

# WEST SIDE SPIRIT

July 14, 2011

Super Block Association  
Tackles West Side issues

## NEWS

### Super Block Association Tackles West Side Issues

By Megan Finnegan

A neighborhood like the Upper West Side has no dearth of community groups, but a handful of residents have noticed one thing that's missing: a super block association. While they don't have any formal title yet, the small group has begun meeting to fulfill its still amorphous mission of uniting the block associations of the Upper West Side.

"We really felt there was a need to link up with other groups that are doing what we are doing, for the purpose of sharing information, strengthening our organization and building community," said one of the group's founders, Dee Rieber, a real estate agent and president of the West 75th Street Block Association, which covers the street from Central Park to the Hudson.

On a recent Saturday morning over breakfast at French Roast, she conferred with three of her cohorts about how to spring their fledgling group into action. Dee was joined by her husband Dan Rieber, who works for a local non-profit, Carl Bevelhymer, a journalist from Hell's Kitchen and member of the West 55th Street Block Association, and Melissa Elstein, a non-practicing attorney cur-



Dan Rieber, Dee Rieber and Melissa Elstein on Columbus Avenue.

rently teaching yoga and ballet who's active in the West 80s Neighborhood Association.

"A lot of people feel like each block has its own little view and its own little issue," said Bevelhymer. "But we discovered, before we came together, we would meet people from other blocks, and they'd say, 'We're having a lot of trouble with vandalism,' or 'We're having a lot of trouble with graffiti, what should we do about it?'" He said that what they've

been surprised to find is that people living near Times Square have similar concerns to those living in the West 90s.

"It's not about the individual issues that each block association deals with," said Dan Rieber. "It's about the commonality that we all share, and how do we interface with one another to address our issues and get support?"

The goal of bringing the various groups together is largely about "problem solving without feeling like you have to reinvent the wheel every time," said Elstein. At a June 15 gathering of block association leaders, "somebody mentioned something about trucks idling. Somebody said, 'Oh we resolved that issue, call so-and-so, so I reported that to the person in my block association with the complaint, and I wouldn't have known that if we hadn't gathered.'"

"No comprehensive list of community groups and block associations existed. No list that was up to date, had all the contact info, websites," said Bevelhymer. They set out collecting information to fill in the gaps. So far, they've compiled an updated list of over 80 community groups, from 34th Street to 116th Street between Fifth Avenue and the Hudson River. Dee Rieber

emphasizes that the list—along with the group's mission—is still evolving.

The group has put out a survey to community leaders and has a few dozen responses coming in. They plan to circulate it more widely before drawing conclusions, but so far the top three priorities are addressing traffic issues (including air quality, safety and noise), beautification and greening of public spaces, and business nuisances like garbage and crowds.

At a more basic level, the group hopes to help current organizations function better, like providing tools for building a social media presence or starting a block association from scratch.

"We're trying to help people figure out, how do you mobilize around an issue, how do you fundraise around an issue," Bevelhymer said.

For now, the group is continuing to gauge residents' concerns and is planning a fall symposium, with an emphasis on finding what already works and sharing that information.

"The final goal here of this group is to help organizations do what they do in a more effective, efficient way," said Dee Rieber.

