



# NORWOOD NEWS

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**INQUIRING PHOTOGRAPHER:  
YOUR STATE OF THE BRONX PG. 4**



**LOADS OF LOVE:  
LAUNDRY LOVE IN BLOOM | PG. 8**

## SHELTER PLAN SHIFTS TO JEROME AVE.

*DHS scraps plans to build shelter at Sam's Carpeting across PS/MS 20*



Photo by Adi Talwar

**THIS BUILDING AT** 3600 Jerome Ave. (pictured) will soon house an all-male homeless shelter that will accommodate some 200 men.

**By DAVID CRUZ**

The New York City Department of Homeless Services (DHS) announced it plans to contract with a nonprofit to open a homeless shelter at a two-story property on the edge of Norwood. The news will likely be welcoming to parents who worried a shelter would be housed diagonally across PS/MS 20 on Webster

Avenue.

But while the news will likely be welcoming to parents of the southern Norwood school, the new location has drawn concerns from parents at a school adjacent to the new site.

In a joint Op-Ed submitted to the *Norwood News*, DHS Commissioner Steven Banks revealed that the new shelter

will indeed be placed at 3600 Jerome Ave., a 29,275-square-foot property near East 213th Street. A consensus was reached between DHS and community stakeholders after months of brainstorming over alternative sites, a point Banks emphasized as a productive step in reaching a middle ground when it comes to shelters. With New York

City facing record-breaking homelessness and angry resistance from communities, typical of most neighborhoods, Banks saw this as a win, crediting the community for scouting alternate sites.

“Rather than saying not-in-my-backyard, they did their homework, they advo-  
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3400 Reservoir Oval East

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Phone: 718 324 4998

Fax: 718 324 2917

E-mail: [norwoodnews@norwoodnews.org](mailto:norwoodnews@norwoodnews.org)  
Web.: [www.norwoodnews.org](http://www.norwoodnews.org)**Publisher**

Mosholu Preservation Corporation

**Executive Director of MPC**

Melissa Cebollero

**Director of MPC**

Jennifer Tausig

**Editor-in-Chief, Norwood News**David Cruz, [dcruz@norwoodnews.org](mailto:dcruz@norwoodnews.org)**Accounts Receivable**

Dawn McEvoy

**Proofreader**

Judy Noy

**Interns**

Sofia Mahairas, Niall Ridgley, Mary Mellon

**Regular Contributors**

David Greene, Adi Talwar

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## IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST

## Special Election Date Set for Vacant 80th Assembly Seat

Governor Andrew Cuomo has marked April 24 as the day a special election will be held for the vacant 80th Assembly District seat that covers Norwood.

The seat was held by Mark Gjonaj, a Democrat, who relinquished his seat after he was voted Councilman for the East Bronx's 13th Council District in November. The 80th Assembly District covers virtually all of Norwood, and the Bronx neighborhoods of Morris Park, Pelham Parkway, and Allerton. Though the 80th Assembly District draws much of its strength from Morris Park, Norwood typically sees more voters head

to the polls. A check of the numbers showed 14,386 Norwood residents voted when Gjonaj won re-election in 2016 compared to 8,039 votes cast in Morris Park.

Some possible names floated to fill his seat include Gjonaj's former chief of staff, Nathalia Fernandez and Lorraine Cortés-Vázquez, a veteran political operative whose résumé includes serving as the former secretary of state for New York.

Cuomo has also called a special election for the vacant senate seat once held by Ruben Diaz Sr., who represented the 32nd Senate District before he was voted Councilman for

the 18th Council District in Soundview. Well before Cuomo made the announcement, Assemblyman Luis Sepulveda of the 87th Assembly District, announced he would vie for the seat.

The election is for one of 11 seats currently up in the State Legislature. The special elections are scheduled three weeks after the Legislature is expected to pass the budget.

Meantime, the 80th Assembly District office, 1126 Pelham Pkwy. So., is open with special hours—10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday. To reach the office, call (718) 409-0109.

—David Cruz

## A Warning From a Norwood Activist: Pick Up After Your Dog

If you're caught not picking up after your dog in front of Sheila Sanchez, expect to hear from her.

"I yell at them. I'll do things, like, 'Hey you! Do you need a bag?'" Sanchez said in a phone interview with the *Norwood News*.

Sanchez, president of Friends of Williamsbridge Oval volunteer group and a rumored candidate for the 80th Assembly District, has noticed an uptick in residents not picking up after their canines.

The list of sightings where Sanchez has noticed an increase include Villa Avenue near St. Philip Neri Church, Williamsbridge Oval Park, and Decatur Avenue between East Gun Hill Road and East 209th Street.

The issue became a central topic at Community Board 7's Long Term Planning Committee on Jan. 31. Loretta Watson, committee chair, was outraged over dog owners' lax approach toward maintenance.

It's illegal for a dog owner not

to clean up after their pooches who do their business on public streets. Fines go for \$250 if an owner fails to clean up after their dog. Exceptions are made for people requiring a seeing eye dog to get by. Police haven't placed a high priority on the infraction, which has to be observed by an officer.

"I know a couple of people who got a ticket, and they've stopped," Sanchez said.

—David Cruz

## Cohen: Charging Station Needed in Norwood

By NIALL RIDGLEY

Councilman Andrew Cohen has requested that the future come to Norwood through a proposed electric vehicle (EV) charging hub.

Cohen drafted a proposal for Mayor Bill de Blasio on Jan. 10 having had his constituents in the 11th Council District express interest to be part of de Blasio's plan to develop 100 new EV fast charging stations across the city in 2018. Cohen believes the northwest Bronx has ample locations conducive to charging hub installation.

"I believe a number of locations, both public and private, would be feasible for EV charging. They include the parking lot for the Van Cortlandt Park Golf Course and a municipal garage located on Jerome Avenue, just north of East Gun Hill Road, among others," wrote Cohen in his letter to de Blasio.

Cohen specifically details Van Cortlandt Park, the city's third largest park, as being an attractive location, as drivers could enjoy the grounds while charging their vehicles.

The *Norwood News* reported on a related proposal for a charging station for EMS ambulances to be located in Kingsbridge. This station was proposed as part of a citywide plan to help EMS ambulances cut emissions by plugging in instead of keeping their engines running, as EMS buses must remain on to keep medicine refrigerated. Both the EMS charging stations and the proposed EV hubs come as part of a larger de Blasio initiative that targets reducing the city's greenhouse emissions by 80 percent by 2035.

## Public and Community Meetings

**COMMUNITY BOARD 7** will hold its general board meeting at the Bronx Library Center, 310 E. Kingsbridge Rd. inside the auditorium, on Feb. 20 at 6:30 p.m. CB7 committee meetings are held on the following dates at the board office, 229 E. 204th St., at 6:30 p.m. unless otherwise noted: Executive Committee meets on Feb. 15; Economic Development Committee meets Feb. 27; Community Relations & Long Term Planning Committee meets on Feb. 27 at 7:30 p.m.; and Website Acknowledgment and Media Committee meets on Feb. 28. For more information, call the board office at (718) 933-5650.

The **52ND PRECINCT COMMUNITY COUNCIL** meets on Feb. 22 at 7 p.m. at Sister Annunciata Senior Center, 243 E. 204th St. For more information, call the 52nd Precinct Community Affairs Office at (718) 220-5824.



