



Building Service Workers



OF THE YEAR

Manhattan Media and
32BJ salute the people
who keep city
buildings running

You nominated, our judges voted and now you can read about the winners of Manhattan Media's first-ever Building Service Workers of the Year awards. The competition was stiff, with close to 200 nominations submitted, but the 13 men and women featured in these pages stood out.

Thanks to our sponsors—SEIU Local 32BJ, The Durst Organization, Halstead Management Company, GVA Williams and Cooper Square Realty—for their support. And thanks to everyone who helped make our September 5 event honoring these individuals a success. See pages 38 and 39 for photos.



Three Decades of Dedication

Deleon is a constant in a neighborhood of changes

By Brady Donnelly

Nathan Deleon, 51, is the hub of his tenant community at 535 West 110th Street. He is a gentle, jolly man who has spent the last three decades treating residents more as family members than clients. As a result, they have come to recognize him as one of their own.

"This is an individual who has been in this building for over 30 years, who knows everybody by name, who has seen generations come and go, who mourns with us when we lose people," said Lydia Gerson, a resident. "He's more than just a doorman—he's sort of the person who stokes the fire of this building and keeps it like a little neighborhood."

It hasn't been easy. This neighborhood has changed drastically since 1977, Deleon said. At that time, the building was a quiet place populated by the elderly, a far cry from the bustling family co-op it is today. His stay there, he expected, would be brief.



Several years passed, each marked by days spent gearing to leave. But Deleon's residents, recognizing his humanity, were beginning to turn to him for aid and assistance. He ran their errands, distributed their medicine and, in one particularly remarkable act of kindness, shaved a man who had lost the ability to do so himself. They needed him, and he accepted the call to duty wholeheartedly.

30-Year Award Nathan Deleon

that everyone's attracted to."

Today, many tenants are young married couples with newborn children—Deleon's personal source of motivation. And the building has converted to a co-op. Resulting conflict over maintenance decisions has led to divisions in what used to be a tightly knit community. If Deleon, sometimes caught in the struggle, longs for the quiet past, he hides it well.



ANDREW SCHWARTZ

Nathan Deleon has thought of leaving his post at 535 West 110th Street, but residents always convince him to stay.

"He's always there in the winter, no matter what, at the door greeting you," Gerson said. "He doesn't hide behind the desk. After all these years, he's just trying to do the top job."

Deleon says he owes this persistence and disarming lightheartedness to residents, who lift his spirit as often as he lifts theirs.

"There are people that are judges, lawyers, presidents, mayors—and they're recognized all over the world," he said. "These people, they depend on me. I help them, they help me." ■

Eyes and Ears on City Traffic

Beyond his building, Joseph Hoey worries about dangers to pedestrians

By Lucy Kennedy

When Joseph Hoey was told that he had been voted West Side Doorman of the Year, his response was somewhat atypical. "I don't want an award. I want things to change," he said. "If there's an award for angriest doorman in New York, I'll take that."

Hoey is angry because the city closed the West 72nd Street exit ramp, which has resulted in many more cars exiting at 79th Street—taking them right past the corner of Riverside Drive, where Hoey has been a doorman for 24 years. That's been a problem, he

says, this summer for pedestrians walking by his corner on their way to the Boat Basin Café, a seasonal waterfront restaurant, for drinks or dinner. He was so concerned for pedestrians' safety that he created



**West Side
Doorman of the Year
Joseph Hoey**

a flyer encouraging people to contact their elected officials and call 311 to complain.

Batya Lewton met Hoey when she was delivering leaflets for the Coalition for a Livable West Side protesting the closing of the off-ramp. "He made a very good impression on me. He really is a concerned West Sider," Lewton said. "He doesn't want to see anybody killed or hurt."

But the off-ramp isn't the only thing that bothers Hoey. The last stop for the M79 is right outside his building's door. He has nothing personally against the bus drivers, but he is bothered that they often "block the box" at the intersection of Riverside and 79th Street. Another problematic offender: drivers who pull U-turns in front of his nose. Hoey has a camera and documents many of

the traffic violations he sees. He worries that the congestion at his corner is not taken seriously enough because there have been no fatalities.

"Is that what they're waiting for? A fatality? To see a headline in the New York Post: 'Nanny and Stroller Crushed'?"

