



NORWOOD NEWS

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GETTING PRIMED FOR THE BX PRIMARY

Norwood News runs down latest in September primary



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Photos respectively by Jose A. Giralt, the Campaign for Alessandra Biaggi, David Cruz, and the Campaign for Jeff Klein

AND THE RACES ARE ON. (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT) Assemblywoman Nathalia Fernandez of the 80th Assembly District, 34th Senate District candidate Alessandra Biaggi, Councilman Andrew Cohen of the 11th Council District, and state Senator Jeff Klein of the 34th Senate District face their political futures come September and November.

**By MARTIKA ORNELLA and
DAVID CRUZ**

A sleepy political race and quiet political machinations about a closely-watched contest ahead of the Sept. 13 Democratic primary, which could see a dramatic shift in representation across the borough.

The theme of progressivism has coursed through key races in the Bronx, thanks to political histrionics coming out of Washington, D.C.

It began with Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the socialist Democrat beating established frontrunner Congressman Joe

Crowley in the June 26 Democratic primary in a race that pitted an outsider against an insider.

That theme has spilled onto the race for the 34th Senate District between Alessandra Biaggi, an attorney who once worked for Governor Andrew

Cuomo and former presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, and Senator Jeff Klein, the influential incumbent lawmaker. Voters will decide who is the favorable candidate in the Sept. 13 Democratic Primary. With the Bronx overwhelmingly com-
(continued on page 19)

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EDITORIAL

Why Newspapers Should Matter to You

For those who haven't heard, the *New York Daily News* saw some of the most brutal cuts to its reporting staff in recent memory. No one was safe, not even the librarians who archive the paper's work. You may not notice it right away—no sector is immune to layoffs—but the pain of the layoffs could easily affect you.

Follow us here: Without reporters you may not know what's happening down the street, how to best shame a bad landlord putting tenants in harm's way, and what the people you elected to represent you in public office are up to. That's plain and simple.

The last prong is maybe the most important since the whole point of newspapers is to watch what elected officials are up to, a mandate that lies in the heart of the First Amendment. It's true, lawmakers happily tell their constituents what's happening in their

office, but usually they're telling you one side of it. Can you remember a lawmaker ever openly admitting to wrongdoing unless a newspaper finds out first or prosecutors are ready to indict?

Without reporters poring through documents, sitting in on government meetings, or even asking a question on what came out of the meeting, makes the prospect of getting the information to New Yorkers virtually impossible. Without reporters, tracking malfeasance becomes tougher. In this age where yes, social media has proliferated and allowed users to inform or disinform their audiences, the craft of journalism is lost. Say hello to fake news.

While many eyes are on Manhattan, home to City Hall, there's a painful neglect on the outer boroughs. This started back in 2015 when the *Daily*

News closed its Bronx bureau. We'll get the occasional coverage from the big media, though we argue it runs on the "if it bleeds it leads" track. The killing of Lesandro "Junior" Guzman-Feliz is a prime example. There's more to the borough than murder and mayhem. There's rejuvenation in the works.

What's most important about the *Daily News*, which arguably sets it apart from the other papers, including the *Norwood News*, is numbers. Their circulation more than 200,000 newspapers a day, way more than the *Norwood News*' 15,000 circulation reach. With more newspapers out there, there are more eyeballs, hence the *Daily News*' numerical impact. From a reporting standpoint, it's not quantifiable. Bottom line—with so few bodies out there covering this complicated city, the reader loses.



Letters To The Editor

Implement School Speed Zone

As a father and grandfather, the New York State legislature's failure to renew and expand the New York City speed camera program is especially troubling. Since its inception, the problem which allows for the installation of speed cameras in 140 school zones across the city has been a tremendous success.

According to the New York City Department of Transportation, school zone speed cameras have reduced speeding by 63 percent and resulted in a 22 percent drop in accidents. In addition to the safety benefits associated with speed cameras, they have also proven to be revenue generators providing over \$65.1 million dollars in additional revenue to the city.

I remain hopeful that the legislature will reconvene and pass this lifesaving legislation. However, until that happens, I believe it is of critical

importance that the city implements a program of manual speed zone monitoring. Manual monitoring will allow the city to continue to provide for the safety and security of our children.

With the opening of school fast approaching, I urge the New York City Police Department and the Department of Transportation to develop and implement a plan for the Manual Monitoring of school-speed zones

Fernando Cabrera
Councilman 14th District

Mainstream Media Rebuttal

Regarding Richard Warren's last letter to the editor published in the June 7-20 edition of the *Norwood News*, can Mr. Warren please provide documentation for any, or all, his charges against various governments and press personnel? His rant against "mainstream media" is sorely lacking in evidence.