# The 411 on 311 in Norwood

Noise- and building-related complaints top list of frequent 311 calls

By DAVID CRUZ

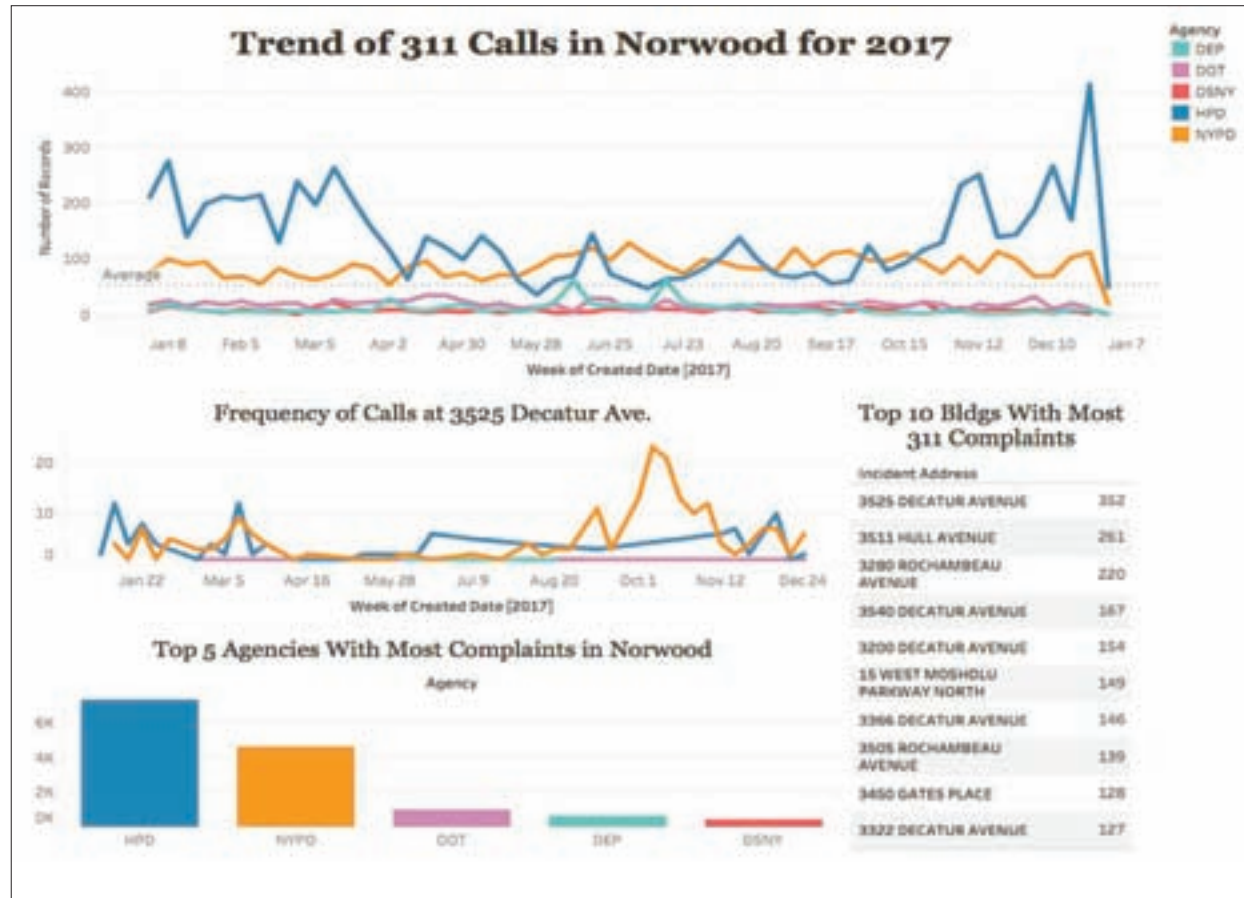
When it came to the more than 15,000 complaints logged to 311 in the Norwood section of the Bronx, tenants at 3525 Decatur Ave. had the most contact with the data-gathering system in 2017, with the bulk of complaints caused by noise.

Those were some of the findings determined in an analysis by the Norwood News which reviewed 311 calls filed in Norwood last year. Some questions answered included how long it took a 311 complaint to close, the top 10 buildings with the most 311 complaints in Norwood, what days were most popular to open and close a 311 complaint, and the agencies frequently tasked to respond to 311 calls in Norwood.

The Norwood News spent several weeks reviewing publicly available data on New York City's Open Data website, filling in addresses by cross-referencing geographic coordinates, filling in zip codes according to intersections, and correcting spelling errors. The system was created in 2003 to determine the types of quality of life issues impacting New York City neighborhoods.

In Norwood, building and noise complaints ranked highest in 2017. With an aging housing portfolio and lifestyles that aren't exactly aligned, the two complaints have consistently stood at the top with close to 12,000 complaints filed in 2017, comprising nearly 80 percent of all 311 calls made in Norwood.

That trend was no different at 3525 Decatur Ave., a six-story building just off East Gun Hill Road. There, 224 noise-related complaints were filed and forwarded to the NYPD. The New York City Department of



Housing, Preservation and Development (HPD) handled 115 complaints, with most of them filed in January 2017. In all, the building fared well when it came to the complaints handled, according to the data. Of the 352 complaints filed, 99 percent of them, or 347, were handled right away.

While 3525 Decatur Ave. stood as the #1 building with the most 311 complaints, it didn't have the most open 311 cases older than 30 days. That distinction went to 3366

Decatur Ave., a block and a half south of 3525 Decatur Ave. Of the 146 registered 311 calls there, 37 have remained open as of press time. The bulk of the open complaints were filed on Dec. 27 and forwarded to HPD, with issues ranging from poor plumbing to a defective cabinet.

Among the longest wait times happened at 3572 DeKalb Ave. There, residents waited 196 days before the agency closed the case for an issue involving pests. In a statement, Juliet Morris-Antoine, an HPD spokesperson, called the time frame of the complaint a rarity. "The apparent time frame for this complaint from open to closed is a bit of a one-off here. The conditions were already noted in the system as an open violation of which the owner was notified," Morris-Antoine said.

The longest wait time happened at 3307 Parkside Pl., where a complaint on a curb cut took 267 days to be corrected. The complaint was forwarded to the New York City Department of Buildings, which issued a violation.

While tenants at 3525 Decatur Ave. praised the building's upkeep, many agreed loud music was the bane of their quality of life. Of the total complaints at the building, the bulk of those complaints fell on Fridays with 73 cases filed, according to the analysis. Saturdays were the favorite when it came to having 311 cases closed, with 59 cases reviewed and closed by various city agencies.

Angel Melendez, a 20-year resident, said incessantly loud noise was a frequent occur-

rence inside the building. He pointed to the third floor, where one tenant has consistently blasted music at several instances at night. A review of data compiled for the building showed 311 complaints logged at all hours of the day. October saw the most complaints, with 74. But just because a building had received the most 311 calls, doesn't make it a badly maintained building.

"It's a well-maintained building but then you have tenants that sometimes overdo it on the noise," said Melendez. "I got one that sometimes about 3 or 4 o'clock [in the afternoon] he blasts the music, but only for a couple of hours. I can tolerate that."