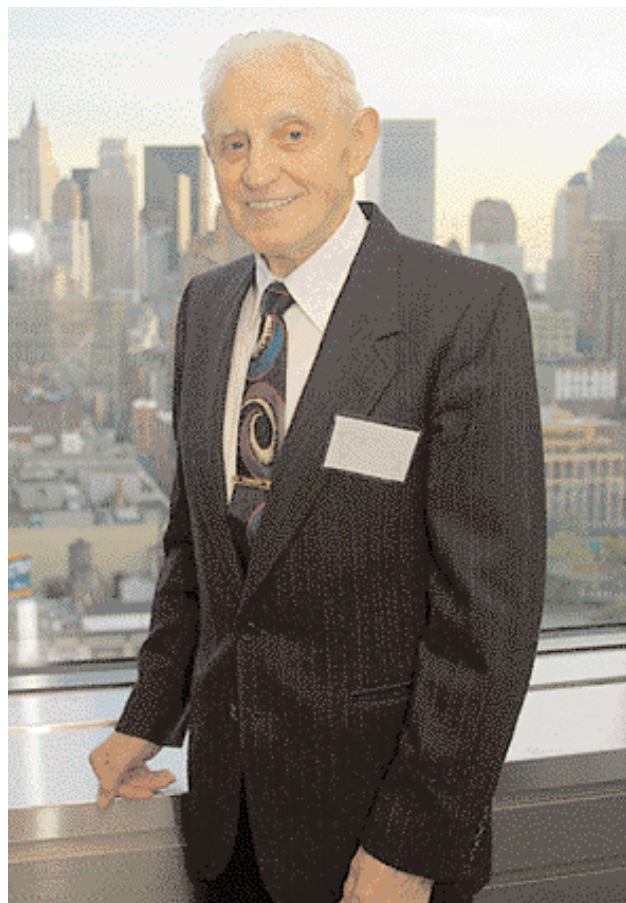
For all his growling, Hoey is a sheep in wolf's clothing. When drivers come back to him terrified that he is going to report them, he tells them not to worry.

For all his growling, Hoey is a sheep in wolf's clothing. When drivers come back to him terrified that he is going to report them, he tells them not to worry. He has an

easy rapport with his residents, helping them carry boxes and chatting with kids. He loves astronomy and spends many evenings looking at the faint stars in the Manhattan sky. That makes his 4:00 p.m. to midnight shift ideal—except that it precludes his getting to the opera as often as he would like. ■

Personal Ties to East Side Building

Keschl bonds with residents—and started his own family on East 79th Street



By Kate Prengel

Unlike his older siblings, Steven Keschl was born in his parents' native Saint Peterfa, a little village on the Austro-Hungarian border.

In an unusual twist, Keschl's family moved to America before he was born and settled in the Pennsylvania countryside. His brothers were born in America, but Keschl alone was born in the old country, during an extended trip his parents took to buy a plot of land. Instead of bringing the infant back to Pennsylvania, his parents left him in the care of his aunt, a warm and loving woman who became a second mother to him. Keschl grew up in Saint Peterfa until the outbreak of the Hungarian Revolution in 1956. Like countless others, he was displaced during the violence and the subsequent Soviet crackdown. At the age of 30, suddenly lucky to have brothers in America, he decided to leave home and head to New York City.

His luck was good: after two days in New York, Keschl found work in a restaurant. He stayed for three years, forming tight bonds with his boss and co-workers. He remembers tears in the owner's eyes when he announced that he was quitting to work at a new building that was just opening on the Upper

East Side: 460 East 79th Street, where he remains to this day.

Keschl started working even before the doors opened to tenants. His first job was as a porter, preparing the apartments for people to move in. Always easygoing, Keschl managed to get along with the "tough German" superintendent, who told him, "You'll be fine as long as you do what I tell you." Once the tenants arrived, the super gave Keschl a try as doorman, a position he's held ever since.

Keschl is a beloved figure in the building today. He stresses the importance of honesty and hard work and has never missed a day on the job. Children who grew up in the building remember him and plan their

visits to coincide with his working hours so that they can bring their own children to meet him. Residents talk about his warmth, generosity and ability to make one and all feel welcome.

Marriage strengthened his ties to the building, since he met his wife, Elizabeth, on the job. She was a lovely German au pair, taking care of a little boy who lived in the building. They now have one son and four grandchildren.

The family now lives in the Bronx, and Keschl says he will work in the building "until they carry me out." ■



**East Side
Doorman of the Year
Steven Keschl**

Steven Keschl stresses the importance of honesty and hard work, and has never missed a day on the job.

