

# Canarsie Residents Seek City's Help With Illegal Apartment Conversions

By Craig McGuire

Forever throwing their hands up in disgust, several Canarsie residents are frustrated and tired of seeing their neighbors illegally convert apartments. However, help may be on the way.

"I'm in Canarsie and I'm not leaving," says resident Lew Krieger. "But there are many people leaving the area like roaches with the Combat after them because of those who continue to convert their two-family homes to three-family."

According to Buildings Department spokesman Vahe Tiryakian, recently appointed Commissioner Joel Miele is implementing new strategies to address a problem with a history of

difficult enforcement.

"Commissioner Miele is in the process of working with the New York City Law Department streamlining services to more quickly facilitate the lengthy legal procedures," said Tiryakian. "The commissioner is also working on legislation, to be submitted to the City Council, that would raise the maximum first offense from \$1,000 to \$2,500, and raise the second offense from \$5,000 to \$10,000."

And, according to Tiryakian, Miele has made an arrangement with the Department of Housing Preservation and Development that will expand the Buildings Department's limited access to buildings with violations.

"We have to see the violation to do anything about them," noted Tiryakian. Department inspectors sometimes fail to write up violations because they are denied entry to a building or property.

Residents may call in an HPD inspector on a variety of complaints ranging from a sagging ceiling to no hot water.

Under the new agreement, the HPD is now authorized to issue any of the 200 violations of the buildings code.

"Residents who observe violations should report them to either the Buildings Department, their community board, or their local officials," said Tiryakian.

"If it is an obvious conversion, a building inspector can come down and issue a violation," said Community Board 18 District Manager Dorothy Turano. "The major problem we face is that few people want to be the one who rats on their neighbor."

"The Buildings Department requires the complainant's name," explained Tiryakian. "If we accepted anonymous complaints we would be running all over the city."

"However, the building code specifically states that the name of the complainant be kept confidential," added Tiryakian. "We strictly adhere to this proce-

served for buildings that pose an imminent hazard."

"If the inspector is not allowed access to the building, which happens more often than not, there is a second attempt made at a later date," added Tiryakian.

Once access is refused on the second attempt, legal procedures are initiated through the city's Law Department.

"In order to secure an access warrant, we need documentation," said Tiryakian, "including an affidavit signed by the complainant."

Landlords take other risks when renting illegal apartments as well. According to Michael Mondschein, a local real estate lawyer, "Illegal tenants are very difficult to remove, and if you are currently living in an illegally converted apartment you are not required to pay rent."

According to Mondschein, the legal fee to file an injunction to have a ten-

ant removed from an illegally converted apartment ranges from \$3,500 to \$5,000. That does not include the money the landlord would be losing on rent during the lengthy court proceedings.

Canarsie and Flatlands residents interested in filing a confidential complaint with the Buildings Department can call (718) 802-3681, or contact Community Board 18 at (718) 241-0422.



Concerned residents like this one offered suggestions on how to better address the problem. Photos by Craig McGuire



## Con Artists Coming Your Way

By Craig McGuire

Summer in Brooklyn is the season for street fairs, days at the beach, and sticky weather. Unfortunately, it is also the season to beware of scam artists, especially if you are a senior.

two black males in their 30s," informed Meier, "these criminals come in all shapes, sizes, ages, and sexes."

"Perhaps the best thing to remember is that nobody is going to give you money in this area," he advised.

purse or wallet.

\* You may be asked to help an elderly or handicapped person cross the street, and while you do, an accomplice will grab your bag. When helping anyone cross the street, keep your bag between you and the