



**From left, top: Jason Rodgers, Walter Thabit, Maria Torres-Bird, Felicia Blackman, Frances Goldin, Val Orselli, Kathleen Berger. 2nd row: Rosaura Mendez, Steven Herrick, Joyce Ravitz, Robin Creswell, Vinie Burrows. Below: Gala Program and Awards.**



## 45th Anniversary Gala A Big Success!

The Cooper Square Committee celebrated its 45th Anniversary at a gala event at Opaline on Wednesday, September 29th. More than 150 people attended, including honored guests former Mayor David Dinkins,

founders Frances Goldin and Walter Thabit, and others. Councilwoman Margarita Lopez and District Leader Rosie Mendez were also in attendance.

David Dinkins, upon receiving his award for his role in preserving nearly 20 city-owned buildings on East 3rd and East 4th Street for low income housing, stated that “this award really should go to the members of the Cooper Square Committee for their hard work in improving their community

for the people who live here.”

Also honored at the Gala were former Chairperson, Maria Torres Bird, former Councilwoman Miriam Friedlander, as well as several key Cooper Square members who passed away in recent years—Saylor Creswell and Rod Rodgers who served on Cooper Square’s Board, and Martin Berger, our long time attorney who helped create the Cooper Square Mutual Housing Association.

Frances Goldin described Cooper Square’s accomplishments this way. “We defeated Robert Moses when people said it couldn’t be done. We saved our buildings from demolition, and now our residents live in one bedroom apartments for less than \$400 a month.”

The anniversary event was not just a tribute to the leaders of the Cooper Square Committee. It was also a successful fundraiser, raising over \$20,000

*continued on page 2*

## City Authorizes Sale Of East 4th Street Cultural Buildings

The Mayor’s Office signed off on the Urban Development Area Plan (UDAAP) for six cultural buildings on East 4th Street on Wednesday, October 27th. The approval process sailed through the Community Board in May and was unanimously supported by Borough President C. Virginia Fields, the City Planning Commission and the City Council, before being signed off on by Mayor Bloomberg. The NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development is now authorized to sell the buildings — 59-61 East 4th Street, 62, 64, 66-68, 70 and 72 East 4th Street — to the non-profit entities created by the East 4th Street cultural and community groups. The sales are expected to take place in the Spring and Summer of 2005.

“We’re really excited to be able to purchase our own space”, said Ryan Gilliam, Artistic Director of Downtown Art and Chair of Fourth Arts Block (FAB), the cultural association representing the 13 cultural and community groups on the block. “Our theatre will move into 70 East 4th Street with Alpha Omega Dance Company to create a Youth Arts Center. FAB could not have accomplished this without the support of Councilwoman Margarita Lopez, Borough President Virginia Fields and the Bloomberg Administration. DCA and HPD in particular played a pivotal role in making this happen.”

With the approval of this plan, nearly 100,000 square feet of cultural and community space will be renovated, and the cultural programming on the block will increase significantly. FAB’s members are going to be able to renovate over 40,000 square feet of vacant, raw space. There will be three new theaters, two new dance studios and three new rehearsal spaces on the block.

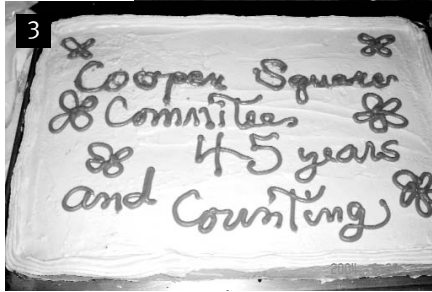
*continued on page 2*

### IN THIS ISSUE

45th Anniversary Gala	1
E. 4th St. Cultural Buildgs.	1
Gala Pictures!!!	2
The Coalition Revolution	3
Transitions	3
2nd St. Supportive Housing	4
72 Low Income Apartments	4
Get A Free Inspection	4