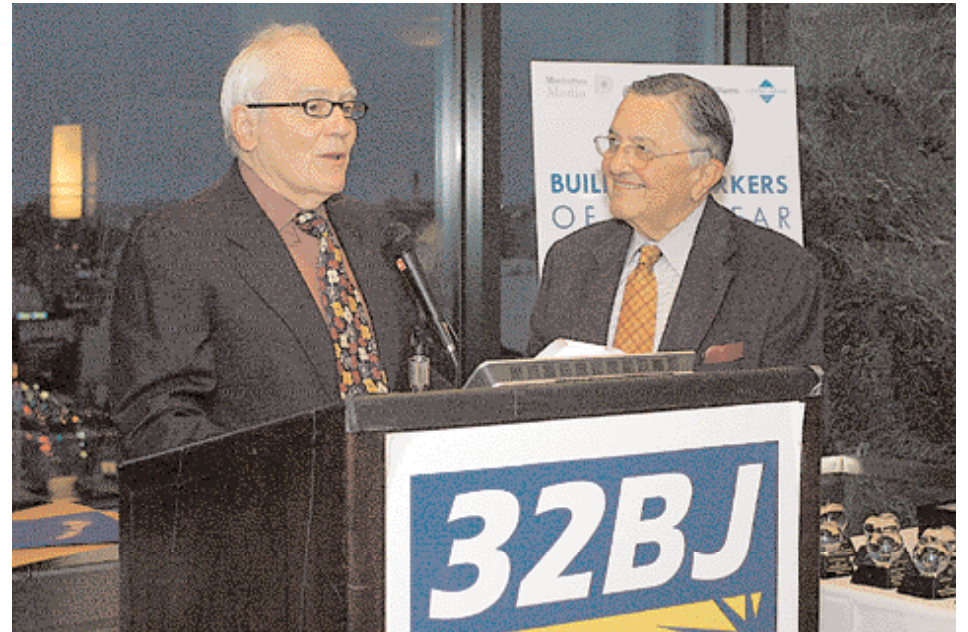
ANDREW SCHWARTZ



Vesel Ademaj, director of building services and security at The Durst Organization, with Dennis Weir, Resident Manager of the Year.



Dionisio "Johnny" Marte, Handyman of the Year, and West Side Council Member Gale Brewer.



Emcees Jimmy Breslin and Gabe Pressman.

Good building workers do not usually get the credit they deserve.

But last week they did.

At our first-ever Building Service Workers of the Year Awards, two legendary journalism figures, Jimmy Breslin and Gabe Pressman, led the tribute to hardworking employees who have gone way beyond the call of duty.

For instance, Steven Keschl took home the East Side Doorman prize. At 460 East 79th Street, children who grew up with Keschl now bring their kids back to meet him. In accepting the honor, Keschl, who met his wife Elizabeth on the job, called the building's

apartment dwellers "people who I love and people who love me."

The 30-Year Award went to Nathaniel Deleon, who reportedly considers going into another line of work. "Every time that he thinks of the idea," according to Comptroller William Thompson Jr., who presented the award, the tenants "ask that he stay." He's become a fixture at 535 West 110th Street.

Deleon chastised himself for getting choked up over his award. "I never thought in my life that I'd be standing here in front of all these famous people," he said. He also recounted how he initially thought the

award itself was a prank. He found himself asking, "Why would somebody do this to me after 30 years?"

But the events were very real, as were the emotions. Winners, in turn, tended to thank Breslin and Pressman for their journalistic work. Two separate speakers described the legendary columnist and NBC veteran as being people who "speak truth to power."

The Manhattan Media event was co-sponsored by the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 32BJ, The Durst Organization, Halstead Management Company, GVA Williams and Cooper Square Realty.



Bronx Deputy Borough President Earl Brown presents a Window Cleaner of the Year Award to Frank Kind, who accepted the honor on behalf of his sons, Jason and Steven.



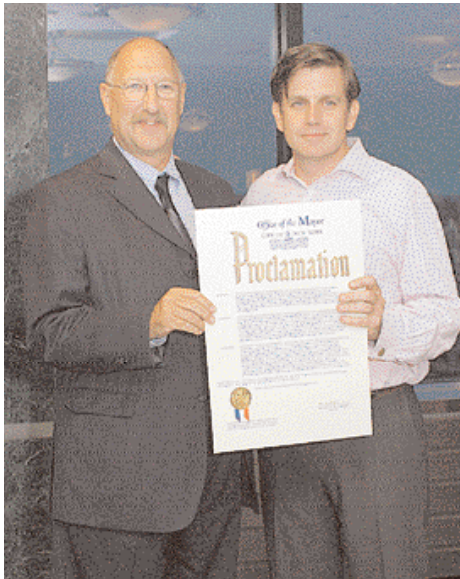
Keith Werney, senior vice president at Cooper Square Realty, with the Lifesaver Award winner, George Smajlal.