Another tenant who only went by Annie said noise happens above her apartment but calling 311 to at least report it has never crossed her mind.

Dsmonaisha Henry, another tenant, said noise issues come second to the lack of hot water her family endures daily. Still, Henry noted that these problems are fixed relatively quick.

"The water turns mostly cold in the morning and at the night," Henry said. "Once we put in a complaint the [hot] water turns back on."

**Editor's Note:** A large dataset of 311 calls filed in Norwood can be found on [www.norwoodnews.org](http://www.norwoodnews.org).



Photo by David Cruz

**3525 DECATUR AVE.** saw 352 complaints registered to 311 in 2017, the most of any building in Norwood, according to an analysis by the *Norwood News*.



## INQUIRING PHOTOGRAPHER

By DAVID GREENE



**Ahead of Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr.'s State of the Borough speech on Feb. 22, this week we asked readers what they think is the current state of the Bronx**



I haven't really seen too much improvement, to be honest with you. Maybe it's a little better, they've opened more businesses in the area and that brings more jobs. Housing is still a big problem too, you have two families living in a two-bedroom apartment, which causes overcrowding. When they distribute the funds, we get what trickles down and the Bronx doesn't get much—it don't. I believe they're cutting more funds than anything and the kids don't have any places to go. The borough president just shows up at different events, but he's not really doing anything to help the people.

**David Johnson**  
Parkchester



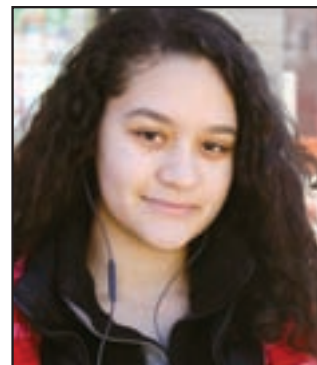
I think the state of the borough is not so good. They have to do a lot of building and a lot of fixing things, like the bridges and roads. The roads have to be redone all over the Bronx. If anything is going good in the Bronx, I don't know about it. So we have to hope for the best. We need funding in the Bronx and the mayor has to ask for more money from the governor and the federal government. The city is not getting its fair share.

**John Singleton**  
Van Cortlandt Park South



This area continues to fall behind year after year. The subways are running by candlelight and the buses are worse than the subways, yeah. The subways are almost completely closed down at night, it's non-existent after [midnight]. I work night and early morning shifts and you wait 30 minutes for one train. Crime is starting to rise up again and the neighborhood is starting to change. There's less police present; you never see foot patrols and only once in a while do you see a car patrol the area. I would not go out after 8 o'clock anymore. It's that bad. The sun is out, that's about as good as it gets here in Bedford Park.

**Robert O'Shea**  
Bedford Park



I think things are going good. There is a lot of violence going on around here, but it's not as bad as it was before. It's more random, not all the time. I think the subways are good, I use the subway all the time and think it's a great form of transportation to use. Things are definitely better than they were last year.

**Kaylin Marie**  
Bedford Park



I would say I think it's improved a little bit, but I think we need to fix a lot of things in our neighborhood. The crime rate is a little high, unemployment's a problem and I'm mostly really very scared about ICE and their immigration enforcement in our communities. I'm a Dreamer to be honest and I'm attending Lehman College and every night I have to live in the shadow of the Bronx, because I don't know what's going to happen. We need to make a lot more improvements and work together as a community.

**Blas Almonte**  
Norwood

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# New Chapter

## Norwood Welcomes New Children's Librarians

By MARY MELLON

With vacancies for two children's librarians at the Mosholu Library finally filled, parents formally met the new staffers who have been at the helm for the last month.

Nicole Figueroa and Katie Loucks were brought on to the branch at 285 E. 205th St. off Perry Avenue in January. Figueroa, who previously worked in Riverdale, said one of the most rewarding parts of her job was having children come in with a love of literacy and the desire to read. She described Norwood warmly. "I really like the community. It's really diverse and everyone is very vibrant," Figueroa said.

Loucks, who worked at a library in Wisconsin prior to taking the position at Mosholu Library, felt similarly. She is now involved with STEM, a free program at the library that teaches children about science, technology, engineering, and math.

"The kids are really nice. They're lovely. I like the kids. They always bring good ideas to the STEM events which I am doing."

Figueroa, who plays the ukulele and is passionate about hand puppets, read enthusiastically to a small gathering of children and their parents. Afterwards, she and Loucks handed out free tote bags and American Girl Doll books to attendees and also supervised craft activities. With Valentine's Day on their mind, some children decorated construction paper hearts with positive sentiments about the library, while others filled in coloring papers.

The event capped months-long uncertainty on when librarians would be hired. The previous two had left their job back in the summer, creating a rare situation for a library heavily utilized by parents. With manpower scaled back, operating the children's side of the library was temporarily on hold. This put several weekly services on hold, including children's story time. Overall, the branch saw a 23 percent jump in services from previous years.

When asked if they were happy to have the new librarians several parents answered, "I'm happy," and "Yes, of course."



Photo by Niall Ridgley

(L-R) KATIE LOUCKS AND NICOLE FIGUEROA are the new children's librarians at the Mosholu Library in Norwood.

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## St. Ann's School Briefly Reopens

Six months after St. Ann's Parish permanently closed, the Archdiocese of New York has temporarily reopened the school to accommodate students and staffers at Immaculate Conception School.

The Olinville-based school moved to the defunct Norwood parish a couple of weeks ago after a flood tore through their building at 760 E. Gun Hill Rd., just short of a mile from the Bainbridge Avenue Catholic school serving kindergarten through eighth grade.

The Archdiocese of New York confirmed that students and staffers will complete the 2017-18 school year at the four-story property.

St. Ann's School closed last August, with diocesan officials citing operating costs as the reason. Students and staffers were relocated throughout the system. The closing came two years after the church closed, leading officials to merge St. Ann's Parish with St. Brendan's Parish on Perry Avenue.

—David Cruz



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## SOUPer Bowl Yields Thousands in Canned Goods

By NIALL RIDGLEY

Touchdown!

Led by a strong fifth grade, St. Philip Neri School in Bedford Park ran through their competition and shocked the Bronx with a surprise soup drive victory this February.

The SOUPer Bowl is a soup drive hosted by Our Lady of Refuge School and soup kitchen in Fordham and co-hosted by three other Catholic schools in the Bronx, namely Our Lady of Mt. Carmel (also in Fordham), St. Brendan's in Norwood, and the surprise winner, St. Philip Neri. St. Philip collected almost 2300 cans in their first year of participation, citing community togetherness, peer to peer mentorship, and a mean inter-grade competitive spirit as their keys to success.

"The children were recognizing, 'wow, we are really helping others to replenish and help feed our neighbors.' One of our mottos is 'servium', which means to serve," St. Philip Neri Principal Ajeia Beebe said.

St. Philip Neri students were taught that service can be fun as well. Beebe and her faculty decided to make the drive into a competition among the various grades, which quickly became a no holds barred free-for-all for the top spot.

"I had students bring in 100 cans... They wanted to win so bad," said Rachelle Leger, a teacher of the triumphant fifth grade. "We had a tactic, we had a game plan to winning. We had a total of 734 cans. We felt really great about it." The fifth graders earned the coveted prize of a pizza party and a custom trophy for their efforts.

