

WESTSIDE

neighborhood alliance

February 2014

Dear Community Board 4 Members:

The West Side Neighborhood Alliance (WSNA) urges the community board to do everything possible to help relocate the Stile's Farmers Market that was recently forced to leave its home on West 41 Street. WSNA considers preserving Stile's as part of its mandate to keep our neighborhood livable, affordable and diverse. In addition, many of our 500+ members shop at Stile's for their fruit and vegetables, and we are afraid that its closing will literally make it harder for them to put food on the table.

The closing of Stile's occurs at a time when Hell's Kitchen is hemorrhaging affordable food retailers. As little as ten years ago, local shoppers could shop at Victoria's Supermarket on Ninth Avenue and West 46 Street – now the site of an American Apparel. A few blocks uptown, there was a Key Foods; today it's become part of Duane Reade. Crossing over to 10th Avenue, there was a Fine Fare on West 54 Street, but that was torn down to make room for luxury housing. On West 55 Street and Ninth Avenue, an A&P suffered the same fate, and a bank sits on that location today. Finally, the two Associated Supermarkets on West 57 and 58 Streets became part of the pricier Morton Williams chain.

So today, in addition to the two Morton Williams, grocery shoppers in Hell's Kitchen are forced to choose among two Food Emporium stores, a Gristedes, and a D'Agostinos – supermarkets priced beyond the budget of many community members. If the trend of this last decade has been for luxury residences and upscale supermarkets to force out more affordable retailers, at least we could count on the three Stile's markets to offer high quality fruit and vegetables at low prices. Now, unfortunately we're down to only one.

WSNA has long taken a stand against our neighborhood being made unaffordable by spiraling residential rents and by the destruction of older housing stock by luxury buildings. But *commercial* rent increases and real estate development have also had the effect of driving out local retailers and affordable shopping in favor of chain stores geared to a high-end clientele. If new luxury high rises are making it harder for all but the very wealthy to move into the new Hell's Kitchen, their crowding out of local businesses like Stile's makes it that much harder for those who already live in the area to continue to do so.

Sincerely,

Richard Brender Stephen Williams Pete Diaz Vivian Riffelmacher Matthew Abuelo
West Side Neighborhood Alliance Executive Board members

Contact: Richard Brender, 917-675-0604 brender4@yahoo.com

To whom it may concern:

The residents of Hell's Kitchen are living in a "food desert." Since Stiles Produce Company had to move from their long time location at 41st Street and 9th Avenue, the residents of HK and beyond have found it difficult, if not impossible to purchase quality produce at affordable prices.

This "food desert" goes far beyond Hell's Kitchen. People of all ages shop at Stiles. The ages include hipsters, parents with children, the elderly, SNAP recipients, folks that come from Tudor City on first Avenue and 42nd Street via bus, the FDNY fire houses to name a few. Stile's services local restaurants and bakeries, and the commuters that load up on fresh fruits and vegetables before getting on the bus to go home to New Jersey. In New Jersey, the prices are higher and the quality lower.

Over the years, Stiles had its finger on the pulse of the changing ethnicity of our community. From just having the basic Ice Berg lettuce, the green beans, etc., Stiles has supplied our evolving food culture. At Stiles, clients could find the special ingredients to make their nutritious "taste of home" meals for their families and friends. Food, good food, makes a family more than strong physically, but strengthens the bonds of culture and community.

The vacant space that housed Project Find has been empty for over three years. We hope this vacant space can be filled with a much needed produce company that has served the area for many years. The space is large enough to hold both Stiles Produce and Big Apple Meat Market. Right now, walking under the overpass at night is an uncomfortable experience. It's dark, strewn with refuse and a home for the homeless street people.

Knowing Steve Stiles and having grown old with his employees, I have a vested interest wanting Stile's Produce back in the neighborhood as soon as possible. His employees have worked for him 16-18 years. They're now without an income and would like nothing more than to return to work for the owner they respect.

The Port Authority can't dither about a decision that makes such an important impact on this community. I would find it interesting to hear the reasons why the Port wouldn't consider renting this space to a viable, all ready successful business.

Best Regards,

The West 44th Street Better Block Association

Save Our Stiles Relocation Support Group
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One neighbor after another writes to say how much Stiles is missed in our community. We need them back, and we need them back soon. They are replacing a vital food resource that's been taken away from us.

Let's just say it was thoughtlessness on the part of the developer who evicted Stile's market - a Hell's Kitchen favorite for 30 years. We won't call it greed, will we? You see, there was evidently no engaging with the community within which they plan to build their tourist tower hotel. True, in an artists concept in their prospectus, the developers pictured the humble Stile's tent next to their luxury hi-rise..and then they turned around and kicked them out with hardly any notice.

The community needs nutrition. We have been brought up to know that that is an important part of a healthy life style - the 5 food groups, the food pyramid, vitamins and minerals - fresh fruits and vegetables daily. If some of us are deprived of these because we're forced to choose between prescription medicine and food, for instance, or because some of us can't walk 10 blocks to the next affordable, and possibly also endangered Stiles market, then what?

We're asking Port Authority to do the right thing and give Stile's Farmer's Market the empty space they've been sitting on for 4 years. Give Stiles a decent rent or lease and give the community the break that we deserve.

We're honored to have taken part thus far in getting the ball rolling, and we're turning it over to our very capable elected officials and community board to negotiate a fair and workable arrangement with the Port Authority.

Thank you,

Keith Rodan
coordinator,
Save Our Stiles.