

Endpaper

Running Out of Gas – but Not Ideas

MANY PEOPLE SPEND their weekends working with real estate brokers, scouring the city for the “right” apartment in the “right” building. I took a different route. I married into our building 27 years ago. Yes, I found the “right” woman, with the “right” apartment, in the “right” building.

What was clearly unique to me about 17 West 67th Street was that owners knew each other, and it was more like a family than just a group of people living behind locked doors. Holiday parties brought people together, some cooking for the party, others there and welcoming.

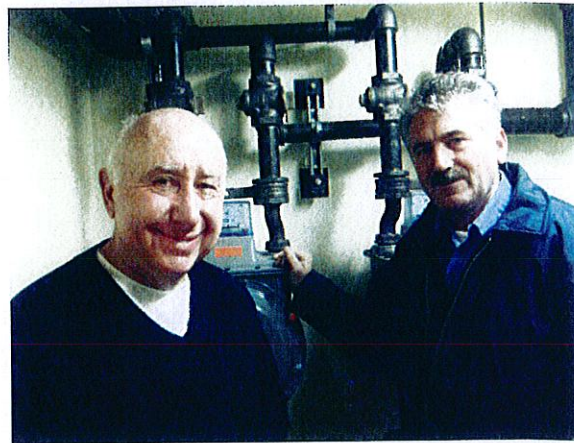
Because of my CPA background, I was asked to join the board, and later became its president. As this was the first co-op board I had ever joined, I had to feel my way through some difficult decisions, management changes, and so forth. I found the time element consuming and left the board to others. While I was away, my wife spent many years as a member and as president for a significant period of time.

Fifteen years later, I received a call from the president of the board, who convinced me to join again. Technology (PCs and mobile phones) made communication easier, so I agreed to come back.

After looking at the mess with which we were dealing, we hired a new manager (Michael Wolfe of Midboro Management), a new attorney (Geoffrey Mazel of Hankin & Mazel), and a new CPA (Carole Newman of Newman, Newman & Kaufman). With this management team, I believed the board could now spend its time dealing with professionals who would be totally responsive to our needs. We were correct because they were, and continue to be, totally responsive.

However, no one could have prepared us for what was about to happen on April 27, 2010. A meter reader from Con Edison reported a gas odor from one of our “in-apartment” meters. Fast-forward to Con Edison shutting down the supply of gas to our entire building. When this happens, even in an 80-year-old property in Manhattan, it is our job not only to find the leak, but to bring the entire building up to present-day code. All before you can apply for gas service to be restored.

We called our management team and began to understand the process – and the potential costs – to accomplish all these goals. Fortunately, Grant Varga, one of the board members who also happens to be an engineer, along with our hands-on superintendent, Tony, managed this enormous undertaking. What was timely for our building at this point was that we had been talking about putting in a master gas meter. This allowed removal of all



TOM SCOTER

Alan Kramer

President, 17 West 67th Street
Kramer (left) with Tony, the super, and master meter.

60 of our individual apartment meters, slashed gas costs, and eliminated the monthly meter reader. We decided to combine all the repair work with the master-meter project. Two birds with one bullet!

The other significant problem was how to keep our building calm and go without gas for so many months. In addition, we had to explain that the building was spending hundreds of thousands of dollars to fix this problem. Also alternate laundry arrangements were made because of the loss of our gas dryers.

We sent memos and called “town hall” meetings to get everyone up to speed. And then explained, explained, and explained again. Communication kept every resident completely up to date. We kept everyone in the loop.

Having a board member on the job meant that the process was organized, focused, and efficient. We were on a first-name basis with many plumbers from Fred Smith Plumbing, and we tapped into their experience with other gas outages.

Because of the board’s tight involvement with this enormous project, we were able to keep the costs down significantly, and just as important, the owners as informed as they were.

In mid-December, after seven-and-a-half months, Con Ed turned our gas back on, just in time to celebrate at our lobby holiday party. We had a wonderful celebration, and the current board ran unopposed at the next annual shareholders’ meeting. ■