Teachers at St. Philip Neri also preach peer mentorship so that



Photo by Niall Ridgley

**ST. PHILIP NERI** School Principal Ajeia Beebe (l) stands with student Auriel Kagarcia (c) and fifth grade teacher Rachelle Leger (r).

the younger students can learn the values of service from their older schoolmates. Auriel Kagarcia, an eighth grader, said that, "I realized that there are a lot of people that are less fortunate than us, and we need to help those people. Especially for the little ones, they need to understand those things."

St. Philip Neri's collection, which ranged beyond just cans to ramen and soup, was donated to the Convent of Guadalupe for the

Franciscan Sisters of the Renewal. As for the future of the SOUPer Bowl, Beebe says there is hope that the drive will expand to other local Bronx schools, including some high schools, in the coming years. But for Leger, it's personal.

"As a fifth grade teacher, I do want to keep [the competition] going because I want to continue our reign. We don't want [the trophy] to leave the fifth grade, in the name of Jesus, no we don't," she said.

## Aspiring Local Journalist Heads to DC Conference

A Bedford Park local will represent the Bronx as a National Youth Correspondent at the 2018 Washington Journalism and Media Conference at George Mason University.

Keri Campbell, 15, a student at St. Barnabas High School in Woodlawn, will join an elite group of students from all over the country for a journalism and media intensive program. Keri was selected for her academic acumen and strong interest in journalism and media studies.

National Youth Correspondents partake in real-world learning through decision-making simulations that push them to solve problems and examine ethical, creative, and pragmatic facets of journalism and media. The experiential segment of the program will feature speakers from the media community, such as prestigious journalists, CEOs of major media outlets, researchers, and successful recent college graduates. Some examples of past speakers in-

clude Hoda Kotb from NBC, Brian Lamb from C-Span, and Pulitzer Prize winning photographer Carol Guzy.

The Washington Journalism and Media Conference gives aspiring journalists and student leaders the chance to learn directly from illustrious faculty, guest speakers, and D.C. practitioners. The weeklong program is an honor to attend and can be a career builder for participants.

—Mary Mellon

# Students Hold 'Blue' Mass for First Responders

By DAVID GREENE

Dozens of police officers, firefighters and paramedics from across the borough and as far away as Manhattan turned out for the annual "Blue" mass, honoring their service at St. Philip Neri Church on the Grand Concourse near Bedford Park on Jan. 31.

"We celebrate Catholic Schools Week in the entire United States this week and every Catholic School celebrates and asks, 'What is the meaning of a Catholic education?'" said Fr. Jose Serrano, who presided over the mass organized by students.

"And we do it with different activities in the school, but also they have

a mass and we take the opportunity to invite officers and first emergency responders to honor them and to give thanks to God for their service and to tell them that we are praying for them."

This annual event was attended by about 40 NYPD officers, members of Ladder 37/Engine 78 in nearby

Fordham as well as a handful of EMTs.

John Riley, a former parishioner whose great grandparents helped build St. Philip Neri Church more than a century ago, attended the service in his capacity as Regional Superintendent of Schools for the Archdiocese of New York.

Riley said after the mass, "We're here to honor all those who give so much each and every day and this is the annual 'Blue' mass here at St. Philip Neri, which honors the emergency workers, the firemen, and the NYPD for all that they do in the community here, and also in the city itself."

Noting the parallels of first responders to those who dedicate their life to the church, Riley noted, "We are in solidarity with those that are called to serve, we have the same mission. The mission of the church is to go forth and protect and to make certain that the most innocent, the most vulnerable are taken care of."

"This is a great day," said Deputy Inspector Ray Mundo, the Commanding Officer of the 34th Precinct in Manhattan's Harlem section, who spoke to the *Norwood News* following the service.

Mundo said of the mass, "We truly appreciate what the church is doing for us. We're always grateful to anyone who shows us any signs of appreciation."

Eighth grader Valerie Rodas said of the mass, "I think it's very important because it shows our gratitude for them and their service and St. Philip Neri is a family and during Catholic Schools Week, it brings out our motto and shows how big a family we are."

Rodas added, "And this is my last year here, so I'm glad to attend this mass."



Photo by David Greene

**SEVERAL DOZEN OFFICERS** from the NYPD stand during the annual "Blue" mass at St. Philip Neri Church in Bedford Park.

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# LAUNDRY LOVE AROUND THE BRONX

**LOVE AND APPRECIATION** was in the air at various laundromats across the Bronx as the Jerome-Gun Hill Business Improvement District and Mosholu Preservation Corporation hailed the first-ever Laundry Love ahead of Valentine's Day. Residents were treated to a free wash, courtesy of the two merchant organizing groups.



Photo courtesy Jerome-Gun Hill Business Improvement District  
**(L-R) MARIA'S LAUNDROMAT EMPLOYEES** Marlen, Mati, and Janeth stand alongside their boss Andy (right) as they help promote the event.



Photo courtesy Mosholu Preservation Corporation  
**CUSTOMERS TAKING UP** every folding station on Sunday made it a busy afternoon for Giant Laundry.



Photo courtesy Mosholu Preservation Corporation  
**DORIS TAMAYO BUYS** her son chocolate covered strawberries at the Laundry Love event, the night before Valentine's Day.

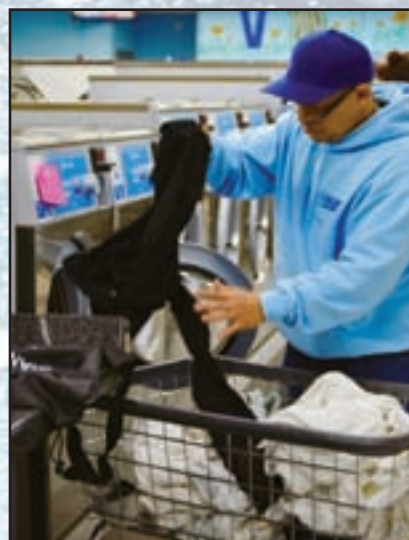


Photo courtesy Mosholu Preservation Corporation  
**LAUNDROMAT OWNER MARIO** Flores hard at work during the Laundry Love Event held on Feb. 11 at Giant Laundry on Webster Avenue.



Photo courtesy Mosholu Preservation Corporation  
**LONGTIME NORWOOD RESIDENT** Carol O'Neil folding the last of her laundry Tuesday night at Blue City Laundromat on 204th Street.



Photo courtesy Jerome-Gun Hill Business Improvement District  
**BACK AT MARIA'S** Laundromat, this resident in green saves a little green by washing her clothes on Laundry Love Day.



# Opinion

## Building Strong Schools Through Community Engagement

By CARMEN FARIÑA

With over 50 years of experience as an educator, I know that it truly takes a village to deliver for students. In each school community, that village is made up of teachers, administrators, support staff, outside partners and of course, families. While I often say it all comes down to what happens in the classroom, when it comes to building strong school communities, families are critical partners.

That's why, as Chancellor, I've made family engagement a priority for all of our schools, and there has been an unprecedented investment in families. Whether we're bringing parents into the classroom to teach robotics, inviting parents to learn English alongside their children, or providing professional development to parent leaders, we're constantly rolling out innovative programs that provide unique opportunities for parents to get involved in schools.

