

# BRRRRINGING IN THE NEW YEAR

By LINDSY VAN GELDER

**B**ACK IN THE good old days, when times were hard and youth hadn't yet gone soft, you couldn't be a member of the Iceberg Athletic Club until you swam 200 yards in the ocean on New Year's Day, followed by a mile-long hike on the Coney Island boardwalk with a 50-pound cake of ice on your bare back.

"But we don't seem to find guys as hardy anymore," sighed Vic Boff, the club's public relations man. Nowadays, however, you do have to kick off the New Year with a swim—"not just stinking in your big toe, either"—and this Saturday will be no different.

For years, the Icebergers—and their rivals, the Polar Bears—have functioned, like Guy Lombardo, as human calendars and as an opportunity for newspaper reporters to write diverting little features chuckling over these adorable geezers and their traditional complaint that the water—at 40-odd degrees—is too warm, ha ha.

However, Boff, a health food chain store owner, wanted to take this year (the club's 59th anniversary) as an opportunity to note that "not like some other clubs, not to mention any names," the Icebergers hit the surf all winter, every day, "even when there aren't television cameras around."

There are 25 members, aged 18 to 82, mostly ex-athletes. "And we're an all-male club," Boff added. "We like to test our male ego."

Boff himself set a record by staying 19 minutes in 32-degree water. "And I've swum in every blizzard since '47. I also make a point of going in the coldest day of the year, every year," Boff, who's 61, says he has had only 5 colds in the past 25 years.

"The air is pure, you're bombarded with oxygen, then you start feeling those thermal changes," he said dreamily. "You turn a bright red. You feel great from it. But I wouldn't recommend it to everyone, of course."

# The Tweed Courthouse Gets Life

By ROBERTA BRANDES GRATZ

**W**ITHOUT FANFARE, the Tweed Courthouse behind City Hall is coming back to life.

Under the cunning guidance of City Council President Paul O'Dwyer, the high-ceilinged, spacious rooms are gradually being stripped of layers of dirt and rows of old file cabinets to make way for O'Dwyer staff people.

Glass doors with graceful etchings of the city's seal are clean and glistening once again, milk glass fixtures are being rescued from piles of debris and rehung, fireplaces long blocked with cartons now serve as elegant ornamentation and well-carved plasterwork has been stripped and repainted.

Less than 10 per cent of the usable space of the massive building—described by one architectural historian as "the finest public building in the Italianate style in the country"—is occupied.

But given the determination of O'Dwyer and his staff, this well-known monument to civic corruption will eventually be a bustle of activity—at great economic saving to the city. (It was completed in 1871 after nine years of payroll padding.)

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Office space in the City Hall area now rents at an average of \$7 a square foot. There are 90,000 square feet of usable space inside the courthouse — mostly old courtrooms requiring a good cleaning and paint job—available to the city rent free, at a saving of some \$630,000 yearly. It is the fiscal crisis, O'Dwyer concedes, that has finally made using the courthouse semi-acceptable among bureaucrats.

"Two years ago," he says, "the Administration was hell-bent on knocking it down. We felt that layers of soot could not obliterate its basic beauty but others laughed at us. The financial crunch is what did the trick."

O'Dwyer is an old hand at fighting for preservation of the city's heritage, and he has long advocated making the civic center area around City Hall more of a tourist attraction.

He points to another development encouraging to preservationists: announcement last week that \$90,000 in matching federal funds had been authorized for restoration of Pier A at the foot of Battery Park City. That historic 1885 pier, the last of its kind in the city, was also scheduled for demolition even though it is an active fireboat station.

Both courthouse and pier are national historic sites, although never designated as city landmarks. As national landmarks, they are not protected from demolition like city sites, but are eligible for federal preservation funds.

A federal grant may therefore be obtained—if the Beame Administration is so inclined—for urgently needed repairs of the Tweed roof, which has caused a good deal of the building's deterioration in recent years.

With its exterior Corinthian columns and interior octagonal rotunda topped with a glass and cast-iron dome, the Tweed Courthouse has many defenders among civic, architectural and history groups.



One of the recently cleaned rooms in the Tweed Courthouse.

But two years ago, a spokesman for Mayor Beame reiterated the judgment that it was of "no historic or esthetic distinction" and refused to reverse the decision to eventually demolish it.

At the same time, a special mayoral task force conceded that in the long run it would cost more to replace the courthouse than maintain it, but argued that maintenance costs eventually would be prohibitive.

Because political boss William Marcy Tweed directed the \$12 million construction job—it resulted in probably the most inflated bills in civic history—a myth developed that the construction was shoddy, O'Dwyer says.

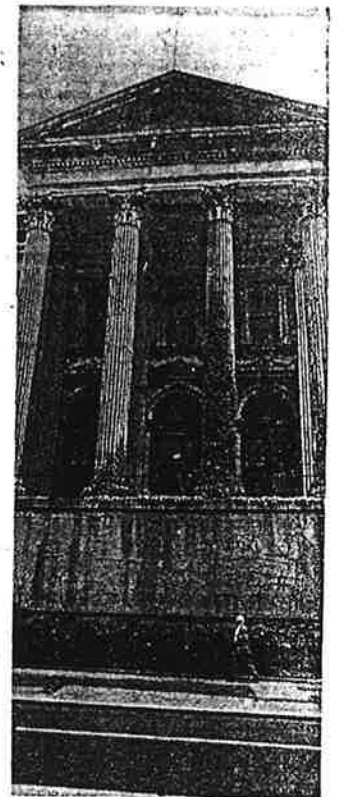
"We have at least destroyed that myth," he

says, "and we have made its assets visible and attractive." However, O'Dwyer says, there's still little sympathy in what he calls "the front office" — which includes the Mayor and his chief of municipal services, John T. Carroll — for permanently rehabilitating the building.

The physical consequences of years of neglect are acknowledged by the building's most ardent defenders. And, says O'Dwyer assistant Jim Callahan, "at first the building staff thought we were crazy when we started having the old files moved out and rooms cleaned up."

Now, Callahan adds with a smile, "they're worried we might scratch the floors."

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The 105-year-old Tweed Courthouse.