



# NORWOOD NEWS

Vol 31, No 1 • PUBLISHED BY MOSHOLU PRESERVATION CORPORATION • JANUARY 4-17, 2018



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NEW YEAR, NEW LAWS | PG. 4**



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# NORWOOD NEWS YEAR IN REVIEW



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By **DAVID CRUZ**

The *Norwood News* produced a total of 284 stories (not counting Public & Community Meetings, Neighborhood Notes and Out & About) throughout the 25-issue print run for 2017. The issues the paper called attention to ranged, though some stories bore greater urgency in the hopes action from local legislators could be taken. Below

are some topics that surfaced and resurfaced throughout the last 12 months, and are once again highlighted in the *Norwood News'* annual Year in Review:

### Homeless Crisis

Norwood was not immune to homelessness, an issue that continues pressing across the city. In the 25 *Norwood News*

issues printed in 2017, the topic of homelessness landed on the front page of the paper four times, more than any other topic.

Coverage of the topic began in 2017 when the New York City Department of Homeless Services announced its annual HOPE Count, a federally-mandated count of the city's street homeless. The exercise is re-

quired for the city to receive federal money to combat homelessness. It turns out the Bronx saw a 453 percent climb in the number of street homeless that night, using a questionable formula.

Still, with the city obligated to find housing, it became prudent for Mayor Bill de Blasio to find housing while also scrap-  
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Vol. 31, No. 1

Norwood News is published bi-weekly on Thursdays by Mosholu Preservation Corporation (MPC) 3400 Reservoir Oval East Bronx, New York 10467  
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## EDITORIAL

## Calling Out Problem Buildings

Michael Cotto of Norwood, along with his wife and two kids, are among those lucky to be alive in the Knox Place blaze that disrupted them and the lives of many others on Dec. 27. They escaped the four-alarm inferno unscathed. When compared to the devastating fire at Prospect Avenue in Belmont that claimed 12 victims a day later, the Cottos were presented with a silver lining.

The fire happened at 3414 Knox Pl. a building notorious for its sub-par living conditions, according to the New York Public Advocate's Office. For the last few years, the city has placed the building's landlords, Narsinh Desai and Nick Gazivoda (records show his name has been spelled as Gazivova) of Norwest Realty Management, and the buildings they manage on the 100 Worst Landlords Watchlist. It's a shame the list holds no legal authority, yet helps make problem buildings livable again through sheer embarrassment.

Lack of heat and hot water complaints were among the common grievances filed by tenants at the Knox Place building in 2017, according to a review of the city Department of Housing Preservation and Development website. Of the 21 violations the building was hit with since 2000, 12 were found credible, three were found in default because representatives for Norwest Realty did not appear at an ECB (Environmental Control Board) hearing, and one is pending. In all, Norwest Realty was hit with fines totaling \$12,973.59. Among the recurring issues is a poorly maintained elevator.

Cotto and his wife had been



Photo by David Cruz

**A SURVIVOR OF** the four-alarm fire (center) at 3414 Knox Pl. outside her building hours after it was partially engulfed in flames.

fighting their landlord for the last two years over what they claim is an electrical issue. The lights along the apartment line he lives in had flickered continuously, a condition that befell other lines. A legal battle ensued, resulting in an uncertified electrician to "fix" the circuit board, Cotto claims. It's unclear whether faulty electrical lines was the culprit in the fire.

What is clear is that this eight-story building was a ticking time bomb. Problems inside buildings like these could mushroom beyond control, and the cost could be human life.

These problems at Norwest Realty buildings apparently didn't spring up overnight. On the review website Yelp there was only one commenter who spoke poorly of the building. The comment by Diana N. chronicled a poor electrical issue at a building owned by Norwest Realty. "I can say with conviction that this man-

agement company needs a management company," wrote Diana N.

Much of what can be done to fix the problem requires an investment of time. Working within the bureaucratic judicial system, action is barely swift. Like Cotto's case, resolution could take years.

It's tough for tenants to speak out against their landlord, particularly those who have little recourse in the way of moving. But to grease the wheels of change, an investment of time needs to be made. There are some great places to start getting help, including West Bronx Housing. The non-profit fights to improve living conditions at residences, connecting tenants with pro bono attorneys. Then there are your local legislators on the city, state and federal level. Most of their offices have a constituent services unit that handle complaints. Housing issues are pretty common.

There is strength in numbers, and the more tenants confront a problem landlord in a unified way, the faster resolve can come.

The day of the Knox Place fire, the *Norwood News* attempted to speak to Gazivoda, who was present at the site. We passed a message to one of his employees, who insisted that Gazivoda couldn't talk but agreed to take our information. Much like tenants who call the company to fix an issue, our request was ignored.

Perhaps Norwest Realty would do well to get out of the management business. Clearly the manner in which they're managing their building leaves a great deal to be desired.

## Public and Community Meetings

**COMMUNITY BOARD 7** will hold its general board meeting on Jan. 16 at Tracey Towers; Community Room B, 40 W. Mosholu Pkwy. So., at 6:30 p.m. CB7 committees are held on the following dates at the board office, 229A E. 204th St. at 6:30 p.m. unless otherwise noted: Housing, Land Use & Zoning Committee meets on Jan. 9; Senior Services Committee meets on Jan. 10; and Parks & Recreation Committee meets on Jan. 10 at 7:30 p.m. For more information, call (718) 933-5650.