My message to all parents, grandparents, family members or alumni reading this: school build-

ings are neighborhood hubs and I encourage you to get involved, spend time at your local school and invest in the next generation of leaders. From PA/PTA president to field trip chaperone to mentor, only when the village is engaged in school-based activities, events and decision-making, can we foster the development of a community deeply committed to the success of our students.

And when we invest in families, they want to invest in us. That's why we've increased our outreach to families. When I became Chancellor four years ago, requiring all schools to host at least one parent-teacher conference at night and extending meeting time to accommodate working families were no-brainers. As a result of these efforts, the number of parents attending family conferences increased by 43 percent since 2013. We've also removed barriers for families that speak a language other than English at home by expanding our translation and interpretation services in over 200 lan-



guages.

The opportunities in New York City are endless, and Career Day events, mentorship programs and beautification projects help us bring those opportunities into schools and classrooms, and expose our students to endless possibilities. For example, alumni from the Bronx spent a Saturday morning painting classrooms and planting a garden at the Longwood Preparatory Academy. This is one of many ways the millions of former New York City public school students are getting involved

through P.S. Alumni.

All across the world, our alumni are doing amazing things: starting businesses, investing in their communities and raising families. P.S. Alumni taps into the incredible network of mentors, volunteers and advocates ready to give back and help students find success.

For alumni who are also parents of current public school students, it's time to get involved. You know firsthand the important role that education plays throughout your life and why it's so important to build a strong foundation. Whether you're volunteering to do a read-aloud in your child's class, or speaking at your alma mater for College Awareness Day, now is the time to share your experience and help shape the next class into the future leaders of this city and of the world.

That work starts in your neighborhood and at your local school. The doors are always open.

*Carmen Fariña is the outgoing New York City Public Schools Chan-*

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# Bronx Disability Backlog Part of ‘National Disgrace’

By MARY MELLON  
and NIALL RIDGLEY

“You are all going to be rejected,” cautions Clarence Sessoms, a U.S. Air Force veteran and Morrisania resident who first filed for disability in 2004. His matter has not been resolved.

He hopes his third appeal hearing this month can finally secure him benefits he’s been seeking the last 14 years.

Genevieve Machado, a Castle Hill resident and former medical assistant who stopped working due to fibromyalgia and a torn meniscus, the latter occurring during a slip and fall and the former surfacing during her career, also feels hoodwinked. She has been working the appeal process and has been unable to secure a hearing date since 2015.

“I have been honest. Maybe if I would have lied, it would have worked,” says Machado. “It’s disappointing really... You work, work, work, work, work, at the end of the day when you need assistance... [you need] the money that you put in, you are denied everything, and why? Why? It’s crazy.”

A lengthy wait for a hearing is not unusual in the Bronx. Data kept by the Social Security Administration (SSA) shows residents who have filed a disability claim at their local Social Security office wait an average of 779 days, over two years, for their case to be reviewed at the Office of Disability Adjudication and Review (ODAR) at 226 E. 161st St. This is the longest wait time in the nation, higher than the national average of 593 days, and there are 6,457 cases pending in the Bronx now. On top of that, only 45 percent of those who are granted a hearing will receive disability benefits.

The Americans with Disabilities Act defines a disability as a physical or mental impairment that severely limits one or more major life activities. Some disabilities are physical. Sessoms, for instance, has had six procedures on his knees, two back operations, a torn rotator cuff, and a torn muscle in his arm, suffered for various reasons, and can no longer perform as a union construction worker, his job of 30 years. Other so-called “invisible disabilities” may not be immediately apparent from the outside. Some examples are learning disabilities or mental health conditions.

SSA defines disability differently



Photo by Niall Ridgley

**GENEVIEVE MACHADO HAS** waited months to have her case heard before the Office of Disability Adjudication and Review.

than many other agencies. To qualify for their benefits, claimants must prove they’re unable to perform work they previously were able to and be unable to do other work due to their medical problems. Their disability must also have lasted or be expected to last for at least a year, or result in death.

Sessoms does not believe he was fairly assessed by SSA. After he injured both of his knees in 2004 he required three years of rehabilitation to

walk again. It was then that he first filed and was denied by SSA.

“I went through all my savings, all the money I had in the company 401(k), my annuities in the union, I spent everything I had to stay afloat. Now I have nothing. And your family suffers when you’re the main breadwinner; they suffer,” Sessoms explains. He has since relied on his wife’s income and a check from Veterans Affairs to stay afloat.

“My best description of [the back-

log] would be a national disgrace,” says Mary Dale, senior vice president of strategic communications at Allsup Inc., an employment network that helps those seeking disabilities assistance navigate the lengthy application process.

After filing a Social Security disability claim, applicants must both prove that they have worked and contributed sufficiently to the Federal Insurance Contributions Act (FICA) and that they are completely disabled. Allsup assists in filling out applications, pulling medical records together, confirming that the relevant taxes have been paid, and that everything is insured.

Sessoms, who is represented by Allsup, says going through the process without representation was very difficult. Allsup suggested he petition for a hearing in New Jersey instead of the Bronx since it was choked with the backlog of cases.

“They continue to put rules and regulations in place that slow the process, don’t have a real benefit to them or to the individuals going through the program and make things even harder for everyone involved,” Dale says. Dale cites an example is how SSA now requires nearly all medical records be submitted for review prior to a decision being made. “So what happens is that they end up with 50,000 or 60,000 cases, with medical evidence that’s more than 1,000 pages long.”

John Shallman, a spokesman for SSA, acknowledged the backlog, attributing it to an aging baby boomer population as they enter disability-prone years and the 2008 Great Recession. The federal agency has hired 250 administrative law judges since 2016 to answer the backlog, with results beginning to show.

“We continue to make progress in eliminating the hearing backlog. For 13 consecutive months, from January 2017 through January 2018, we have reduced the number of people waiting for a hearing decision,” said Shallman.

Sessoms is indignant. “We are not the ones who are scamming the system, we are the ones who are putting into the system, paying our money into it and I think you should give us the benefit of the doubt.”

*Additional reporting by David Cruz*





# HEALTH CHECK

## Keeping New Moms Safe

By **CLAIRE GARON, MPH, CHES**

Congratulations! During pregnancy, your body has an enormous responsibility and needs your care. In the weeks after giving birth, knowing what to expect from your body and how to spot signs of trouble can literally save your life.

Today, we're talking about how to identify symptoms of post-birth complications and what to do next. Post-birth complications are serious physical conditions that can happen

within a year of giving birth.

Pregnancy and childbirth send your body on a roller coaster of physical changes. After you give birth, your body continues to experience many strong sensations. Hormones flood your veins, your breasts fill with milk, and you may experience cramps as your uterus shrinks back to its original size. These are unpleasant, but completely normal after giving birth.

Unfortunately, some moms experience

symptoms of serious medical conditions in the weeks and months after birth, including blood clots, excessive bleeding from the uterus, heart problems, or an infection of the C-section incision. In the weeks after birth, listen to your body and trust your gut when something feels wrong.

