



NORWOOD NEWS

Vol 28, No 24 • PUBLISHED BY MOSHOLU PRESERVATION CORPORATION • DECEMBER 10-23, 2015



**INQUIRING PHOTOGRAPHER:
EMBRACING HOLIDAY SEASON | PG. 6**



**SEE PHOTOS: SEASON'S
GREETINGS IN NORWOOD | PG. 12**

SMOKING OUT OVAL FIREBUGS

Recent incidents spark concern and search for calm



Photo courtesy Frank da Cruz

A FIRE AT Williamsbridge Oval Park on Nov. 27 can be seen from the windows of neighbors surrounding the heavily used park.

By **DAVID CRUZ**

The 52nd Precinct has apprehended a teen suspect wanted in a string of nighttime fires at Williamsbridge Oval Park, which has prompted a large response by officers and the New York City Department of Parks, and continues to do so.

Police have charged the suspect, a 17-year-old boy

whose name is being withheld because of his age, with reckless endangerment after patrol officers caught up with him on Dec. 6, in front of the park's recreation center before hauling him to the stationhouse. The 17-year-old had already been a person of interest for the rare fire the day before, but ran from the police before they could nab

him.

The teen, a self-described leader of a neighborhood crew, admitted to some of the fires though he blamed several others on other incidents members of his group. Shortly after the suspect was charged and released, more fires inside the park were reported, though it's unclear whether the same suspect was behind

it.

At least seven fires were reported at Williamsbridge Oval Park, with the first happening on Nov. 24. FDNY crews rushed to the scene that evening, knocking out a large fireball settled near a playground inside the park. The blaze, powered by dry leaves, took close to a half hour to extinguish. *(continued on page 18)*



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EDITORIAL

Getting a Handle on Oval Park Deviants

In the last few weeks, Williamsbridge Oval Park has experienced a wave of unsettling incidents that include spurts of unsolved fires, ghastly graffiti tags, and daytime fistfights (with at least one reported stabbing of a 17-year-old) among young people.

The Oval, as it's known, is the epicenter of working-class Norwood. It's the community's main family-friendly venue ever since it was repurposed from a defunct city reservoir in the 1930s. Activity at the park typically decreases around this time, but warmer temperatures have put that on hold. Incidents, it seems, have ticked up. The latest happened during the last week of November, when at least three nighttime fires were reported. The same week, a graffiti tag reading, "Los Profetas," the fictional name of a street gang featured in the six-year TV series *The Shield*, was found on pillars to the west.

The 52nd Precinct, an overly busy stationhouse, has acknowledged the problem. To their credit it has devoted more officers to the Oval, conducting nightly patrols. The New York City Parks Department has also reacted, dispatching at least two Park Enforcement Patrol (PEP) officers to monitor the park's safety.

But questions surface: What happens when the authorities leave? Would that make the park vulnerable and unchecked once again?

Instead of a reactive approach, common by city agencies, a permanent solution to improving security at Oval Park is warranted. That can come in raising the number of PEP officers, unarmed security personnel whose reach extends to just enforcing park rules. With just a pittance of PEP officers rotating patrols at the Bronx's 291 parks, their



Photo by David Cruz

A PARKS ENFORCEMENT PATROL vehicle stops in front of this fight between underage boys at Williamsbridge Oval Park, a common problem at the park.

presence comes unnoticed. Riding in patrol vehicles, PEP officers are deemed peacekeepers, monitoring any happenings. But they cannot effect arrests or carry firearms, making their job more of a hall monitor post than an actual authority.

A baseline Parks Department budget keeps the PEP numbers the same, but with more park goers than ever before, more staffing is inevitable. In Norwood, where construction of various residences along Webster Avenue will eventually usher an increased neighborhood population, more PEP officers are a necessity. At some parks, private partnerships foot the bill in hiring more security staff. At parks with no private endowments, they're at the mercy of the NYPD or any available PEP unit.

Even if the number of PEP officers increases, their authority is limited. Without arresting power, PEP officers can only rely on responding NYPD officers, a taxing recourse. In one recent incident at the Oval, a pair

of PEP officers spotted young people roughhousing from their patrol car. They didn't exit their vehicle, opting to remain inside instead. Waste of resources.

Other proposals since the recent park issues include adequate lighting, a resource that could rankle residents, yet could serve as its best deterrent. A controversial request for surveillance cameras was also proposed, though children should not be videotaped when enjoying a park.

Perhaps the best vigilance comes from neighbors encircling the park. Keeping a watchful eye on this heavily used amenity can help save some lives at the park. Preserving the peace is an obligation in protecting a valuable park.

Maybe it's a good thing these issues at the Oval are happening now. Fewer people are out there in cold weather. Let's hope these issues are resolved before next summer.

Public and Community Meetings

COMMUNITY BOARD 7 will hold its general board meeting Dec. 15 at Scott Tower, 3400 Paul Ave., at 6:30 p.m. CB7 committee meetings are held on the following dates at the board office, 229A E. 204th St. at 6:30 p.m. unless otherwise noted: Traffic & Transportation: Dec. 10; Veterans Committee: Dec. 10 at 7:30 p.m.; Housing/Land Use & Zoning: Dec. 16; Community Relations/LTP: Dec. 29; Economic Development: Dec. 29 at 7:30 p.m. For more information, call the Board office at (718) 944-5650.

52ND PRECINCT COMMUNITY COUNCIL meets Dec. 17 at Beso Lounge, 320 E. 204th St., from 6 to 10 p.m. For more information, call (718) 220-5824. (**Editor's Note:** *This meeting also doubles as the Council's annual holiday party.*)

OPINION

End of an Era: Losing Pieces of Norwood

By **MICKEY BURKE**

You've heard the term before – “the end of an era.” Well folks, you are experiencing it. Two things that have been integral to Norwood (and Bedford Park for that matter) have [been] or are disappearing. One could have been kept, the other inevitable. That's right, this Fall 2015, here in the north central Bronx, we are experiencing the end of an era.

There are two major changes that have been or are taking place. The first one straddles the border of Norwood and Bedford Park. Someone (or “someones”) decided that a generation's old tradition, going back to when Mosholu Parkway was created, should be eliminated. They decided to plant trees in the middle of the two quadrangles on the Parkway between Hull and Marion avenues and Van Cortlandt Avenue East.

Why, after all these decades, has this been decided? I just can't figure it out. There never were trees in the middle—why now? You might say, “So what?” The “so what?” is that for the very first time in neighborhood history kids can't play football there. An annual, end-of-summer/beginning of fall neighborhood tradition has been crushed. It was something you could count on, like the changing of the seasons. There are always complaints that teens don't have enough recreational venues. Why take away this natural venue, which was a part of

growing up in this city? What an awful idea! Possibly perpetrated by soccer fans who seem to disparage football. Or maybe it's the residue of Mayor Bloomberg's great tree planting odyssey. Trees are great and needed. However, they could have been planted elsewhere. Why screw with Mosholu Parkway? In my opinion, a wrong decision. Just awful.