Security Officer of the Year Keith Thomas accepts his award from West Side Assembly Member Eric Schneiderman.



Hector Figueroa, secretary and treasurer of 32BJ, with Elpidio Molina, recipient of the Good Citizen Award.



Mike Fishman, president of 32BJ, and Deputy Mayor Kevin Sheekey holding a mayoral proclamation recognizing building workers.



Deputy Mayor Kevin Sheekey with Lower Manhattan Office Cleaner of the Year Sandra Henao.



Queens Council Member Eric Gioia with Gloria Coreas, Midtown Office Cleaner of the Year.



Charles Brown, Superintendent of the Year, with Paul Gottsegen, director of management at Halstead Management.



Building Service Workers OF THE YEAR

PHOTOS BY ANDREW SCHWARTZ



Brooklyn Building Worker of the Year Napoleon Alston receives his award from Brooklyn Deputy Borough President Yvonne Graham.



Frank Monaco accepted an award on behalf of the West Side Doorman of the Year, Joseph Hoey, from Brooklyn Assembly Member Hakeem Jeffries.



Queens Council Member Eric Gioia, Gabe Pressman and Jimmy Breslin.



East Side Council Member Dan Garodnick with the East Side Doorman of the Year, Steven Keschel.



Nathaniel Deleon accepts a 30-Year Award at the podium from City Comptroller Bill Thompson.

The Building Social Worker

As shop steward, Alston keeps the peace with management

By Kate Prengel

Napoleon Alston has worked at the Medgar Evers Housing complex at 745 Gates Avenue in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, for the past 26 years. He is a porter and shop steward, or spokesperson for the union. After 26 years on the job, he knows everyone in the neighborhood. And everyone in the neighborhood, young and old alike, knows him; people greet him constantly as he goes about his business.

Alston describes his position as being the “eyes and ears of the union” and admits that the job of shop steward, which involves mediating between workers and management, can be tough. Still, he loves his work, which keeps him active and which provides him with endless variety. He thrives on the busy atmosphere and delights in the fact that he is always meeting new people, as each day he is confronted with a new problem to solve.

In some ways, shop stewards have a lot in common with counselors or social workers: they must learn to negotiate between angry, and sometimes

irrational, people who do not necessarily want to listen to each other. One of Alston’s proudest moments on the job came a few years ago, when he managed to save one of his coworkers from being fired. The coworker had missed work to attend the funeral of a family member; leaving in a rush, he forgot to tell his manager, and the manager wanted to fire him. Both men were seeing red, each absorbed in his own version of events. Somehow, though, Alston managed to calm them down to the point where they could sit

Brooklyn Building Worker of the Year
Napoleon Alston

says, stressing the importance of creating a neutral setting so that workers and managers can air their grievances. He talks, too, about the importance of leaving personal troubles at home instead of dragging them to work.

A Bronx resident, Alston is married with three children. Originally from North Carolina, he still has property in his hometown of Cherry Point, and plans on retiring down there—when the time is right.

down and talk about the misunderstanding. In the end, the coworker was reinstated, both men were happy and work resumed as usual.

“Two wrongs don’t make a right,” Alston



Napoleon Alston says it’s important to keep a neutral atmosphere so workers and managers can resolve grievances.

Clogged Drains—and Computers, too

Dionisio Marte handles it all in his West 88th Street building



Dionisio Marte has a knack for finding solutions to the array of problems in an old Upper West Side building.

By Katherine Prengel

Dionisio Marte, or Johnny, is a handyman at 215 West 88th Street. He has worked in the building for the past 13 years, and since he also lives in the neighborhood, he is a well-known local figure, sharing stories about his children and taking a quiet interest in everyone around him.

Marte is hardworking and ingenious, skilled at finding solutions to the never-ending array of technical problems that arise in an old Upper West Side building. But residents praise him most of all for his great patience and his willingness to help solve their problems. He keeps a friendly eye on older residents and worries if he hasn’t seen them in a few days. And he is available at any hour to help hang a picture, unclog a drain or work out a computer glitch.

A rather shy, quiet man, he realizes the importance of patient listening, and he is adept at juggling the needs of residents and building owners. He manages, residents say, to get along with everyone. He has been invaluable during the recent renovations the building has undergone during a condominium conversion. The change, and all the necessary work, has been

stressful and uncomfortable for many. All agree that Marte has been a “rock” of calm during this period.

