

# Turtle Bay News

A Publication of the Turtle Bay Association

Spring 2007 Vol. 50, No. 1

## TBA Celebrates 50 Years: A Look Back in History

**L**ike the honey locusts and London plane trees that grow along our streets, we too hope to take firm root," James Amster told the Turtle Bay community back in the early 1960s, just a few years after he and a small group of his neighbors formed the East 49th Street Association to fight for local causes.

Today, Mr. Amster surely would be proud and pleased to know that the organization he founded, now known as the Turtle Bay Association, has indeed taken "firm root," with a membership numbering close to 2,000 and a 50-year history of successes in making Turtle Bay an increasingly better place in which to live.

### An Evening in 1957

It all began on an evening in the late fall of 1957, when "Jimmy," as James Amster was known to friends and colleagues, invited a small group of local residents to his home at Amster Yard on East 49th Street. He was concerned about news reports that the Manhattan Borough President, Hulan Jack, was pushing a plan to broaden several midtown cross streets. Manhattan traffic had reached seemingly intolerable levels, as American cars grew wider and longer, and more of them were crowding Manhattan streets.



TBA founder Jimmy Amster in his garden oasis, Amster Yard, in the 1970s. Photo courtesy: Robert Moyer

Since he'd first taken office in early 1956, Hulan Jack had been promoting the idea of widening several cross-town streets by up to six feet to create another traffic lane. He proposed tearing up three feet of sidewalk on each side of the street, uprooting well-established shade trees in the process. Mr. Jack initially wanted to widen all the narrow crosstown streets between 23rd and 59th Street, but the city's Board of Estimate, responsible for land use decisions at the time, narrowed the list to only five: 49th and 50th Streets, as well as 35th, 36th and 37th Streets.



### Preserving the Street

Jimmy Amster, a successful New York interior designer, some ten years earlier had transformed a cluster of old buildings at 211-215 East 49th Street into the charming Amster Yard, an enclave of homes and offices surrounding an inner courtyard. Jimmy lived in one of the houses and his business was in another. He decided something must be done to preserve the street. So he and Mabel Detmold, manager of the twenty houses that formed the Turtle Bay Gardens complex directly across 49th Street from Amster Yard, gathered residents together to strategize on how to squelch the widening plan.

They were a determined group. Among them was Mabel Detmold's son Peter, a young Cornell University Phi Beta Kappa and World War II veteran who was in the real estate business, specializing in the many old 1850s brownstones lining Turtle Bay's streets.

### Forming an Association

Early on, the neighbors decided to form the East 49th Association. A formal entity, they believed, would give them more clout in dealing with city officials. Jimmy Amster was named chairman.

Within a few weeks, the city had decided to start the widening project with 36th and 37th Streets, tearing up many of the blocks in the Murray Hill area. These

streets were considered a priority since they were directly in the traffic flow between the Lincoln and Queens Midtown tunnels.

Jimmy Amster knew that if the city's plan was allowed to go forward  
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coordination of parkside  
construction sites...page 3**

## Mark Your Calendar

- **Sunday, May 6**  
Turtle Bay Street Fair  
Second Avenue from 43rd to 53rd  
212-751-5465
- **Saturday, May 12**  
Katharine Hepburn Garden Party  
(Marking 100th Anniversary of her Birth)  
1 p.m.-3 p.m.  
Dag Hammarskjold Plaza  
212-629-2003, 212-751-5465
- **Sunday, May 13**  
17th Precinct Street Fair  
Lexington Avenue from 42nd to 57th  
212-826-3228
- **Saturday, June 9**  
Outdoor Art Show  
High School of Art & Design  
10 a.m.-3 p.m.  
Dag Hammarskjold Plaza  
212-629-2003
- **Saturday, June 23**  
Empire Autorama  
Classic Cars on Display  
10 a.m.-6 p.m.  
Dag Hammarskjold Plaza  
646-932-0421
- **Last Tuesday every month**  
17th Precinct Community Council  
Open Meeting, 6 p.m.  
Sutton Place Synagogue  
225 East 51st Street  
212-826-3228  
(No meetings July, August,  
December)
- **Second Wednesday every month**  
Community Board 6  
Full Board Meeting, 7 p.m.  
NYU Medical Center  
550 First Avenue  
212-319-3750

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Web Site: [www.turtlebay-nyc.org](http://www.turtlebay-nyc.org)

Check our Bulletin Board:

East side of Second Avenue,  
between 48th and 49th Streets,  
on outside wall of the supermarket.