The second major change is more personal because it concerns a friend and former colleague, and a long time officer of the East 204th Street-Bainbridge Avenue Merchants Association. His business has been a mainstay on East 204th Street for two generations.

Some may remember the shop was originally on the north side of the street, to a state-of-the-art beautiful shop at 312 E. 204th St.

This establishment has been a mainstay of the 204th Street/Bainbridge Avenue strip since 1970. Allan, the dedicated owner of Freilich Jewelers, has been a strong supporter of the commercial corridor for decades. He was one of the merchants, along with the Buck brothers, myself, and a number of others who back in the late '70s revived the dormant Merchants Association. Allan, like myself, is old school. You take care of your customers, you provide honest dealings, and you do your best. He was always available, both

to his customers and to the Merchants Association.

Time passes on, commercial rents keep getting higher, and so maybe the time comes to retire. I guess it's inevitable. Something you may not know about Allan is his talents besides his masterful skill at creating and repairing jewelry. He was an accomplished trumpet player and a striving pianist.

The lesson of this story is a real blow to the strip because it's a real jewelry store, not a junk jewelry store with plexi glass partition. It gave a touch of class and variety to the strip. Going in to do business with Allan was also a pleasant visit to

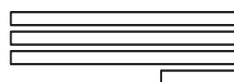
a friend and former colleague. I will miss these occasional visits. I mourn this loss as should we all. We should all wish him well and be thankful we had such a nice place to shop for so long.

Another saying I'm sure you've all heard, “All good things must come to an end,” and so it will be on Dec. 24 [Freilich's final day]. Truly an end of an era in Norwood and the whole north central Bronx. Allan: all the best!

Mickey Burke is a Norwood resident and former owner of Keltic Connections, a business once on East 204th Street.

Have an Opinion On What You've Read In Our Paper?

The *Norwood News* loves, welcomes and encourages letters to the editor.



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Mabel Gerber, Norwood's Accomplished Piano Teacher, Dies at 85

By DAVID CRUZ

Mabel Gerber, a pianist who dazzled audiences at Carnegie Hall while staying grounded as a piano teacher in Norwood, died on Nov. 21 after a long fight with multiple myeloma, friends and family confirmed. She was 85.

Gerber was known as the neighborhood's omnipresent piano teacher and owner of Gerber's Piano Studio at 3230 Bainbridge Ave. It's there she taught classical music and all its lyrical parts to hundreds of students around Norwood over the last six decades, often culminating with performances at MS 80 or PS. 8.

Gerber was born to Edward and Salome Gerber on Oct. 4, 1930 inside the same home she lived all her life—an apartment on Rochambeau Avenue. An only child, Gerber had an affinity for music borne of her mother, also a pianist and owner of the Bainbridge piano studio. At the age of 9, the younger Gerber would sit at the family's Steinway & Sons piano, a tony instrument that, like Gerber, became a fixture in that apartment for decades.

After attending MS 80 and graduating from the High School of Music and Art, Gerber enrolled at the Manhattan School of Music on scholarship, earning a bachelor and master degrees in music in 1951. She took her love of Bach, Mozart and Schubert, sampling their music at some high-profile venues.

She played at organizations such as the Educational Alliance, a storied social services organization in Lower Manhattan, later gracing the stage at Carnegie Hall in 1961 for some solo performances. Across from Carnegie Hall was Cami and Hudson halls, music centers where she and her students played for several years, delighting crowds with her Twilight Concert series.



MABEL GERBER (LEFT), who passed away at the age of 85, dedicated her life to playing professionally and to teaching the piano to young people. Here she poses with two students following a recital.

“The concerts were real character building,” said Rebecca Citron, Gerber’s cousin, adding Gerber’s lessons went beyond “just sitting down at the piano.”

Having remained single her entire life, Gerber was survived by Citron, and her surrogate son, Richard Miranda, who met Gerber 40 years ago. “Her family was the students that she had,” said Miranda, hired by Gerber as the studio’s maintenance man. “She would take off her coat and give it to you.”

As Norwood’s Jewish population began leaving, Gerber, also Jewish, stayed in the neighborhood, eventually taking over the Bainbridge music school shortly after her mother passed. Her mind was seldom on profit, foregoing high fees just so the children can practice. She offered a half hour’s worth of private instruc-



DURING HER EARLY years, Mabel Gerber would perform at Carnegie Hall as evident in this music program featuring her.

tion to young students for as low as \$8 in 1999 as a way to accommodate Norwood’s growing working class.

“Some kids are too poor to pay, so I don’t charge them,” said Gerber in an interview with the Norwood

News in 1999. “The children don’t know. I just tell them their parents sent me the check. I try. I do my little bit. I do what I can.”

During school recitals, Gerber would remain by her students’ side in a show of support. “She got very involved with many of them, helping them to get into colleges, to auditions, some of them went on to do music,” said Citron.

Gerber, a gregarious conversationalist with a fondness for felines, also had a political side. A member of the now dissolved Decatur Democratic Club, Gerber would help cast light on problematic issues within the former 83rd Assembly District (now the 81st Assembly District), volunteering as a poll worker during election season.

In respect to her Jewish roots and wishes, Gerber was buried the day after

her death at Mount Hebron Cemetery in Queens, the final resting place of her parents.

Back in Norwood, friends sat at Gerber’s shiva [a Jewish tradition of seven days of mourning following a death] held inside her apartment Dec. 5. Days before, Miranda spent days categorizing Gerber’s moments, taking stock of her memorabilia inside her one-bedroom apartment. Among them were old ticket stubs and playbills of Gerber’s performances at Carnegie Hall. Miranda considered Gerber a fond preserver of memories, always inclined to maintain keepsakes that stretched back to the 1930s. In the last few weeks, former students have stopped by Gerber’s apartment to pick up a memento to remember Gerber. As for the Steinway piano, it still remains. The music school has since closed.

Wishing you happy holidays
and a joyous new year!



Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr.

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INQUIRING PHOTOGRAPHER

By DAVID GREENE

This week we asked readers their holiday wishes for 2016.



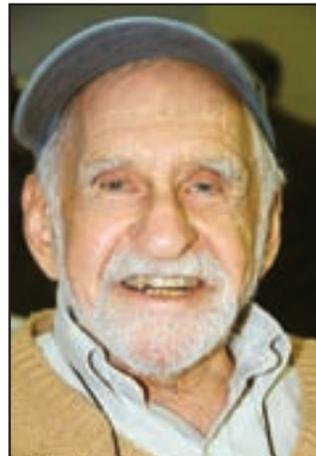
I wish that this war will stop. That's one of the main things I look forward to. But it's hard; it's not getting better. It's difficult to avoid certain things. I guess you just have to roll with the punches and try and be more positive. Besides that, myself, I'm just trying to finish school for the holidays and start a new year fresh and hopefully with a new girlfriend.

