

Flatiron BID uses hi-tech to track problem areas

By Maciej Wroblewski

The Flatiron/23rd Street Partnership, the city's newest Business Improvement District, has decided to crack down on litter and graffiti in the BID area, and plans to use camera-equipped handheld computers to do it.

Through a program called ComNet, Computerized Neighborhood Environment Tracking, the Partnership is now able to systematically record conditions throughout its district, an approximately 38 square block area from 21st Street to 28th Street and 3rd Avenue to 6th Avenue. The Flatiron Partnership will use data collected from ComNet to document neighborhood conditions, determine priorities, and assess the results of their own programs.

Using ComNet computers, teams of at least two people each, assess an area, working methodically along a predetermined route. Each handheld computer is pre-loaded with street maps and a customizable catalog of typical conditions such as overflowing wastebaskets, sidewalk and roadway litter, and others. The precise location, date and time of each entry is recorded to ensure accuracy and accountability and the handhelds are equipped with cameras, which can be used to record conditions that are difficult to document.

"We are thrilled to embark on this ComNet survey, as it will prove to be a useful tool in assessing conditions and assisting



Flatiron/23rd Street: BID Executive Director Jennifer Brown and Director of Operations Scott Kimmins conducting a ComNet survey near the corner of 23rd Street and Fifth Avenue.

the BID as we set priorities and implement programs," commented Jennifer Brown, executive director of the BID.

"Our mission is to make this area cleaner, safer, and more beautiful for neighborhood businesses, workers, and residents, and the ComNet survey is an important tool in our efforts."

As of this week, the Partnership has been conducting a baseline ComNet survey targeting litter, graffiti, excessive "ponding" on streets and sidewalks and other conditions that

will be addressed by a comprehensive sanitation program, which will include a uniformed street cleaning team seven days per week and ongoing graffiti removal. The BID will launch its sanitation program in the coming weeks.

The survey is being conducted predominantly in-house, by BID staff members, representatives from the Fund for the City of New York and a limited number of volunteers.

In the months ahead, a broader based, long-term survey

of BID area conditions will be undertaken documenting a wider range of conditions, such as cracked sidewalks, faded crosswalks, and any of other 300 plus conditions.

ComNet was developed by the Fund for the City of New York, an independent foundation established by the Ford Foundation in 1968. The Flatiron/23rd Street Partnership was officially launched in July. The effort to create the BID was led by the 23rd Street Association and its president, Sharon Ullman.