Albena Jurgatis is a longtime building resident who tells a touching story about Marte. Jurgatis’ sister lived in the same building, in a different apartment, until she passed away. In her sister’s last years, she became deeply paranoid, worrying that others were out to hurt

Handyman of the Year
Dionisio (Johnny) Marte

her. Her paranoia extended to her own sister—but not, somehow, to Marte. She always trusted him, and he responded by look-

ing after her with special care: inspecting her apartment for safety hazards, asking whether she was eating regularly and providing her with an ear to turn to.

Marte was born in the Dominican Republic and came to New York in 1989. He is now proud to be a U.S. citizen. He spent five years working in construction before finding work at the West 88th Street building. An entrepreneur, he somehow finds time, between his jobs in the building, to work in the liquor store in Newark that he and his brother opened last year. He is married and has two children—Ashly, 6, and Johnny Junior, 1—who he says are the secret behind his endless energy.

An Activist and Spokeswoman

Coreas spoke out against an unfair firing—and got jobs back

By Lucy Kennedy

When Gloria Coreas lost her job cleaning offices at the Tommy Hilfiger company in Manhattan, she was devastated. She cares for her ailing, 78-year-old mother at her apartment in Queens and she didn't know how she would pay her rent, bills and mother's medical expenses without a job. So Coreas and her co-workers approached their union, SEIU Local 32BJ, for help.

The union encouraged Coreas and her eight colleagues to protest and hand out leaflets outside the Tommy Hilfiger offices on West 26th Street. Coreas said that while handing out leaflets, she got a lot of support from Tommy Hilfiger workers, many of whom she had come to know during her six years there.

Lynsey Kryzwick, communications coordinator at the union, organized an interview for Coreas with Jim Dwyer of The New York Times. "Her openness, to be able to speak to the press, to open up—especially at such a time of vulnerability—was amazing," Kryzwick said. "She became a stand-out within the group."

Coreas moved from El Salvador to the United States

in 1973, leaving her baby son with her parents until she could afford to bring him four years later. She started out working as a cashier in Queens and later became a cleaner in Manhattan offices. After 9/11 she lost her job at Goldman Sachs when the company moved to New Jersey. Coreas then started working at Tommy Hilfiger.

Coreas and her co-workers were given 24 hours' notice when they were let go. Tommy Hilfiger had hired a new contractor that paid its cleaners \$8 per hour, rather than the \$19 per hour that Coreas was paid. She remembers being called up to the fifth floor for a meeting she assumed was cleaning-related—but instead was let go.

Less than a week after The New York Times article came out featuring the office cleaners' story,

**Midtown Office
Cleaner of the Year
Gloria Coreas**

Coreas and her colleagues got their jobs back. "It was very exciting. I can't believe it," Coreas said. "I was hugging and kissing everyone. I was so happy everything turned out well."

Part of Coreas' job was to clean designer Tommy Hilfiger's office. She said that when she came back to work he apologized to her personally, saying, "I'm sorry, Gloria. I didn't know what was happening." ■



Gloria Coreas got a personal apology from Tommy Hilfiger after she and her coworkers were suddenly fired.

Taking Time to Care About Others

With her past in mind, Sandra Henao spreads the word about union benefits



Sandra Henao says union membership changed her life. She takes time each year to reach out to workers who aren't organized.

By Wendy Ilene Friedman

For Sandra Henao, an office cleaner in lower Manhattan, joining the union was a transformative experience.

"It changed my life totally," said Henao, 37.

Before joining SEIU Local 32BJ, Henao earned \$6.50 per hour without any benefits or vacation pay.

"I never had anything. No benefits. Nothing," she said.

With two young kids to support, she found it hard to make ends meet.

Henao now earns a decent wage and gets full benefits.

Knowing what a difference union membership made in her life, each year Henao takes a leave of absence to help the union organize and recruit other workers who find themselves in a situation like hers.

"I appreciate what they did for me, so I give my time to them," she said.

This summer, Henao was in Newark, N.J., talking with area school employees to help them become members and get equal pay. Some workers she met work two or three jobs to make enough money to support their families.

"There are a lot of people that don't make enough

money to feed their families," she said. "I feel like I have to help them."

The union targets companies and organizations whose employees may benefit from an association with 32BJ. Henao meets with these workers and explains how the union can assist them, telling them her story and encouraging them to become members.

