

## **Battery Powered**

Downtown Area Burns Bright After Sandy

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The warnings were dire: If you were one of the unfortunates living in Zone A, Mayor Bloomberg ordered you to pick up and leave.

One Manhattan neighborhood that looked on nervously before Hurricane Sandy hit was Battery Park City. Sitting exposed on the Hudson River, it braced for the worst.

But something peculiar happened: The worst passed it by.

By Thursday, when Chelsea, the West Village and TriBeCa were still shrouded in darkness, Battery Park City was humming. At Danny Meyer's North End Grill, the lights were on and there was a two-hour wait.

Around the corner, the Regal Battery Park cinema had show times up in lights.

A big crowd had formed outside Meyer's Shake Shack, waiting for burgers and shakes.

The Goldman Sachs Tower at 200 West St. never lost power. (The joke, if you ask the locals, is that the workhorses at Goldman mastered the secret of cold fusion.)

The neighborhood looked . . . normal.

Of course, all you had to do was crane your neck across West Street to see the power off in the Financial District, where many buildings still remain uninhabitable. But one of the great surprises of Hurricane Sandy was that BPC was mostly unscathed.

Arthur Greene, for one, abandoned his apartment in the Liberty Green building at 300 North End Ave. on Sunday to stay with his girlfriend, Meghan Sharkey, at her apartment in the East Village. When the storm was over, Sharkey's apartment was left without power — but Greene's place was fine. On Wednesday, Sharkey was the one accompanying her boyfriend back to his place.

That night, the couple was surprised to get a ring at their doorbell and be faced with trick-or-treaters.

"We had nothing," Greene says. "We went across the street to Duane Reade [to get candy]." Yes, the Duane Reade was open.

“I went to stay with my family in the Village,” says Jeffrey Sackheim of Charles Rutenberg Realty, who, with his fiancée, lives in a 2,000-square-foot Battery Park City one-bedroom (with a home office). “Then everyone came to Battery Park City to stay with me. I had seven people staying with us.”

Some BPC residents didn't bother to leave. Jacqui Brown, her husband, Noël, and son Xander stayed put in their two-bedroom penthouse at Liberty Green. “We have family in Canada. [During Hurricane Irene last year] we said, ‘Yeah, let's not mess around,’ ” Brown says. “This time, I didn't feel like going up to Canada.”

She cooked steak one night, tacos the next, loaded up on water and occasionally looked out the window to catch a glimpse of CNN anchor Erin Burnett's film crew buffeting themselves against the wind. The Browns never lost power.

Meanwhile, Floyd Cardoz, the chef at North End Grill, and his general manager, Kevin Richer, prepared for a disaster.

“We were at Tabla during the blackout [of 2003], and we lost a lot of product,” Cardoz says of his former restaurant on Madison Square Park.

But a day after the hurricane (when Cardoz's own house in New Jersey was hit by a tree, knocking out power), Cardoz got photos texted to him showing how well the restaurant had held up. By Wednesday, he was back in the kitchen.

How did BPC manage to survive the storm so well?

Part of the reason is that Con Ed never shut down BPC's power network. “We shut down three networks preemptively on Sunday night,” says Allan Drury, a spokesman for Con Ed. But Battery Park City's network was on higher ground and didn't look to be in danger.

Another surprise was that the buildings remained largely undamaged, even as water was pouring through the streets.

At Millennium Tower, a condo building at 30 West St., the water was 3 feet high outside, yet none of the water breached the building's lobby. The water was drained into the basement by the duct system in front of the building, and then pumped out later.

“The basement was designed as a bathtub,” says a representative for Millennium who declined to be named. “Only three doors lead into the lobby and basement, so when those are blocked [or] sandbagged, the building is basically watertight. The first-floor walls and glass were designed to resist water pressure.”

Millennium Tower was not alone. Much of BPC's housing stock was constructed in the last decade and — according to guidelines set out by the Battery Park City Authority, which mandates that new buildings be eco-friendly — the design of these buildings was much smarter than those in other parts of the city.

“All the mechanical equipment is on the top of the building,” says Michael Gubbins, a senior vice president at the Albanese Organization, of the three towers that his firm has built in BPC: the Solaire, the Verdesian and the Visionaire. (Compare that to buildings just across West Street in the Financial District, where low-lying mechanical systems were seriously damaged by flooding.)

Also, notes Gubbins, “The Solaire and the Verdesian have green roofs, and green roofs slow down the storm water.”

Proximity to the water (and the possibility of flooding) was very much in the Albanese’s minds when they built a water-treatment plant in the building.

This, Gubbins notes, is “part of the guidelines [the Battery Park City Authority] issued after 1999 — they require a building to have a waste-water treatment plant.”

And many of these buildings train their staff in being prepared for floods and other potential disasters. “We had backup generators ready,” says Mark O’Reilly, the resident manager of Millennium Tower. (It proved unnecessary.)

Perhaps most surprisingly, real estate deals are being done in BPC, even as much of the city recovers from Sandy.

“We have a contract out which we expect to get signed this week,” says Corcoran Group broker Jessica Weitzman, who has several listings in Millennium Tower and lives there herself. “We received a backup offer on the same apartment last week after the storm.”

None of the three Millennium Tower units that Weitzman currently has under contract (two of which are scheduled to close this week) — nor the deals themselves — have been harmed by Sandy. Weitzman adds that she “expects an offer on a different apartment this week.”

By Monday, Barbara Kaufman, another BPC resident and Charles Rutenberg Realty agent, was showing apartments for rent in the Liberty Court condo building at 200 Rector Place. Prices at the building (where rentals range from \$2,300 to \$8,895 per month) haven’t changed since the storm.

“I was staying at my sister-in-law’s apartment on 21st Street and Fifth Avenue,” Kaufman says. “When the electricity went out there, I called somebody I knew in Battery Park City and asked them what they were going to do next. They said to me, ‘I’m sitting in my living room watching TV.’ ”