

Room service salute

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FOR 90 YEARS, the Soldiers', Sailors', Marines', Coast Guard & Airmen's Club has opened its doors to the nation's military.

Now the midtown hotel is getting a well-deserved face-lift, thanks to the local painters and carpenters unions.

"We don't want to change the building — it's such a part of history," said Hazel Cathers, the club's executive director. "But our guests do like modern conveniences."

The building, located at 283 Lexington Ave., provides active-duty service members, veterans and their families with a place to stay in New York — for as little as \$25 a night.

Since the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan began, the hotel has been busier than ever.

"There are certain times when we're absolutely booked solid,"

Unions craft face-lift for midtown military hotel

Cathers said.

Even U.S. Central Command Chief Gen. David Petraeus' wife, Holly, stayed there during a recent visit to the Big Apple.

The club relies solely on room fees and gifts from private and corporate donors to remain open, so renovations have been scarce over the years.

That's where the unions stepped in.

The New York City District Council of Carpenters and the local chapter of the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades offered to donate labor and supplies to spruce up the 1880s-era building.

Workers from both unions will redo the lobby, the library, the front desk, the sitting room and the snack bar in the four-story,

29-room hotel.

"We feel a sense of responsibility to give something back," said painter Rony Luna.

Retired Army Gen. David Ramsey, 77, the club's former executive director, said while the upgrades are long overdue, he wants to make sure to keep the building's rich history intact.

"We want to enhance the structure of the building, but also preserve the period look of it as much as possible," he said.

Carpenter Gerry Crimmins said they're still trying to come up with rest of the materials to

finish the job.

"Because of the economy, a lot of suppliers are reluctant to donate, he said, adding that the unions plan to hold a fund-raiser next month.

Tim Gaughran, a 52-year-old colonel with the Marine Reserves, has been staying at the club while he settles his late aunt's estate.

He said he hopes the club survives these tough economic times.

"We need people to come forward and help preserve this heritage," he said.

For information, visit www.ssmclub.org.

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