

How Stewardship Is Done

We've read many words from the keyboard of Mike Schell during the decade he served as President of the Board at 336. He's written us about the challenges of maintaining the physical plant of our nearly century-old home; the steadily improving health of our building's balance sheet; the tireless dedication of the 336 building staff; the yeoman efforts, always going above and beyond, of our superintendent; the accomplishments of various 336 residents; the changing seasons in our breathtaking front yard across Central Park West... But because the words were his, very little has been written about Mike's extraordinary stewardship of our community.

Ten years ago, Mike came to the realization that he should get more involved in the affairs of 336. He wrote me at the time that he thought we really should be more diligent about attending the building's annual meeting. Little did he know...

I had the privilege of joining the 336 board with Mike in 2007 and served with him for six years. I returned to the board last year as Mike let us know that he and Kathy were selling #4A after nearly three decades in the building. Mike writes eloquently and poignantly of what our community means to him elsewhere in this newsletter. I wanted to write these few words to say something about what he has meant to our community, from the vantage point of a close witness to his devotion to our collective well-being.

We tend to take for granted the service of those who shoulder the task of managing the building's affairs. I certainly did, for well over a decade, before deciding the time had arrived to get involved. Many, past and present, deserve our thanks for having contributed their time and energy to our home.

But Mike gave us something special. He brought to bear the wisdom he had gained over many years as a lawyer, an executive, an academic board member, a political advisor, a construction worker, a parent. And to all of those skills, he added a passionate commitment to fair play that has helped steer our building's affairs in ways dramatic and mundane, far-reaching and of-the-moment, broadly written and finely detailed. He was always there when needed; there wasn't a matter on which he didn't offer careful thought and sound judgment. He looked after the building when his own health was in question and I never saw him falter. He has earned the respect of the building's professional management and the love of the building's staff.

So on behalf of all of us, let me simply say to Mike: Thank you. And to Mike and Kathy: we'll miss you but this will always be your home.

David Blither



PRESIDENT'S POTPOURRI

Dear 336 CPW Friends and Neighbors,

This is it – the last of these periodic president's letters of potpourri which have afforded me the opportunity to impose my musings on our building community. For better or worse, but I would hope with some salutary effect from time to time. The theme for this one is reminiscence and nostalgia, wrapped in a sincere and determined undertaking to stay in touch.

As I write this, I hope I will have a chance to see every building resident at the holiday party on Wednesday, December 14. By the time you read this, it will already have happened and we will have exchanged greetings and farewells – or not. If not, this note will have to do.

Sometime in the fall of 1984, Kathy and I discovered 336 CPW as we searched for a new home that would accommodate a family of four – about to be five. The cloud of ignorance and naiveté that enveloped that search – and the two of us for that matter – is so large and impenetrable it defies fair and accurate portrayal at this distance. “Clueless” will have to do. I doubt the various proximate features of Central Park (tennis courts, reservoir, running trails, playing fields, Shakespeare in the Park, etc.) had dented our consciousness. We might have paused momentarily over “how far uptown” it seemed to be, but certainly no more. Our decision was based on the beautiful views of Central Park and our imminent – and desperate – need for more space. And our naiveté.

The process seemed endless. Actually, more like non-existent. We submitted our application. Nothing happened for a month. Then two. Then three. Had we offended? Screwed it up somehow? Finally, I talked to the chair of the admissions committee who said not to worry, he would take care of things. We got the interview. Kathy was bursting, nearly at the end of her pregnancy. I remember only the chairman – who is a resident to this day and to whom we are eternally grateful – and a young woman living in an apartment given her by her father. It was her firm opinion we could not afford the apartment and should be denied admission. Happily, the chair and the rest of the committee prevailed. We moved into the apartment in March of 1985. The baby came in June, and eventually we got around to renovations and furnishings. But slowly, very slowly. Indeed, a year later the doorman asked Kathy if we were moving out because he thought we had too little furniture and the rooms echoed.

The years flew by, as I think they do for all young families. Five years. Ten. Twenty. Three memories are somewhat representative of the whole 20 years.

Sometime in the mid-90s – call it 1995 – I was getting my car out of the garage where I worked at 55th & 3rd. I encountered a lady whom I barely recognized – and did not really know at all. I knew she was the president of the board at 336 CPW. She was accompanied by her husband whom I had never met nor seen before. We exchanged greetings and a bit more information about ourselves. I learned her husband and I had been living in the same building (336) and working in the same building (919 3rd) for a decade or more – while never once encountering one another.