# Honors By Five-Two Council



Photos courtesy Doug Condit

**THE 52ND PRECINCT** Community Council recognized several Norwood neighbors on Dec. 21 for their commitment to bettering the community. They include: (first photo) Betty Arce (l), standing with Council President Brenda Caldwell; and (second photo) Jean Trotter; each receiving an Appreciation Award. Meantime, the office of Councilman Ritchie Torres, represented by Aicha Bamba (third photo, center) recognized NYPD Neighborhood Coordination Officers (each holding his City Council Citation), Samuel Baez-Vera (l) and Ricardo Roman (r) for making themselves available to the public, as NCO officers are assigned to do.

# NCBH Welcomes First Baby of 2018



Photo courtesy NYC Health + Hospitals/North Central Bronx

**NEWBORN MARINA ALSAYEDI** is welcomed to the world on Jan. 1 by medical staff at NYC Health + Hospitals/North Central Bronx, making her among the first newborns of 2018. Baby Marina was delivered at 4:36 a.m. at the city-owned hospital in Norwood weighing in at 7 pounds 4 ounces. The hospital is known for its maternity ward. Mom and dad are said to be doing well.

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# INQUIRING PHOTOGRAPHER

By **DAVID GREENE**



This week we asked readers their thoughts on several new laws that took effect in New York State on Jan. 1, which included Paid Family Leave, an income tax cut for 4.4 million New Yorkers, and a minimum wage increase for New York City residents.



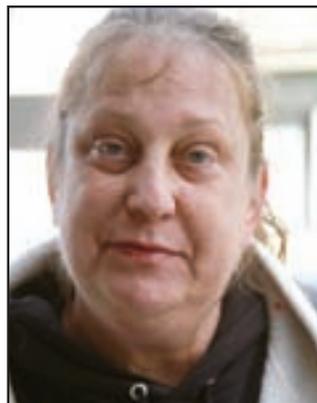
I feel like some of these laws are good. The raise is great, but I wonder if it will raise the cost of everything else with inflation. But overall a lot of these new laws are good for the residents of New York State and the City of New York. With all the sickness and diseases going around, sometimes you need a break to help your loved ones, so the paid leave is a great idea.

**Cindy Louis**  
Yonkers



It all sounds good. I'm about to start working this month when I turn 18, so raising the minimum wage applies to me. So that's good that they made it law and I will be getting a certain amount of money.

**Kimberly Bernal**  
Mt. Hope



I'm against the snowmobile law because people have to get around. Snowmobiles are recreational vehicles and people have to get around when it snows. I think it's great to get paid family leave, 12 weeks is a lot of time and workers need it. Well, if it's underwritten it would probably be okay, and as long as the employer doesn't get hit with all the workers getting sick at the same time.

**Kristina Johnson**  
Pelham Parkway



Personally, I don't think those laws will affect me, not anymore. While I was working, the minimum wage would have affected me. I think the family paid leave is very important. I feel very strongly for that law and I'm glad they did that. We have a lot of relatives that are elderly and we're taking care of them. I was taking care of my mother and then my father. Since I retired a number of years ago I've been paying taxes, so I don't expect a tax return. The minimum wage? I'm for it going up.

**Don Lundy**  
Norwood



My two kids are grown and they have good jobs so the minimum wage won't affect them, but the paid leave sounds like a good idea. I don't expect to see a tax cut because I get a lot of breaks. I was a construction worker back in the day. I think it's important to raise the minimum wage, it's a good thing. The child tax credit is a great idea, but not everyone with a child makes over \$50,000 a year.

**Bernie O'Sullivan**  
Bedford Park

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# INFERNOS ROCK THREE



Photo by David Cruz

**SURVIVOR MICHAEL COTTO** stands outside as fire crews come in and out of his home at 3414 Knox Pl. (background), which was damaged by a four-alarm fire.

## By DAVID CRUZ

In the course of two weeks, the Bronx has seen a wave of catastrophic fires across the borough, with at least one of the infernos killing 12 people.

In the early morning hours of Dec. 27 a fire ripped through a building owned by Norwood's reported worst landlord, sending tenants fleeing out to one of winter's chilliest nights.

The Dec. 27 fire woke up Michael Cotto, a six-year Norwood tenant at 3414 Knox Pl. His daughter first woke up, inhaling smoke.

"Everything is gone," said Cotto, standing alongside his wife, Jacqueline Colon. Luckily, the pair and their daughter have found a home at his mother-in-law's house. He and hundreds of others in the 36-unit building have been displaced.

The building was listed as being owned by Narsinh Desai. In November, New York City Public Advocate Letitia James placed Desai on the 100 Worst Landlords Watchlist. Desai was placed 70th on the citywide shame list for having 118 violations in his building. The building now has 36 violations, with two C violations, considered the most egregious.

Desai is listed as the managing agent for Norwest Realty, a local management company at 287 E. Gun Hill Rd. Cotto and other tenants have taken the management company to Housing Court to make repairs to the building's electrical system.

Though a cause of fire is still being determined, residents suspect the building's electrical system is to blame.

Cotto and Colon have directly sued Nick Gazivoda, one of the officers at Norwest Realty, who oversees the building's



Photo by David Cruz

**NICK GAZIVODA (CENTER)** stands outside the building where the fire happened.

"This is the result of being cheap with the electrical, that's what this is," said Michael Espilco.

day-to-day operations.

