

## BUILDING OWNERS FINED

It's that time again! If you own a building or know someone who does, this news item is important to you. The New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development Commissioner Jerilyn Perine has issued a reminder to all owners of multiple dwellings to renew their building's registration with HPD's Division of Code Enforcement



Property Registration Assistance Unit. Multiple dwellings with six or more units must have been registered by May 1, 2003.

It's not expensive to do, just

\$13 to register for the year. The form is available on HPD's web site, NYC.gov/hpd. Owners of buildings with three to five units have until October 1, 2003 to renew their registration.

This is an annual requirement for owners of multiple dwellings, under the City's Housing Maintenance Code and the State's Multiple Dwelling Law. Owners of private one and two-family homes, are not required to register their property unless they live outside the City. In that case, the building must be managed by a New York City agent and must be registered with the Department's Division of Code Enforcement's Property Registration Assistance Unit. If you haven't registered, do it ASAP to avoid being fined.

## TO OUR READERS:

We're proud to introduce the first issue of our new edition of *The Gotham City Inspector*. For over 40 years, Alvin Ubell of Accurate Building Inspectors in Brooklyn, and more recently, his son Lawrence, with associate, Matthew Barnett, have enjoyed sharing their expertise and work experience in many ways:

- with their clients, in nearly 1000 inspections a year.
- in the courtroom, as expert witnesses in over 100 appearances.
- with listeners for over 20 years, on their monthly visit to WNYC's "The Leonard Lopate Show" *"The Gurus of How-To."*
- in numerous magazine articles, books and lectures around the country.

It's all an opportunity for the Accurate team to express their *Dedication To Quality & Safety In Housing & Construction.*©

In this premiere issue of our newsletter, we introduce several segments which you can look forward to reading in each edition. *In the News* brings you up to date with a report on timely news items based on recent laws or housing related concerns. In *Inspector's Diary*, Al, Larry and Matt, share some of their memorable experiences. *Living in New York* highlights important aspects of housing in the city and discusses points of ongoing interest. *Did You Know?* is where you can turn to learn about energy, safety, home repair, building facts and even keep up with Larry's hobby of Go-Karting! And just for fun, try matching wits with the home inspectors by taking our quiz. You'll be surprised at how much there is to learn about building, housing and home repair.

We hope you find *The Gotham City Inspector* both a valuable resource of information and an enjoyable read.

Sincerely,

Emily Hoffman  
Editor



## QUEENS LANDLORD BEHIND BARS



Building owners in the city are required by law to provide heat, hot water and electricity to their tenants throughout the heating season (October 1, 2002 - May 31, 2003) or else. Queens building owner Henry Davis found out the hard way when Queens Housing Court Judge Gilbert Badillo sent him to the Brooklyn House of Detention on March 5th for being in contempt of the court's order to provide those services to his tenants. HPD argued that Mr. Davis deprived his tenant at 90-92 202 Street in Queens of electricity, heat and hot water for months.

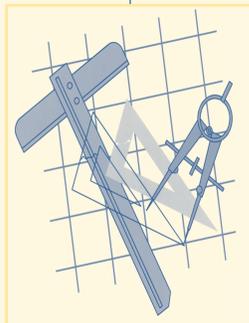
In November of last year, the court ordered him to restore services and then issued a Warrant for Civil Contempt in January, 2003 due to lack of compliance. Mr. Davis claimed he didn't have the funds to comply but couldn't substantiate why. HPD's Emergency Service Bureau (ESB) had tried to gain access to the building to restore these essential services but was denied entry by Mr. Davis. But once Mr. Davis was sent to jail, the ESB could do its job. They repaired the boiler, supplied fuel and restored electricity. Who pays for the repairs? Mr. Davis. And if he doesn't, there'll be a tax lien on the property to look forward to when he gets out of jail.

## INSPECTOR'S DIARY: ARCHITECTURAL TRAPS

When an inspector is called in to determine an architectural trap as part of a tort case, sometimes he finds an unlikely witness that tells all.

Al Ubell tells the story:

I was investigating a trip and fall down a stair and in the process was measuring a lobby stair set, where I was told an incident possibly took place. The doorman asked "what are you doing?" I said, "I am redesigning the steps and the entry vestibule." And, in a way, that's really the truth because that's what I do when I look at



a condition that is allegedly defective. In essence, I must redesign it in order to figure out the way it *should* have been designed, built or repaired originally. I need to determine what would have been the *right* way to make this set of stairs safe and in conformity to good accepted standards - or, that the set of stairs was, indeed, in compliance. This process tells me what, if any, the defects are and how the accident did or did not occur. I look for information that the owner or man-

agement agency could have had prior to the incident by searching public records for code deviations or compliance. I also check if the defect was so blatant, that one

could not miss it or so slight that it was trivial. Could a layperson have recognized the fault? I also try to determine if the fault or defect, if any, was a result of improper construction, design, maintenance, or repair.

So, back to the story When I told the doorman that I was redesigning the steps, he proceeded to tell me

about all the accidents that had taken place and how. He also told me, what he thought the defect was. And if that wasn't enough, he held the "dumb end" of the tape measure (where the ruler starts) and helped me measure the stairs! Immediately after my investigation, I called the attorney of record and said "I think that deposing the doorman and asking him about what has taken place in the lobby would be of great advantage."