Michael Gordillo

I'm just wishing for a better understanding of life. I want to better myself and move out of the shelter. I can have a better life for myself. I've been in the shelter for about a year and Wildcat has helped me get out of the shelter, and that's a good thing. In 2016 I'm moving onward and upwards with my life; it's a blessing. I was born and raised in the Bronx, so I wish everybody in the Bronx and the United States the best holiday.

Lawrence Gibson

I wish everybody a happy holiday and hope that all the members of the military get back home safe.

Syed Hussain

My wishes for 2016 would be for peace in the world and everyone being well and as healthy as possible, and also not to have any more terrorist attacks. This is wishful thinking, but these are my wishes and sometimes wishes turn into reality. Also, [I wish for] health for my family, my son and daughter-in-law, myself and all my friends at Bronx House.

Dr. Jack Jaffe

All the best and we shouldn't have any more wars because I went through a brutal war. I lost seven members of my family in World War II. Of course I see similarities between then and today and it's scary.

Esi Shor

Editor's Note: Have an idea for an Inquiring Photographer question? Send suggestions to dcruz@norwoodnews.org.

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- ⇒ **Marble Hill**



Music to PS 8's Ears

By ADEAMOLA AGBOOLA

Students at PS 8 on Briggs Avenue at Mosholu Parkway are currently enjoying a robust music education program, thanks to the elementary school's new partnership with a non-profit organization that caters to schools lacking resources to provide school-wide music programs.

Education Through Music (ETM), the non-profit partnering organization, worked with the school to eliminate the problem by providing funds and support to hire an additional music teacher who works part time in assisting Shoshana Kaye, the school's full time music teacher.

Kaye, an experienced music teacher and band director, recently worked at a high school in Harlem, but was excused before being hired by PS 8's Assistant Principal Stephen DiPaola. Even with the help of the new teacher hired through ETM, Kaye still teaches six classes of about 30 students each for 42 minutes, five days a week. That means she's responsible for some 800 students for the 2015 academic year. "It's tough gig and it comes with high expectations but with little

time," Kaye said. "I see each class once a week and I can't afford to miss any day of the week."

In a school with an enrollment of over 1,200 students, providing quality music education across the board has been challenging, according to the school's principal Claudia Tahiraj, who has been working there for 18 years. "It used to be that only half of our students are able to take music classes in a semester," explains Tahiraj. "We've had to move the teacher to cover the other half the following semester."

Emily Feinberg-Hofier, the part time music teacher hired directly by ETM picks up the remaining 400 or so students working three days a week.

Typically, ETM links up with schools that don't have music programs, with the aim of jump starting one by hiring and paying the teachers themselves. It also provides the school with a curriculum the organization claims meets national standards.

In speaking about PS 8, Tim Lemberger, ETM's communications and marketing director, said, "This school is unique in a sense since



Photo by Adedamola Agboola

MUSIC LIVES AT PS 8. (l-r) PS 8 principal Claudia Tahiraj, Education through Music teacher, Emily Feinberg-Hofier, and full-time music teacher for PS 8, Shoshana Kaye, pose with a class of PS 8 students.

they already have a music program. Most of the schools we work with don't have any music programs. We hire and provide the teacher salary, a music curriculum and teacher development."

ETM partners with schools with the aim of developing a sustainable long term music program with the school according to the organization's mission posted on their web-

site. Teachers hired through ETM remain on the organization's payroll for a couple of years with the aim of integrating them into the school's system and philosophy. "The goal is that these teachers then get hired by the school through the New York City Department of Education after developing a well-rounded music program," said Lemberger explaining the goal of the partnership.

Bedford Park Church to Dedicate New Organ on Dec. 13

By VIVIAN RATTAY CARTER

The oldest house of worship in the neighborhood, Bedford Park Congregational Church, founded in 1889 and designated a historic landmark in 2000, is receiving an early Christmas gift this year. On Sunday, Dec. 13, for the first time in 10 years, members of the congregation will be able to enjoy the sound of organ music in their sanctuary, as they dedicate a new Rodgers digital organ.

Several months ago, the trustees considered completely restoring their 1930s-era Möller pipe organ, which was purchased second-hand from another church in the 1950s. The instrument had endured water damage due to a leaky roof, which has since been repaired.

The Möller Company's many famous pipe organs around the U.S. include those at the chapels of the U.S. service academies (West Point, Naval and Air Force Academies). Möller also



File Photo

BEDFORD PARK CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH is inviting the public for a dedication ceremony of its brand new digital organ.

built organs in the first three decades of the 20th century for Morris and Evander Childs high schools.

The quote the trustees received to completely restore the 58-year-old organ ranged from \$87,000 to \$179,000, an

amount the small congregation could never hope to raise. Instead, with funds on hand, the church found it was able to buy a top-of-the-line digital organ and install it inside the existing organ cabinet, while leaving the original system of Möller pipes and pedals intact. Eventually, the church has the option to connect the new musical instrument to the original one.

Following the service dedicating the new digital organ, a potluck Christmas meal will be shared. All in the community are welcome to attend the service to hear the playing of the organ by Vladimir Yudilevich, and participate in the meal (\$10 donation requested).

Additional upcoming services include one on Christmas Eve (Thursday, Dec. 24 at 7:30 p.m.), and New Year's Eve (Thursday, Dec. 31, at 7:30 p.m.), when the church will once again resonate with the sound of traditional hymns and Christmas carols.

Plans Unveiled for Oval Skate Park

By MICHAEL BROWN JR.

Plans for a skate park expected to be built at Williamsbridge Oval Park have been unveiled, advancing the highly anticipated \$750,000 project.

According to plans released at Community Board 7's parks committee, ledges, quarter pipes, ramps, rails, and a bowl corner will be some of the skate park's features. The park, to be built at a concrete space on the eastern side of the park, will also include two entrances, one already in existence and another to be added during construction. The park will be larger than expected so construction crews can avoid uprooting existing trees surrounding the perimeter of the space.

"The skate park will be the most unique section of the Oval, as it is the only area designed by individuals who are going to use it--the skateboarders who currently skate in the Oval," said Doug Condit, a member of Friends of Williamsbridge Oval, who has been following developments for the project.

In 2004, the New York Department of Parks and Recreation had promised to build a skate park. A group of skateboarders came before Community Board 7's general board meeting April 29 last year, pleading for a new skate park to be added to the Oval.

