All the old fight joints are gone. Stillman's Gym. Sunnyside Garden. St. Nicholas Arena. Beecher's Gym.

Once prominent landmarks, they have long disappeared from New York City's landscape much the way boxing has faded from the forefront of American sports.

But there is still a place where an ex-fighter can call home.

All boxers are welcome at the Waterfront Crabhouse in Long Island City. That is where Ring 8, the New York City chapter of the Veteran Boxers Association, holds its monthly meetings. To attend a meeting is to journey through boxing history and listen as Stillman's Gym or Sunnyside Garden are resurrected in the stories of the fighters who plied their trade at those long-forgotten venues. It's a place where retired fighters gather and reminisce about the days when New York was the mecca of boxing, and where they come for various health benefits.

"We do great things for boxers and I like being a part of that," said Bill Tate, a former middleweight from Queens Village. "Too many boxers have been used up by the sport and then discarded. The meetings are a way to keep in touch and a way to see that everyone is still doing well."

Look around the room and suddenly the names, faces and places start coming back.

There's Herbie Kronowitz fighting the last main event at Ebbets Field ...There's Danny Giovanelli entering the ring at the old Garden ...There's Henny Wallitsch fighting at the Polo Grounds ...There's Bobby Cassidy slugging it out at Nassau Coliseum ...There's Lenny Mangiapane scoring a knockout at Sunnyside Garden.

The mood is often nostalgic, but Ring 8 is not merely a social club of 550 dues-paying members. The organization's purpose is to assist boxers in need. The dues are $25 per year, and that entitles fighters to eye exams, eyeglasses, dental work and other health-related expenses. Other benefits – such as payment for rent, utilities or groceries – are met on a per-need basis.

What makes Ring 8 important is that boxing, unlike baseball, football, hockey and basketball, does not have a union that protects the interest of its main participants. Although countless agencies and individuals profit from the sport-promoters, television networks, sanctioning bodies and state governments-no one champions the cause of the boxer. There is no pension fund for fighters and the only time they receive health benefits is on a night they fight. Even then the amount they are covered for can vary from state to state.

Although Ring 8 has made important strides in assisting fighters, it lacks the resources to help every fighter and does not wield enough clout to force major changes.

Boxers helping boxers is the organization's motto. It is a unique fraternity that honors the men (and women) who have had the courage to climb those three steps into the ring. The members range from hall of famers like Emile Griffith and Jose Torres to countless Golden Glovers. Show up at a random meeting and you're likely to find more than 70 years of Golden Gloves fighters represented. Pick a Year: Until his recent death, Sammy Farber, who competed in the very first Golden Gloves class in 1927 was a member.

Pick a year: Phil Pollack, champ, class of '36 ...Keene Simmons, champ, class of '40 ...Nick and Pete Spanakos, champs class of '55, '56, '61 and '64 ...Jimmy Gibney, class of 1969 ...Tony Chiarantano, class of 1987 ...Glen Ghany, champ, class of '93-'98.

In the past seven years, the organization has vaulted from obscurity to main-event status. In the early 1990s, meetings were held in a tiny union hall on Manhattan's West Side. Attendance was sparse and even the fighters were losing interest. Then, in 1993, Tony Mazzarella, owner of the Waterfront Crabhouse and an inspector with the New York State Boxing Commission, opened his doors to the organization.

"I'm drawn to these guys because boxing is a man-on-man sport," said Mazzarella, Ring 8 treasurer. "In the ring, fighters rely on no one. Unfortunately, that sometimes carries over after they retire. It makes me feel good that these guys have a clubhouse to go to."

Mazzarella and his brother-in-law Bobby Haubert provide a hot buffet for the 100-plus members who attend each meeting and guest speakers are the featured attraction.

Ring 8 is the largest Veteran Boxers Association chapter in the country. The membership is open to anyone willing to help boxers and approximately 150 of its members are fighters, trainer or managers. When the organization was formed in 1957, membership was reserved almost exclusively for fighters and among the founding members were Jack Dempsey, Ben Jeby and Ruby Goldstein.

Mickey Walker, Sandy Saddler, Kid Gavilan and Beau Jack are a few of the high-profile champions who have received assistance.

Most Ring 8 members boxed from the 1940s to the 1960s, which is considered the sport's Golden Age. There is a concern, however, as to who will run the group in the future. Juan LaPorte, a 46-year-old former WBC featherweight champ from Brooklyn, is considered part of the younger generation.

"I want to help all fighters," LaPorte said. "It's important to bring young fighters into the organization because we have to give something back to the sport. We have to take care of our own. The younger fighters should see what the older fighters are doing. I learn so much from being around these guys."

The social aspect of a Ring 8 meeting is therapeutic for the fighters. Many of them, like most athletes when they retire, have slipped into the obscurity of everyday life.

"Ring 8 keeps a lot us going," said Henny Wallitsch, the club's president. "We come here to be around other fighters. There are a lot of fighters who belong to Ring 8 who were great fighters. It's important to those of us who gave so much of themselves to boxing, that we are not forgotten."

Who could forget? ...Joe Miceli, who fought 12 world champions ...Coley Wallace, who beat Rocky Marciano in the amateurs ...Vinnie Cidone, who fought Rocky Graziano ...Artie Levine, who knocked down Sugar Ray Robinson ...Charlie Noel, who went the distance with Sandy Saddler ...Doug Jones, who fought Ali and Joe Frazier.

They never forget at the Waterfront Crabhouse.