

Rockaway Residents Look Back at Hurricane Sandy and the Move to Arverne View

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This is our final installment of a three part series on Arverne View, a housing complex in the Far Rockaways. When Hurricane Sandy hit, L+M Development Partners was in contract to purchase the complex. They closed when the development, then called Ocean Village, had no power whatsoever. In the year since, the company undertook a massive renovation project that addressed the building problems before Sandy, as well as the many concerns of building resiliency after Sandy hit. In [Part One](#), we detailed the extent of the renovation. In [Part Two](#), we toured just about every corner of the complex, which is still under construction. For Part Three, we talk with three residents who live here now. Belinda Cook, a Rockaways resident for years, came to Arverne View after being displaced from her home by Sandy. That's the same story for Mirian Herrera, who spent six months in a hotel after being displaced by the storm. Finally, we talked to Lola Vaughn, who has lived in the same apartment at the complex since 1987. Read their stories, [after the jump](#).

Belinda Cook, a longtime Rockaways resident, remained in her building during the storm. Sandy flooded her building's basement with eight feet of water, and after mold started to grow FEMA removed residents and placed them in hotels. Cook moved into a Manhattan hotel with her son and daughter, and remained there for seven months due to holdups with building repairs. Instead of moving back into her old building, the city helped move her into Arverne View. She submitted a housing application in January. She remembered Ocean Village from when it had first been a good development to live in, and then had fallen into disrepair. She knew the building was under new management, but wasn't necessarily sure of the scope of work coming — "I just needed a home," she said. She moved into a newly renovated apartment at Arverne View the same month she submitted her application.

As for the work that continues throughout the complex, "The renovation was okay with me," she told us. "I wasn't home during the daytime, during construction, and I love the way it came out — how open it is outside, and everything inside my apartment." The majority of the 1,093 apartment units now have kitchen and bathroom upgrades, window replacements, painting, new doors, new hardware, and new intercoms. L+M is also building a flood wall to help protect against future storms, but she's unsure how much it will help given the surprising devastation of Sandy. Regardless, she never considered leaving the Far Rockaways, even while she stayed in the Manhattan hotel. "I knew I was coming back," she said. "I love the Far Rockaways, I love the summertime here, I love the breeze, I love the beach view." She plans to stay long-term at Arverne View and has high hopes for the neighborhood. As she says, "The Rockaways are coming back."

Mirian Herrera had a similar experience — her apartment building on Mott Avenue lost heat and electricity for a month. With the assistance of FEMA, she moved into a hotel with her three children, where she stayed for six months. Her landlord actually took her to court for not paying rent on her apartment unit while she was staying in the hotel; the court decided that if she moved out of her old building in one month she would not have to pay back the rent. A friend actually referred her to Arverne View. She brought the paperwork, worked with the management, and moved into a newly-renovated apartment on the 28th of July, three weeks from when she submitted her housing application. She said, "I love it here," and also expressed plans to stay longterm. Initially after the storm hit, she considered leaving the Rockaways. "Right in the beginning, I thought of moving out of the Rockaways — we got hit really bad," she said. She had reservations, however, because her children already attended schools in the area. And once she found the apartment at Arverne View, she figured she'd stay. "You're never really ready," she told us, in regards to a future storm hitting. "But we are a little bit more protected here."

Lola Vaughn, on the other hand, has lived in the same apartment in Ocean Village/Arverne View since 1978. She told us that the complex "Was okay then, then over a period of years it went downhill." The complex, she said, "has had its highs and lows." She decided to stay in Brooklyn with her daughter during Sandy. She stayed in touch with a neighbor who remained in the Far Rockaways during the storm — she couldn't come back to her home until the building elevators were in working order; Vaughn is 85 years old and needs the assistance of a walker. Vaughn ended up staying in Brooklyn for five weeks before returning to Queens. After the storm, she said, "It never crossed my mind to leave the Rockaways."

On moving back home, she knew the complex was under new ownership but “we didn’t know exactly what would happen.” She reports, “They installed a new bathroom, a new kitchen, now they are working on the doors and hallways. It is a big job, but they are doing a wonderful job.” (The city provided vouchers for the existing tenants of Ocean Village, so that they are not paying a higher rent on their renovated apartments. Incoming residents pay a higher rent, but within the restrictions of affordable housing rates.) Vaughn is also head of the Seaside Senior Center, which is based in Arverne View. The center will move from Building 4 to Building 1 after L+M renovates the new space. Vaughn spoke of the surge of new faces moving in, as L+M filled 350 vacant apartments since purchasing the complex. That reminded her of all the people that have come and gone in her 35 years here. “I chose not to leave,” she said. “I chose to stay, and I’m glad I did.”