Condit played a key role in supporting the initiative, forming a skateboard committee, and going to local skate shops to acquire funds before requesting it from the New York City Council. Though he knows that news

about a skate park isn't on most people's minds, he keeps up his support. "It's not page one news, [but] we want a skate park!"

"Under state law, skateboarders can skate in streets, which is unsafe," Condit said, supporting the skate park as an alternative to the riding in the streets. True to what Condit said, skaters in the area have been skating near the entrance of Williamsbridge Oval Park.

During the presentation of Friends of Williamsbridge Oval, one Community Board 7 member said the funds for the skate park had been for the dog run.

A skate area was originally conceived a decade ago when improvements for the Oval were announced along with other Bronx parks after a water filtration system (the Croton Water Filtration Plant) was put into Van Cortlandt Park by the Department of Environmental Protection. A multi-million dollar budget was put together for these parks. Williamsbridge Oval was to receive \$15 million for improvements.

So far, the Oval has spent \$14.3 million on things other than the skate park, including a recreation center that required renovations, a playground, track, basketball courts, and a dog run instead.

A spokesperson for the New York City Parks Department expects the park to be built in May 2016, though there are little signs of construction at this time.

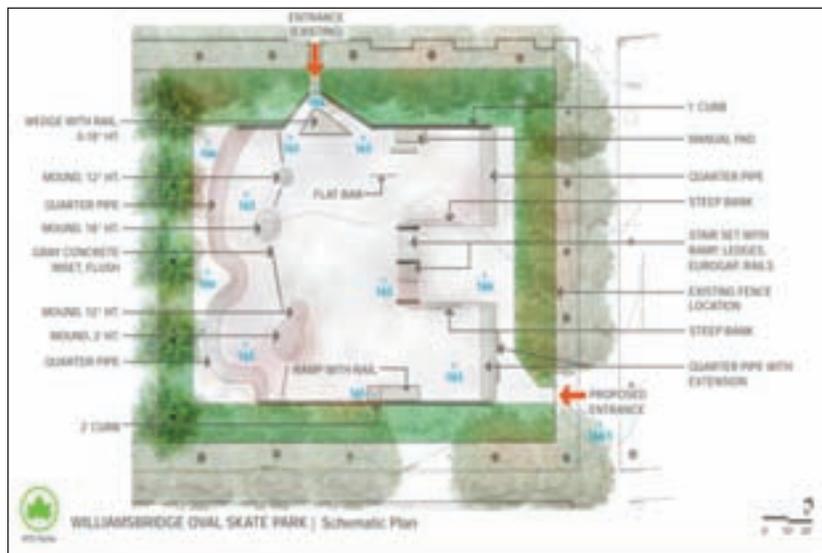


Image courtesy NYC Department of Parks

A DIAGRAM OF the pending skate park at Williamsbridge Oval Park was released at a recent Community Board 7 Parks Committee meeting.

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Day of Terror Begins in Bedford Park, Ends in NJ

By DAVID CRUZ

A 3-year-old child is safe and sound after having been abducted by her father, which triggered a rare Amber Alert in Bedford Park. The dad is wanted for allegedly stabbing his 31-year-old estranged wife, mother of the child.

Police have charged Diomedes Valenzuela, 51, for stabbing the victim on Dec. 1 just before 2 p.m. in what police dubbed a custodial incident. Valenzuela was visiting his 3-year-old daughter at her apartment on Perry Avenue when he got into an argument with the victim, according to police. The argument became heated and Valenzuela allegedly stabbed her multiple times to the body.

Valenzuela quickly grabbed his daughter and fled in a grey 2004 Dodge Caravan, activating the Amber Alert. He was caught hours later in New Jersey by NJ State Police. The victim, in the meantime, was rushed to St. Barnabas and was listed in critical condition.



Photos courtesy NYPD

POLICE RELEASED THESE pictures of Diomedes Valenzuela and his 3-year-old daughter, who had immediately fled in this 2004 Dodge Caravan, and was apprehended after having snatched the child, and after having allegedly stabbed his 31-year-old estranged wife, mother of the little girl.



Photo by Jasmine Gomez

CONSTRUCTION CREWS AND EQUIPMENT is a commuter's first view as they exit the #4 Woodlawn subway station at Jerome Avenue. Crews have spent the last few weeks building a so-called bus bulb to improve pedestrian safety.

Construction of Jerome Ave. Bus Bulb Cuts Taxi Stand

By JASMINE GOMEZ

A so-called bus bulb is currently under construction below the #4 Woodlawn elevated subway station on Jerome Avenue. While it's viewed as an added safety measure for riders, it also means the elimination of an unofficial taxi stand.

The bus bulb-- a method that extends a sidewalk to a bus stop-- is being built at the corner of Jerome and Bainbridge avenues directly below the elevated #4 subway line. Crews have begun elongating the sidewalk towards the existing BxM4, Bx16, and Westchester County's Bee Line stops, eliminating side lanes.

The new sidewalk design is part of a long-term campaign to eliminate safety hazards that endanger riders, a goal of Mayor Bill de Blasio's citywide initiative, Vision Zero. As it stands at most bus stops below elevated train lines, commuters have to wait by a steel pillar to catch a bus, creating a precarious situation.

Reconstruction has also relocated the unofficial taxi stand for cabbies waiting on passengers coming out of

the Woodlawn station. The cabs have moved their waiting stand to Bainbridge Avenue.

"Because of where the taxis are waiting, it makes it kind of difficult for the 16 and the 34 bus to get through sometimes, as well as other traffic coming down Bainbridge," said Lowell Greene, Transportation Committee Chair for Community Board 7 (CB7).

Jerry, a cab driver who picks up passengers near the #4 Woodlawn train station, noted that the pending bus bulb eliminates space on the side lanes, creating congestion as cars are forced to wait for a bus to load/unload passengers instead of going around them.

But Greene believes that when the construction stops, the traffic problem should diminish. "That will probably get resolved, but the way the sidewalk is being built out, it will take some readjustment of where the taxi drivers will wait," he said.

Shavone Williams, a spokesperson for the New York City Department of Design and Construction (DDC), the

agency overseeing the reconstruction, said the project will only ensure the safety of commuters. "We have completed all of the water main upgrades in this specific location and are preparing for the sidewalk extensions. DDC is committed to Mayor de Blasio's vision for a healthy and sustainable city and to building well-designed, safe environments that enhance our communities and contribute to the city's growth" said Williams.

For now, CB7 has spread word on the short-term traffic congestion of the project.

A similar project is also under way at the intersection of Jerome Avenue and Kingsbridge Road, with plans for other bus bulbs across the Bronx.

