

PUPIL POWER PERSUADES BLOOMBERG TO ORDER RAZING OF NEIGHBORHOOD HORROR



JESSE WARD

Students from East Brooklyn Churches High School for Public Service, including some sporting "I called 311" stickers, take a bow after their successful campaign to persuade the city to tear down the crackhouse two doors down from their school on De Kalb Ave. in Bushwick.

High school crack-down

Students' spirited campaign KOs drug den

FOR TWO YEARS, the vacant building on De Kalb Avenue was a notorious crackhouse.

Besides the used vials and trash that littered the street, the building was two doors down from a city high school — and students were so uneasy, they crossed the street just to get to class.

"It was nasty," said Nereida Montanez, 15, a student at the East Brooklyn Churches High School for Public Service.

But where adults in Bushwick failed, the students have put their civics lessons into action and achieved dramatic results.

"We called and reported it several times," said Alex Camacho, a nearby business owner. "If it hadn't been for the students and the teachers, I guess we wouldn't have gotten anything done."

The city is moving to tear

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down the abandoned building later this month after an all-out campaign launched by the school's 10th-graders to force the city to deal with the problem.

"I feel good that we could make a difference," said Sonia Sanchez, 15, standing outside the now-boarded-up building at 1143-1145 De Kalb Ave. "It was really disgusting."

The 10th-graders staged a massive "311 blitz" Nov. 23, encouraging hundreds of students and community members to call the city's complaint hotline to report the problem.

Students also invited City Councilwoman Diana Reyna (D-Bushwick) to their art exhib-

it featuring photo essays about the blighted site. "It's a public safety issue," said Reyna.

Each of the seven 10th-grade homerooms was given a task: Some students prepared a script to coach callers on the issue. Others put up signs around the school urging people to get involved, while still others made stickers to hand out that read "I called 311."

The strategy worked: That same day, Mayor Bloomberg took notice. Hours later, the Buildings Department moved to tear down the building.

"Mayor Bloomberg was disturbed to hear about the condition of this hazardous abandoned building adjacent to one of our public schools," said Community Assistance Commissioner Jonathan Greenspun, who will meet with the students next week. "This is probably the best lesson in civ-

ics they will ever get."

Fed-up observers said the problem started when the shuttered former medical office became a place where people were seen heading in and out of after dark; the sidewalk was frequently strewn with overflowing garbage bags, old clothes, mattresses, empty beer bottles and used drug paraphernalia.

City officials occasionally attempted to board up the building in response to complaints, merchants said, but each time, vagrants would soon return.

The budding civic leaders are glad the building will soon be torn down — but the campaign is far from over.

The students are now busy

drawing up plans detailing how the site could be used to create a much-needed gym and auditorium for the overcrowded school, which was founded by East Brooklyn Congregations.

"The gym we have is really small, so when we have basketball practice it's not accurate," said Gisella Tavarez, 15. Reyna said she is writing letters to bolster their case. Greenspun said, "We'll look forward to discussing that with them."

Meanwhile, government teacher L. Schere said the school's staff applauds the students for turning their concerns into action. "This shows that young people have a voice if they stand up and use it," said Schere.



Diana Reyna