## Turtle Bay News

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## Turtle Bay Retains Good Safety Record

**T**urtle Bay's long-time reputation as a safe community continued last year, with total crime in the 17th Precinct decreasing slightly from 2005, and down 65 percent compared with 1995. Crime since 1993, when the New York Police Department began its current reporting system, is down 72 percent.

Of the seven major crime categories that are tracked, robberies and grand larceny of automobiles showed the greatest year-over-year decline in 2006, down 22.8 percent and 24.4 percent, respectively.

"The downswing in robberies is a good indication that the neighborhood is safer," says Police Officer James Meury,

crime prevention officer for the 17th Precinct. The absolute number of robberies last year, including both street robberies and store robberies, was 98.

Total year-end crime statistics for the 17th Precinct, which covers roughly 30th to 59th Streets from Lexington Avenue to the East River, are listed below:

	2006	2005	%CHANGE
Murder*	2	0	--
Rape	12	14	-14.2%
Robbery	98	127	-22.8%
Felony Assault	74	79	-6.3%
Burglary	213	197	+8.1%
Grand Larceny	959	935	+2.5%
Grand Larceny/Auto	34	45	-24.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,392</b>	<b>1,397</b>	<b>-0.3%</b>

\*The two murders reported in 2006 were both domestic-related.

## Members Hear Updates at Annual Meeting

Elected officials, local 17th Precinct representatives and TBA officers briefed some 100 TBA members attending the organization's 49th Annual Meeting last fall.

Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer, State Assemblyman Jonathan Bing, and City Councilmembers Dan Garodnick and Jessica Lappin each spoke at the November 14th meeting, addressing issues and concerns affecting the Turtle Bay community.

Precinct officers reviewed the area's safety record and crime statistics. (See story above.)

Mr. Stringer talked of his Community Board reforms, which he said are intended to "empower Manhattan's Community Boards in unprecedented ways," and his recent transportation conference which he said "launched an urgent debate on the future of the transportation crisis in Manhattan."

Assemblyman Bing pointed to his many efforts on behalf of the community, including interceding in the last year's park concession issue at Dag Hammarskjold Plaza, and efforts to successfully resolve issues concerning the location of the city's water tunnel shaft and the MTA's utility tower on East 50th Street. (Fall '06 and Winter '06 Turtle Bay News) City Councilmember

Garodnick, representing the District 4, and Councilmember Lappin, District 5, both updated members on their efforts on behalf of the community. "I am lucky to have an organization like the TBA in my district... with dedicated volunteers willing to pitch in to continually help make our community a better place to live," Ms. Lappin said.

The TBA thanks Grey Advertising for hosting the meeting at its auditorium at 777 Third Avenue and for refreshments served after the meeting.

## Renovation Update

The big \$1.9 billion United Nations renovation project is in the final planning stages. As reported previously, renovation of the Secretariat will be done in phases, ten floors at a time, with displaced office staff moving temporarily to rented offices in East Midtown and Long Island City. To house conference needs during renovation, a two-story temporary building will go up on the grassy area of the U.N. North Lawn. Currently, it is expected that construction of the "big box" will start in the fall of this year, with the building coming down on completion of the project in 2014.

# Planning Paramount at Parkside Sites

By BRUCE A. SILBERBLATT

**T**urtle Bay really doesn't have too many parks, but the few it has have drawn the attention of developers far and wide. There's nothing like a park view! Four projects overlooking Dag Hammarskjold Plaza and Greenacre Park are in the works.

The most prominent of the group will replace the soon to be razed ADL Building, 823 United Nations Plaza at 46th Street. The demolition will be in two stages, first the upper nine floors, then the two-story base. The developer is the Macklowe Organization, whose last venture in our neighborhood was 310 East 53rd Street. Unlike that site, the zoning here permits a sheer tower which TBA thinks can rise 40 stories. Plans, however, have not been disclosed or yet submitted to the Department of Buildings for approval.

