

The RIVERDALE PRESS

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Nights at The W, but days spent walking up Broadway

Some say The W residents beg for money, food from eateries and other businesses

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Customers and owners of Greystone Coffee on Mosholu Avenue say residents from The W Assisted Living around the corner on Broadway regularly wander into the establishment asking for money. The W's managers say residents there — who are free to come and go as they please — receive just \$261 a month from the government.

GARY JEAN-JUSTE



By Luisa Beltran

The W Assisted Living at Riverdale Home for Adults has been a mainstay in North Riverdale for nearly 40 years. But an open-door policy that allows its more than 250 residents to come and go at all hours of the day and night has had an impact on local businesses.

Some of The W's residents suffer from mental illness or physical addiction. While they don't need around-the-clock medical care, several can be found sitting in front of the building, at all hours. Rain or shine.

Throughout the day, some make their way walking about two blocks north, to Hugo's Gourmet Market. Here they typically buy fresh fruit like oranges and bananas they can't get at The W, a person familiar with the situation said. Sometimes they will pay for beer or lottery tickets.

The W residents — many of whom have walkers — are usually very polite and more often scared or confused, people said.

Some businesses aren't as kind about what they've experienced, however. Throughout the day, several residents wander to Greystone Coffee on Mosholu Avenue, which sells hot and cold drinks, pastries like scones and croissants, as well as sandwiches. The W residents typically pester Greystone's owners and customers, often asking for money.

One of Greystone's owners said he recently caught a resident of the adult home "peeing on the sidewalk" in front of his business.

These residents aren't violent, the owner added. "Just annoying."

Some also make their way south about a mile to the subway stop on West 242nd Street and Broadway. A few W residents will typically panhandle on the corner as people make their way up the steps to the train. The congested city block features two delis, a Dunkin', The Last Stop bar and Shamrock Wine & Liquor.

One deli employee said a W resident stops in at least 10 times a day, asking for “a dollar or a cup of coffee.” They are provided the coffee free of charge.

The main reason for the panhandling?

The W residents are short on cash. Those living in assisted living and nursing homes typically receive monthly allowances they can use for personal items like clothing and shoes. These allowances usually range from \$30 to \$200, according to The American Council on Aging. Each resident of The W receives a \$261 allowance at the beginning of each month, which is determined by the Social Security Administration, a spokesman for The W Group — which operates the 6355 Broadway facility — said.

“We care deeply for the residents in our facility — many of whom suffer a variety of challenges — and are committed to operating a safe facility for them and the surrounding community,” The W released in a statement.

“W Group has invested considerable resources to upgrade the facility since taking over. We are committed to resolving issues in collaboration with input from residents and the community.”

Muhannad “Manny” Assi, who owns the Broadway 1 Mini Mart and Jerusalem Cafe, said The W residents often enter his shop, seeking to buy loose cigarettes because they can’t afford a whole pack.

Loose cigarettes are illegal to sell in New York City.

Other than that, Assi said he’s never had any problems with any of The W residents.

“Most of them are just not all there in the head,” he said, “but they are still human beings.”

Assi has lived in Riverdale since 1984. The residents of The W, he said, have never been taken care of.

“The people are always poorly dressed, in my opinion, because they are just poor and don’t have clothing provided by the facility or assistance by the government,” Assi said. “Those welfare and SSI benefits only go so far.”

This is the conclusion of a two-part series that began in our June 22 edition.

Keywords

The W Assisted Living of Riverdale, homeless, residents, Greystone Coffee, Hugo’s Gourmet Market

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