**45<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala cont. from page 1)**

towards the Cooper Square Committee's capital campaign. "More than 80 local businesses and non-profits placed ads in our program book, which also includes a wonderful history of Cooper Square's achievements. We greatly appreciate their support. We are now 1/3 of the way towards reaching our goal of raising \$150,000 towards the purchase and renovation of our space at 61 East 4<sup>th</sup> Street in 2005," according to Steve Herrick, the Executive Director. ■



**#1: Francis Goldin receives award from City Councilwoman Margarita Lopez.  
#3: Anniversary cake.  
#4: Water Thabit accepting award for outstanding achievement.**



**#7: (from left) Eric Spruiell, Christian Valerio, Steve Herrick, Maria Guerrero, Felicia Blackman.  
#9: Maragarita Lopez.  
#13: Christine Gonda, Esperanza Urena, Josefina Cipriani.  
#14: Lucille Carrasquero, Rosie Mendez.**



**#2: (from left) Christian Valerio, Joyce Ravitz, Val Orselli, Marva Clark. #5: Francis Goldin with former Mayor David N. Dinkins.  
#10: (from left) David Dinkins, Lisa Kaplan, Bernette Carway-Spruiell.**



**#6: Maris Torres-Bird inducted into the CSC Hall of Fame. #8: Kathleen Berger accepting for Martin Berger. #11: District Manager, Rosie Mendez. #12: Painting donated by local artist Patricia Melvin.**



**East 4th Street cont. from page 1**

Jose Oliveras of Teatro Circulo, and FAB's Vice President, sees the block as a model multicultural district. "We have two multicultural dance companies on the block and three Latino theatres which will be the first Latino theatres in NYC to own their own theatre spaces. We also have several cutting edge Off Off Broadway theatres on the block serving very diverse audiences."

Coordinating the relocation of several of the cultural groups from one building to another will be a challenge, but FAB's members are working on a relocation plan to manage the process. "Doing renovation with tenants in place is never ideal, but we think the groups have realistic plans to stage it so that none of the groups will have to shut down their operations or significantly scale back their programming", said Valerio Orselli, Executive Director of the Cooper Square Mutual Housing Association. ■

# The Coalition Revolution: Multi-Building Tenant Alliances

## *The Croman Coalition, Granite Tenants Coalition, and the Shalom Tenants Alliance*

By Cassie Carter, Steve Herrick and Eric Spruiell

It used to be enough to form a tenant association in one's building to address grievances and demand repairs and services from unresponsive (or openly hostile) landlords. It's no longer enough. That's why tenants have formed multi-building alliances such as The Granite Tenants Coalition, The Shalom Tenants Alliance, and the Croman Coalition: to present a united front against the tremendous power of corporate landlords and underwhelming apathy of government agencies.

In 1994, 1997, and in 2003, the NYS Legislature steadily weakened the Rent Laws, creating more loopholes and incentives for landlords to vacate apartments in order to deregulate them. Some corporate landlords, such as Croman and the Shaloms, have used these loopholes and incentives to full advantage. They have acquired hundreds of buildings, primarily in formerly working class neighborhoods in Manhattan, and they use buy outs, aggressive holdover actions against tenants, disruptive renovations, and other tactics to raise rents, deregulate apartments, and displace long-term tenants.

The landlords are strong, the laws protecting tenants are weak, and city and state agencies that are supposed to oversee landlords and protect tenants are not doing their jobs. Individual tenants and small tenant associations fighting bad landlords face overwhelming odds on a battlefield of bureaucratic red tape and indifference.

The multi-building alliances of Croman, Granite, and Shalom tenants provide the moral support, resources, and teamwork needed to level the playing field. These groups pool their energies and limited financial resources, and share information and ideas. They work closely with their elected officials and tenant rights organizations to push government agencies to conduct investigations and

issue violations; they hire attorneys; and they engage in grassroots flyering and website campaigns to get their stories out. In addition to building coalitions of tenants under individual landlords, these multi-building alliances have begun to actively support each other, with members attending each others' meetings.

These alliances have revealed their landlords' tactics to be not isolated incidents affecting one or two individuals, but patterns replicated again and again, affecting thousands of tenants. By sharing information and joining forces, these alliances are working to change a dysfunctional system.