"The landlord never did anything. We took him to court," said Cotto, wrapped in

a blanket provided to him by the American Red Cross. "All he did was change the circuit breaker and the problem kept still occurring. Did he come to fix it? No. Now we have a fire and everything is gone."

"Since 2015 I've had him in court and he doesn't fix the problem," said Colon.

The fire started at around 4:30 a.m. on Dec. 27 on the sixth floor of the six-story building, according to fire officials. At least two people were injured, according to the on-scene fire battalion chief. The fire was put out just after 6 a.m. The building's A, B and C lines were impacted. The FDNY usually sees more activity during frigid nights when tenants are turning on stoves or ovens to stay warm. The Red Cross provided assistance to some 15 families.

"I have a petition from the A, B and C lines. Everybody have flickering lights. Everybody had power outage," said Colon.

Gazivoda, who was on site to assess the roof damage sustained by the fire, was unavailable for comment.

"All of these people have no place to live now because of his negligence," said Espilco.

Cotto was offered assistance at his job

at Montefiore Health System, where he works as an engineer.

Fire crews weren't only working to put

# BRONX NEIGHBORHOODS



Photo courtesy FDNY Twitter

**FIRE CREWS BATTLE** the blaze from the top floor of 2363 Prospect Ave.

out the Knox Place blaze. An abandoned home long considered an eyesore along Decatur Avenue burned for more than an

“Our units responded to a three-story unoccupied multiple dwelling with a working fire in the basement,” said FDNY



Photo courtesy Eric Phillips, spokesman for Mayor Bill de Blasio

**MAYOR BILL DE BLASIO** (at podium), at the scene of the Belmont fire at 2363 Prospect Ave., says “This is the worst fire tragedy we have seen in this city in at least a quarter century.”

hour early that morning and was all but gutted.

The blaze broke out in the basement of 3132 Decatur Ave., and quickly spread to the first and second floors. Firefighters contained the fire and prevented it from sweeping into the Huang Lee Laundromat next door.

spokesman Keith Reilly. “At its height, the fire was an all-hands,” which Reilly stated consisted of 60 members and 12 units.

Members were able to bring the fire under control at 5:18 a.m. Reilly added, “There were no reported injuries and the cause is still under investigation.”

Despite having been boarded up for

several years, one source told the *Norwood News*, “I had heard that people had been going in there, but I haven’t seen anyone recently.”

A second house fire in October severely damaged another home and injured an occupant as well as a firefighter and paramedic. That fire also remains under investigation.

A day later in the evening of Dec. 28, 12 people, among them one child, lost their lives while four were critically injured in a fire called one of the “worst fires in several decades.” The fire in the Belmont section

just a few miles south of Norwood came amid a deep freeze that engulfed the city.

“This is the worst fire tragedy we have seen in this city in at least a quarter century,” said Mayor Bill de Blasio at the scene of the fire at 2363 Prospect Ave. “Based on the information we have now, this will rank as one of the worst losses of life to a fire in many, many years.”

De Blasio said one of the victims in the blaze was a one-year-old baby.

Eric Phillips, de Blasio’s spokesman, wrote on Twitter that the cause of the fire “appears to be a small child playing with a stove in a first-floor apartment.” A review of the New York City Department of Buildings website showed no open violations against the building. It’s owned by Howard Alkoff of D&D Equities. The *New York Daily News* reported the first floor apartment where the fire started had open violations for faulty carbon monoxide and smoke detectors.

Twelve other people were rescued and are expected to recover, de Blasio said. In several instances, fire crews can be seen leading survivors out of a fire escape.

Close to 200 firefighters braved the temperatures to fight the five-alarm blaze since just before 7 p.m. and was brought down by 9 p.m. The first floor fire acted like a chimney, according to FDNY Commissioner Dennis Nigro. The five-story apartment building by East 187th Street is within walking distance of the Bronx Zoo and Fordham University.

There was no rest for the weary for the Fire Department. On Jan. 2, firefighters battled a seven-alarm fire in the Tremont section that injured two-dozen people. The fire, a mile and a half from the Prospect Avenue blaze, began just before 5:30 a.m. and was knocked out at 2 p.m.

*Additional reporting by David Greene.*



Photo by David Cruz

**THE RED CROSS** offers help to survivors of the 3414 Knox Pl. fire on Dec. 27.

# Norwood News 2017



Photo by David Cruz

**LOOKING BACK.** COUNCILMAN Andrew Cohen (at podium) at the Sept. 19 demonstration says the proposed homeless shelter across from PS/MS 20 is a bad idea.



File photo by Aaron Mayorga

**A HOMELESS MAN** (pictured) is spotted outside the new Fordham Plaza Center on Fordham Road.

(continued from page 1)

...ping the cluster site shelter model that became popular during the Bloomberg Administration. It's now sought to build traditional shelters.

Since August, talk of a shelter swirled around Sam's Floor Covering, a successful carpeting store at 3041 Webster Ave. that rests diagonally across PS/MS 20 and the 52nd Precinct. It was revealed that the owner of the property was approached by Neighborhood Association for Inter-Cultural Affairs (NAICA), a nonprofit homeless shelter provider, to convert the business to a shelter and add another floor to the existing two-story structure. On Sept. 19, residents protested the possibility of a shelter, with legislators telling the city it's simply not the best location for one. So far, the city has not decided whether to place a shelter at Sam's Floor Covering. Sources have repeatedly told the *Norwood News* that a site at 3600 Jerome

Ave. is now under consideration.

