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Chelsea Marriott's last tenant

by **patrick arden / metro new york**
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CHELSEA. Maryanne Marinac recalled the day in 2004 when her apartment building suddenly turned into a hotel.

"We were coming home one day, and they were installing a new awning that said 'Marriott,'" she explained.

Soon blue carpeting was put down in the hallways, and a portrait of the Marriott brothers was put up in the lobby. The curb outside was painted yellow. Buses pulled up with tourists eager to go shopping.

"They installed key-card locks in the doors of apartments that weren't occupied by long-term tenants," she said. "It was a hotel."

In December 2001, when she moved her family in, the 204-unit 24th Street building was full of long-term tenants. Now she's the last one left. Today she goes before a judge in an eviction proceeding brought by the Marriott ExecuStay hotel.

Marinac insists she should be able to stay because the hotel is occupying a residential building, and its 1999 certificate of occupancy does call for 17 floors of "Class A," or permanent, apartments. She carries a satchel full of color-coded folders with documents that tell a long and complicated story. She believes this knotty narrative means her \$1,500-a-month apartment is also rent-stabilized; Marriott says otherwise, though the chain's attorney would not comment ahead of today's court date.

Marriott ExecuStay — which has been fined for violating its certificate of occupancy and for operating a parking garage — is joining a growing number of "corporate" hotels operating out of buildings certified for "Class A" apartments.

City Councilwoman Gale Brewer and Assemblyman Richard Gottfried have been working on legislation with the Bloomberg administration to crack down on the practice.

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Officials are trying to “to fix ambiguous language in the law that frustrates enforcement efforts,” said Bloomberg spokesman Jason Post. “We want to craft legislation that will stop the quality of life problem that illegal hotels create, but also recognize that there is demand for corporate housing. Striking the right balance takes time, and we want to make sure we get it right.”

Last year Marinac started to withhold rent, after Marriott stopped cashing her checks. She’s determined to keep fighting her eviction as she heads to court today, though the experience has been “financially and emotionally horrible.”

Rent-regulated?

The 18-story structure — once owned by Michael Lazar, a former City Councilman convicted of racketeering in 1986 — seems to have been erected in three phases over many years. A review of certificates implies that in the mid-’80s three floors were built on top of a four-story building. Rent stabilization generally covers buildings constructed before 1974. The original structure was erected sometime before 1966.



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