



Rebuilding neighborhoods one block at a time

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KEEPING THE GRINCH AT BAY IN EL BARRIO Residents Keep the Lights Burning on East Harlem's Holiday Tree; Lighting Ceremony to be Held December 15th at 6:30 PM @ Northeast corner of East 106th Street and Third Avenue

East Harlem, New York—Four weeks ago, it seemed likely that Franklin Plaza, the site of the East Harlem Holiday Tree, would remain dark this year. The tree's usual sponsor, the East Harlem Board of Tourism, was struggling to raise money in the face of a faltering economy and to find the staff resources to ensure that all the logistical issues were addressed.

But at the last minute community organizations and residents, led by Hope Community, a local non-profit housing group, stepped up to make donations and contribute their time to support the tree, which has become an East Harlem tradition. Last week, event organizers announced that they had raised the \$9,000 necessary to ensure that a tree lighting ceremony will be taking place on December 15th at Franklin Plaza, on the corner of East 106th Street and Third Avenue.

"We've been lighting a tree at Franklin Plaza for the past four years," said José Carrero of the East Harlem Board of Tourism and co-chair of the tree committee, who helped to found the tradition. "We didn't want this year to be an exception."

Local businesses, non-profit organizations and individuals reached into their pockets to make the tree possible. In addition to major sponsors like State Senator José M. Serrano, Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone Development Corp., Banco de Ponce de Leon, Con Edison, East Harlem Business Capital Corp., Harlem Community Development Corp., Manhattan Youth Baseball, Hope Community, Inc., Mount Sinai Medical Center, Manhattan Community Board 11, El Barrio's Operation Fightback, Lott Community Development Corporation, and La Voz Hispana, many local small businesses and residents made personal donations.

"The tree lighting is a tradition that's should continue to flourish," said Roger Cabán, chair of Hope Community's board of directors and co-chair of the tree committee. "Hope is proud to have stepped up to the plate at a critical point



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to keep this tradition alive.” In addition to making a donation, Hope staff raised funds and carried out much of the logistical work required to make the tree lighting possible.

The tree has become a symbol of the neighborhood’s efforts to maintain its rich cultural heritage in the face of rapid change. East Harlem, like other northern Manhattan neighborhoods, is facing development pressures and rising rents. This year, residents are facing additional concerns about a rapidly deteriorating economy.

“The tree gives those of us who live and work in East Harlem a chance to join together and celebrate our community,” said Kathy Benson of the Museum of the City of New York, who volunteered hours of her time on the project. “This year, of all years, it’s important that we all stand together during the holiday season.”

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