"We're looking at everything under the 4 train, pretty much the length of Jerome [Avenue]. That program has been pretty successful. What we've done is made it safer for drivers and for people who are waiting on the bus," said Department of Transportation's Deputy Bronx Commissioner, Nivardo Lopez.

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Holiday Tree Lighting Ceremonies

The holiday spirit thrives in Norwood and Bedford Park with tree lighting ceremonies at the Jerome-Gun Hill Business Improvement District and Serviam Gardens marking the season of giving.



Photo by Jenny Sharp

THIS SPARKLING TREE lit up the Jerome-Gun Hill BID, which hosted its annual Tree Lighting Ceremony on Dec. 7. A raffle and hot chocolate were some of the giveaways at the yuletide event.



Photo by Jenny Sharp

SANTA COMES TO THE BID! Jolly Saint Nick stopped by the Jerome-Gun Hill BID Holiday Tree Lighting Ceremony surrounded by plenty of kids.



Photo by Jenny Sharp

JOLLY SAINT NICK welcomes young ones to sit on his lap at the Jerome-Gun Hill BID.



Photo by Jenny Sharp

EVEN CHILDLIKE GROWNUPS shared a moment with Santa and his helpful elf at the Jerome-Gun Hill BID's Tree Lighting Ceremony.



Photo by Miriam Quinones

THE HOLIDAY SEASON shines at Serviam Gardens, thanks to their Christmas tree that lit up at a Dec. 2 ceremony for the first time.



Photo by Miriam Quinones

THE CROWD AT Serviam Gardens, the senior residence on East 198th Street, got into the holiday spirit at the residence's annual tree lighting event on Dec. 2.

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Bronx Volunteers Promote Citizens Committee Grant Applications

By VIVIAN RATTAY CARTER

On a sparkling but chilly Friday afternoon in December, several Bronxites gathered near a street mural in Woodlawn explaining how their neighborhood has benefitted from local volunteers armed with seed money from a citywide nonprofit called Citizens Committee for New York City (CCNYC).

At the corner of Katonah Avenue and 235th Street, Peter Kostmayer, chief executive officer of CCNYC, stood with volunteers from Women of Woodlawn, to announce that his group is looking for a few more great grassroots volunteer efforts in the Bronx. Hundreds more, to be precise.

CCNYC intends to boost the number of Bronx applications in 2016, bringing attention to the types of projects they fund earlier than normal.

In 2015, the Bronx received 307 such grants, while 702 landed in the borough of Brooklyn. Bedford Mosholu Community Association received \$1250 in 2015 CCNYC funding for a street mural, which was painted over this past summer at 202nd Street and Briggs Avenue, near PS 8. Kostmayer praised the thousands of groups that have re-



Photo by Vivian Rittay Carter

A DIFFERENCE FUNDING MAKES. Community stakeholders, including the Women of Woodlawn civic group, stand in front of mural made possible through funds from Citizens Committee for New York City.

ceived grants in years past, declaring, “We love all of these great organizations in Brooklyn, but right now, we love the Bronx the most.”

CCNYC’s funding cycle for 2016 neighborhood micro-grants officially opened, with applications due Jan. 25, 2016. Over \$1.6 million will be awarded, with a cap of \$3,000 per winning group. CCNYC grants fund projects that rely on resident volunteers forming a group to celebrate and improve their neighborhoods or schools through quality of

life improvement projects.

Groups do not need to have not-for-profit legal status to apply, but they must meet some fairly specific criteria. CCNYC does not fund individuals, for-profit ventures, groups that employ paid staff, or budgets of over \$40,000. Priority is given to groups in low-income and underserved neighborhoods, and to schools serving Title I “high needs” populations.

Grants typically cluster into a few categories—park beautification proj-

ects and cleanups, art installations such as street murals celebrating the people and traditions of neighborhoods, and gardening-related education projects. Women of Woodlawn has cleaned up and beautified local parks, combining seed money and volunteer energy. They also received funding for the painting of a mural in the Katonah Avenue business district.

Councilman Andrew Cohen, representing Norwood and Woodlawn, lent support for the campaign, noting, “It’s hard to get City Council funds to groups on this level.” He pointed out that the NYPD has agreed to help extend the community outreach for the CCNYC grants through its police officers on patrol.

Each officer has been supplied with informational cards to distribute to residents expressing interest in community improvement projects. A few officers present at the event handed out these cards to prove the point. Cohen added that three other city agencies are in line to assist volunteer groups through CCNYC grants, including the departments of Parks, Sanitation, and Transportation.



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BUSINESS BEAT

Cigar Shop Brings Aroma of Dominican Republic to Norwood

By DAVID CRUZ

For the past 15 years, toasty whiffs of natural smoke would puff out a tiny shop on East Gun Hill Road in Norwood, emitting an acquired scent.

If customers look behind the store's window pane, a quad of workers carefully roll brown thick cigars. In front of them, a row of brown lounge chairs are available for the casual smoker looking to sit and reflect as they inhale sweet tobacco.

"A cigar is meant to relax yourself," said Francisco Rosario, owner of Rosario's Cigars LLC.

Rosario's family-operated shop is a true family collaboration in every sense of the word. He employs his brothers and cousins who know the art of hand rolling cigars. Rosario, looked upon as the family patriarch, has also displayed reverence to relatives. He's named one of his cigars "Grandfather" in honor of his grandfather. He also has a cigar named "Mrs. Maria," after his wife, Maria, who doubles as his business partner. His reverence for family also translates



Photo by David Cruz

FRANCISCO ROSARIO, OWNER of Rosario's Cigars LLC, stands at the cigar making station as workers prepare the next batch of cigars.

towards his clients.

"I see the client like family," said Rosario.

The shop is one of 14 in the Bronx, though it pegs itself to be one of the few cigar shops where its cigars solely originate from the Dominican Republic, from where Rosario hails. Rosario, 56, is not only the owner, but the store's quality assurance representative.

"It's like being a chef," said Rosario,

of the cigar making process. "If the food doesn't taste good, you're not going to make it again."

Though the store's been in Norwood for 15 years, cigar making has run in the family for nearly a century, still hearkening back to Tamboril, Dominican Republic. It's home to the family's tobacco farm, where raw materials for the store's handmade cigars are grown and imported.

Imparting Rosario with the art of hand rolling cigars came from his mother, Sejida Altagracia Rosario, and his grandfather, Ramon Rosario. When he arrived to the United States, the younger Rosario worked at a cigar shop in Belmont as he saved money to open his own store.

Clients even include former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani (Rosario quickly pointed out a framed photo of him and Giuliani holding cigars), Congressman Jose Serrano and actor Chuck Norris. He's even the unofficial cigar man for members of the NYPD's 52nd Precinct.

The store sells more than 100 cigar brands with prices that range from \$5 for cheaper brands to \$16 for top shelf choices such as El Sueno Don Francisco #1.

