

Located between W. 16th and W. 19th Sts. and Ninth and 10th Aves., they're a block from the High Line, a park that has been recognized internationally as a masterpiece. The Meatpacking District, with the city's best nightlife, is a few blocks to the south. Chelsea Piers' golf range and yacht marina are a quarter-mile west.

It's no wonder, with this location, that the almost 3,000 people in the 944 apartments in 11 buildings constantly worry about displacement — losing their apartments if the complex is sold. According to officials at both the New York City Housing Authority and the federal Department of Housing and Urban Develop-



ment, this will not happen, as it's against the vision and goals of either organization and virtually a legal impossibility.

In the past three years, though, Fulton has been surrounded by high-end condominiums designed by some of the world's top architects. While Fulton's residents pay rent based on their household income (and rents on three-bedroom apartments don't exceed \$1,200), people in buildings close by pay \$3,000 per month for studios and up to \$2 million to buy one-bedrooms.

Boutiques along 14th St. sell bras for \$500 and chairs for

\$4,500. One night at the Maritime Hotel, across Ninth Ave. from the project, can cost more than a month's rent for some. One nearby residential building has a pet-grooming room; another has metal shutters that open with the push of a button.

Nowhere else in New York City does such wealth coexist with middle- to lower-income residents. While other neighborhoods, such as Tribeca and Park Ave. in the upper 90s, have subsidized housing in proximity to multimillion-dollar apartments, the residents there live separate lives, rarely crossing paths.

Not in West Chelsea. The Fulton Houses' neighborhood has become a crossroads for those coming and going to the sights, stores and eateries.

At the same time, the neighborhood has become a national model for how developers, poli-

ticians and community leaders can work together to improve the area and the lives of residents regardless of gender, race, sexual orientation or income bracket.

"How many neighborhoods start out battling and battling over developments?" says Christine Quinn, speaker of the City Council and long-term Chelsea resident who has repped the district for more than a decade. "Developers who come to Chelsea know they must embrace the resident base. Everyone involved in the neighborhood wants to get the right parties at the table and form coalitions that better the area."

One of those is Miguel Acevedo, a community activist and president of the Fulton Houses Tenants Association. As with most Fulton residents, Acevedo's family came directly from Puerto Rico, settling in the neighborhood

with 50,000 or so others in the 1950s to find work in the manufacturing warehouses west of 10th Ave. from 18th to 26th Sts.

"Most of these people don't know anything but Puerto Rico and Chelsea," says Acevedo, touring the Fulton Houses on a sunny Saturday. "I looked around and saw what was happening to the neighborhood and I thought we could work with the newcomers in a way to benefit the community. My kids deserve to grow up here like I did. The only way that will happen is if I keep fighting."

Acevedo formed Fulton Youth of the Future, an organization aimed at ending the cycle of public assistance by encouraging kids to succeed in school and in the job market. Working with nearby Chelsea Market, the Council on the Environment of NYC and the

Rico, settling in the neighborhood



Meosha Livingston (l.), from the Fulton Houses, and organizer Olivia Blanchflower (r.) work together at the Saturday produce Youthmarket run by local teens and young adults

Meosha Livingston (l.), from the Fulton Houses, and organizer Olivia Blanchflower (r.) work together at the Saturday produce Youthmarket run by local teens and young adults

Continued from previous page
 Related Cos. and Taconic Investments, which own the nearby luxury rental and condo building called the Caledonia, Acevedo's organization created a Saturday Youthmarket that allows local kids to operate a fresh-fruit and vegetable stand.

He has also helped Fulton residents, including single mothers, get jobs at the nearby Desmond Tutu Center, held educational lunches with the High Line, and worked with Chelsea Market, the James Beard Society and the under-construction Dream Hotel to create a cooking scholarship whose recipient would come from the Fulton Houses and work as a chef at the hotel, across the street from where he or she grew up.

"We all have a common goal here," says Michael Ginsberg, who runs events and marketing for the Chelsea Market, the food emporium and office building on Ninth Ave. between 15th and 16th Sts. "We want to make the neighborhood a better place where all people can come together. When you keep it simple like that, and have motivated people like Miguel, it works."

Meosha Livingston, 21, is a single mother who works at the produce market and just enrolled

in a criminal-justice program at a midtown college. She finds inspiration in the high-design architecture and fashion boutiques.

"When you see great things, you start to think great," says the 17-year Fulton resident. "These changes are good for us. Before, everyone was out for themselves. Now it feels like we're here together. I don't go into those fancy stores all ghetto-looking, talking loud. That's no way to act. There's opportunity everywhere."

The Chelsea Improvement Co. (CIC), a private improvement district established by developers including the Related Cos. and Taconic Investments, creates some of that opportunity. Taconic has believed in the neighborhood since it bought 111 Eighth Ave. in 1998: It owns the 14th St. building that houses the Apple Store and helped secure the land that enabled the Western Beef supermarket, with its affordable prices, to stay in the neighborhood, in addition to co-owning the Caledonia with Related. The plaza outside Apple is run by the CIC, which holds weeknight salsa lessons and has a neighborhood greenery program pending.

'When you see great things, you start to think great'

"As New York City developer, we live in glass houses," says Paul Pariser, a principal in Taconic. "Everything we do is watched. That keeps us honest. We're in such confined spaces in New York that we need to work together. That's what's made the dynamic transformation of this neighborhood so successful."

Still, challenges remain. Fulton residents complain they can't shop in the Meatpacking District, where a local was horrified by a fur coat, designed for a little boy, costing \$800. Another preferred the old days when transvestite prostitutes roamed the streets to the current era of bourgeois clubgoers.

Acevedo worries that the retail stretch on Ninth around W. 18th St., filled with stores his neighbors can afford to patronize, such as pizza parlors, will soon be gone.

"New landlords are already trying to raise rents by practically extorting money," he says. "But they should know we're going to be watching them every step."

For a sister story on rapid neighborhood change, see our story on Columbus Square, p. 4.



JEANNE NOOMAN



JEANNE NOOMAN

Top: Miguel Acevedo, president of the Fulton Houses Tenants Association Above: The last stretch of old-time neighborhood businesses, across from the Fulton Houses