

SBS IN THE NEWS

The Neighborhood Retail Alliance

Fire and Hope

Wednesday, December 23, 2009

The disastrous Bronx fire that consumed stores on 204th Street gutted the neighborhood's only supermarket-the Foodtown owned by our friends the Katz family. As Bronx News Network reports, however, the gutsy Katzes are planning to come back bigger and better than ever: "I just spoke to Dan Katz, whose family owns the newly renovated Foodtown on E. 204th St. that was just destroyed by yesterday's fire. The Katz's announced that they will rebuild an even larger store on the same site in 2010 and also provide groceries at Pricebusters, another store they own on E. 204th St. between Hull and Decatur avenue."

Good for Danny who, along with his brother Noah, run one of the best family owned grocery chains in the city-and beyond. The rebuild will not be easy or cheap, but the Katzes are committed to the neighborhood: "Everyone should know that we are committed to serving the residents and we will rebuild and even bigger and better store that what was there," said Noah Katz, Dan's brother, in a press release...Dan Katz told me that they have an agreement with the landlord to lease the two other properties claimed by the fire -- the American Diner and the dental office -- in order to expand their business."

So, in the aftermath of tragedy comes the hope of something better, reminding us at the same time, just how important local business is to the community. As one resident told the News: "The spate of fires on 204th St. has residents and business owners thinking the worst. "Two places in two months burned down. It's crazy," said Richard Vasquez. "This supermarket has been there a very long time and I can't believe it's down right now. The just redid it and now it's gone."

With all of the fires on 204th Street, the natural inclination is to suspect foul play: "It seemed like the whole block was burning down," said local Rey Marcano, 43, a bus driver. "I don't think it was accidental." And local council member Oliver Koppell told NY1 pretty much the same thing: "All of these fires started late at night when no one was around," said Bronx Councilman G. Oliver

Koppell. "I mean, it just doesn't seem to me to be coincidental."

If so, there's an arsonist on the loose in the Bronx, bringing back unpleasant memories from the not so distant past. The potentially illegal nature of this tragedy behooves that the area elected officials and the Bronx BP act quickly to help the local merchants rebuild.

And, as the News points out, the city appears to be responding in the right way: "City officials said they are doing everything possible to help displaced workers and business owners rebuild from the ashes of the Norwood fires. The city Department of Small Business Services is holding a meeting Dec. 29 at 10:30 a.m. in Community Board 7 offices at 229A E. 204th St. SBS spokeswoman Laura Postiglione said the department has numerous tools, including grant money and help accessing loans, to get owners back in business. "We'll work to help the displaced workers get temporary employment if the business is not going to reopen or is temporarily closed," she said. "We're working...to get them back on their feet as soon as possible."

Which is good news for the Katz family who, much like the Sloans who own the MortonWilliams supermarket chain, are fixtures in the Bronx, and have dedicated generations to the borough's neighborhoods. We'll give the BNN the last word on this: "The Katz family, which owns 11 other Foodtown stores has operated the store on East 204th Street, first called MetFood, since Dan's grandfather, Paul, opened it in 1956. Their father, Sydney, joined Paul in 1962. Noah and Dan joined the company in the 1980s."