

## **Manhattan: Hooray for Hamilton's old hood**

Overlooked area gains new currency just like its 'hunky' namesake.

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When Andrew Ding moved into a studio apartment on West 149th Street in Hamilton Heights two years ago, he was frustrated to discover that he had to travel beyond his neighborhood to find a nice café. So he decided to do something about it. The former classical violist turned real estate agent teamed up with a partner and opened the Chipped Cup on Broadway, right around the corner from that apartment. On opening day last month, a half-dozen people were queued up outside waiting.

"It wasn't a large crowd, but it was impressive for 7 a.m. on a Saturday," he said. "People in the neighborhood are hungry for businesses like ours."

And that is why more of them—ranging from childrens-wear boutique Shoeganza to restaurant and bar Harlem Public—have either opened in the area or are planning to do so soon. They and others are part of a broader revival of the long-overlooked section of northwest Harlem. Today, people from all over the city are flocking to the hilly mile-long stretch that runs from West 135th to West 155th streets between Edgecombe Avenue and the Hudson River. They are coming for rents that average \$1,600 a month for a one-bedroom, for the handsome housing stock and for a spot in an up-and-coming neighborhood.

The area is also benefiting from the stirrings of some of its longtime linchpins. For openers, its biggest tourist attraction—the handsome 210-year-old home of its namesake, Alexander Hamilton—was recently renovated and shifted to a commanding corner of St. Nicholas Park at a cost of \$15 million. It also doesn't hurt that the great man's reputation itself has seen something of a rebirth. *BusinessWeek* recently hailed the Founding Father as a "federalist hunk," and noted that others are calling him a "stud."

Meanwhile, Trinity Cemetery, home of John James Audubon and John Jacob Astor, up on West 153rd Street, is drawing ever more visitors.

More concretely, Hamilton Heights is getting a boost from Columbia University's \$6.3 billion expansion, which will take the school right up to the neighborhood's southern border. Meanwhile, City College of New York, whose campus extends 11 blocks south from West 141st Street, will complete a two-building, \$600 million science complex next year. With all that going for it, the area is getting some attention.

"People are moving there in droves," said Timour Shafran, managing partner at commercial brokerage Citicore, who helped his family manage properties in the area more than a decade ago. "Back then it was a dream come true to get a college kid, waiter or artist to live there."



For those looking for a place to buy, there are turn-of-the-previous-century townhomes on quaint, tree-lined streets that rival those found in brownstone Brooklyn, but at a fraction of the cost—around \$1 million.

Even the turreted mansion once owned by James Bailey of Barnum & Bailey Circus fame fetched only a reported \$1.4 million in 2009. But prices are creeping up. A three-bedroom, four-and-a-half-bath Romanesque Revival house with eight fireplaces on Convent Avenue hit the market at a price of \$3.5 million.

Meanwhile, a proposed West Harlem rezoning that includes roughly 27 blocks in Hamilton Heights and neighboring Sugar Hill is going through public review. It would allow taller buildings on West 145th Street and on Broadway, bringing more foot traffic to the area.

"Shops, restaurants and cafés are in demand," said Lee-Ann Pinder, a broker at Citi Habitats.

In May, Hamilton Heights native Maria DeJesus answered that call, opening Shoeganza on West 149th Street, in an area otherwise bereft of apparel shops.

"I have seen more avant-garde businesses in the area," said LaQuita Henry, a Community Board 9 member and community liaison person for Heritage Health and Housing, a local development organization that has been encouraging businesses to spruce up storefronts.

Even though the area's relatively high commercial rents make it difficult for smaller operators to succeed, some are finding a path around that obstacle. Mr. Ding of the Chipped Cup got his landlord to give him a break on the rent in the hope that his success will be a plus for the area.

Others are simply throwing themselves into the competitive fray. Susan Yang, for example, added vegan items to her menu at Café One to cater to changing neighborhood tastes.

"Any new shops that open in the area will create more traffic and bring more business to us," said Ms. Yang, who took over the restaurant eight months ago. "There is a lot of opportunity here."