Below are signs of potentially serious medical conditions. Fortunately, many of these problems can be resolved if you get medical care. If you experience anything on the list below, call 911. They include:

- **Pain in Chest:** Possible sign of blood clot in lung or a heart problem.
- **Difficulty Breathing:** Possible sign of blood clot in lung or heart problem.
- **Seizures:** Possible sign of a condition called Eclampsia.

If you experience anything on the list below, call your OB/GYN pro-

vider and tell them your symptoms. You can call your OB/GYN for advice instead of 911 for these symptoms:

- **Vaginal Bleeding:** Call if the bleeding soaks through one pad an hour. Or blood clots from the vagina the size of an egg or bigger. It's a possible sign of obstetric hemorrhage.
- **C-section Incision Not Healing:** Possible sign that incision is infected.
- **Temperature of 100.4°F or Higher:** Possible sign of infection in body.
- **Red or Swollen Leg:** Red or swollen leg that is painful or warm to touch. It's a possible sign of blood clot in the leg.

*Claire Garon, MPH, CHES, works with Montefiore Health System's Office of Community & Population Health.*

*Source: Empowering Women to Obtain Needed Care Project.*

## At Montefiore, a Healthier Heart Starts With a Step

By **DAVID CRUZ**

Heart disease kills more people in the Norwood, Kingsbridge Heights and Bedford Park sections of the Bronx than cancer, says the city Health Department.

At Montefiore Medical Center, nearly four dozen staffers strolled around so-called "Montefiore Mile" to set an example and make a point: walking can dramatically reduce one's chance of developing heart disease. Four trips around the indoor path found at the hospital's Moses Campus in Norwood equate to a mile.

"You're maintaining and building heart muscles," said Dr. Mario Garcia, co-director of the Montefiore-Einstein Center for Heart & Vascular Care and professor and chief director of cardiology at Montefiore and Einstein College of Medicine. "The more amount of muscle mass, the more energy you have."

Staffers clad in red spent their 11 o'clock walking the halls of "Montefiore Mile" alongside Dr. Stephen Safyer, CEO and president of Montefiore Health System, who's joined staffers for the yearly event since it began in 2008. Dr. Peter P. Semczuk, senior vice president and executive director of the Moses Campus, was also on hand.



Photo courtesy Montefiore Health System

**(L-R) DR. STEPHEN SAFYER**, president and CEO of Montefiore Health System; Dr. Mario Garcia, Montefiore Einstein Center for Heart & Vascular Care co-director; and Dr. Peter P. Semczuk, senior vice president and executive director of the Henry and Lucy Moses Campus, Montefiore, lead a walk around "Montefiore Mile."

It happened on Feb. 1, the start of Heart Month. Overall, the Bronx fares poorly when it comes to heart disease. Health officials continually rank heart disease as the leading cause of death in the Bronx.

The mission to reduce heart dis-

ease has prompted Montefiore to dispatch a cardiovascular outreach team to educate patients on the benefits of maintaining a healthy heart. Its propensity to educate as a form of prevention has made Montefiore a leader in preventing

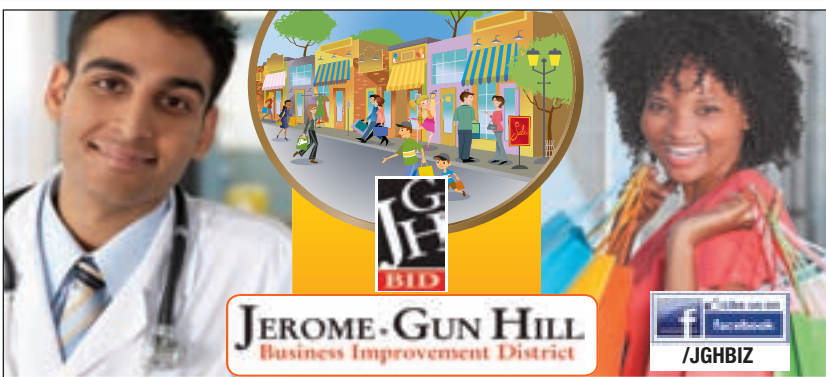
coronary artery disease through the Cardiac Wellness Program. The program encourages changes in lifestyle and eating habits as a way to reverse heart disease.

Heart transplant surgeries are common at Montefiore (last year there were 49 heart transplant surgeries at the hospital), though a last resort. Exercise stands as a critical tool to preventing heart disease. That includes walking to stop the development of arteriosclerosis, a condition that thickens artery walls, making it tougher for blood to flow through smoothly. The condition is known to cause heart attacks and obesity.

The typical age for men to develop heart disease starts in ones 50s. In some instances, Dr. Garcia, who's been a doctor since 1986, has occasionally treated heart disease patients in their mid-30s. Eating less greasy foods and exercising more are just some simple tips that can reduce the chances of developing heart disease, said Dr. Garcia. He admits it's not always easy given Bronx residents' unorthodox work schedules. But avoiding fatty foods is certainly one step.

"It may have worked for the caveman, but the caveman probably died by age 30 or age 40," he said.





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# Classifieds

## Professional Directory

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## NEIGHBORHOOD NOTES

### Flea Market

#### Donations Sought

Donations are needed for the Bedford Mosholu Community Association flea market scheduled to be held on March 10. Bring new and used items (except clothing and hard cover books) to the BMCA office at 400 E. Mosholu Pkwy. So., apt. B1 (lobby floor) on Feb. 21 and 28 from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m., March 3 from 1:30 to 4 p.m. and March 7 from 7:30 to 9 p.m. For more information, call (718) 367-2230 or email bedfordmosholu@verizon.net.

### Pre-K Applications

Pre-K applications are available for families with children born in 2014. Families who submit a Pre-K application by the March 30 deadline will get an offer letter in May 2018. To apply, one can go online at [nyc.gov/prek](http://nyc.gov/prek), call 311 to be directed to the New York City Depart-

ment of Education, or visit the Family Welcome Center at 1 Fordham Plaza, 7th floor, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Mondays through Thursdays or 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Fridays.

### Civil Service Exams

Civil service exams are available for the following jobs through Feb. 28: Child protective specialist, environmental police officer, motor vehicle operator, motor vehicle operator for CUNY and for NYC Health + Hospitals, school safety agent, sewage treatment worker, special officer, special officer for NYC Health + Hospitals, and traffic enforcement agent. To take the test, an application must first be submitted to <http://on.nyc.gov/2o4cPeS>. For more information, contact 311.

### 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.

### Free Family Services

University Behavioral Services, 4119 White Plains Rd. (230th Street), offers needy families free resources for child care/after school, parenting, child support, employment, education, housing assistance/referral, elder care, legal assistance, and more. For more information, call Meredith Pouncey at (718) 652-0227 ext. 259 or 271.

### 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.

### Tax Forms Available

Free federal and NYS tax forms are available for pickup at the Mosholu Library, 285 E. 205th St. (info: (718) 882-8239); and free NYS forms at the office of Assemblyman Jeff Dinowitz, 3107 Kingsbridge Ave. (info: (718) 796-5345).

### Free Tax Filing Assistance

Free tax filing is available for families whose total income is \$54,000 or less or individuals who make \$30,000 or less at the following locations: MMCC, 3450 DeKalb Ave. (appt: Dwayne Lee at (718) 882-4000 ext. 209 or email [DLee@mmcc.org](mailto:DLee@mmcc.org)); and SUNY Bronx Educational Opportunity Center, 1666 Bathgate Ave. (appt: (718) 530-7019). Applicants must bring a W2 and/or 1099 form or any other proof showing income, government-issued ID, social security card or ITIN number for self, spouse and dependents, a 1095 health form or health insurance statements and bank account information for those looking to have their tax refund direct deposited. Appointments are required.