Further down the block, at 313-315-317 East 46th Street, three five-story walk-up buildings have been demolished. Coming is an 18-story condominium with ground floor retail and 73 apartments. Next door, 305 East 46th Street (the 16-story Albano Building) is undergoing conversion from lofts/offices to apartments. The architects for both jobs are a husband-wife team, Cetra/Ruddy, which has designed high-rise apartments elsewhere in the city.

## West of Greenacre Park

Just west of Greenacre Park, 211 East 51st Street, an existing 14-floor apartment house, is being stripped to its structural frame and reconstructed into condominiums. An extra seven stories will be asymmetrically set atop the west end, furthest from the park (this peculiar plan is due to the site straddling two different zoning districts, low-rise residential to the east, high-rise commercial to the west. The latter, as things turn out, is the only portion of the existing building where one can go higher). There will be medical offices on the first two floors and 85 apartments above. Renderings by the architect, Meltzer/Mandl, reveal a masonry and glass façade, including large windows replacing the present blank wall overlooking Greenacre.

All four projects appear to comply with the zoning resolution and are "as-of-right."

At 865 U.N. Plaza, a block north of Dag Hammarskjold Plaza, an alteration from rental to condominiums is underway. The building will stand as before, but within, those tenants whose homes were at so-called "market rent" had to move or buy in. The vacated units are being renovated into condominiums. The remaining stabilized and/or controlled tenants can stay, but at a cost – surviving major construction work all around. Once again, affordable housing loses out.

## Construction and Safety Problems

Needless to say, there are construction and safety problems unique to building next to active parks. Where new foundations are needed – at 313-317 East 46th and possibly at the ADL site – great care must be taken not to undermine the park. Sheathing and underpinning, both costly, may be needed. During demolition and façade removal, the parks and the public need to be protected from the inevitable dust and falling debris. These measures, of course, continue as the buildings rise above ground and are enclosed.

As an example of what can go wrong, during the very cold week of February 5 the Albano Building suffered interior flooding; the water froze solid on its rear wall and then, with milder weather, thawed. Heavy ice shards crashed into the unprotected Hepburn Gardens portion of the Plaza, causing extensive damage to the fixtures and plantings. Fortunately nobody was injured.

The Turtle Bay Association is pressing for a community coordination committee, which would have representation from the Friends of Dag Hammarskjold Plaza and the Greenacre Foundation, the Parks Department, elected officials, and, of course, TBA. This was done successfully when the Trump World Tower went up several years ago. Such a committee would address community complaints, monitor construction, and make certain that the builders do their work in a professional, safe manner.

## Newsorthy Notes

**Outdoor Café at the Plaza.** The new concessionaire at Dag Hammarskjold Plaza, the New York Milkshake Company, will offer outdoor seating as soon as the weather warms up. Owner Scott Marcus says he has applied for a liquor license and hopes to be serving cocktails by late spring, when the café will also offer live music on certain evenings each week. Once the schedule of music performances is finalized, it will be posted outside the glass house at the east end of the Plaza.

**Film Festival at the Plaza.** This year would have marked the 100th birthday of Katharine Hepburn, long-time Turtle Bay resident. To mark the occasion, planning

is underway for a film festival of some of her most famous movies, to be held this summer at Dag Hammarskjold Plaza near the Katharine Hepburn Garden. Details of the event, to be co-sponsored by the Friends of Dag Hammarskjold Plaza and the Turtle Bay Association, will be mailed to members when finalized.

**Charlotte's Web.** The book on which the recently released children's movie, "Charlotte's Web," is based, was written right here in Turtle Bay. Author and essayist E. B. White, who lived in Turtle Bay Gardens in the 1940s and 1950s, came up with the idea for the tale of a spider and a pig while at his farm home in Maine. But he wrote

the book, published in 1952, at his duplex at 229 East 48th Street.