Sometime 10 or 12 years after we had moved in, I indulged in one of my quixotic crusades at 336 CPW. The board was asking shareholders to authorize governance changes which changed the balance of discretion and authority between shareholders and the board – away from shareholders and toward

the board. I wrote a couple of letters to the building, campaigned against the request and went to the meeting. I remember being greeted with almost universal disbelief that I was a resident of the building – let alone had been there for more than a decade. In any event, shareholders declined to approve the request. I later learned the lady resident who had been the reason and the target for the change and the indirect beneficiary of my efforts was the niece of a lawyer I had encountered in business who had made my life miserable.

The third story represents a collection of experiences we had raising kids in 336. It was maybe 1 or 2 o’clock in the morning on a weekday night/morning. The night man – whom we knew well, liked very much and trusted completely – rang the bell and asked if we knew our 12-year-old daughter had just left the apartment and the building and got in a cab. That night was a bit of a crisis, but in later years we trusted and relied on “the guys” to enforce our mandates that “no one comes in or goes out.” Family stuff.

Idle recollections you might ask? Probably, but for me the message is New York isn’t really all that big a place after all.

As we started our third decade in the building in 2006, it would be fair to say we knew folks, we knew the staff and we probably were recognizable to many of our neighbors in the building. But I would be hard pressed to say 336 CPW was nearly as much a focus of our lives as the kids, the kids’ schools, work, weekends spent elsewhere, family elsewhere and so forth. All that changed with a phone call from the kid born two months after we moved to 336 CPW – our third child, second son. He told me a long-tenured, very well-liked building staff member had been fired. “Dad, you’ve got to do something about it!” he insisted. So began a 10-1/2-year engagement with our neighbors, the building and eventually everything involved in its stewardship. An engagement that just ended this December.

I have previously reprised the “stuff” that went on in those 10 plus years and need not repeat it. What I have not afforded adequate justice is the evolving family of folks who have lived here over the years. The pleasure – and privilege – of getting to know everyone living in this building and meeting everyone as they moved into the building is indescribable. It is just not possible to do justice to that experience, its richness, its warmth, its variety, its vitality, its exquisite humanity. Truly it has been a fascinating and joyful collection of relationships and individual encounters that have educated and enriched me. Thank you all.

I will miss you. We will be back from time to time and I hope to see you occasionally, but it will not be the same, of course. On the other side of the coin, Chatham, Cape Cod, Massachusetts, is not all that far. If you plan to be in that vicinity, or just happen to find yourself nearby, our door will always be open and we would be delighted to welcome you for a cup of coffee or a few days’ visit. Believe me, we would.

One final farewell word of advice. We are a family. We are a variety of ages, profiles, backgrounds, outlooks, vocations, beliefs and so on. And we sometimes find ourselves cross-wise with one another. But we are still a family. Please try to keep that always in focus, always believing the relationship is more important than any differences that may vex us now and then. It is our source of strength. Do your best not to lose or diminish it.

With fondest best regards. The French and German terms for “good-by” translate loosely into “till we meet again” and “till we see one another again.” Au revoir! Auf Wiedersehen!

Mike Schell

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Winter Splendor

It was a bit of a tough heave getting the new sidewalk in, after cracks formed in the 94th Street side and parts had to be repoured. The work, mandated by city regulations, caused some hopefully manageable inconvenience, but that job is finally done and done well....and the crowning glory are the new tree beds along 94th Street, currently decked out in hardy and colorful ornamental cabbages. (A test for next issue: what kind of trees are those?)



After soliciting and comparing bids from six providers of exterior plantings and maintenance, 336 CPW hired John Mini Distinctive Landscape to seasonally plant the five tree beds for the spring, summer and fall, and to maintain them every two weeks. Once the snow clears for the year, residents can expect to see mixed pansies planted for the spring, to be supplanted as summer arrives with begonias and caladium. Keep your eyes on (and all dogs out of) those lovely spaces!

336 Annual Holiday Party

Friends, food, and festivities were abundant at the annual 336 CPW Holiday Party. All of the pictures will soon be posted to the website - check it out at www.336cpw.org.

