

Fancy 4th Avenue? More And More Entrepreneurs Do

By Karen Iris Tucker

Once a thoroughfare known for drive-thrus, auto-body shops and boarded buildings, 4th Avenue in Park Slope is slowly beginning to brighten with freshly-sprung condos and plucky small businesses.

While not yet ready for its close-up, 4th Avenue, technically part of the Gowanus Canal area in Brooklyn, is decidedly a new real estate frontier.

"There's nowhere else to go," says Rick Staula, an agent for Aguayo & Huebener Realty on nearby 5th Avenue. "There's no room to build on 5th, 6th or 7th Ave., so people are naturally going to 4th, which is going to be an extension of Park Slope. It will extend the gentrification that much further."

Staula says prospective owners and renters are undeterred by 4th Avenue being a noisy six-lane strip with traffic. "Why would they be?" he asks, referencing luxury

buildings that have been built along Manhattan's West Side Highway. "Could you get any noisier than that?"

Park Slope resident W.R. Coffel is one such proprietor who is unfazed by 4th Ave.'s rougher edges — despite such events as the one on the day he met a reporter on 4th Ave. at Union Street. Police had set up a dragnet to nab an armed robber who was running from the Staples office supply store just a few streets down.

Coffel, a poet and visual artist, chose 234 4th Ave., between Union and President Streets, as the spot for his multi-purpose art venue, Monster Gallery, scheduled to open at the end of this month.

"I honestly think this will become a richer community than it was before," says Coffel, who, deeply impacted by the events of September 11, 2001, "wanted to put back only good energy."

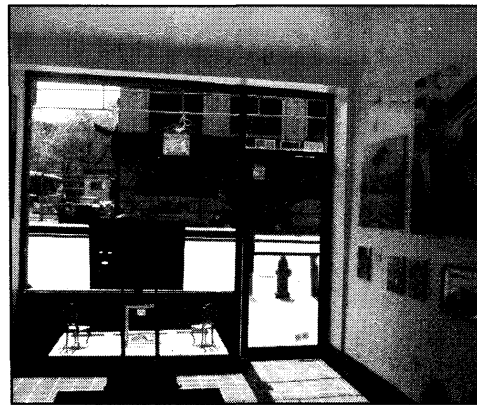
He is hoping his gallery will do just that, providing the communities on and around 4th Ave. with a low-cost setting for independent filmmakers to arrange small screenings and show their work.

To accomplish this, Coffel has engaged in a little local cross-pollination, enlisting the talents of Chris Morris, chief technician for the performance venue Brooklyn Lyceum — directly across the street from Monster Gallery — to help him install a seven-foot-wide movie screen. (Owner of the Lyceum, Eric Richmond, is now a relative vet among new-wave entrepreneurs on 4th Ave. He bought and began ren-



Brooke Webster's Cattyshack bar; renovations are nearly complete.

Photo By Karen Iris Tucker



View from inside Monster Gallery, which faces The Brooklyn Lyceum.

ovating the long-abandoned bathhouse seven years ago.)

Coffel will also feature his art ("large-format Giclee printmaking, sculptures, box-collages, and visual manuscripts") as well as that of others, at Monster Gallery. He plans to display the oil paintings of Sloper JoAnne McFarland when the space officially debuts.

Coffel has also been known to hop down the block to read his prose at Spoken Words Café, an African/world music, poetry, and comedy venue opened four months ago by owner Chief Dayo.

Dayo, who has lived on 15th Street off

4th Ave. for 26 years, says he was moved to open up shop, "because there wasn't even a place to sit and have coffee," on 4th Ave. Dayo calls the avenue a "melting point," because it is easily accessible to residents of nearby areas such as Sunset Park, Red Hook and Downtown Brooklyn.

"The community needs to have this type of an establishment. They were craving a place to listen to music and poetry, like they have on 5th Ave. and 7th Ave.," says Dayo. He affectionately refers to the three arts enterprises on the block — Monster Gallery, Spoken Words Café and The Brooklyn

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