

## Brrrisk winter walks through neighborhood

By Sabina Mollot

Members of the Polar Bears in Coney Island, who celebrate the winter by taking a dip in the briny blue, dressed as if it were a sunny summer day, aren't the only ones who know how to make the most of even the most frigid days.

Apparently, there have been plenty of people—both locals and tourists—who've been enthusiastically taking in the sights New York City has to offer this winter, via guided walking tours.

The free weekly walks through the Flatiron and Union Square parks spon-

sored by both neighborhoods' BID partnerships have continued to attract crowds no matter how bitter the weather.

According to Jennifer Falk, executive director of the Union Square Partnership, a Union Square tour she attended the December before last saw a group of two-dozen walkers.

"We hope, as we continue to market them, the numbers will increase," said Falk, who credited the event's popularity to the fact that the tours are held 52 times a year, rain or shine. "We thought it was important that as a service provider we

have consistency. That's how you build a following."

According to Falk, about half of the tour participants are tourists, the other half neighborhood residents, who are there to

**Continued on Page 6**

## Brrrisk winter walks

Continued from Page 1

learn about the park's history and transformation from a troubled "needle" park to the trendy destination it is today, surrounded by art vendors and restaurants.

Meanwhile in the Flatiron District, the tour program also runs year-round, even if the tours don't attract 20 people at a time, which they sometimes do during the summer.

"Once we only got three people and once we only got one person because it was raining, but they do show up," said Jennifer Brown, the executive director of the Flatiron/23rd Street BID.

Unless the weather is especially brutal, recent tours have

been given to groups of 10-15, led by one of three guides, one a professional guide, one a historian, the other an author of the book *Madison Square: The Park and its Celebrated Landmarks*, Miriam Berman. In Union Square, since the USP's recent partnership with Big Onion Tours, the walks there have been led by one of three guides, who work on a rotating schedule. The guides are graduate students studying topics relevant to city history.

Alfred Pommer, a Stuyvesant Town resident who leads walks for his own business, New York City Cultural Walking Tours, also said people go on his tours for a vari-

ety of reasons, regardless of the weather. He leads 26 individual walking tours, the more popular ones including the gargoyle tour of the Flatiron District and Gramercy Park, a Lower East Side tour highlighting Jewish history there and the midtown architectural walk, which attracts many real estate industry types there for research purposes.

"I get people from Israel doing the architectural tour," said Pommer. "You think they'd want to do the Jewish Lower East Side tour."

Others are tourists looking to enjoy the city come hell or high winds and some are locals he can easily spot as history buffs. Affection for below-freezing temperatures doesn't seem to be a motivational factor for them, nor

does getting some exercise.

"The exercise would be a lot better if you belonged to a hiking group," said Pommer. "You walk at a leisurely pace, although it is better than sitting down and watching a movie."

Then there are those who do, in fact, like wandering around in the chill of winter.

"There is a species that does enjoy a nice, brisk walk," said Pommer. "You do get them. They're very robust, but they're more the exception than the rule."

For more information about Pommer's regular public tours (\$15) or private tours (\$60 per person or group), visit [nycwalk.com](http://nycwalk.com) or call (212) 979-2388.

For more information about the Union Square or Flatiron tours, see T&V's Around & About section.