



VENDOR NEWSLETTER

Street Vendor Project
666 Broadway, 5th Floor
New York, NY 10012

Winter 2003-04
(646) 602-5679
or (646) 602-5681

Ticket Blitz Continues !

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Bangoura Zenab, an experienced business-woman from the Ivory Coast, knew that street vending in New York City would not be easy. First, she needed her NY State sales tax certificate, which she got. Then she needed her business certificate, which she got. Then, she rented a small space outside a store on Fordham Road for \$300 per month. She began selling hats and clothing from a tiny table.

Within a week, however, Ms. Zenab was roused by a white female police officer who bombarded her with seven tickets on the spot with no explanation. Due to a language barrier, Ms. Zenab had difficulty questioning the officer, and when she tried to get a bystander to interpret, the police officer barked, "tell it to the judge." The next day, the same officer came back to write her four more tickets.

Harassment? The judge thought so. The tickets, which were for violations like No Permit for Pushcart (she was vending from a table, not a pushcart), No Tax Stamp (she had one, the officer never asked for it), and Failure to Give Name of Supplier (there is no such violation), were dismissed outright once they got

to court, but not without a presentation from the Street Vendor Project and a day wasted in court for Ms. Zenab.

"That is not enforcing the law, that is discrimination," she said. "I am not a criminal, I'm an honest woman who is trying to make an honest living." Luckily for everyone, Zenab has begun to bring her friends to vendor coalition meetings to fight for the rights of all vendors. She is working with other vendors on legislation to get the city to give more licenses to hard working people like her.



A new record ! Bangoura Zenab received 11 tickets in 2 days

A license may not help her, though, since police abuse happens just as much against licensed vendors. Amar Ndiaye, a license holder who has sold for five years along Westchester Avenue in the Bronx, received six tickets one cold morning in January before he could even set up his table. Among the charges were two counts of Disorderly Conduct for creating a "hazardous condition," and one for Loitering ! The Street Vendor Project explained to the judge that it was Ndiaye's job to stand on the sidewalk all day. Case dismissed!

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Vendor Bill Passes in Albany — Reaction is Mixed

After nearly a year of speculation and negative publicity against vendors, the state legislature finally renewed the disabled veteran vendor law on March 1, 2004.

Vendors met news of the new law with a mix of disappointment and relief. In Times Square, disabled veterans and art vendors were kicked off the

avenues, back onto the less lucrative side streets. All vendors were banned from the area between Ground Zero and Broadway. The lively vending scene that had built up there will soon come to a halt.

But many vendors were relieved that the bill was not as drastic as they feared. Despite what it seemed from the newspa-

pers, relatively few vendors will be effected by the new law. We won a big victory with the defeat of the fingerprinting bill, which would have given vendors permanent criminal records. Yellow license vets will now be able to set up two per block, rather than one. Call (646) 602-5679 if you have questions about the new law.

Update from Street Vendors United

During the last 3 months, New York Street Vendors United, the city-wide coalition of vendors of every type from every borough, has begun an unprecedented movement for



Coalition vendors at a recent meeting.

vendors rights.

The coalition burst onto the scene on November 18, 2003, when more than 300 vendors came together at Judson Memorial Church. It must have been the biggest gathering of vendors in one room in history. Food and drink, an open-

ing video, a beautiful banner, and translation in five languages helped make the convention a success. News media were on hand. Licensed and unlicensed, food and merchandise, vendors realized their problems were all the same. They resolved to work together to achieve solutions.

That's what they are doing. Since the convention, coalition members have been meeting every week to continue this effort. Two subcommittees were formed; one to change the vending laws and the other to take on the recurring problem of police harassment.

The police harassment subcommittee, for its part, decided to host a Public

Meeting on police & vendor relations, scheduled for March 24th at Our Lady of Pompeii Church. The goal of the meeting is to create a dialogue with the police to reduce harassment and to educate them about the rights of vendors. Top police officials are expected to attend this event.

The legislative committee has begun a campaign to change city law to improve the lives of street vendors. Imagine -- one day soon, the laws governing vendors might be written by vendors themselves, instead of the businesses that want to drive us off the streets.

After much intense debate, the coalition unanimously agreed on a 5-point proposal to make the vending laws more simple and fair for everyone:

1. Remove the licensing cap, to

create jobs and promote opportunity;

2. Change the 20 foot (from a building entrance) rule, which makes it impossible to vend on many streets, to 10 feet;

3. Open all streets to vending and, to prevent congestion, introduce a rule that vendors must stay 6 feet away from each other;

4. Reduce the ECB fine amounts so that the maximum fine is \$150, not \$1,000;

5. Require all police officers to undergo training on vending laws.

We will soon introduce this proposal to City Council. We need your help. To learn more, call the Street Vendor Project at (646) 602-5679. Together we have the power to make better lives for ourselves !!!

GOT A STORY OF POLICE ABUSE ??

On March 24th, New York Street Vendors United will hold a public hearing on police & vendor relations

All vendors are invited to come tell their stories and hold the top police commanders accountable

When: Wednesday , March 24, 2004 6 p.m.— 8 p.m.

