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October 1st Wednesday 9:00 am to 11:30 am
October 16th Thursday 5:00 pm to 7:30 pm
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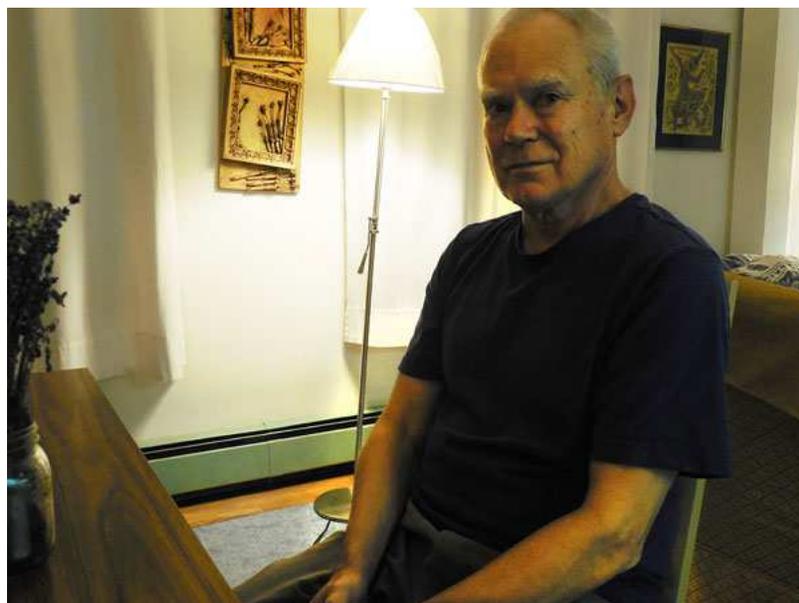
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Tuesday, November 04, 2014

Trying to roll back the E. Sixth St. rat upsurge

October 30, 2014 | Filed under: Community | Posted by: The Villager



David Rouge is waging a war on rats on his block. Photo by Gerard Flynn

BY GERARD FLYNN | Around September, David Rouge, who lives on E. Sixth St. between Avenues A and B, had the idea of having a party on his roof – and out back – because, as he said, “We have a nice back garden.”

Then he stood on the roof of his building one evening and looked down, ending the party before it had begun. For what he found was hardly suitable to his palette, or anyone’s for that matter.

“I happened to look down and there was a pack of five rats moving back and forth,” he said, “going through the fence as if there was nothing there.”

Rouge (pronounced roug-ay), who is a Department of Housing Preservation and Development employee, sprang into action, leafleting the area. A member of his block association, he organized residents with the help of Susan Stetzer, Community Board 3 district manager.

A Sept. 25 meeting held on the block was attended by Caroline Bragdon, a research scientist with the Department of Health’s Division of Veterinary and Pest Control Services.

Residents had been known, Rouge said, to use tomato vines, even muskrat pee to ward off the pests, who researchers at Columbia University revealed last week, carry not just a hefty amount of potentially deadly pathogens, but 18 hitherto unknown viruses, as well.

Bragdon advised a repeat of a tactic that had worked months before at the nearby community garden at the corner of Avenue B: Bait the rat nests, then, after a week, flood them, and cut off their food supply. Rouge has been trying unsuccessfully so far to coordinate a plan with other building owners

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to leave garbage on the sidewalk in the morning so rats can't feed on it at night. But because that includes coordinating efforts between building superintendents and the Department of Sanitation, it's easier said than done.

Yet, whatever efforts have been made aren't making a lot of inroads, neighbors say.

In fact, one neighbor, Ulyana Kuykini told The Villager last Friday night while walking her dog that, "During the summer it was crazy. You couldn't walk on the sidewalk, day or night." It's gotten better somewhat since, she said.

Rouge has a new theory: that construction around the neighborhood by city and private developers is a significant factor, though Stetzer discounts it.

One building on the block is owned by Steve Croman, who is currently under investigation by the state Attorney General's Office for possibly using illegal methods to pressure out rent-regulated tenants. Yet, Croman has been very helpful, Rouge said, in dealing with the rat problem.

Ben Shaoul, a developer who, like Croman, has been subject of tenant-harassment complaints, owns two buildings on the block. One is a former supermarket midblock and another is near the 6B Garden, the latter which Rouge suspects may be the rat problem's source, since Shaoul started doing renovation work on it last year.

Rats are chiefly nocturnal and avoid people, unless there's an infestation and their nests are disturbed, in which case they flee to the nearest building or other "safe spot."

Rouge suspects Shaoul might not have done the necessary extermination work before starting work.

Rouge intends to ask homeowners to let him and the Department of Health perform a routine "no-fault inspection" of the building, 108 E. Sixth St.

Rouge also pointed to garbage from the nearby school as possibly fueling the rodent explosion.

However, he noted, the school has been putting out garbage for years and there wasn't this kind of upsurge.

Because the Department of Health can levy a hefty \$5,000 fine for signs of a rat problem, Rouge fears he might have a problem gaining access to the building, however.

Yet, he remains hopeful the rodent invasion can be rolled back.

"I would like to go in my backyard and not be afraid that a rat will run over my feet," he said.

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