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# Out & About

Compiled by JUDY NOY

## EDITOR'S PICK

### Heart Healthy Month

Mind Builders and Montefiore Medical Center offer free adult classes at Mind-Builders Creative Arts Center, 3415 Olinville Ave. (info: (718) 652-6256) as follows:

Feb. 17 and 24 - Salsa from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m.

Feb. 17 and 24 - Stretch from 1 to 1:30 p.m.

Feb. 15 - African/Modern from 7 to 8:15 p.m.

Feb. 21 - Zumba from 7 to 8 p.m.

Feb. 24 - Zumba from 9 to 10 a.m.

Feb. 20 - Yoga & Stress Reduction from 7 to 8:15 p.m.

### Onstage

The Bronx Library Center, 310 E. Kingsbridge Rd., presents **Sonido Costeño Trio in Concert**, featuring Latin music, Feb. 17 at 2:30 p.m. For more information, call (718) 579-4244/46/57 or visit [www.nypl.org](http://www.nypl.org).

Lehman College, 250 Bedford Pk., Blvd. W. presents free **concert** featuring the Lehman Chamber Players performing classical music, Feb. 25 at 2 p.m. in the Music Building, Recital Hall, 3rd floor. Donations are welcome. For more information, call (718) 960-8833.

Lehman College, 250 Bedford Pk., Blvd. W. presents **Student Play Festival**, Feb. 22 to 24 in the Speech and Theatre Building's Studio Theatre at 7 p.m. Events include six dramatic works. For more information, call (718) 960-8710.

Lehman College, 250 Bedford Pk., Blvd. W. presents **concert** which celebrates John Corigliano's 80th birthday, Feb. 22 at 7 p.m. in the Music Building, Hearth Room. Tickets are by donation to support the John Corigliano Scholarship Fund. For more information, visit [lehman.edu/music](http://lehman.edu/music) or email [music.department@lehman.cuny.edu](mailto:music.department@lehman.cuny.edu).

### Events

Holy Nativity Church, 3061 Bainbridge Ave. (204th Street), hosts the 40th anniversary of **Poetry and Dining**, Feb. 23 at 7:30 p.m. Events include dinner, drinks, poetry and surprises. Guests may bring poetry to read. Donations are \$25. For more information, call (718) 652-5853.

Lehman College, 250 Bedford Pk., Blvd. W. presents **Biennial Symposium**, Feb. 23 and 24, in the Music Building room 330, featuring Irish language literature and the folklore of Ireland. Tickets are \$20; free for students. For more information, call (718) 960-8833.



Photo courtesy Bronx Borough President's Office

**BRONX DEPUTY BOROUGH President Marricka Scott-McFadden (l) stands with honorees (l-r) Tamika D. Mallory, Hon. Helen Diane Foster, and father of PFC Kwabena Mensah at an award ceremony honoring achievements by members of the African-American community on Black History Month. Also pictured is Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr. (r). Check under "Black History Events" for more.**



File photo courtesy Joshua Bright/Wave Hill

**THE WEATHER MAY limit outdoor events at Wave Hill (pictured), but there's still plenty to do inside (see "Events" section for details).**

information and program details, contact [irish.studies@lehman.cuny.edu](mailto:irish.studies@lehman.cuny.edu).

Williamsbridge Oval presents the following free events: **Winter Olympics**, Feb. 20 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., for ages 6 to 13, which include arts and crafts, hockey, mini bobsled, ice skating, and curling (bring your own lunch); and **Tiny Prints: Baby and Toddler Program**, Mondays 11:15 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. and Fridays 12:15 to 1:15 p.m. For more information, call (718) 543-8672.

BronxWorks presents **Dip Against Homelessness**, Feb. 17 at 11 a.m. at Orchard Beach. Donations are welcome for this fundraiser. Non-dippers may donate new gloves, socks, hats or scarves at the event or to BronxWorks through Feb. 16. For more information and locations, call (646) 393-4002.

Bronx River Art Center (BRAC) presents art workshops at Bronx Community Board 6, 1932 Arthur Ave. (East Tremont Avenue), 4th floor, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. (for ages 6 to 12) and 2 to 4 p.m. (for teens and adults), as follows: **Cartooning** on Feb. 17; and **Masks** on Feb. 24 (\$8/youth; \$10/adults; \$15/parent/child. Also offered is **Cartooning Classes**, through March 9 from 4 to 6 p.m. for ages 12 to 18. \$65/eight sessions (sign up at [Eventbrite.com](http://Eventbrite.com)). For more information, call (718) 589-5819.

Mosholu Montefiore Senior Center, 3450 DeKalb Ave. offers seniors **dance workshop**, Latin Rhythms, Music and Dances From Around the World, at 10 a.m., Mondays through March: Feb. 26, March 5, 12 and 19. Register in advance or just show up. The course culminates in a revue. For more information, call (718) 798-6601.

**Wave Hill**, a Bronx oasis at 675 W. 252nd St. in Riverdale, offers **Family Art Projects**: Josephine Baker Dances Out the Winter Blues, to make handmade musical instruments and hear storyteller, Feb. 17 and 18; and Exotic Desert Dwellers, to sketch and paint, then make a mirage, Feb. 24 and 25; both from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Also scheduled is **concert**, Feb. 25 at 2 p.m. (\$28; \$24/members; \$12/ages 8 to 18), featuring classical music (info: ext. 251). All events are in the WH House. 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.

### Black History Events

The Mosholu Library, 285 E. 205th St., presents **50th Anniversary of 1968**, featuring the documentary, "MLK: Death in Memphis," followed by a brief discussion, Feb. 16 at 1:30 p.m. For more information, call (718) 882-8239.

Bronx County Historical Society presents free lecture, **Slave Stories, Our Stories**, Feb. 23 from 6 to 8 p.m. at the Museum of Bronx History, 3266 Bainbridge Ave. (208th Street). Events include discussion and conversation with one of the house slaves who worked in the Valentine-Varian House.

For more information, call (718) 881-8900.

Senator Jamaal T Bailey and the Tracey Towers Tenant organization present **The Power of Voting**, Feb. 24 from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. in Tracey Towers' Community Room A, 40 W. Mosholu Pkwy., So. Events include a discussion on Black Votes Matter and a series of performances celebrating black culture. Breakfast and refreshments will be served. For more information and to RSVP, call (718) 547-8854 or email [ngaray@nysenate.gov](mailto:ngaray@nysenate.gov), by Feb. 23.

Lehman College, 250 Bedford Pk., Blvd. W. presents free **Resistance Beyond Walls and Borders**, Feb. 28 from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. in the Lovinger Theatre. Events include subjects of mass incarceration, political prisoners and repression, film and panel discussion. For more information, call (718) 960-8833.

Bronx Community College, 2155 University Ave. presents free **Marvin Horne Jazz Quartet**, Feb. 15 from noon to 3 p.m. in the Roscoe C. Brow Playhouse. For more information, call (718) 289-5100.