She will return to her regular job of maintaining the 42nd floor of the American Express offices at 200 Vesey Street in Lower Manhattan this coming February.

"They understand my work with the union and don't give me any problems," said Henao of Harbor Maintenance Services, which sub-contracts with American Express.

Having worked for the company since 2000, Henao was initially stationed at the Wall Street Center of American Express in the World Trade Center's Tower One. She was on vacation during the week of September 11, 2001, but it took her company about a year to re-hire her at the new building.

"I love my building," she said. "My co-workers are nice. My tenants are very respectful. And the area is beautiful around the financial district. It's a nice place to work." ■



**Lower Manhattan Office
Cleaner of the Year
Sandra Henao**

Always Improving

In his work and personal life, Keith Thomas forges ahead

By Kate Prengel

Keith Thomas was born in Guyana, the oldest of 11 children. When he was a boy, his parents decided that the family deserved more opportunities than they would ever find in Guyana and moved to the U.S.

Thomas's father, described as a hardworking, family-oriented man, found work at 1345 Fifth Avenue near 112th Street, where he is currently the evening fire safety director. He helped his son get a job in the same building when Thomas was a student at John Jay college, and Thomas has been there ever since, racking up 13 years of service and earning praise from colleagues and the building's office workers along the way.

Thomas says he values the job because of the endless opportunities it affords him, both to learn and to meet different kinds of people. He works as a security guard and deputy fire chief and is also the shop steward, the person who handles relations between workers and management.

A big fan of self-improvement, Thomas has taken advantage of many of the educational opportunities

offered by the union. He has received training as a locksmith and building superintendent, learned to operate sprinklers and cleaning equipment, and taken safety classes at the Police Academy and sensitivity classes through the union.

On the job, there's constant variety, from broken elevators and disgruntled staff to an anthrax scare. A mysterious envelope full of white powder showed up at the front desk one day and was opened by an inexperienced junior employee. Thomas calmed down the scared worker and sent the powder to a lab, which announced that the substance was harmless.

Thomas oversees the safety and well-being of

350 workers, and he takes this responsibility seriously. He makes sure, for example, that workers showing signs of substance abuse receive the counseling they need in order to clean themselves up. And he does his best to keep everyone calm and content so that the complicated life of the building can continue to run smoothly.

An East New York resident, Thomas is married and has one daughter, Alicia, 6.

Commercial Office Building Security Officer of the Year

Keith Thomas



Keith Thomas has taken advantage of the many classes and training programs offered by the union.

An Eye on the City Below

A family tradition, the Kind brothers take to the sky

eventually joining the union together. The brothers have been partners for 15 years now, working together on scaffolds high in the sky over the city.

Steven, the elder by 10 months, concedes that he may be something of an adrenaline junky. He loves the sight of the city spreading out beneath him. When he's not working, he likes to bungee jump or race motorcycles.

"I love all of that dangerous stuff," he laughs—though he is quick to add that the union provides very thorough safety measures and he has never felt unsafe.

Nevertheless, window washing "really gets the adrenaline going," he says. And he needs as much adrenaline as

buildings around the city. Jason married last month and does not yet have children. Like his brother, he races motorcycles and enjoys boating and water-skiing in his free time. The two brothers share the same kind of eager, restless energy. Neither is the type to lounge.

Steven and Jason's days begin around 3 in the morning, when they start to get ready for work. Both live on Long Island, just a few towns away from each other. Most days, they go up in the scaffold at 4:30 or 5:00 a.m., so as to get as much work done as possible before the hottest part of the day. By 2:00 or 3:00 in the afternoon, their day is over.

Window Cleaners of the Year

Steven and Jason Kind



Jason and Steven Kind, left to right, say they like living on the edge in their free time, too.

By Kate Prengel

When Steven and Jason Kind decided to become window washers, nobody in the family was very surprised.

Their father, Frank, washed windows for 45 years, and their grandfather washed windows for 40 years. Following the family tradition, both brothers began washing windows at the same time, going up in the scaffolding with their father when they were teenagers and

possible in order to keep up with his two young sons, Steven, Jr., 10, and Luke, 5.

Jason has always known that he wanted to wash windows, ever since he used to go up with his father. "It's like Great Adventure," says Jason, when asked to describe his job. "No two days are the same." He enjoys the endless variety of buildings and vistas, praising, for example, the Hearst building and the charm of other old

They say, for those who wonder, that they have never witnessed any dastardly deeds, or indeed anything terribly interesting at all, through the windows of the buildings they clean. "We clean office buildings," says Jason, and chuckles. "There's nothing too interesting going on in there."