**Renew Now.** If you haven't already done so, please send in your TBA membership renewal coupon. Coupons were sent to all current members earlier in the year. For more information, call the TBA office at 212-751-5465 or e-mail [tbaoffice@mindspring.com](mailto:tbaoffice@mindspring.com). And remember, if you sign up a new member, you'll receive an "I ♥ Turtle Bay" T-shirt. Call the TBA office for details.

**E-mail Reminder.** If you are not currently receiving e-mail reminders about TBA and other community events, please e-mail the TBA office ([tbaoffice@mindspring.com](mailto:tbaoffice@mindspring.com)) with your name and e-mail address.

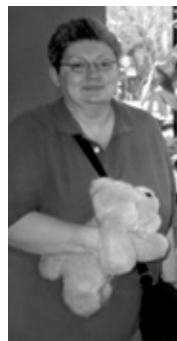


## 20th Annual Toy Drive Tops All Others

The TBA Annual Holiday Toy Drive and Party was the most successful ever in the 20 years the organization has been sponsoring the event, bringing in more toys and children's clothing for needy youngsters in the New York metropolitan area than in any previous year. Hundreds of dolls, stuffed animals, scarves and gloves were contributed, along with some \$2,500 in cash contributions. Of particular note was the very generous support of Dottie Howard and Allan Hunter. They collected scores of

toys from neighbors in their building at 349 East 49th Street, arriving at the Party, held at CK Restaurant on Sunday, December 10, with carts of toys for the youngsters. Many, many thanks to Dottie and Allan for their kindness and enthusiasm.

The cash contributions were presented to Northside Center for Child Development, God's Love We Deliver and the Senior Center at St. Peter's Church, and the gifts to Northside Center for dispersal to the children.



Joining neighbors...and toys...at the annual charity event were, top row, Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer, shown here with Bunny Blei. Dottie Howard, far right-hand corner, contributed many of the items at the Toy Drive, collected from residents of her apartment building at 349 East 49th Street. Bottom row, left to right, are Zoe Segal-Reichlin and City Councilmember Dan Garodnick, Meredith Ballew and Assemblyman Jonathan Bing; Colleen Curtis, Community Board 6 Chair Lyle Frank, and TBA President Bill Curtis.

## TBA Thanks a 'Good Neighbor' Eatery

The TBA thanks CK Restaurant for its hospitality in hosting the TBA's Annual Holiday Toy Drive and Party. Opened just three years ago, CK – located at 936 Second Avenue between 49th and 50th Streets with an enclosed sidewalk café – specializes in Cantonese and Szechuan cooking. The restaurant is the first Manhattan establishment

of the Ki brothers – Kevin, David and Shing – but they have had restaurants in White Plains and Brooklyn for many years.

Open from 11 a.m. to midnight for lunch and dinner, CK Restaurant is also available for private functions of up to 70 people, catering for nearby parties and also offers a take-out menu for pick-up or free delivery.

For more information, see CK's web site, [www.ckrestaurant.com](http://www.ckrestaurant.com), or call the restaurant at 212-838-6668.

For neighborhood information and events  
check out our web site:  
[www.turtlebay-nyc.org](http://www.turtlebay-nyc.org).

## TBA Board at Work

The following is a summary of issues and activities addressed at recent TBA Board meetings, as reflected in the meeting minutes. The TBA:

- is monitoring, with Community Board 6 and as part of the East Midtown Coalition for Sensible Development, plans for the Con Ed Waterside development and United Nations renovation project.
- has joined other neighborhood interests in opposing MTA's planned utility building on East 50th Street, which has now been modified.
- is closely watching neighborhood construction sites for safety and other concerns.
- has joined with other neighborhood groups to demand stronger laws regarding newsrack placement on City sidewalks.
- continues to work to beautify the neighborhood through the TBA Tree Program and support of the Turtle Bay Tree Fund.
- has sponsored or supported neighborhood events, including the recent Holiday Toy Drive and Party and Valentine's Day Dinner Dance. Events upcoming include the Turtle Bay Street Fair and Katharine Hepburn Garden Party and Film Festival.
- produced a pocket guide and walking tour of Turtle Bay historical and architectural sites.