The Bronx Library Center, 310 E. Kingsbridge Rd., presents **Black History Month Celebration**, Feb. 28 at 4 p.m. Discuss Black history and how to help shape the future. For more information, call (718) 579-4244/46/57 or visit [www.nypl.org](http://www.nypl.org).

### Library Events

The Bronx Library Center, 310 E. Kingsbridge Rd., presents for adults: **Exposing Politics**, a play of political acts, Feb. 24 at 2:30 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: **Crafty Fridays at 3 p.m.:** (ages 5 to 12), crafts, Feb. 16 and 23; **STEM: Kids Science at 3 p.m.:** (ages 5 to 12), Feb. 20 and 27; and **Bilingual Birdies Spanish Series at 11 a.m.:** native Spanish speakers play guitar, percussion, and use puppets, Feb. 21. Teens/young adults can enjoy: **Craft-eens! at 3:30 p.m.:** Crafts on Wednesdays, (all materials are provided), Feb. 21; and **film:** "The Shack," Feb. 24 at 1:30 p.m. Adults can attend: **Knitting Circle:** Thursdays at 3 p.m. For more information, call (718) 882-8239.

The Jerome Park Library, 118 Eames Place (near Kingsbridge Road), offers for children: **film:** Feb. 24 at 2 p.m.; and **Afternoon Arts:** to make a creation to take home, Feb. 26 at 4 p.m.; both for ages 5 to 12. Teens/young adults can attend: **We Are the World: Understanding Salsa:** presents instruments, music and lyrics, Feb. 20 at 4 p.m. For more information, call (718) 549-5200.

**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 Feb. 19 for the next publication date of March 1.



## Shelter Plan Shifts to Jerome Ave.

(continued from page 1)

cated, and they achieved consensus, bringing a property owner and a not-for-profit service provider to the table while gathering the support of Community Board members and neighbors alike,” Banks wrote of the community.

One of this issue’s Op-Eds was co-written by Councilman Andrew Cohen, representing the area where the shelter will be situated. “I think it’s a location that I think will have as little impact on the overall community as these can happen. I think that it’s a lot better than the other site proposed,” Cohen told the *Norwood News*.

That other site was 3041 Webster Ave., a two-story property owned and operated by Sam’s Floor Covering, also known as Sam’s Carpeting. Last year, property owner Carmine Rossi submitted paperwork to the New York City Department of Buildings that looked to repurpose the building for “sleeping accommodations” and build another floor. The language was similar to that found in building permits for impending men’s only homeless shelter sites.

The Jerome Avenue two-story site will be home to some 200 men who are originally from the Bronx. BronxWorks, a social service nonprofit, was picked to operate the shelter with a contract still being finalized. The nonprofit has already been contracted by DHS to conduct outreach of the borough’s homeless population. Within Community Board 7, comprising the neighborhoods of Norwood, Bedford Park, Kingsbridge Heights, Fordham and University Heights, there are 677 people known to be homeless.

The property was once the home of Federation Employment and Guidance Service Inc. (FEGS), which had closed shortly after filing for bankruptcy. The building became vacant last year, opening up the property for a shelter.

Cohen had spent last year conferencing with representatives from DHS and the mayor’s office, holding meetings in the basement of City Hall. The matter went up to Mayor

Bill de Blasio, a staunch supporter of traditional shelters over the cluster site program popularized during the Bloomberg administration.

“I got the word that we were not going to proceed at the original location from the mayor himself,” Cohen recalled.

The shelter is expected to open sometime this summer. “I hope it’s not here in perpetuity, but I think it will be here for a very long time. The homeless population has been growing for 25 years and we’re barely at the point where we stopped growth,” Cohen said.

The new location was long favored by members of Community Board 7, which saw the Webster Avenue site as too close to PS/MS 20, a K-8 school. News of a proposed shelter arriving near the school stoked fears from parents who staged a protest in late September denouncing proposed plans.

But the new site’s back wall faces the back wall of MS 208/The Bronx Dance Academy, where the majority of the schoolchildren who attend it are girls. Unlike PS/MS 20, it would take great effort to walk all the way around the Jerome Avenue site to school’s front doors at 3617 Bainbridge Ave. Parents learned about the new shelter after the *Norwood News* alerted them to it.

Jillian Gutierrez, a parent who was once homeless, isn’t sure the location is a good match. “This school’s mostly girls, I don’t know if they’re pedophiles,” she said. “I’ve been in a shelter before so I know how these people usually get. They’re not people persons. Some are, some aren’t.”

“There’s a lot of implications here,” Frank Fermin, a father picking up his son, a sixth grader said. “We’ll have a few worries.”

Adaline Walker-Santiago, chair of Community Board 7, said the concern will be raised when BronxWorks presents it at the board sometime in the coming months. “We’re still working to see if it can be less than 200 men and to make sure it’s well coordinated,” she said.

# Opinion

## Working Together to Welcome Neighbors

By STEVEN BANKS  
and ANDREW COHEN

Homelessness is one of the hardest issues we have to confront as public servants and partners in government. But working together to do so is more important than ever because homelessness impacts literally every community across the five boroughs, including our own constituents right here in Bronx Community District 7—often due to rising rents and stagnant incomes, not through any fault of their own.

If we’re going to succeed in this fight, it’s because we find ways to tackle these challenges together, collaboratively along with our communities, putting people and neighborhoods first in all that we do.

We must make sure our homeless neighbors can reside in safe, stable locations closer to the anchors of life and communities they last called home as they get back on their feet. That means implementing a borough-based approach and closing the 17-year-old Band-Aid cluster program as well as commercial hotels used as shelters on and off since the time of Lindsay. We must also make sure our new, improved locations are integrated into the fabric and character of each neighborhood so that our homeless neighbors feel welcomed and supported as they stabilize their lives.

To that end, as we all strive to remake the shelter system, which grew haphazardly over many decades, the City is asking communities to help identify locations that not-for-profit providers can propose through the open-ended RFP procurement process. With clusters closing quickly, especially right here in the Bronx, this community district heard the call to action—and the City embraced their response.

We are proud to represent and

work in partnership with a community that didn’t turn its back on New Yorkers in need. Rather than saying not-in-my-backyard, they did their homework, they advocated, and they achieved consensus, bringing a property owner and a not-for-profit service provider to the table while gathering the support of Community Board members and neighbors alike. Their dedication to do this is inspiring: they didn’t just talk the talk, they walked the walk.

Today, thanks to a productive, collaborative process with community members, we’ve identified a site that meets the needs of our homeless neighbors and community members alike. We’re proud to announce that we will be moving forward with not-for-profit service provider BronxWorks’ proposal to operate 3600 Jerome Avenue as a high-quality borough-based shelter, and we have notified the community of the intent to do so—bringing us closer to our goal of being able to provide our neighbors from this community who fall on hard times with the dignified support they deserve right here in this community. We are encouraged by the community’s engagement and are confident that, together, with their support, we will make this the best experience it can be for New Yorkers in need as they get back on their feet.

As we transform how we provide shelter throughout the five boroughs, we encourage communities to join us. Our shared mission to better support our neighbors in need depends on working together.

*Steven Banks is the Commissioner for the New York City Department of Homeless Services. Andrew Cohen is Council Member representing the 11th Council District, which covers Norwood.*



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