

# 4th Avenue Renaissance In the Making

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Lyceum across the way — as “The Triangle.”

Just a block down, between Carroll and President, sits a colorful new watering hole, Cattyshack. Brooke Webster, former proprietor of the now-defunct lesbian bar Meow Mix on the Lower East Side, bought the two-story space with a silent partner 15 months ago. Like Coffel, she plans to open to the public within the month — possibly within a week — if the city provides her with water pressure soon.

“After having to deal with the neighbors above Meow Mix and also not having enough space, I thought 4<sup>th</sup> Ave. would be a perfect place for bars since it’s not very residential,” says Webster, whose Cattyshack is situated between an auto repair garage and a vacant tire shop.

Webster, reveling in the expanse of her new establishment, installed a sprawling 45-foot bar on the first floor and a 1,200-foot back deck on the second, which she plans to heat in the winter. Cattyshack will also offer patrons a pool table, a dance floor with a moveable stage, “old skool” video games and guest DJs.

“The upstairs will have a bar room with windows all around, everywhere you look,” says Webster, a Crown Heights resident. She plans to feature theme nights such as “Chump Change,” geared to people who work in the service industry, and also a hosted karaoke night, “I’m Okay, You’re Karaoke.”

“There are going to be so many nooks and crannies with different parties going on each night,” says Webster, a configuration she hopes will serve to attract myriad patrons.

Invariably, such revitalization of a neigh-

borhood can be worrisome for long-time residents, who are often displaced due to soaring real estate prices.

This conundrum is all too familiar to the non-profit community organization, Fifth Avenue Committee (FAC), which sought to ward off such displacement back in 2003, when rezoning authorized developers to build structures of up to 12 stories on 4<sup>th</sup> Ave.

FAC lobbied the city for “inclusionary zoning,” which would require developers to offer some affordable apartments in their new buildings. Those efforts were largely unsuccessful.

Gretchen Maneval, head of housing development for FAC, has continued to push the city in this regard.

“We are currently in discussions with City Council folks and the administration about putting together a proposal for city-owned land along 4<sup>th</sup> Ave.,” she says. “We’ve been working with Bill de Blasio’s office, trying to rally the city to earmark funds for use in developing affordable units on those sites.”

De Blasio, representing the 39<sup>th</sup> Council District, reached through his chief of staff, Peter Hatch, said, “It will be an uphill battle, but I am hopeful we can work with the community to convince developers to take advantage of the incentives available to them to do the right thing and build affordable units.”

Coffel, who ultimately seeks for Monster Gallery to be a non-profit that feeds resources into the community, has a humble goal: “To be able to have you interview me a year from now about how I’ve stayed,” he jokes. In all seriousness, he adds, “I’m thrilled to be here; artwise, this is one hell of a community on 4<sup>th</sup> Ave.”