"When I make a cigar, I see it in my hand and in my heart," said Rosario.

Rosario's Cigars is located at 323 E. Gun Hill Road. He has another store in the Castleton Corners section of Staten Island.

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DeWitt Clinton HS Slams NY Post Report Over Grade Fixing Claims

DeWitt Clinton High School's journalism teacher and her students criticized a recent *New York Post* story over an investigation of an alleged grade-fixing scheme involving their principal. Overwhelmingly, they support Principal Santiago Taveras and questioned the journalistic integrity of the story and daily newspaper.

"In my mind it came out of the blue," said Ann Neary, who has taught Advanced Placement literature, writing and journalism at the school for 11 years. She said she had not heard any rumors of improper grade changing. "An investigation does not imply that the charges are true," said Neary. The New York City Department of Education did not respond to emails about the investigation.

Taveras is reportedly accused of changing students' failing grades to passing without teachers' knowledge or consent. The Special Commissioner of Investigation for city schools

is now looking into the claims.

Neary praised Taveras' leadership during the last few years with pressure on the school to downsize. There are currently two new schools in the building--Bronx Collaborate and World View high schools. "I think he works really hard. He tries to rally us around positive things that happen in our school, and there are many and none of it gets press," said Neary, citing the number of recent graduates who've earned full scholarships to prestigious colleges, including Princeton University.

Neary said that of her 33 journalism students, 29 fully support Taveras. She said she and her students feel the *Post's* editorial coverage of public schools is imbalanced. "The *Post* has a habit of downgrading anything that happens in public schools and over publicizing anything that happens in charter schools," she said.

--Haydee Camacho

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Smoking Out Oval Firebugs

(continued from page 1)
tinguish.

Other fires were reported Nov. 27 and 29, happening between 8 and 9:30 p.m., according to witnesses who noticed bright flames smoldering from the park. No injuries were reported for each fire.

Tipping Point

The latest incidents represent a tipping point over safety issues at the park, with several quality-of-life concerns cropping up recently. A few weeks ago, a 17-year-old boy was stabbed inside the park, an act categorized by the 52nd Precinct as gang-related. In a separate incident, a fistfight broke out among young people, prompting a poorly-attended community meeting seeking solutions to quell violence.

Police have also received complaints of thieves stealing personal items from parkgoers playing at the multi-use field.

“This year we’ve had a significant increase in conditions at that park,” said Captain John Korabol, the 52nd Precinct’s second-in-command. Speaking at the latest Bedford Mosholu Community Association meeting on Dec. 2, Korabol noted that the stationhouse has put officers on foot patrols at the park since the summer. “During the evenings at the park, we’ve made a number of arrests regarding incidents in that park,” he told the audience.

Protecting the Park

The community and neighbors have largely condemned the uptick in violence. That widespread condemnation stems largely from the neighborhood’s deference to the park, which has improved from a time when the track and field was nothing more than dusty terrain in the 1970s and 1980s.

By all accounts, Williamsbridge Oval Park is a heavily used public space in Norwood, with at least a dozen basketball courts, playgrounds, benches, and multi-use fields. It opened in 1937 after the New York City Department of Parks refashioned the decommissioned reservoir into parkland.

The park’s amenities, also include an indoor recreation center, popular for young people and senior citizens taking advantage of the computer lab, fitness gym and community space.

Following the incidents, the Parks



Photo by Adi Talwar

AS OF PRESS TIME, the most recent fire at Williamsbridge Oval Park (pictured), occurred on Dec. 8. FDNY knocked the flames out immediately.

Department dispatched its Parks Enforcement Patrol (PEP) officers. Though not quite an arresting authority, PEP officers are uniformed security personnel, responsible for ensuring park goers obey rules and reg-

for forging better relations with the public. “We like to keep them on foot patrol,” he said. “It’s easier for them to navigate and learn the lay of the land; [and] interact more with the community. That’s what we’re trying to do.”



Photo by David Cruz

ROUTINE PATROLS BY Parks Enforcement Patrol officers have fanned across Williamsbridge Oval Park daily.

ulations for each park. Their presence is often scattered given the small roster of officers employed by the Parks Department.

And while PEP officers typically patrol the grounds during the day, the 52nd Precinct monitors park activity at the latter part of the day. For Korabol, an officer’s presence can be advantageous, serving as a strategy

control the area.

Ideas were also discussed by the Bedford Mosholu Community Association, a civic body that normally touches on matters happening in Bedford Park. Sheila Sanchez, president of FOTWO and a member of the BMCA, proposed cameras be installed throughout the park.

But that proposal was countered by Councilman Andrew Cohen, in attendance at BMCA, who expressed “mixed feelings of people being observed while enjoying a park.” “I feel that it’s an unusual spike, because I think the Oval is pretty safe, generally speaking, I’m hoping that this is sort of an aberration,” Cohen explained.

For robbery-related crimes, Korabol noted that the 52nd Precinct and Parks Department are looking to install lock boxes near the sports field to secure property.

Cohen, along with Community Board 7, put pressure on the 52nd Precinct and Parks Department, sending a letter that formalized their concerns.

For now, the 52nd Precinct is adhering to its strategy, keeping officers at the park until further notice. “We want officers to be approachable, and maybe someone in that park one day when an officer [is] walking around, and not driving via car, will whisper in their ear,” said Korabol.

Seeking Solutions

The topic of safety overwhelmed several local Facebook pages. On the Facebook page for Friends of Williamsbridge Oval (FOTWO), a volunteer group that monitors issues at the park, residents bounced around ideas on how to better secure the park. One user proposed volunteers approved by police and park authorities could pa-

ADVERTORIAL

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Don't forget! Our annual holiday shopping promotion is also happening through Dec. 20. Shop at more than 60 Fordham Road retailers to get 10 percent off your purchase by showing a print advertisement, web coupon, event invite, or your MetroCard.



Photo courtesy Fordham Road BID

WHILE AT THE Fordham Road BID this holiday season, shoppers can stop and admire "Heartseat," this public art sculpture on display at the corner of Fordham Road and Webster Avenue.

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have been patrolling the district since Black Friday and will run until the end of the year.

In other Fordham news, stop by Fordham Road and Webster Avenue to see the newest installation of public art in the Bronx, "Heartseat" by Stereotank. "Heartseat" was originally featured in Times Square as an award-winning Valentine's Day piece and has now found its home right here on Fordham Road! Fordham Road is a major transportation hub accessible by MTA New York City Transit subway 4 & D trains, the Metro-North railroad, various bus lines, as well as containing numerous area parking facilities.

