

Jane Ballroom closes down after multi-agency sweep

BY ROSLYN KRAMER

The high-spirited drinking crowd that ambled expectantly down Jane St. toward the Hudson River has fallen off considerably since the first days of October. The reason: The Jane Ballroom, their destination, had closed for several weeks. Not that the hotel management was admitting it.

For a while hotel employees cheerily told visitors hoping to soak in the Ballroom's fabulousness that the room was closed for repairs, but would be open the next day. Mid-November was more likely when it would be back open, many Jane Streeters believed. And if court dates are any indication, hotel management will have to clean up its act by the first week in December.

That's when the many violations found by a multi-agency task force conducting a highly visible inspection of the hotel are scheduled for court.

"A blind man could have seen it," said Steve Maslow, describing the dramatic arrival of law enforcement officers for the multi-agency inspection. Suddenly, a flock of cars showed up, sirens blaring as if converging on a major crime scene. But no, they had come to comb the hotel's fabled Ballroom for violations of the city's safety codes.

There were intimations of what was to come a few hours earlier, when Jane

St. activists Maslow and Salvatore Raso, Community Board 2 Chairperson Jonathan Hamilton and Jane Street United attorney Barry Mallin met with Sixth Precinct Deputy Inspector Raymond Caroli to discuss community grievances.

Caroli is credited with taking the lead in getting the cooperation of the Mayor's Office in addressing the nightspot, which has been driving neighbors to distraction.

"He really got the ball rolling," Maslin said of the precinct commanding officer. The three community people each had his or her own viewpoint on what one called "the noise and barbarian behavior" frustrating Jane St. residents.

C.B. 2's Hamilton emphasized the way the hotel's new owners — Sean MacPherson, Eric Goode, Richard Born and Ira Druker — promised one thing and produced another. Maslow, too, felt double-crossed. An original subscriber to the new owners' living-room vision for the Ballroom, he remembered being "enthusiastic at first — I had visions of people reading from their new works in an elegant salon," he said.

But if that vision was slightly over the top, no one was prepared for the lack of safety precautions at the place revealed by the mayor's enforcement task force visit. Never mind the \$20 drinks, unblinking violation of the ban on smoking, even the lack of promised food. There were also

the details of required safety precautions that legally had to be installed by licensed workers, such as a questionable sprinkler-system installation that may not have been done by a licensed plumber.

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Perhaps the crowning jewel of violations was a Buildings Department certificate of occupancy that was ancient history, dating back to a decade or so ago when the Ballroom featured a cutting-edge hip rock musical, "Hedwig and the Angry Inch." The certificate of occupancy was for a theater, and allowed eating and drinking. Only the drinking remains.

Other infractions the law enforcement team noticed were illegally installed safety measures usually taken for granted, such as a casually installed alarm system, doors deemed fire hazards because they either were not closed when they should be, or could not open because they were. The basement was particularly hazardous,

including holes in the wall and garbage bags blocking an exit door. Yet a liquor license existed for this subpar subterranean space. The number of people mixing in the Ballroom exceeded the legal limit. Clubbers could enter the hotel through a staircase connected to the Ballroom mezzanine (which had yet more violations).

Transient visitors to The Jane hotel might not have noticed a stray clubber wandering the hotel's halls, but permanent, rent-stabilized residents did. Which might explain the odd visitor looking into rooms, and in one reported case, a near attack on a woman resident.

The inspection record remains incomplete. The all-important report from the State Liquor Authority has not yet been made public.

It's rumored that the Ballroom will reopen in mid-November, but there's a lot of cleaning up to do, and obtaining a final inspection and clean bill of health from the Mayor's Office of Special Enforcement.

Hotel occupants knew what was coming back in 2007, when illegal construction in the hotel began.

"They make all this money at the expense of everyone else, and everyone else foots the bill," said one indignant veteran tenant. "Who are these people?"

According to The Jane, the hotel's front bar remains open while the Ballroom issues are being addressed.