While corporate landlords have the financial means and the contacts to advance their interests, these tenant coalitions could prove to be a counter-weight to the power currently levied by the corporate landlord groups if they organize and effectively make their case. Tenant groups have untapped political potential vis a vis their superior numbers. The Cooper Square Committee is working to provide technical and material support to these tenant coalitions, as well as to document the displacement problem.

Our staff and tenant leaders surveyed 70 tenants in 20 buildings during 2004, and found that median rents among tenants who moved in after 1997 is \$1,850 as opposed to \$750 for tenants who moved in prior to 1997. The disparity among these two classes of tenants is shocking. 50% of tenants residing in their apartments for more than 7 years have been in court with their landlords, while none of the tenants who moved in during the past 7 years has been in court.

Given these realities, it is essential that tenant coalitions coalesce city-wide to address major systemic problems in the Rent Laws and in DHCR's administration of them. ■

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## **T R A N S I T I O N S**

In July, 2004, Eric Spruiell, joined the Cooper Square Committee as a Tenant Organizer. Eric replaces Geoff Bruen who went to pursue a law degree at Temple University in Philadelphia. Geoff will be missed by the staff and by the many tenants who sought his counseling. Fortunately, Eric brings with him a great many strengths and years of experience as a tenant advocate and organizer. He has already become a valued resource by advising people with housing issues or those forced to go to housing court unrepresented by legal counsel. ■

## ***Become A Member!***

***YEARLY memberships  
range from \$1-\$5 for individuals  
or \$10 for businesses.***

***For more information call:***

***212-228-8210***

# 2<sup>nd</sup> Street Supportive Housing Progresses



54 affordable apartments will be coming to East 2nd Street by the second half of 2005. The new building, with supportive services, was topped off in October, 2004 and has a projected completion date of July, 2005.

The project experienced some major delays because repairs needed to be done on the adjacent buildings after cracks formed during excavation. However, those problems have been resolved. "We expect to start marketing apartments in the new 53 unit building in the early Spring of 2005", said Steve Herrick, Executive Director of the Cooper Square Committee.

60% of the units (32 apartments) will be earmarked for persons with psychiatric disabilities while 40% (21 apartments) will be set aside for low income single adults earning less than 50% of the median income (under \$19,000 per year). The Cooper Square Committee's development partner, Community Access, Inc., will be responsible for marketing the special needs units while Cooper Square will market the low income units. A lottery will not be required, enabling local residents to be the beneficiaries of the new housing. ■

## Get A Free Housing Inspection

If you believe your building is not up to code, contact the Cooper Square Committee at (212) 228-8210 and schedule a roof to cellar inspection of your building. We can alert the City's Dept. of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) about code violations and the need for a follow up inspection, and we can help you get emergency repairs if your landlord is not responsive. ■

# 72 Low Income Apartments Coming to Houston Street

Avalon-Chrystie recently topped off their new 360 unit building at Houston Street between the Bowery and Chrystie Streets in late October. The 80/20 building will contain 72 low income apartments, over 50,000 sq. ft. of retail, and a new 40,000 sq. ft. community center to be operated by University Settlement and the Chinatown YMCA. University Settlement is interested in leasing space to non-profit cultural and community groups so that they can operate educational and recreational programs at the site.

Although the building is still one year away from completion, Avalon-Chrystie plans to begin occupying a portion of the building by mid-2005. Phipps Houses will be marketing the low income apartments. They plan to place announcements in the newspapers in early 2005. Cooper Square Committee members will be notified when the marketing is about to begin.

Low income tenants will be selected via a lottery, and households earning less than 60% of the New York metropolitan area's median income will be eligible. The income ceiling varies based on household size, but will be about \$23,000 for a family of 2 and \$31,000 for a family of four.

People interested in applying for the low income housing should check the City's website at the following address: <http://www.nyc.gov/html/hpd/html/for-apartment-seekers/apt-listings.html> or check <http://www.avalonchrystieplace.com>. HPD's site is updated regularly and includes information about a variety of affordable rental housing applications available around NYC. ■



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