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NEIGHBORHOOD NOTES

Toy Giveaway

The 52nd Precinct, 3016 Webster Ave., is hosting a toy giveaway event Dec. 18 at 4 p.m. for children under the age of 13. Parents are required to preregister with the precinct and must accompany their children to receive a gift. For more information and to register, call Community Affairs Police Officer Crystal Reveron at (718) 220-5824.

Flu Shots

Walgreens in partnership with Montefiore will be giving flu shots at 573 E. Fordham Rd. (Hoffman Street between East Fordham Road and East 191st Street), Dec. 11 from noon to 2 p.m. Insurance card is required. Appointment is not required. For more information, call Luisa Benedetto at (718) 842-8100.

Library Awards

Nominations are being accepted for the NYC Neighborhood Library Award. To nominate your library, pick up a form from your local library or fill one out online at <http://www.nyclibraryawards.org> by Dec. 18. Winning libraries are awarded up to \$20,000.

Heating Assistance Available

This winter, the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) offers eligible households of low-income and elderly New Yorkers to receive a one-time benefit of up to \$625 depending on income, household size, and heating source. Applications for emergency benefits for those in danger of losing heat will be accepted starting Jan. 4, 2016. For more information and requirements, go to <http://otda.ny.gov/programs/heap>.

Snow Laborers

Early registration has begun for part-time emergency laborers for the upcoming snow season. Pay is \$13.50 per hour, and \$20.25 per hour after 40 hours are worked in a week. To register, visit the

Bronx yard at Mosholu Avenue and Broadway in Van Cortlandt Park, Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Applicants must be at least age 18, bring two small photos (1 ½ square), or original and copy of two forms of ID and a Social Security Card.

Free Tutoring

Sistas & Brothers United, 103 E. 196th St., 3rd fl., offers free tutoring for students ages 12 to 21 in the subjects of math, history, English, and science, Monday through Friday from 3 to 6 p.m. For more information, call Crystal Reyes, College Access Coordinator, at (718) 584-0515 ext. 243.

Nominate a Teacher

Nominate your child's favorite teacher who shows exceptional success in impacting student learning, for a Big Apple Award, sponsored by the Department of Education in partnership with the Fund for Public Schools. Nominations can only be made online at <http://on.nyc.gov/12ShVh8>, through Jan. 18, 2016.

Neighborhood Grants

Citizens Committee will award micro-grants of up to \$3,000 to resident-led groups to work on community and school improvement projects throughout the city. A webinar on how to apply for CCNYC grants is set for Wednesday, Jan. 6, at 6 p.m. To sign up for the webinar, visit www.citizensnyc.org, email Tehmina Brohi at tbrohi@citizensnyc.org, or call (212) 822-9563.

Immigration/Legal Services

Immigration and legal services are available at the Office of Councilman Fernando Cabrera, 107 E. Burnside Ave., Thursdays and Fridays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. A housing lawyer is available every other Monday. Appointments are required. To schedule one, call (347) 590-2875.

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Out & About

Compiled by JUDY NOY

EDITOR'S PICK

Celebrate the Holidays

The public is invited to a Winter Wonderland to celebrate Christmas, Eid eMilad-un Nabi, Kwanzaa, Chanukah and Three Kings Day, Dec. 19 from noon to 2 p.m. at the Williamsbridge Oval. Events include winter arts and crafts, carnival games, healthy snacks and a visit from some special guests including Santa. For more information, call (718) 543-8672 or visit nyc.gov/parks.

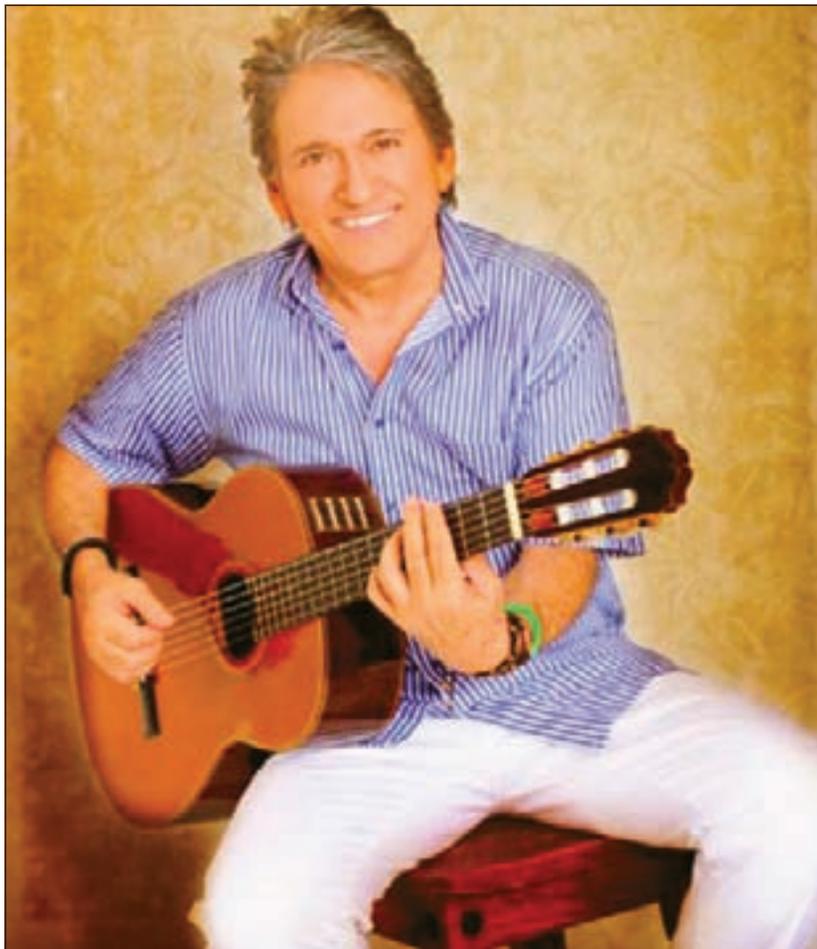


Photo courtesy Lehman Center for the Performing Arts

THE LEHMAN CENTER for the Performing Arts presents Parranda Navideña, a Puerto Rican style Christmas celebration Dec. 12 at 8 p.m.

Onstage

The Bronx Library Center, 310 E. Kingsbridge Rd., presents **Concert**, featuring the Celia Cruz H. S. Chamber Orchestra performing classical music, Dec. 12; and **Definitely Dickens Carolers** featuring carolers performing traditional and contemporary holiday classics in Victorian-style costume, Dec. 19; both at 2:30 p.m. For more information, call (718) 579-4244/46/57 or visit www.nypl.org.

Events

The New York Botanical Garden's Ross Hall presents **Winter Harmonies Concert Series**, featuring Le Train Bleu ensemble performing classical music including a concert for kids at 2 p.m., Dec. 13 and 20 at 2 and 4 p.m. Tickets (which include All-Garden pass admission to the Holiday Train show) are \$35/adult; \$23/child; members: \$15/adult; \$10/child. For more information, call (718) 817-8700 or visit www.nybg.org.

