

Queens

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Daily News, Sunday, August 8, 1982

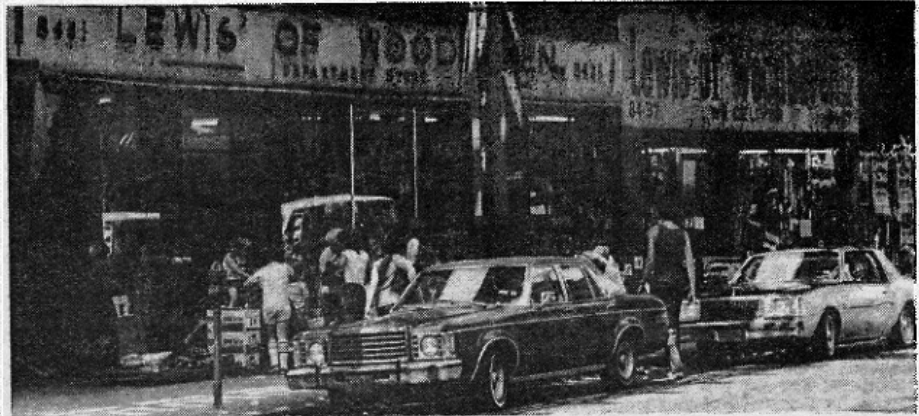
The name is WoodHAVEN

By JACK LEAHY

'A HAVEN in the city" is the motto and description of Woodhaven that has been adopted by community leaders seeking to preserve the middle-class neighborhood. Indeed, haven seems to be an especially appropriate appellation for an area that has largely escaped the urban problems that have disrupted so many New York neighborhoods in recent years.

But that doesn't mean Woodhaven residents and merchants regard the community as being immune to social change and property decay. Instead, they are working through the nonprofit Greater Woodhaven Development Corp. to prevent any signs of decline.

The GWDC, headquartered at 84-20 Jamaica Ave., is concentrating on maintaining and improving the strip



View of Jamaica Ave. shopping area at 84th St. in Woodhaven.

DENNIS CARUSO DAILY NEWS

of retail stores that runs through the heart of Woodhaven under the Jamaica Ave. elevated subway structure.

"IF THE COMMERCIAL strip

goes down, the rest of the residential area will go too," said Gus Kobleck, GWDC's project director.

The GWDC was formed about three years ago as an outgrowth of a

federation of Woodhaven block associations, according to GWDC president Mary Whalen. It defines its area of concern

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as being bounded on the north by Park Lane South, on the east by 100th St., on the west by Elderts Lane and the Brooklyn border, and on the south by Atlantic Ave.

In September 1979, a \$105,000 grant was won from the city's Office of Economic Development to foster matching investments in storefront improvements and new business investment, Whalen explained.

That effort proved to be so successful that the city has put up another \$140,000 this year for similar grants as well as for street improvements to make the area more attractive to shoppers.

"FOR EVERY dollar in grant money received by the merchants, they agree to invest another \$3 of their own money in sprucing up their stores," explained Kobleck.

"In the past 18 months, we have documented that the grants have stimulated another \$2 million in private investment," he added. "There may be an economic recession going on in the country, but you'd never know it around here. The money is out there somewhere."

Alex Guiseppone, 29, owner of the Park Place Greenery at 87-26 Jamaica Ave., said he set up his flower shop 10 months ago and made about \$4,000 worth of improvements to the site.

Among other things, he had the two-story building steam-cleaned for the first time in decades, and put up new signs and did extensive interior painting.

"IT'S ONE OF the few vital business areas left in the city where the rents haven't become outrageous," he noted.

Margie Schmidt, 23, and her brother, William, 25, are the third generation of their family to own and work in Schmidt's Confectionery, a homemade-candy shop founded by their grandfather 56 years ago.

"We get most of our customers from the neighborhood," said Margie, "but people who have moved to the suburbs often come in for some old-fashioned candy. They usually say they're glad to see we're still here and that the neighborhood hasn't changed all that much."

About 80% of the people who shop in the scores of stores along Jamaica Ave. also live in Woodhaven, according to Tony Cambria, a native son who returned to the neighborhood as the vice-chairman of the GWDC board and as a vice president of the Columbia Savings Savings and Loan Association, which has two branches in the community.

BESIDES SEVERAL candy and flower shops, the 17-block stretch of Jamaica Ave. in Woodhaven contains doctors' and dentists' offices, men's and women's clothing stores, coffeeshops, restaurants, taverns and bakeries, laundries and cleaners, grocery and liquor stores. A person can buy hardware, jewelry, furniture, cosmetics or shoes. Or else, one can visit any of four banks or S&Ls to borrow money for purchases.

There also are travel services, law offices, insurance agencies, barber shops and hairdressers. The community boosters point with justifiable pride to the fact that the strip has few vacant stores.

"When a vacancy occurs, the shop usually is snapped up right away by a new business," said Whalen.

AND WHILE the el may seem to be an architectural eyesore looming over the new planters, lighting and bus-stop benches installed by the GWDC, Cambria said people view it as a "necessary necessity."

"That doesn't mean the trains couldn't be quieter as they rumble through here," he insisted. "We intend to push for a subway noise abatement program that has been proposed by city officials."

Whalen said Woodhaven also has to deal with an "identity" problem.

"We're not Woodside or part of Richmond Hill, as outsiders sometimes think we are," said Whalen. "We're Woodhaven... a haven in the city."

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