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TRIBECA

Where Everybody Knows Your Parking Space

By LEIGH NEWMAN

AT magic hour in TriBeCa on a warmish February evening, the setting sun glints off the brick-and-gilt facade of the Western Union building, and black Labs appear on the sidewalk, tugging at owners swaddled in cashmere overcoats. As the cobbled streets empty, the lights flicker on across an entire floor of a sooty industrial gray building, a telltale sign of a luxury loft within.

But there, at the corner of Hudson and Worth Streets, in a parking lot packed with BMWs and S.U.V.'s, a tiny kiosk glows with its own inner, albeit fluorescent, light. The windows are covered by iron grating and signs, one of which reads, "O-sized vans \$50.00." When the door opens, a wisp of smoke floats out, accompanied by the gentle sound of clinking bottles.

"The club" has come to order. Every week or so, in this tiny 7-by-12-foot space, up to half a dozen men — telecommunications executive, taxi driver, engineer, all brought together by their status as monthly parkers at the lot — gather to "blow the stink off," as Lawrence Eichorn, an executive in the building industry and a founding member, puts it. Huddled around a space heater, surrounded by bags of rock salt and a time clock, they share stories, problems, a beer.

The group's unofficial leader is the lot's manager, a 52-year-old Pakistani immigrant named Jeff Asghar. Mr. Asghar has worked at the lot since 1980 but dates the club's founding to 1988, when an engineer named Dennis Hickey began parking his battered Ford Mustang there, though neither car door worked and Mr. Hickey had to enter and exit the car by climbing in and out of the windows.

In the early days, the setting left much to be desired. "No heat, no A.C.," recalled Mr. Hickey, who owns a \$2 million, three-bedroom condominium nearby. "We had to sit on each other's laps. All this luxury is new."

By luxury, he means a space outfitted with a broken chair, a mini-fridge, a microwave and a counter piled with bags of potato chips. There is just enough room to allow Mr. Hickey to sit, Mr. Eichorn to stand, and Mr. Asghar to lean over the counter and write out a parking stub for a customer.

Then in squeezes a telecommunications executive named Sam Bower with the night's first order of business. Mr. Bower has just been laid off by one of his clients.

In response, Mr. Hickey and Mr. Eichorn offer him a few hours' work at their own companies. Mr. Asghar offers free parking. No, Mr. Bower assures them, he will find another client. "Let me buy you a beer, at least," says Mr. Hickey, opening the fridge and handing Mr. Bower a cold bottle of Stella Artois.

Next on the agenda is the plight of Mr. Asghar's youngest son, a recent graduate of Rensselaer Polytechnic

Institute, who has just gotten his third speeding ticket, this time for going 97 miles an hour. “Two hundred fifty on a lawyer, plus the ticket,” Mr. Asghar says with a shake of his head.

“Isn’t there something in the Koran against speeding?” Mr. Eichorn asks.

In large and small ways, this group has over the years become a support system for its members. Mr. Hickey sponsored nieces and nephews of Mr. Asghar who were seeking to emigrate from Pakistan. Mr. Asghar drove overnight to Buffalo to attend the funeral for Mr. Hickey’s father, changing into his suit in a restroom in a McDonald’s because he could not find a motel room. Mr. Eichorn debated with Mr. Hickey and Mr. Asghar for more than a year about whether to propose to his girlfriend, and after he took the plunge, he invited both men to his wedding.

Along with sorting out personal and professional problems, members like to recall the lot’s glory days — the visits by Robert De Niro, who used to live a block away, and by the lawyers [Johnnie Cochran](#) and Barry Scheck. John Kennedy Jr. not only parked his Jeep in the lot, but delivered his Christmas tip in person.

This particular evening, as more beers make the rounds (for everyone except Mr. Asghar, who still has to park cars and drinks ginger ale), a peaceful silence reigns. In the distance, traffic honks and lurches on its way up Hudson Street toward the Holland Tunnel. The kiosk phone rings. Mr. Hickey picks up.

“Parking,” he says. There is a pause. “Yes, honey, O.K., honey,” he replies. Nodding, he puts his hand over the receiver. “My wife knows where to find me,” he whispers.

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