The best sights, both brothers agree, are in the sky around them.

Rising Through the Ranks

Taking advantage of union classes, Brown worked his way up to super

By Wendy Ilene Friedman

Before joining the Gotham Organization, Charles Brown, 33, spent a lot of his time on the road. He was a test driver for General Motors and then worked for a courier delivery service. Eventually he tired of being on the road all the time and wanted a change. In 1998, he took a position as a porter at the New Gotham building at 520 West 43rd Street. From there it was a rapid rise to the top.



"I went through every position in the building within a year and a half," he said. Brown primarily credits his friendship with Katherine Sabroff, the project manager on the development, for his good fortune. The two developed a bond and, noticing his potential, Sabroff encouraged Brown to apply for positions as they became available.

"I saw his potential early on," Sabroff said. "He has a way about him that inspires people."

For his part, Brown says Sabroff showed him opportunities—and he took advantage of each one by working hard and enrolling in free courses at the SEIU Local

32BJ union trade school. There he acquired the education and skills to succeed in various positions. "I definitely took advantage of the classes to give me knowledge of what I needed to advance in the field," he said.

Brown studied and trained in many aspects of building maintenance, including plumbing, refrigeration and

Superintendent of the Year Charles Brown

mechanical training. It has paid off. He was promoted to superintendent and has held the position for the past eight years. He also lives at the address with his wife and soon-to-be three children (his wife is six months pregnant)

while managing the all-rental Hell's Kitchen residence.

"The building is great," he said. "It's a family environment. I get along well with the tenants, management and owners. We respect one another. I love the environment here."

Always setting new challenges for himself, last year Brown became the first of the nine children in his family to receive a college degree. He attended the College of New Rochelle while working full-time, earning a bachelor's degree in psychology. "It was a little strenuous balancing work and school," Brown said—but he still managed to



Charles Brown recently received a college degree while working full-time, pulling off a 3.8 GPA.

maintain a 3.8 GPA.

The next ambition on Brown's list is to oversee a new development. "I want to open a building and head a project myself," he said. "That's my goal." ■



George Smajlal housed stranded managing agents after 9/11 and drove two property managers home during the blackout.

By Brady Donnelly

George Smajlal, who's been in the resident management business for about 15 years, says his success is a result of two things. His management strategy is based on the idea that workers encompass a family, not a staff,

A Model Manager

Going above and beyond is just part of the job for Smajlal

and should treat one another accordingly. And he has a firm willingness to help others—so much so that he's been described as a lifesaver.

But Smajlal shakes off praise. His deeds, he says, are hardly noteworthy. Anyone put in these situations would respond in the same way.

"It's just part of life," he said, his accent marked by hints of the former Yugoslavia, from which he moved when he was 17, and New York, where he has lived since. "I never feel I did anything special."

Coworkers, residents of 765-775 Park Avenue, family and friends disagree.

"He is someone that everyone should try to emulate," said Eugene Bellon, general manager of the Olympic Tower on 51st Street, where Smajlal used to work. "He just doesn't say 'No' to anything. If you know him or speak to him, and you have a problem, he's just like, 'Talk to me.'"

On September 11, 2001, when the hysteria that followed the attacks left commuters stranded, he housed managing agents for the night. During the 2003 blackout, he drove property managers to Long Island and Connecticut. And, in a task hardly included in his job description, he woke in the dead of night to drive an ill resident to the hospital. He stayed until he knew she was stable.

"I don't feel that it's a rare thing," he reiterated, almost

defensively. "I think a lot of people do that, there's many people who do that. It's not talked about—I feel more that way."

While clearly reserved and cordial, he stands assertively by his business strategy. A building can only function, he says, if everyone—from the staff to the residents to the shareholders—is happy.

"At one of the first buildings I went to, half of the staff wouldn't talk to one another," he said. "I would tell them, 'Listen, we're like a family. You spend more time with your

Lifesaver Award

George Smajlal

coworker than with your wife and your kids at home, so rule number one: You are not going to work here if you're not going to get

along with us."

The resulting environment is an efficient one. Delighted with the changes he has made over the last six years, residents recently turned his first-floor apartment into a duplex to make room for his wife and their young baby.

In Smajlal's eyes, New York is a pretty nice place to live.

"People have this perception of the rich being the cold, and I see it totally different," he said. "Some of the nicest people I've met in my life, generous people or the most helpful people I've met in my life, they were really super wealthy and real New Yorkers."

