

Tenants fight for building with hip

Louise Roug
Los Angeles Times

NEW YORK — In the beige linoleum hallway, a fluorescent light flickers on and off as a woman saunters over to visit her neighbor. The elevator creaks and whines, then frees a gaggle of giggling girls. Downstairs in the laundry room, a young mother sorts her children's clothes, enjoying the room's warmth on a blustery day.

But for this west Bronx apartment building's residents, the comfort of home might not last.

The mostly low-income tenants are battling a millionaire investor over the future of this small but pricey slice of real estate near Yankee Stadium.

If the building is sold and taken out of its affordable-housing program as planned, tenants fear rents will rise to unaffordable levels. To prevent that, they are trying to buy the building and turn it into a co-op.

It's a familiar New York story. Throughout the city, poorer residents have been squeezed in recent years as investors and developers have taken over low-income buildings and put them on the open market for higher rents, affordable-housing advocates say.

One angle that has helped residents raise money to buy this building is its historical significance: It is one of the birthplaces of hip-hop.

In August 1973, a hulking Jamaican-American teenager named



CAROLYN COLE / LOS ANGELES TIMES

The owner of this New York building, designated as the birthplace of hip-hop, wants to opt out of a rent-control program. Residents are raising money to buy it.

Clive Campbell started throwing back-to-school parties with his sister Cindy in their building, 1520 Sedgwick Ave.

Campbell, nicknamed Hercules because of his size, bought multiple copies of the same albums and, spinning his turntables, stitched together a new genre with a mix of music and break beats.

Soon teenagers were flocking to parties in the recreation room. Two-by-fours and metal crates served as chairs and tables, but no one was sitting down; the place was packed with dancing kids.

"It got a little out of control," said Campbell, who became known as DJ Kool Herc. And so music and turntables moved from Sedgwick Avenue to the nearby Twilight Zone club, and

hip-hop spread through the city.

"We weren't doing (the parties) for money — it was just about music," said Campbell, who is considered by many a founding father of hip-hop.

He sees the building on Sedgwick as a musical monument like Grace-land or the Apollo Theater in Harlem. "This is part of the American dream," Campbell said.

This summer, state officials declared the building the "birthplace of hip-hop," making it eligible for national and state registers.

But for Pauline Beckham, 54, the battle to buy the building is not about preserving the past. She is fighting to save her home of eight years, a place where she has watched children hunt for Easter eggs in spring and attended barbecues in summer.

"I thought I had a safe investment," Beckham said, referring to the modest two-bedroom apartment she bought with family pictures and work above the kitchen door. "I didn't think they could do this."

Built almost 40 years ago, the building is covered by the state rent-control program, which helps low-income families afford housing.

Last year, the owner announced plans to sell the building to a high-profile New York investor. Beckham and other tenants are sick and opt out of the rent-control program.

A representative for the building's management company declined to call for comment.

Tenants raised money from city agencies and other sources — about \$11 million — and high-profile help from D.C. Rep. Jose E. Serrano, D-N.Y., and Charles E. Schumer, D-N.Y., who have lobbied the city and Congress on the residents' behalf. The city, which can own the building, says tenants need \$14 million.

The city, which can own the building, is expected to make a decision soon, according to Amy Yee, a co-organizer with Tenants and Homebuyers, a statewide tenants' organization that is working to buy the Sedgwick Avenue residence.

In New York, as elsewhere, tenants have invested in recent years in what they believed were undervalued assets, quickly flipping them for millions of dollars in

ASK AMY

Should wife have told him about her baby?

Dear Amy: My wife and I just celebrated our 40th wedding anniversary.

I accidentally discovered that she had a baby out of wedlock two years before we met, three years before we married.

We've had some very heated discussions about this.

I feel she has been dishonest by not telling me this. She claims that this happened before I knew her and that it's



AMY DICKINSON

important lifetime facts that partners should know about each other.

In a marriage, you should

were reversed and you had fathered a baby.

I would urge both of you to work this out in therapy. This is an important moment in your marriage.

Dear Amy: I attended a baby shower for the daughter of a close family member.

We drove three hours with other relatives to attend the noontime shower in another state.

My husband says to let it go and to pass on the next invitation.

— Lynn

Dear Lynn: Back in the day, baby showers were about "showering" an expectant mom with gifts for the baby. These events were held in the host's living room with punch, wine, homemade casseroles and sweets to eat.

PEOPLE
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Anna's daughter

Anna M. ... inherit her ... A Los A ... only mad ... Hope in the ... trust in the ... Her fat ... Smith's e ... co-truste ... Super ... Beckloff ... Stern, w