But not all new shelters are standard. In Fordham, crews completed a 135-unit affordable housing residence that will also house a first-floor homeless shelter for 200 working homeless men. The affordable housing/shelter combo developed by the Bowery Residents Committee and partly financed by the New York City Department of Homeless Services drew outcry from residents at the nearby Fordham Hill Oval Cooperative. In late summer, the board at the nine-building complex argued that the process to alert residents of the shelter wasn't transparent enough. Residents have been fighting aggressively against allowing a certain segment of homeless into the property that the board's president, Myrna Calderon, described as a prison after taking a tour.

## Development

Construction once again took center stage in Norwood, where at least four projects are currently under way. Much of that development is happening on Webster Avenue between Mosholu Parkway and Webster Avenue. The Doe Fund is near construction of an 82-unit supportive/affordable housing site on Webster Avenue and East 204th Street.

A block down, The Stagg Group looks to finish Norwood Gardens. Stagg hit a snag in May when the *News* re-

shop, worries over whether it's environmentally sound surfaced. A remediation plan has now been imposed by the city, prompting the Stagg Group to move forward with the project in March.

But while other development projects proceeded, at least one project remained at the wayside. That included the plan to revamp Mosholu Parkway, a proposal that gained some traction in 2015 and 2016 only to be placed on the back burner.

The *News'* borough-wide focus on de-



File photo by David Greene

**THERE WERE A** few setbacks to this property at 3084 Webster Ave. by East 203rd Street in Norwood in 2017. The property, expected to be a mixed-use building, is owned by the Stagg Group.

ported several stop work orders were imposed onto the project after the city learned of improper construction happening there.

The Stagg Group is also set to build Mosholu Grand, a property at East Mosholu Parkway and Van Cortlandt Avenue South. For the last year, the project has been on hold as developers get their paperwork in order. Because the site was once a gas station and auto body

development was made possible by a partnership with WFUV radio, where student reporters touched on development issues in the South Bronx, Parkchester, Fordham, and parts of Jerome Avenue.

But among the more borough-wide stories that came with nary a celebration was the approval of a state loan to developers of the Kingsbridge National Ice Center. The development, mired in delays, was approved for the \$138 mil-

# Year In Review

lion loan earmarked for the first part of construction. It's a development that was barely celebrated by legislators or the community alike as much of the decision-making happened in Albany.

## Quality of Life

The NYPD served as friend and nuisance for the public when it came to quality of life concerns. A large heroin use epidemic within the jurisdiction of the 52nd Precinct saw a major bust in the Fordham/Bedford Park neighborhood. The section of Marion Avenue and East 194th Street was particularly highlighted following a major bust of a drug dealing gang in October. The suspects were accused of dealing heroin laced with fentanyl.

But while cops have locked up plenty of bad guys, residents have pointed to their flagrant use of parking at any given spot so long as a department-issued placard was placed on the dashboard. The abuse of the placard prompted the creation of the Twitter account Placard Abuse, which has generated plenty of pictures of officers from the 52nd Precinct using their placards to park on sidewalks. The citywide abuse of the problem prompted the de Blasio Administration to announce a crackdown of placard abusers. So far, the crackdown has been met with plenty of criticism by users of Placard Abuse, saying the city's plan does not go far enough.

Still, crime took a dive in the Five-Two. The latest data obtained by the *News* shows major crimes down 14.95 percent when compared to the same time the previous year. Of the seven major crimes (murder, rape, robbery, felony assault, burglary, grand larceny, and grand larceny auto), there was a slight increase in the number of reported grand larcenies with 630 this year compared to 628 the same time the previous year.

## Politics

The Bronx saw some significant changes to the political landscape with a Musical Chairs theme wrapped around it. In Norwood, residents said goodbye to Assemblyman Mark Gjonaj of Norwood's 80th Assembly District. His interests in city affairs prompted him to go for the seat held by term-limited Councilman Jimmy Vacca. A slew of contenders vying for Gjonaj's seat surfaced, with at least two real challengers in the mix as of



File photo by Miriam Quinones

**COUNCILMAN FERNANDO CABRERA** wins a third term representing the 14th Council District.



File photo by Miriam Quinones

**NEW COUNCILMAN MARK GJONAJ** is embraced by Bronx Democratic County Committee chair Marcos Crespo at the September Primary after claiming victory.

press time (see story on page 11 for more details).

In Kingsbridge, veteran Councilman Fernando Cabrera defeated newcomer Randy Abreu. A lawyer for President Barack Obama's Department of Energy, Abreu showed some political muster when it showed he raised \$69,228 in campaign contributions. Much of the funds were from outside sources. Among the more high-profile donors from within the Bronx was Senator Gustavo Rivera, a known nemesis of Cabrera. Records show Rivera had given contributions totaling \$2,925 to Abreu's campaign.

Still, despite the sizable donations, Cabrera came out on top, securing 56 percent of the vote over Abreu's 33 percent.

When it came to city affairs, Mayor Bill de Blasio, a Democrat, won a second term for mayor. Of the 5,547 votes counted in the November general election, de Blasio won Norwood, securing 2,305 votes,

or 41.5 percent of the vote. His chief rival, Nicole Malliotakis, secured just 5.8 percent of the vote in the neighborhood.