## Turtle Bay Association

President: William E. Curtis

Vice Presidents: Millie Margiotta, Dolores Marsh, Bruce Silberblatt

Treasurer: Francine Irwin

Secretary: Barbara Connolly

Directors: Jed Abrams, Ethel Bendove, Bunny Blei, Orin Buck, Meryl Brodsky, Barbara Connolly, William E. Curtis, Denise Hamilton, Marie-Louise Handal, Pamela Hanlon, Olga Hoffmann, Bill Huxley, Richard Irwin, Millie Margiotta, Dolores Marsh, Patricia Q. McDougald, Francine Irwin, Michael Resnick, Carol Rinzler, Jeannie Sakol, Helen Shapiro, Bruce Silberblatt

## Neighbors Bring Smiles and Spirit to Valentine Party



Sharing smiles at TBA's Annual Love Thy Neighbor Valentine Party held on February 12 were, top row, left to right, Sharon Lee and Dorothy Kay; Felicia Stein and Sira Kalajian; Richard Doyle and Elaine Downey; Denise Hamilton. Middle row, left to right, Helen Shapiro and Thomas LaBarbera; Betty Lupton and Eileen Devlin, standing, Robert Casanovas and Shirley MacLeod, seated; Meryl Brodsky and her cousin Robert Brodsky; Gary Papush and George Vellonakis. Bottom row, left to right, Dolores Marsh and Jessika Kifer; Lenore Setzler.

### Turtle Bay Happenings

**Turtle Bay Music School.** "Chocolate Chip Chamber Music," Saturday, March 24, 11 a.m. Interactive concert for children 2-6 years old, with parents. Free. 244 East 52nd Street. 212-753-8811 for reservations; [www.tbms.org](http://www.tbms.org).

**Art at German House.** Paintings by contemporary Berlin artist Daniel Sambo-Richter, March 21-April 13. Free. Lobby level, 871 United Nations Plaza. Information: [www.german-info.org/newyork](http://www.german-info.org/newyork); 212-610-9719.

**St. Bart's Players.** "The World Goes 'Round-The Songs of Kander & Ebb," a musical revue to "razzle dazzle." April 19-29. \$25; \$23, seniors. St. Bart's

### Art & Culture

Community House, 109 East 50th. For times and tickets, 212-378-0248; [www.members.aol.com/bartsweb](http://www.members.aol.com/bartsweb).

**Japan Society.** "Awakenings: Zen Figure Painting in Medieval Japan." Major exhibit of loans from rare private collections and museums. March 28-June 17. \$10, \$8, seniors. 333 East 47th Street. Information: 212-832-1155; [www.japansociety.org](http://www.japansociety.org).

**Instituto Cervantes.** "Granada by Joan Hernandez Pijuan." Exhibit of expressionist drawings. Through April 17. Free. For hours and information: 212-308-7720; [www.cervantes.org](http://www.cervantes.org).

- compiled by Rita Rowan

### Briefly in Business:

- The TBA thanks the following businesses that contributed door prizes for the TBA Valentine Day Party: **Affinia Fifty Hotel, Beekman Liquors, Country Bank, La Spafumerie, Salon Amici, WCBS AM Radio, WFAN Radio, Zoran Salon.**
- Reminder: The **Vanderbilt YMCA**, a TBA business member, offers TBA members a 20 percent discount on annual YMCA membership, normally a \$1,056 value. Call 212-756-9600 for details.
- **Murphy's Pub and Restaurant**, located at 977 Second Avenue, is a new TBA business member and offers all TBA members a 10 percent discount.

## TBA Marks 50 Years

*continued from page 1*

on 36th and 37th Streets, his street would be next. So he and his colleagues took up the fight to save Murray Hill's streets. During the next two years, they joined Murray Hill neighbors in repeatedly appearing before the Board of Estimate to protest the plan. The meetings were heated and raucous. Newspaper reports called it "verbal warfare" over whether "Manhattan's future would be traffic or trees."

