



Asian Americans for Equality

Progress Report for Grand Street Fire Fund

April 13, 2012

289 Grand Street Tenants Case: Victory!

For tenants of 289 Grand Street, the judge's decision handed down on March 2, 2012 siding with the Grand Street Tenants Association, formed shortly after the April 10, 2010 fire to fight for tenants' rights to return to their original apartments after repairs are to be made, couldn't have been a better early anniversary present.

Upon "careful review of all relevant testimonial and documentary evidence along with the court's inspection of the premises," Judge Timmie Elsner of the Civil Court of New York City deemed the structure of 289 Grand Street safe for occupancy after repairs, as argued by expert witnesses testifying on behalf of Grand Street Tenants Association. Judge Elsner ruled that 289 Grand Street's landlord, Wong's Grand Realty Corp., must correct violations issued against the building by HPD and remove the building's vacate order by March 1, 2013.

This means 289 Grand Street tenants could return home in less than a year's time.

News of the court case victory spread quickly throughout Chinatown on March 2, culminating with a press conference held at AAFE with Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, State Senator Daniel Squadron, Council Member Margaret Chin,

and Vito Mustaciuolo of NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development (see picture).

"I am so happy with today's decision because the tenants of 289 Grand Street deserve justice," said Christopher Kui, AAFE's Executive Director. Kui further commented that this ruling is a victory for all rent-regulated tenants across New York City, giving thanks for the leadership and support of Silver, Squadron, Chin, Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer, and HPD.

Looking ahead, AAFE will continue to work with 289 Grand Street tenants to ensure access to their belongings before building repairs are made and monitoring the progress of the repairs.

"While we are thrilled about this victory, we still have much more work to be done to ensure that the tenants can return to their homes," said Kayan Chiu, Senior Housing Counselor.

Representing 289 Grand Street tenants was AAFE attorney John Gorman, an expert in housing legal issues who has represented tenants seeking help from AAFE in various successful cases throughout the past 20 years.



Left to right: Council Member Margaret Chin, AAFE Executive Director Chris Kui, Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, Tenant Stephan Vendola, Vendola's Attorney Helaine Hartig, HPD Attorney Mark Roeder, and AAFE Attorney John Gorman.

Looking Ahead...

AAFE continues to assist tenants affected by the Grand Street Fire on April 10, 2010:

- 283-285 Grand Street
- 289 Grand Street

In addition, AAFE's efforts in preserving affordable housing rights of Chinatown's low-income tenants include:

- Housing counseling and other services offered at 111 Division Street, M-F, 10 am – 5 pm
- Community Outreach and Education
- 128 Hester Street: AAFE is representing close to 30 people who lost their home in 2009.
- 72 Hester: AAFE was a first respondent on the site of a fire on April 10, 2012. AAFE is working to support with affected tenants.

Housing & Community Services Staff:

- Kayan Chiu, *Senior Housing Counselor*
- Joan Huang, *Housing Counselor*
- John Gorman, *Legal Consultant*
- Peter Gee, *Program Director*

Introducing...

The AAFE Chinatown Housing Preservation Fund

283-285 Grand Street is now being rebuilt as a 2-story commercial building. By law, a landlord is not obligated to rebuild rent regulated housing once a building is demolished. We need your support to save affordable housing!

Two years ago, AAFE established the Grand Street Fire Fund in response to the needs demonstrated by affected tenants from the 7-alarm fire. Generous donations from individuals, small businesses, and corporations enabled AAFE to meet the victims' immediate needs such as replacing IDs and important documents, and to work toward the larger issue of ensuring the tenants' affordable housing rights are preserved. **Thanks to your support, results like the 289 Grand Street victory became possible.**

Chinatown is a community deeply in need of the housing services, advocacy, resources, and education that AAFE can provide. AAFE both provides quality services to New York City's low-income tenants and makes sure their voices are heard on the policy level. To this end, AAFE has established the **AAFE Chinatown Housing Preservation Fund** to work towards long-term preservation of the City's affordable housing.

Just like its predecessor, the Grand Street Fire Fund, tax-deductible contributions given to the AAFE Chinatown Housing Preservation Fund will support programs and services provided by AAFE's Housing Team. In particular, funds will support AAFE's **fire prevention education** for the community.

Funds will also ensure legal experts like Attorney John Gorman, who represented the 289 Grand Street tenants, is present to help tenants navigate through the complicated process of fighting for one's housing rights.

You can help by sending a check made payable to Asian Americans for Equality at 111 Division St., NY, NY 10002. Please indicate AAFE Chinatown Housing Preservation Fund in the memo line. Tax-exempt donations may also be made online by visiting www.aafe.org and clicking on the Donate Now button. Please type AAFE Chinatown Housing Preservation Fund in the dedication text field. Contact AAFE at 212-964-2288 for more information.