## Notable Deaths

The Bronx lost several local residents whose contributions to the neighborhood or sheer impact of their deaths caused the borough to pause.

**Carlos Ortiz:** A relentless booster of the NYPD, Ortiz died on Feb. 9 for causes still unknown. He was found in his apartment. Ortiz served as the sergeant-at-arms for the 52nd Precinct Community Council. Brenda Caldwell, the council's president, said that Ortiz "loved his com-

**Andrew Sandler:** Sandler's brief time as Community Board 7 district manager was impactful enough that a street sign bearing his name is in the works. His death from cancer on Aug. 5 at the young age of 31 shocked many. It was clear that Sandler's sense of public service was infectious for those who knew him. Several hundred showed up at his funeral in Riverdale.

**Mary Valenti:** One could consider Mary Valenti the village elder. She died at the age of 102 on Sept. 12 from pneumonia. Valenti raised a family in Bedford Park at a time when neighborly bonds were stronger than what they are today. She showed no fear in hounding bad neighbors on Moshulu Parkway, and she was a regular at the Bedford Park Community Association meetings well into her centenarian years. Her lasting legacy as a Bedford Park stalwart sparked a campaign to have a street named after her.

**Miosotis Familia:** The officer from the 46th Precinct was gunned down at East 183rd Street near Creston Avenue on the overnight hours of July 5 while on duty for the Fourth of July weekend. Her violent death inspired hundreds of police officers from around the country to attend her funeral.

**Belmont Fire Victims:** The devastating fire at 2363 Prospect Ave. in Belmont shook the holiday season to



File photo by Miriam Quinones

**A SEA OF BLUE** at the Grand Concourse near East 188th Street on July 11 as officers mourn the death of NYPD Officer Miosotis Familia.

munity; was so devoted in doing what he could to help and be involved in making a change and difference in our community."

the core. The accidental fire sent 12 people to their graves, ending 2017 on a painful note for residents in the five-story building.

# Norwood Man Brings the Bronx to Cannes Film Festival

By DIEGO BARGACEL PEÑA

If anyone would describe Matt Raimo of Norwood, they'd likely describe a resident with a true love for neighborhood.

"Norwood born, Norwood bred, Norwood 'til the day I'm dead," Raimo says, talking to the *Norwood News* at the Keeper's House.

Those who know Raimo will also describe a budding filmmaker whose passion for the silver screen goes back to the 1990s.

Today, with help from his job at Empire City Casino in nearby Yonkers, Raimo's love for film has reached another echelon—entering his movies to the prominent Cannes Film Festival.

Three of his films - "In God We Trust," "Kharon's Fare," and "El Hijo Solo" - were submitted to the France-based film bonanza with "In God We Trust" accepted. Several thousand miles from the Bronx, moviegoers would see or analyze a film shot in the Bronx neighborhoods of Throggs Neck, Marble Hill, and Allerton. Norwood, of course, is waiting for its close-up.

For now, a different side of the Bronx is shot, one veering away from



MATT RAIMO EDITS video at his office at Empire City Casino.

Photo courtesy Gary Axelbank, thisistheBronX

the unfortunate stigma it carries across the globe. Raimo hopes a film whose backdrop is the Bronx "can

change the perception of an audience member who only knows the Bronx from the crime movies of yesterday and show them the beautiful place I see it for."

Born in 1980 at North Central Bronx Hospital and having spent most of his educational career in Bronx schools, such as Cardinal Spellman High School, Raimo has had a passion for storytelling from a very young age.

He made friends with a student in Cardinal Spellman who had a cousin with a camera, which introduced him to creating stories using film. "The thing with the camera is that it led the guy to go to Lehman [College] for video editing and if you were in the video editing class, you automatically got a timeslot on BronxNet," said Raimo. This led to Raimo and his friend creating a comedy sketch show called "Family Values" for BronxNet that lasted four seasons.

"[Filmmaking] is something I realized I could do when I wrote my first script and it became something. I really do like telling stories, I like sitting down in front of a group of people and swapping stories," Raimo says.

But a lot has changed in filmmaking since those days, as Raimo notes. "In the '90s, you couldn't put a tripod

on the street corner without a permit, but things have changed," he says. "There's a lot of things that have made filmmaking more accessible. We carry around video cameras in our phones all the time."

Raimo's passion for movies extends into his professional life. At Empire City Casino, Raimo works as an entertainment technician in the marketing department. There, he produces and edits videos for events, and offers technical support for film scouts. Raimo has lent his talents to scouts looking to shoot scenes at the casino, where television shows "Bull" and "Billions" have been shot.

The Norwood filmmaker adopts a do-it-yourself film approach, a technique that worked for Hollywood filmmaker Robert Rodriguez, whose all in method led him to an established career. It's an approach he hopes to inspire young filmmakers with.

"Two pieces of advice: do it and do it," says Raimo. "You are the only person who's going to prevent you from doing something that you have to do."

"I don't know where you've come from, I don't know where you're going, I don't know your struggle, I don't know your background. It's possible that you don't have two pennies to your name, but if you want something bad enough, you will find a way."

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# Local Faces, Old and New, Surface on Bronx Political Scene

By DAVID CRUZ

With seats on the city and state level up for grabs in 2018, several faces both familiar and in the background, have emerged well before the political season truly gets under way in the Bronx. All this comes as the Bronx Borough President welcomed his new second-in-command.

