

In 1990, a NY Times reporter wrote about Manhattan Valley. Here it is slightly updated

In the heart of the neighborhood along Amsterdam and Columbus Avenues are all manner of madre y padre businesses: vegetable stands, bakeries, grocery stores, drug stores, a shoemaker, a fish market, hair salons, furniture and hardware stores, pizzerias and Chinese fast-food outlets, one fancy Dominican restaurant and plenty of bars.

From 104th Street to 107th Street on Columbus Avenue, where there are 12 bodegas, mothers walk their babies from one store to the other. Neighbors often stop in mid-block to chat.

But at night, the streets clear. Traffic is left to the drug dealers, who stand under lampposts and rush like eager doormen when limousines and BMW's pull to the curbs.

Manhattan Valley has always been a humble place. In the 1880's, tenements there housed poor Irish immigrants and the neighborhood was nicknamed Shanty Town. The best buildings in the area have always stood on its fringes, either on Central Park West or beyond its borders on West End Avenue.

The valley does boast a row of townhouses from 104th to 106th Streets on Manhattan Avenue, a quirky block west of Central Park West, that are as impressive as any in the city. And it also boasts two apartment towers that opened in the late 1980s on 110th Street between Central Park West and Manhattan Avenue.

Leah Schneider, who was the executive director of the Manhattan Valley Development Corporation, lived in the neighborhood for 35 years until she died in 2001. She once remembered when 250 buildings -- or half the area's housing stock -- were burnt out and derelict.

"Years ago, people wouldn't step foot in Manhattan Valley," Ms. Schneider had said. "In the '70s, it looked like the South Bronx."

Largely due to nonprofit housing groups, many of the city-owned buildings in the valley were rehabilitated. In 1987, the Manhattan Valley Development Corporation, along with the Valley Restoration Development Corporation, the Westside Federation for Senior Citizens Housing, and Community Board 7, developed the Manhattan Valley Plan to renovate all 447 city-owned properties and build on eight vacant city lots.

By 1990, they opened a 40-unit building for homeless and low-income households, with 10 percent of the units reserved for AIDS-afflicted homeless people, and accepted applications for 50 apartments at 102-116 109th Street for people with incomes of no more than \$33,000. Also, in February 1990, a 72-unit building on 104th Street for homeless, low- and moderate-income families opened.

In Dec 1990, the group received approval from the city's Department of Housing Preservation and Development to develop eight buildings on Columbus Avenue, between 108th and 109th Streets, into 90 apartments and a street-level market. "The stores will be the kind the neighborhood needs," said Maria Soto, president of the Upper West Side Business Improvement District. "We didn't allow the city to sell the buildings to high-priced developers."

Mrs. Soto was one of a group of homesteaders who, after 12 years of trial and error, turned seven city-owned tenements on 105th Street between Amsterdam and Broadway into a 44-unit sweat-equity cooperative for low-income families. "It's not a high-class neighborhood," Mrs. Soto said. "But I believe it'll be better in 5 or 10 years."

In Dec 1990, the Manhattan North Tactical Narcotics Team brought in 40 undercover officers for several weeks of drug arrests -- a tacit acknowledgment that the drug situation is unbearable. The commander of the team, Capt. Robert Curley, said that before the narcotics team moved in, officers raided 67 West 107th Street, off Columbus Avenue, on Oct. 30, seizing half a kilogram of cocaine, \$448,751 in cash and an Uzi machine pistol. "That," he said, "is heavy dealing." In addition violent crime was falling in the valley. . .

In 5 to 10 years it did get better.