Meanwhile, Jimmy had become convinced that there was an alternative way of solving traffic tie-ups on the cross streets. He turned to Peter Detmold to help prove he was right. Peter and some neighbors formed a committee to monitor traffic. They monitored traffic on East 48th, 49th and 50th Streets between Second and Third Avenues. Their very thorough and precise study – they accounted for the parking status of 922 vehicles between May 15 and June 13, 1958 – showed that if parking regulations were properly enforced, traffic could flow satisfactorily and there would be no need to widen the streets.

### What He Surmised

That's just what Jimmy Amster had surmised. "We have demonstrated that our streets can handle all the traffic required," Jimmy told the New York Times in May 1959. "Thus at what cost to city and resident alike do we contemplate turning our streets into glorified parking lots and truck causeways?"

Within a few weeks, after many delayed votes, the Board of Estimate rejected Hulan Jack's proposal to broaden 36th and 37th Streets. And while Jimmy Amster warned neighbors that the "old demon street-widening" could remain a threat for some time to come, it was never implemented, and only once – in the mid-1960s – was it ever seriously discussed again.

The issue had put the East 49th Street Association on the map of high-powered community activists. Soon other residents of the area – notably those on East 48th Street and East 50th Streets – were joining the East 49th Street Association.

The energetic and charismatic Jimmy Amster found it easy to attract loyal volunteers to help with neighborhood causes. And he increasingly realized that Peter Detmold, with his intellect and dedication to the com-

munity, was a strong right hand. Together, they soon were leading other crusades in the community, taking on zoning and land use issues, safety and security, and working to form a joint council of other East Side residential associations. They began tree planting programs to beautify the neighborhood. And they also started a tradition of social get-togethers, often at Amster Yard or in the Turtle Bay Gardens in the early days, "to bring community spirit to this part of Manhattan," they said.

### New Name Unveiled

By 1965, the association's membership had spread to blocks far beyond the street for which it was named. And so early that year a new name, Turtle Bay Association, was unveiled. Over the years, the group tackled many issues and made significant

strides that have shaped the neighborhood. (See box below.)

Jimmy Amster died in 1986 at 77. Earlier, Peter Detmold was killed, tragically, in 1972 at the age of 48. Jimmy remained as TBA's chairman until his death. Shortly after Peter Detmold's death, Bill Curtis was named Association president.

"Jimmy's and Peter's leadership during the Association's formative years is still felt within the organization today," Bill Curtis says. "It is in large part because of their early vision and commitment that the Turtle Bay Association celebrates its 50th anniversary this year as one of the strongest civic organizations in Manhattan."

Yes, Jimmy Amster, the Association did indeed take "firm root."

**T**hrough the years, the Turtle Bay Association and its leaders have taken on a multitude of critical issues that have helped to shape the neighborhood as we know it today. Just a few of them include:

- In the mid-1960s, they fought to stop the building of a big municipal parking garage at 48th Street and Second Avenue, and successfully worked to minimize a mammoth expansion of U.N. offices and support buildings that would have taken over residential areas.
- In the 1970s, in what many consider one of their greatest achievements, they stopped a huge Long Island Rail Road passenger terminal planned for the northwest corner of 48th Street and Third Avenue. They also fought to keep helicopter service, noisy and considered dangerous, from continuing atop the nearby Pan Am Building.
- In the 1980s, they were instrumental in the successful effort to limit building heights in the area by downzoning the Beekman Place district and Turtle Bay midblocks between First and Third Avenues, and led the drive to redesign and refurbish Peter Detmold Park.
- In the 1990s, they fought for the reopening of the 48th Street ramp to the FDR Drive and, importantly, spearheaded the rejuvenation of Dag Hammarskjöld Plaza and opening of the Katharine Hepburn Garden, adding an oasis and centerpiece the community had long lacked.

**Yes, I want to join the Turtle Bay Association and help support our community's quality of life.**

#### Annual Membership Dues

- |  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Senior \$10   | <input type="checkbox"/> Individual \$25  | <input type="checkbox"/> Family \$30      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business \$40 | <input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor \$100 | <input type="checkbox"/> Pacesetter \$250 |



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- ☐ I would like to become more involved in TBA activities.

Please make your check payable to Turtle Bay Association.

Mail to: Turtle Bay Association, 224 E. 47th St., New York, NY 10017