## Special Elections

With Assemblyman Mark Gjonaj having vacated his post at the 80th Assembly District to become the next Councilmember for the 13th Council District, his Norwood seat is up for grabs. And though Governor Andrew Cuomo hasn't formally announced it yet, he is expected to call for a special election sometime in the spring.

Some potential candidates include Nathalia Fernandez, Gjonaj's former chief of staff who ascended to the position of Bronx Regional Representative for Cuomo. Another includes Lorraine Cortés-Vázquez, a veteran political operative whose résumé includes serving as the former secretary of state for New York state. Aside from serving as Mayor Bill de Blasio's advisor, Cortés-Vázquez serves as chair of the National Puerto Rican Parade. She generated controversy after allowing Oscar Lopez Rivera to march in the Puerto Rican Day Parade despite corporate pressure.

Though Morris Park is a major stronghold for the 80th Assembly District, Norwood typically sees more voters, according to data crunched by the *Norwood News*. A check of the numbers showed 14,386 Norwood residents voting in the 2016 contest compared to 8,039 votes cast in Morris Park. With Norwood residents knowing more about Fernandez than Cortés-Vázquez, it's likely Fernandez may secure Norwood. She will also secure a large chunk of support in Morris Park, according to a source embedded in several community groups there. "The support there is for Nathalia," said the source.

With political sources noting that the Bronx Democratic County Committee (BDCC) is primed to support Fernandez, Cortés-Vázquez' run appears quixotic. But the contest can be seen as positive for the BDCC, where there the list of fe-

male legislators is short. Anyone who will win the race would have to run again in September for the primary given that Gjonaj vacated his Assembly seat halfway into his current term.

"My own belief is that I believe that this 80th Assembly situation means nothing," Anthony Rivieccio, founder of Northwest Bronx Democrats, a local political action group, said. "If Nathalia gets appointed by the party, well, she still will have to be re-elected in September. So a lot of people consider this an open seat race and a lot of people will treat it like such. And Lorraine is probably one of those people who feels that way. And I would say a lot of contenders feel that way that whatever the governor decides. It will mean nothing because in September that's the real race."

Meantime, the race for the 32nd Senate District is already seeing a contender in current 87th District Assemblyman Luis Sepulveda, who has already announced his intent to run for the senate seat. Sepulveda's district covers the neighborhoods of West Farms, Van Nest, Parkchester, and Soundview. The 87th Assembly District virtually overlaps with the 32nd District, though extends towards the south central Bronx neighborhoods of Morrisania, Longwood, and Hunts Point. The senate seat was held by

Ruben Diaz Sr., who vacated the state post shortly after being sworn in as the Council Member for the 18th Council District. Councilwoman Annabel Palma held the seat and was term-limited.

Sepulveda appears to have a lock on the seat given his relationship to Diaz Sr. (Sepulveda served as Diaz Sr.'s campaign manager during the Council race) and since no one has thrown their name into the race.

"I pledge to continue in the Senate with the same dedication and energy that I have shown in representing the people of the 87th Assembly District, who have returned me to office with overwhelming voting margins for three terms," Sepulveda said in a prepared statement. "In the Senate, I want to fight for public safety and criminal justice reform, education programs, affordable housing, increased access to mental health care, economic development and opportunities, and social service reforms, especially as they affect middle class families and the working poor," he continued.

## New Bronx Deputy BP

An aide to Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie and loyal Bronx Democrat has been chosen to be the new deputy borough president, succeeding Aurelia Greene who announced her retirement after more than 40 years in public ser-

vice.

Marricka Scott-McFadden will serve as the borough's second highest ranking executive. Some duties of a deputy borough president include presiding over the Bronx Borough Board, a body made up of community board chairs, their district managers, and New York City Council members representing the Bronx. Greene helped run the Borough Board meetings while also advising Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr. with budget and community board matters.

Unlike Greene, Scott-McFadden has not held an elected public position. Her résumé stretches to 2001, when she served as chief of staff to Heastie until 2010. She moved onto the world of lobbying, working for Mercury Public Affairs (lobbying records have her last name down as Scott-FcFadden). Her connection to Heastie helped elevate Scott-McFadden, who was promoted to vice president a year after Heastie settled in as Assembly speaker. Some clients Scott-McFadden directly worked with included OpenGov Inc., NYC Mission Society and Dart Container Group.

In a statement, Scott-McFadden looks to promote "a positive agenda" for the borough's population. She was sworn in on Jan. 2 before acting Supreme Court Judge Elizabeth A. Taylor.

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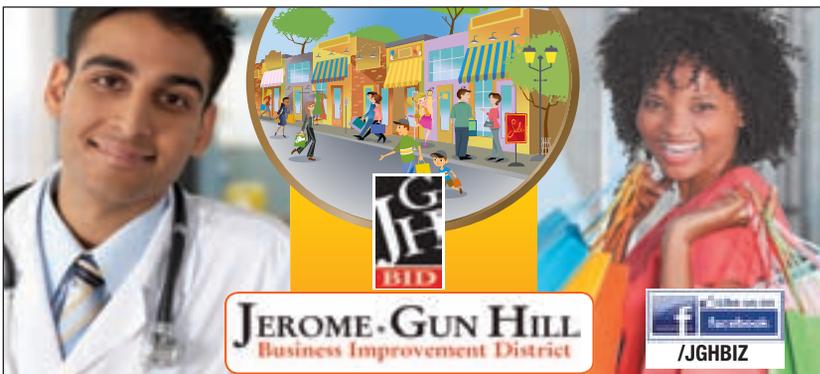
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## NEIGHBORHOOD NOTES

### Apply to Local Community Board

Applications for placement into a local community board are available. City residents who qualify must either reside, work or have a professional or other significant interest in the Bronx. Applications are open to anyone as young as 16 years old. Deadline for application submission is Feb. 9. For more information and to apply, call (718) 590-3913 or visit [bronxboropres.nyc.gov/community-boards/](http://bronxboropres.nyc.gov/community-boards/).

