

WHEDCO'S "STAIR PROMPTS" KICK-OFF EVENT

By Howard Giske

WHEDCo, the Women's Health and Economic Development Organization, is promoting exercise and safety along with representatives of the NY City Department of Health and the Dep't of Transportation. WHEDCo has been putting up signs encouraging people to use the stairs as an alternative to elevators, known as "stair prompts" at their 132-apartment Urban Horizons complex, at 50 East 168th St, Bronx NY.

The Department of Transportation was there at an event on Wednesday afternoon, July 23rd, giving out bicycle helmets, fitted for children and adults. Their aim is to encourage bike riding and safety, since all children age 13 or younger, legally must wear a helmet when on a bicycle, scooter, skates or skateboard.



WHEDCo President Nancy Biberman said that the program encourages burning calories, not electricity. If residents at the apartment building want to stay fit, there are 10 stories of stairs to climb. Urban Horizons also had their cellar and boilers retrofitted recently. The Urban Horizons building is part of the former Morrisania Hospital, which WHEDCo rehabilitated 12 years ago. Recently, the organization has been focusing on reducing energy consumption in daily operations.

They already have replaced all the refrigerators in the building's apartments with new Energy Star, energy efficient refrigerators with the goal of keeping ConEd bills down. Another thing that people can do is to carry a pedometer, to measure how many steps they take, and if possible, bring their sneakers to work.

Dr. Jane Bedell, the NY City Department of Health Assistant Commissioner for the Bronx was on hand to give more background on the program. Dr. Bedell says that there is an epidemic of obesity and diabetes in the Bronx. Other diseases that are increased by overweight are heart attacks and strokes. About 65-percent of the adult population is overweight, and this causes a higher level of diabetes cases. She was asked what people can do about this. Her advice is to: 1. drink water not soda, 2. limit TV watching, especially for children, to one hour a day, including video games, 3. walk, run and bicycle as much as you can, 4. eat five servings a day of fruits and vegetables. It's true that people in New York City walk a lot between using public transportation, they are not totally dependent on using cars, but the obesity problem persists. That is why even a little thing like a "stair prompt" sign is useful.

There is a flood of child obesity, with 1/3 of children overweight. This could translate into a diabetes rate far higher than the present rate for New York City adults, of close to 10-percent, perhaps verging on 50-percent, according to some experts. The good news is that this is a recent trend, and can be acted upon now. Residents at the Urban Horizons building are generally positive about the program. Ms. Althea Clarke, who lives there, says that she and her 3-year-old son often use the steps, not the elevator.