

Speech by Gramercy Park Block Association President Arlene Harrison

Ceremony honoring the service and retirement of NYPD 13th Precinct Police Officer Scott Kimmins, on the 10th anniversary of the federal takeover of the Kenmore Tuesday, June 29th 2004 at Kenmore Hall, 145 East 23rd St

In March 1994, The Gramercy Park Block Association organized a Town Hall meeting co-hosted by Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney and the newly appointed Police Commissioner William J. Bratton. 900 area residents and business owners crowded into the Brotherhood Synagogue to hear, for several hours, tales of horror on only one subject, the Kenmore Hotel located at 145 E 23rd St. From 1985, when slumlord Troung took over the Kenmore, the community watched its nine year precipitous decline from a moderately respectful residence into extreme squalor and crime.

At the meeting dozens of people came forward to describe rampant drug dealing, armed robberies, break-ins sometimes three to four times a day, prostitution, rampaging gangs of former Riker inmates, violent disputes and fights, murders and the crime that frequently spilled over into the streets. They described the deplorable conditions, collapsing floors, gaping holes, little sanitation, rats, no heat, electricity or hot water for weeks at a time, and the elderly sometimes having to walk up twenty-two floors for months because elevators weren't working. The Kenmore residents, many elderly, frail and with special needs, were so frequently victimized that they became prisoners in their own rooms, living in constant fear and afraid to leave. The Kenmore had become a place the community avoided and a deterrent to the survival of nearby businesses.

Immediately following that meeting, Congresswoman Maloney went to the Justice Department and in 10 days Attorney General Janet Reno visited the Kenmore. That began series of operations that led in three months to the June 8, 1994 seizure of the hotel under a law that allowed the authorities to seize buildings with a long history of drug sales and repeated criminal activity. This takeover, the largest asset seizure in the history of the federal government, succeeded in large part in such a short time because of the evidence collected and carefully documented during an eight year period by a 13th Precinct Police Officer, Scott Kimmins. This dedication alone would have made Kimmins a hero in the eyes of many but there was something even more important to some that made Kimmins a hero.

In 1985 Officer Kimmins was assigned a neighborhood beat that included the Kenmore Hotel. The Kenmore soon became his beat, and during the next eight and a half years he spent each day addressing the deplorable, hazardous conditions that the owner not only ignored but seemed to encourage. Officer Kimmins spent countless hours mediating disputes, working with city agencies to improve conditions and controlling crime. He made it his business to make daily visits to the residents with special needs who he came to feel were like “members of my own family who need my personal protection”. They in turn came to count on Officer Kimmins’ visits, and those too terrified to leave their rooms began to come out only when they knew he was there. Even today residents speak fondly of Officer Kimmins as a “ray of sunshine” who made a tremendous difference in their lives while they were living a nightmare.

It is for that reason that in August 1994 at a City Hall Ceremony, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and a host of Federal, State and City officials recognized Police Officer Scott Kimmins as “the true hero of the Kenmore story”.