### “Treecycling”

Recycle your holiday tree to nourish parks throughout the city. Free chipping of trees will take place at Van Cortlandt Park’s golf course at Bailey Avenue and Van Cortlandt Park South, Jan. 6 and 7, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Donors may bring trees until Jan. 7 to local drop-off sites for future recycling including Williamsbridge Oval Park, Kossuth Playground at Mosholu Parkway North and Kossuth Avenue; St. James Park at West 192nd Street and Jerome Avenue; or Poe Park at the Grand Concourse between East Kingsbridge Road and East 192nd Street. For more information and additional sites, visit [www.nyc.gov/dsny](http://www.nyc.gov/dsny) or [www.nyc.gov/greenyc](http://www.nyc.gov/greenyc).

### Paid Time Off

The Paid Family Leave policy is now in effect in New York State and is eligible for parents after a baby’s birth and for caretakers of a family member. In 2018, full-time employees who work 20 or more hours a week and have been at their present job for at least 26 weeks or more qualifies to take up to eight weeks paid time off at 50 percent of their average weekly wage. Part-time employees with a regular schedule of less than 20 hours a week can apply for Paid Family Leave after working 175 days for their employer. The program will be fully phased in in four years. For more information, call (844) 337-6303.

### Heating Assistance

Sign up to receive free heating assistance through the New York State Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP). Eligible households can receive assistance of up to \$725. A family of four with a yearly income of \$53,482 can still qualify for help. For more information about eligibility, and to sign up, call (212) 331-3126.

### Bronx Photo Club

The Bronx Photographic Society (formerly the New York Botanical/Zoological Photographic Society) meets bimonthly at Fordham University Prep School on the Fordham University Campus, 441 E. Fordham Rd., room 327 or 329 starting at 9:45 a.m. as follows: Jan. 6 and 20, Feb. 3 and 17, March 3 and 17, April 14 and 21, and May 5 and 12. For more information, call (718) 543-3115.

### Free Snow Removal

The Office of Councilman Fernando Cabrera offers free snow removal services for private homeowners within the 14th Council District who are 62 years old or over. Registration is required, and there are a limited number of spots. For more information, call Karen Cacho at (347) 590-2873.

### Snow Laborers Sought

NYC seeks emergency snow laborers to help remove snow and ice from bus stops, step streets, and other locations throughout the city this winter. Interested applicants must be at least 18, eligible to work in the USA and capable of performing heavy physical labor. Registration is at the DOT garage, Bronx Yard, Mosholu Avenue and 258th Street (Van Cortlandt Park), weekdays from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Bring two small photos (1 1/2” square), original and copy of two forms of ID, and SS card or Tax ID number. Hourly salary is \$15; and \$22.50 after 40 hours are worked in a week. For more information and locations, call 311.

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# Out & About

Compiled by JUDY NOY

## EDITOR'S PICK

### Afro-Caribbean Holiday Comes to the Bronx

The public is invited to learn about and celebrate Kingsbridge Octavitas Community Parranda, Afro-Caribbean holiday caroling tradition, with Bomba Yo at the St. James Recreation Center, 2530 Jerome Ave. (between 190th and 192nd streets), on Jan 13. Events include history and singing practice from noon to 2 p.m. and Parranda on Kingsbridge Road from 2 to 4 p.m. Free hot chocolate and refreshments will be served. For more information and to RSVP, contact [SamelysLopez@gmail.com](mailto:SamelysLopez@gmail.com).

#### Onstage

Lehman Center for the Performing Arts, 250 Bedford Pk. Blvd. W., presents **Hasta Siempre**, featuring Luis "Perico" Ortiz, performing salsa music, celebrating his 55th anniversary, Jan. 20 at 8 p.m. Tickets are \$50 to \$65; \$100/VIP (which includes pre-concert reception including hors d'oeuvres and drinks at 6:30 p.m.). For more information, call (718) 960-8833.

The Bronx Library Center, 310 E. Kingsbridge Rd., presents **Sonido Costeño in Concert**, featuring Latin music, Jan. 13 at 2:30 p.m. For more information, call (718) 579-4244/46/57 or visit [www.nypl.org](http://www.nypl.org).

#### Events

New York Botanical Garden's **Annual Holiday Train Show** featuring model trains and



Photo courtesy Wave Hill  
**THE ZIG ZAG Quartet** is scheduled to perform at Wave Hill on Jan. 12 (see Events section for more information).

miniature replicas of NYC landmarks ends on Jan. 15. For more information and to purchase tickets, call (718) 817-8512.