Where: Our Lady of Pompeii Church, 25 Carmine St.

Take the A, C, E, B, D, F, or V train to West 4th Street, walk south to Carmine

For more information call the Street Vendor Project at (646) 602-5679 or 5681

Member Profile: Sophia Laskaris

My name is Sophia Laskaris and I am a third generation New York City food vendor. My parents were immigrants from Greece who worked as food vendors their entire adult lives. As a youngster, I always helped my parents and uncles with their business — I even remember my mother pushing me to work on top of the hot dog cart!

For all their hard work, my parents taught me one important lesson: the Work Ethic. If I only had one quality to pass down to my child

it would be the Work Ethic. I believe in myself and in the system, so I persist in this traditional way of life that was handed down to me.

Vendors are a unique part of the city's cultural landscape. We are the greatest ambassadors to millions of worldwide visitors. We take great pride in our work and



don't want to be forced from our time-honored way of life. We are hard-working parents, tax-paying citizens and human beings. Our livelihood is just as valuable as any other member of society and should be treated as such. We go through great pains to follow the laws and regulations. The vending business

is increasingly difficult, and many vendors are being forced out. Instead of ticketing us so much, the city should offer us help. For example, they could help us find commissaries and relax street restrictions to give us more places to work.

I have worked closely with the Street Vendor Project since 2002 and am currently a member of the Board of Advisors. It is vital that we all work together to create better lives for ourselves. With unity, communication and continued hard work, we can and will accomplish our goals.

Be a Member of the Street Vendor Project !

On January 1, 2004, the Street Vendor Project launched a dues-paying membership system. From now on, in order to receive individual help from us on tickets, appeals, license renewals, taxes, representation in criminal court, etc., you must be a member. Membership dues are \$100 per year, which works out to only about \$8 per month. Dues must be paid in full before you receive your membership badge. People have been lining up to become members! Our new system will create a closer community of vendors and make sure we use our time on vendors who are most involved in our struggle for justice. The dues we collect will help us keep the lights on and the rent paid at 666 Broadway – and for things like our new digital camera !

BENEFITS OF MEMBERSHIP

- ? ECB Tickets (we come to you)
- ? ECB Appeals
- ? Sales Tax Help
- ? Criminal Court (some cases)
- ? ID Badge (see sample, right)
- ? Vote in Annual Elections
- ? Forfeiture and License Revocation Cases
- ? License and Permits Applications and Renewals
- ? Help with Filing Police Complaint (CCRB) Forms
- ? Free Disposable Camera and 25 foot tape measure
- ? ESL classes (to begin Summer, 2004)
- ? Health Insurance and Loan Fund (our goals for the future)



MEMBERSHIP DUES = \$100 per year

Over the past 2 years, the Street Vendor Project has helped hundreds of vendors with their licenses, taxes, and tickets – by going to their spot and taking photos, by going to ECB and Criminal Court, by filing appeals, and by fighting forfeitures cases. We've had great success. All this takes time, however, and we are a small non-profit organization. We hope you become a member and become a part of our struggle for justice. We are an organization run by vendors for vendors. As a member, we are accountable to you, and we will do everything in our power to fight for your rights. Together we will be stronger. To become a member of the Street Vendor Project, call 646-602-5681.



Street Vendor Project
666 Broadway, 5th Floor
New York, NY 10012
(646) 602-5679 phone
www.urbanjustice.org

individual rights • social change



The Street Vendor Project of the Urban Justice Center is a membership based nonprofit organization, run by and for street vendors, that was founded in October 2001 to provide legal representation, advocacy and grassroots organizing support to street vendors of all kinds in New York City. For more info, go to www.urbanjustice.org. Vendor Power.

Food Vendors Petition Health Department

Mobile food vendors have begun to speak out against a series of cutbacks by the Health Department that have affected their livelihood - and which they were not told about until it was too late.

The Health Department first angered vendors in the summer of 2003. Without notice, it closed its only Manhattan inspection station, at 9th Avenue and 27th Street, forcing vendors to go travel all the way to Queens for in-

spection. Vendors who could easily push their carts from the west side garages to 9th Avenue now have to hire a truck to transport them to Queens. Since inspectors rarely pass vendors on the first try, vendors must incur great expense and hassle when they already have to take days off work.

Luckily, a group of Arab American vendors in midtown have refused to be treated so badly. They recently wrote a petition letter to ask the Health

Department to re-open the 9th Avenue inspection station. The vendors are currently collecting signatures to present to the city. Please contact Mohammed El Madaaway at 646-207-1744 to participate in this campaign.

Vendors are also upset about recent Health Code changes that require all vendors (even those with non-processing carts who sell pre-packaged food, hot dogs, fruits and vegetables) to pass

the Food Protection Course on food safety. Vendors cannot work without passing the final exam, but it is not offered in Arabic, Bengali, or many other languages food vendors speak. The Health Department has refused to meet with the Street Vendor Project to discuss this topic, and they have refused to change their ways. Please call us and tell us what you think about the new food protection requirements.