The New York City Department of

Parks and Recreation presents free: **Seasonal Crafts**, each Friday through Jan. 29, 2016, from 2 to 3:30 p.m. at Poe Park's Visitor Center, 2640 Grand Concourse (at Kingsbridge Road. For more information, call (718) 365-5516.

The Williamsbridge Oval offers **Hip-Hop Aerobics Classes**, Thursdays from 7:30 to 8:30 p.m. For more information and to become a member, call (718) 543-8672.

Wave Hill, a Bronx oasis at 675 W. 252nd St. in Riverdale, offers **Family Art Projects**: Candles, Snowflakes and Stars, to mold an image of nature onto a candle or make a woven string star or button snowflake, Dec. 12 and 13; and Snow-Globe Gift Boxes, to make a snow globe using live pine boughs, then decorate it, Dec. 19 and 20; both in WH House from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Grounds admission is free until noon Saturdays and Tuesdays all year. For more information and a schedule of events including tours and walks, call (718) 549-3200.

Holiday Events

Lehman College, 250 Bedford Pk. Blvd. W., presents **Christmas Around New York**, Dec. 13 at 3 p.m. in the Lovinger Theatre, featuring the New York Choral Society performing traditional and international Christmas carols with brass and organ

accompaniment. Also included are an audience sing-a-long and a special appearance by the Celia Cruz Bronx H.S. of Music Stage Choir.

Lehman Center for the Performing Arts, 250 Bedford Pk. Blvd. W., presents **Parranda Navideña** (Puerto Rican style Christmas celebration), Dec. 12 at 8 p.m., featuring José Nogueras and El Trio Borinquen. Tickets are \$25 to \$50; \$10/ages 12 and under. For more information, call (718) 960-8833.

Hostos Center for the Arts & Culture, 450 Grand Concourse, presents free event (tickets are required): **Annual Kwanzaa Celebration**, featuring Harambee Dance Company performing traditional and contemporary African dance, Dec. 10 at 7 p.m. in the Repertory Theatre. Subject to change. For more information and to reserve, call (718) 518-4455 or visit www.hostoscenter.org.

The Riverdale YM-YWHA, 5625 Arlington Ave., presents **Chanukah Community Party**, Dec. 12 from 6:30 to 8 p.m., featuring for kids: arts and crafts, dancing, food craft, and more, all in an Israeli style (light kosher dinner and treats will be provided after candle lighting; \$10/pp; \$35/family). For more information, call (718) 548-8200 or (347) 479-8274.



Photo courtesy Joshua Bright

GET INTO THE holiday spirit with Family Art Projects at Wave Hill. Dec. 12 and 13 will feature the Candles, Snowflakes and Stars workshop.

The New York City Department of Parks and Recreation presents **Holiday Train Show**, daily through Jan. 18, 2016 from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. at the New York Botanical Garden's Enid A. Haupt Conservatory, featuring model trains that zip through a display of 150 NYC landmarks, each recreated with bark, leaves and other natural materials. Advance reservations are recommended. For more information and tickets prices, call (718) 817-8716

Library Events

The Bronx Library Center, 310 E. Kingsbridge Rd., presents the following events for children: **Early Literary Series:** (ages 2 to 4), musical fun, read aloud, free book giveaway and library card signup, Dec. 10 at 10 a.m.; **Hands-on Projects at 4 p.m.** (ages 7 to 12; in-person preregistration required): Paper Snowman Making, Dec. 10 and Gingerbread House Making, Dec. 17; **Dorothy in the Land of Oz** (ages 3 to 12): presented by Traveling Lantern Theatre, Dec. 12 at 2 p.m.; and **Family Time** (ages 3 to 6): reading aloud and crafts, Dec. 12 at 11 a.m. Teens/young adults can join **Design Your Own Leather Bag:** to make a leather backpack, tote or messenger bag, and add pockets and accessories, Dec. 10 at 4 p.m.; and **film:** "Elf," Dec. 24 at noon. For more information, call (718) 579-4244/46/57 or visit www.nypl.org.

The Mosholu Library, 285 E. 205th St., offers for children: **Harry Potter Party** (ages 5 to 12): to celebrate the series with games, crafts and trivia, Dec. 18 at 3:30 p.m.; and **Winterfest** (ages 5 to 12): games and crafts, Dec. 23 at 3:30 p.m. Teens/young adults can attend **film:** "Pixels," Dec. 19 at 1:30 p.m. Adults can attend: **Free Computer Classes:** to learn email and basic computer information, Wednesdays, 10:30 to 11:30 a.m. For more information, call (718) 882-8239.

The Jerome Park Library, 118 Eames Place (near Kingsbridge Road), offers for kids: **Diary of a Wimpy Kid Old School Book Celebration** (ages 5 to 12): celebrate this book series with a fun craft, game and snacks, Dec. 18 at 3 p.m. (registration required); **Abacadabra** (ages 3 to 12): hand tricks and comedic talents interactive show, Dec. 21 at 4 p.m.; and **Kids Pajama Party** (ages 18 months to 12 years): cool craft and read-alouds, Dec. 21 at 6 p.m. (registration required). Adults can join: **Computer Basics at noon:** to learn computer parts, email and more, Dec. 17. For more information, call (718) 549-5200.

A HAPPY AND HEALTHY PASSOVER TO ALL OUR JEWISH READERS!

NOTE: Items for consideration may be mailed to our office or sent to norwoodnews@norwoodnews.org, and should be received by Dec. 14 for the next publication date of Dec. 24.

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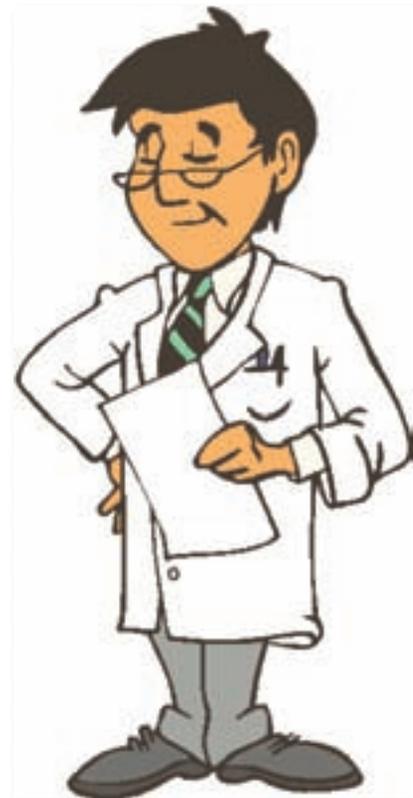
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