**Wave Hill**, a Bronx oasis at 675 W. 252nd St. in Riverdale, offers **Family Art Projects**: Create Your Year - Hello 2018!, to create a garden of fruits and vegetables, Jan. 6 and 7; and Freedom Quilting Bee, to create a quilt from squares of fabric, Jan. 13 and 14; both in the WH House from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Also scheduled is **Zig Zag Quartet**, jazz concert on Jan. 14 at 2 p.m. in the WH House (tickets: \$28 plus grounds admission; \$24/ members; \$12/ages 8 to 18; ext. 251). 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.

Lehman College Art Gallery, 250 Bedford Pk. Blvd. W., presents free, **Dark and Stormy Night Gothic Influence in Contemporary Art**, Tuesdays to Saturdays, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., through Feb. 10. For more information, call (718) 960-8833.

#### Library Events

The Bronx Library Center, 310 E. Kingsbridge Rd., presents for adults: **film**: "The Zookeeper's Wife," a true story, Jan. 6 at 2:30 p.m.; and **Microsoft for Beginners**: Jan. 9 at 2 p.m. For more information, call (718) 579-4244/46/57 or visit [www.nypl.org](http://www.nypl.org).

The Mosholu Library, 285 E. 205th St., offers for children: **Toddler Bilingual Storytime at 10:30 a.m.**: (ages 18 to 36 months), librarian will read, sing and play songs in English and Spanish, Jan. 8 and 16; and **STEM: Kids Science at 3 p.m.**: (ages 5 to 12), Jan. 9 and 16. Teens/young adults can enjoy: **Craft-eens! at 3:30 p.m.**: Crafts on Wednesdays, (all materials are provided), Jan. 10 and 17; and **film**: "Power Rangers," Jan. 13 at 1:30 p.m. Adults can attend: **Knitting Circle**: Thursdays at 3 p.m. For more information, call (718) 882-8239.

#### Exhibits

The Bronx County Historical Society presents **What Lies Beneath -- Cemeteries of the Bronx**, through April 8, at the Museum of Bronx History, 3266 Bainbridge Ave. (208th Street), For more information, call (718) 881-8900.

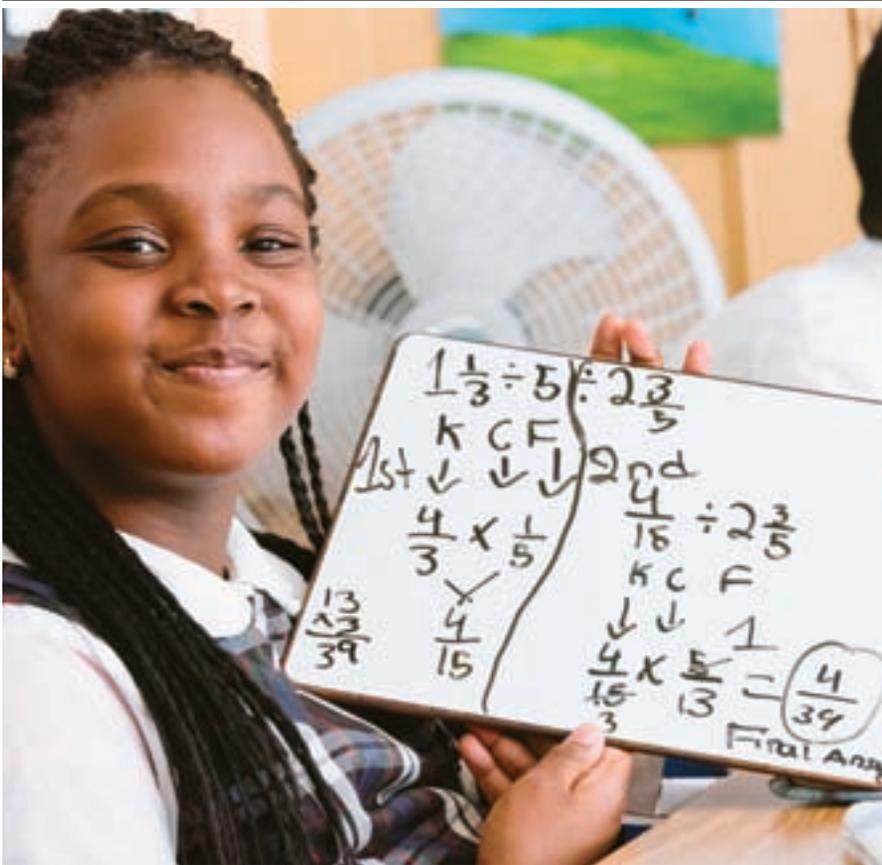
Bronx Museum of the Arts, 1040 Grand Concourse (at 165th Street), presents **Gordon Matta-Clark: Anarchitect**, and **Susannah Ray: A Further Shore**, both through April 8. For more information, call (718) 681-6000.

**NOTE**: *Items for consideration may be mailed to our office or sent to [norwoodnews@norwoodnews.org](mailto:norwoodnews@norwoodnews.org), and should be received by Jan. 8 for the next publication date of Jan. 18.*



File photo by Miriam Quinones

**LAST YEAR'S PARRANDA** celebrations saw this musician (r) stop by several stores in Kingsbridge Heights. Expect to see that in St. James Park this year (see Editor's Pick for more details).



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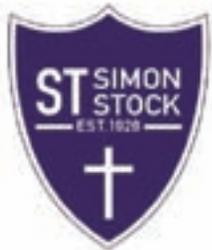
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