# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

### July 12, 2017

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State's defeat in the city A6 • The U.S. and Qatar signed a deal to crack down on ter-ror financing, part of efforts

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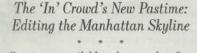
pean governments for help in finding those who rioted during the G-20 summit. A7

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The postponement of a ballet based on dancer Nure vev's life has set Russia's cultural observers on edge. A7

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Secret app, available only to a select few, makes two skyscraper spires change color

BY RACHEL LOUISE ENSIGN AND LIZ HOFFMAN

On warm nights, Bobby Francis and his three roommates like to hit the balcony of their Manhattan apartment, pull out their phones and change the color of the New York City skyline.



"It doesn't feel like something I should have access to at all," said Mr. Francis, who turns 23 on Wednes-day. The consultant sleeps in the former kitchen of a converted two-bedroom apart-

ment Yet he does, Mr. Francis and his roommates are members of New York's latest exclusive club: Spireworks, a much whispered-about free app that allows users to change the colors of the spires atop two of New York's tallest buildings.

The only way to join is to be invited by a current user, so ac-cess has spread through an unlikely network of colleagues, friends and denizens of the city's rooftop bars. Among fans, in-vites remain a pre-cious commodity, creating a new class of haves and have-nots.

4 Times Square The have-nots plead their case on so-cial media, and a black market for invitations has opened up on Craigslist.org and other web-Please see SPIRE page A9

## Pushback **On Bid Tests Buffett's** Resolve

#### BY NICOLE FRIEDMAN

Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway Inc. is under pres sure to do something it usually doesn't do: raise its bid. Berkshire's subsidiary Berkshire Hathaway Energy struck a

deal last week to buy bankrupt Energy Future Holdings Corp., including Texas electricity-transmission business Oncor, for \$9 billion in cash.

Paul Singer's Elliott Manage-ment Corp., a major Energy Fu-ture creditor, said Berkshire's bid doesn't value Oncor highly enough and that it is working on a rival offer. "It is quite likely that the Berkshire transaction will not close, given the lack of support from the debt-ors' creditors," a lawyer for Elliott wrote in a Tuesday letter that was publicly released by Please see ONCOR page A9



Cloud is winning.

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Continued from Page One sites, where they sell for \$100 and up. The app owners re-cently asked Tinder, the dating app, to take down a profile hawking a Spireworks invite for \$1.000.

Anthony Papavasiliou, a 38year-old owner of a Fort Lee, N.J., Greek restaurant, has been posting on social-media sites eeking access since a friend showed him the app in action two years ago. He donated \$250 to Creative Time, a New York nonprofit that supports artists that was giving out invites, but he didn't nab one.

I just have to have it," he said, describing himself as "the kind of guy who wakes up at 3 a.m. to get the latest iPhone." The app lets users control the colors of spires atop two buildings: One Bryant Park, dubbed the Bank of America Tower after its main tenant, and 4 Times Square, home to law firm Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP and distinguished by a large neon logo of fashion label H&M.

The app is the brainchild of Mark Domino, a digital-media artist who built "multisensory musical instruments" while a student at Brown University. He is the son-in-law of Douglas Durst, the real-estate tycoon whose family company, the Durst Organization, owns the two midtown office towers. Mr. Domino works as director of digital media at Durst.

After sunset each night, app users can log in, choose a build-ing and select from a palette of



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A night view of New York City, showing the colored spires of Bank of America Tower and 4 Times Square.

colors during a two-minute session. Options for sparkles add pizazz. Cloud-hosted software sorts the requests and instructs the lights that line the two spires, a combined 716 feet tall.

Usually only five users are allowed to actively change the colors at a time. So, on busy nights, a digital queue forms. Waits approached half an hour on July 4th this year. Red, white and blue were the only colors available that night.

"What is more powerful than getting control of the city?" asked Vincent Bruneau, the 36year-old CEO of a company that runs a corporate-meeting app who scored an invite. "It's kind

Last year on a trip to Paris, Mr. Bruneau received a 6 a.m. call from a friend back in New York begging him to change the color of the spires so he could impress guests at a party. Bleary-eyed, Mr. Bruneau obliged

Durst has added One World Trade Center, which it manages, to the app on special occasions, including the U.S. Open tennis tournament, the NYC Marathon

wrote the code to control the spire lights. At the Durst holi-day party in 2010, his father-in-law hit the button for the inaugural color change. Durst employees invited a few friends and tenants, who each got a few invites to give away.

The app's community grew slowly and by word-of-mouth. In the past year, it has increased dramatically and the number of users is now approaching 10,000, Mr. Domino said. Each user can offer five invites. Earlier this year one couple

turned Durst's Times Square spire blue to reveal the gender of the baby they were expect-ing, and a handful of men have used it in marriage proposals Mr. Domino said. One user hid his phone in his pocket and bet tourists near Times Square that he could change the spire's color as a magic trick, Mr. Domino said.

At a 2015 party celebrating the listing of a posh Tribeca penthouse with clear views to Midtown, a broker with the app wowed potential buyers as they played rooftop croquet while being serenaded by a string quartet. "Talk about being king of the castle," said Elizabeth Kee of Core, the listing ag The apartment sold for \$8.3 illi

When Natalia Krasnodebska a Spireworks invitation from her friend Ashley Zelin-skie, she said she fired off a thank-you tweet. Almost imme

currently showing at Sotheby's, was flooded with dozens of requests for invitations from strangers. She said she declined them all. Mr. Domino said he didn't

diately, Ms. Zelinskie, an artist

like the velvet-rope vibe that has grown around the app. He said he wanted Spireworks to be an "open system to share in moments of discovery and play.

He said he is looking for ways to cut down on "bootlegging," perhaps by doing away with the invitation system in favor of one unlocked by charitable donations. Durst said it has had preliminary discussions with charity partners but declined to name them.

Mr. Domino also said he was dismayed how many of the app's most ardent fans are young men who want to use it to pick up women. He said that in a recent sur-

vey of Spireworks users, bar-tenders at the Boom Boom Room, a millennial hot spot atop the Meatpacking District's Standard Hotel, complained the club was saturated with men using the app to try to seduce women.

James Geraci, a recent college graduate from the Boston area, tweeted to the official Spireworks account during a Memorial Day visit to New York seeking an invite. Some women were coming by his hotel room, which faced the spires, and he said he thought the app would be "a power move of a pickup line.

No one ever responded. Mr. Geraci said he "ended up having to try to impress the girls the old-fashioned way."

of supernatural."

and World AIDS Day. Seven years ago, Mr. Domino