## DID YOU KNOW?

- That you can test the energy efficiency of your refrigerator with a dollar bill? If the gasket around the refrigerator door isn't tight, cold air escapes and the refrigerator's compressor motor has to work longer and that costs you more! But just one dollar can mean a big savings. Simply close the refrigerator door on the dollar, with half the dollar sticking out. Then pull. If it comes out easily, your unit needs a new gasket or door adjustment.
- A queen termite can lay up to 768,960,000 eggs in her lifetime of 15 to 20 years?



**WORKER**  
Actual Size 1/4-inch



**SOLDIER**  
Actual Size 5/16-inch



**QUEEN**  
Actual Size 1/2-inch

- The best way to prevent dust from escaping from the mortar joints of interior brick facades? One coat of clear poly-urethane will do the trick.

- That the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge is the second longest suspension bridge in the world? There are 4,260 feet between the 693 foot high support towers for a total roadway length of nearly 3 miles from the Brooklyn ramp to the Staten Island ramp. Due to seasonal expansion and contraction, the bridge's roadway is 12 feet lower in the summer than the winter. It considered one of the most elegant bridges, like a necklace crossing New York Bay. The bridge was designed by



- Othmar Herrmann Ammann (1879-1965) who designed fourteen major bridges in his lifetime - eleven of them right here in New York City.

- In Go-Karting (Larry's hobby), what makes one Go-Kart faster than another? Larry says, "It's how the driver sets up the Go-Kart in line with the suspension and how he drives. The weight of a driver is a major factor in the suspension package of the Go-Kart and where you place the seat can effect the handling too."

## LIVING IN NEW YORK: WHAT'S REALLY IMPORTANT TO HOME BUYERS, OR SHOULD BE!

On Sunday, February 23, 2003, the lead story on the front page of the New York Times Real Estate Section was called *The ABC's (and XYZ's) of Home Buying*. It was a comprehensive article covering the many aspects of what it is called "the complex journey to home ownership." The inspection of a property - any property - including co-ops, condos and even new houses, is an essential part of the process. But once you get that inspection report, it's critical to decide what is *really* important to you.

For example, every property buyer is concerned about the condition of the roof. But in the case of a brownstone, the flat roof is not an expensive component in comparison to other aspects of the building. In the average brownstone, the roof is an 800 square foot area. At approximately \$3 a square foot, (and that's a pretty good roof!) \$3000 to repair or replace the entire roof is not a lot of money when you're buying a half a million dollar building. On the other hand, a plumbing system that's not vented properly, or has

putting in it that you can see, is a clear indication that something's going on inside the walls. And that can mean trouble. Twenty, thirty, maybe even \$50,000 worth of trouble to replace an entire plumbing system.

Look at heating systems. A hot water boiler can cost four to five thousand dollars to replace, which is not a huge expense for a large building. But what if the pipes that are connecting the entire heating system throughout the building are falling apart? That is something you must know.

Many people think that structural or physical concerns are what are most important. In reality, not very many buildings fall down each year. But think about how many buildings burn down because of fire due to poor wiring or how many people die inside a building because of bad heating systems, or incur property loss due to flooding because of inferior plumbing systems. These are the real concerns. Even in antique, historical houses, the structural concerns are real, but in most cases can be fixed. So what's the bottom line of a report? How do people make a decision based upon the report? Remember: every piece of property is worth the money at the right price. When a person decides to buy a house, several things must be taken into consideration: budget

(how much can they afford), lifestyle (what kind of place do they want to live in for the money) and whether or not they're handy (are they planning on doing the repairs themselves).

Think about appreciation too. There was a time when the Brooklyn Brownstone Conference (Al served on the Board of Directors) was encouraging people to buy brownstones. Many of them were in terrible shape. But now, after many years and many repairs, they are palatial and sell for not much less than palaces too! In New York, it's hard to say that any real estate is bad. When buildings fail in New York, it is not a result of the market anymore. It is because the owner may not have the wherewithal to maintain the building or doesn't care for the tenants or building or doesn't have the know-how. Or he is simply a slum lord.



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## INSPECTOR'S QUIZ

In building a wood frame structure there is an element that is used that is shorter than usual, like the stud above a door opening or above or below a window. What is the term used in the construction industry for that element? I assure you this word has nothing to do with the physically challenged. Apologies for the use of the word.... but that is how it is described in the dictionary. What is that word?

For the answer, visit our website, <http://www.AccurateBuilding.com> or <http://www.Ubell.com>

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If there is a subject that you would like to see discussed or an article that you would like to contribute to be featured in The Gotham City Inspector, please forward it to Lawrence Ubell at the above address. All articles submitted will get appropriate recognition.



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***Read All About It!***

**TABLE OF CONTENTS:**

Letter to our readers	Page 1
In the News:	
Building Owners Fined	Page 1
Queens Landlord Behind Bars	Page 2
Inspector's Diary:	
Architectural Traps	Page 2
Did You Know?	Page 2
Living in New York:	
What's Really Important to Home Buyers - or Should Be!	Page 3
The Inspector's Quiz	Page 3