"I love my job," he continued. "There's nothing else I would ever do." ■



Building a Better Community

Elpidio Molina's activism extends to the neighborhood and beyond

By Wendy Ilene Friedman

For the past 19 years, longtime Bronx resident Elpidio Molina, 48, has worked as a building porter at the Amalgamated Housing Cooperative in the Bronx. There are nearly 2,000 residents and 15 buildings in the complex. Molina, his wife and their three children live in one of them.

Molina is proud to call himself the site representative for his union, SEIU Local 32BJ and values his association with the organization. He appreciates its ability to get union employees the benefits and resources they need, and equally regards its political influence in helping better the South Bronx community.

"It's great to be able to use [the union's] political power to help the community," he said.

Improvements to the neighborhood are important to Molina. He makes a great effort and puts in a lot of time to help the area and its residents. He participates in community organizations such as La Aurora, a group focused on immigration and education issues that affect the Washington Heights neighborhood, and the New York Civic Participation Project (NYCPP), an initiative formed by unions after 9/11 to support communities, and

he serves as the co-chairman of the Local 32BJ Latino Caucus, which was established last year.

A regular at neighborhood meetings, Molina listens to the concerns of residents. After learning about the difficulties parents and others were having in communicating with area teachers and medical professionals, he successfully campaigned to have Spanish-English translators placed in local schools and hospitals.

Good Citizen Award Elpidio Molina

"I try to make a difference within our community," he said. "I feel a responsibility to help."

Molina recently petitioned the city to

clean up a neighborhood park so children would have a place to play. He also pays close attention to what is happening at area schools. "I want to make sure when our kids go to school they are going to learn what will help them in the future," he said. When there were problems with overcrowded schools and unengaged teachers, Molina stepped up to make sure teachers were qualified and enough supplies were available for students.

"We are now at a point where we will probably have better schools," he said. "It makes me happy."

Right now Molina's attention is focused on a pending response from the state about the issuance of driver's



ANDREW SCHWARTZ

Elpidio Molina says he feels a responsibility to help make the community better.

licenses. Before 9/11, residents did not need a social security number to obtain a license; now one is required. Molina became aware of many cab drivers in the area who could no longer renew their licenses because of their resident status, in turn placing them in a financial crunch.

"These taxi drivers can no longer make a living," he said. Molina thinks they will hear an outcome soon. "We're keeping our fingers crossed." ■

A Personal and Professional Approach

Keeping a pre-war co-op running—and becoming part of the community



ANDREW SCHWARTZ

Dennis Weir had a career guarding presidents before coming to a West Side building.

By Wendy Ilene Friedman

Dennis Weir, 47, has witnessed history.

As a presidential honor guard with the United States

Army, he was part of a crew that walked in protective formation around presidents as they traveled. Serving time with Presidents Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan, Weir can remember greeting the Iran hostages on their return home in 1981, attending nearly 800 funerals at Arlington Cemetery and welcoming dignitaries and heads of states from around the world.

When his duty ended, the Army found him a job as a doorman at 300 East 74th Street. He stayed for three years, had a brief stint waterproofing New York City rooftops, then returned to building work as a resident manager. Through the years, he has worked at four Manhattan addresses on both sides of town and has been running the show at 375 Riverside Drive near West 110th Street, a pre-war co-op, for the past year and a half.

Joe Ben-David, president of the building's board association, is one resident who appreciates Weir's work.

"He really turned around the staff's attitude and residents' willingness to ask about things," Ben-David said. "He's very friendly and professional. He offers ways to help and participates in the life of the building."

While past resident managers would attend board meetings, give a report on any maintenance issues and leave, Weir always stays for the entire meeting and participates in discussions, according to Ben-David.

"He's very engaged in the life of the building—not just the bones," he said. "He acts as a peer."

Besides managing the building and overseeing its 10 employees, Weir often can be found gardening and doing other things around the building to beautify

the 1922 construction. He loves older buildings.

"It can be exciting because you never know what [renovations] people have done and you don't know where stuff is when it's an old building," he said.

Finding a pipe in a pre-war building, for example, is more challenging than in post-war construction, he explained.

As a full-time resident with his wife Antonia and their four children, Weir also enjoys living in the West Side building. After 19 years on the East Side, he appreciates the newness of the area. His three-year-old daughter attends the Broadway Presbyterian nursery school on Broadway at West 114th Street. "It's a nice neighborhood," he said. ■



Resident Manager of the Year Dennis Weir