We read the *Norwood News* to be informed about local issues! Roxanne Delgado's letter regarding the Bronx animal shelter plans is far more relevant.

Bill Cohen
Van Cortlandt Village

Warren's Counter

David Cruz' editorial specifically claimed we have an independent press and I disputed that. That's why it qualified for the *Norwood News*. The evidence is in the article and there's numerous other facts and issues that are not covered by the mainstream media. Or does Bill Cohen think that it is not on purpose, but just a coincidence that all these issues and facts are ignored by the mainstream press? A 400-word letter does not leave room for a bibliography. So if Cohen has any doubts about these facts, he can check out independent publications such as *CounterPunch* or Google these issues. I've done enough reading on this stuff, his lazy mind can do a little work.

Richard Warren
Van Cortlandt Village

Norwood News Takes a Break and Returns August 30

As has been the case for years, the *Norwood News* will be taking its summer hiatus, and this current edition will cover virtually the entire month of August. This means readers won't see another print edition until Aug. 30.

We'll be around, of course. You'll find our bylines on the website, www.norwoodnews.org. You may also continue to send tips, letters, and story ideas to Editor-in-Chief David Cruz at dcruz@norwoodnews.org or norwoodnews@norwoodnews.org.

Whalen Park's Official Reopening Draws Namesake's Family

By SOPHIA EBANKS

After one year of reconstruction, Norwood's Whalen Park officially reopened to the public with a ribbon-cutting ceremony attended by local officials and family members of the patriarch behind the park's name.

"I couldn't stop crying," said Kate Armstrong, daughter of the late Henry A. Whalen, a Norwood resident and the park's namesake. "Our father would be so proud

of this. Never in our wildest dreams did we imagine that it would turn into this great park that it is today."

The park, located on Perry Avenue and 205th Street next to the Mosholu Library, has been revamped with the installation of new playground, now equipped with climbing blocks and spray showers. A "story time corner" has also been added to the park for library reading groups and other group gatherings. Park

benches, game tables, park lighting, and a water fountain are placed throughout the park as well.

"Today we have a park that's as good as any park in the city," said Council Member Andrew Cohen. "To see the transformation of Whalen Park, it just restores my faith."

The \$1.8 million reconstruction project received funding from government agencies and representatives, includ-



Photo by José A. Giralt

RELATIVES OF HENRY A. Whalen at a ribbon cutting ceremony after the reconstruction of the park named for him in the Norwood section of the Bronx on Tuesday, July 24. Whalen was a World War II veteran and a local activist.



Photo by Jose A. Giralt

CHILDREN PLAY IN WHALEN Park's newly installed sprinkler on the day it is dedicated after reconstruction in the Norwood section of the Bronx on Tuesday, July 24. Henry A. Whalen was a World War II veteran and a local activist.

emony along with their husbands, children, and grandchildren. Whalen was a World War II veteran, a community advocate who worked to open the James J. Peters Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Kingsbridge, and was an active church member. He and his daughters lived just a block away from the park, visiting regularly.

At the reopening, children were already playing on the playground and were welcomed to join the Mosholu Library's reading session in the park.

"We came here and saw all these kids here and it's so moving," said Armstrong. "Because when we were kids there were kids all over the place, climbing the trees, and just having fun. It was just a neighborhood full of kids and even though we moved away, it's still a neighborhood full of kids. So the tradition lives on."

The Parks Department also cut the ribbon on a brand new \$500,000 skate park in Van Cortlandt Village on July 24.

INQUIRING PHOTOGRAPHER

By DAVID GREENE



This week we asked readers their thoughts on the decision by the New York Daily News to cut its newsroom staff by nearly 50 percent and what effect, if any, would it have on coverage of our borough.



That's discouraging for the simple fact that those resources they're letting go are the resources that scoop the information from this area that is valuable to us, and I think it makes us vulnerable now with what's going on around us. I get my news from the Daily News and I'm disappointed about this decision.
Alexander Vega
Kingsbridge



People today are getting their news by phone and mobile devices on the Internet. Will it affect people in the Bronx? Hell yes, because we see a majority of the stories they cover are happening in Manhattan, Harlem and Wall Street, but in my opinion, they are going to miss the most important stories here in the Bronx where people are struggling with poverty and income. Of course, the Bronx has been overlooked for years regarding news coverage. I get a lot of my news from word of mouth from the community and social media.
Chris Davis
Castle Hill



I think some important stories are going to get left out now, because the Daily News was a good source for uncovering stories and I don't know if any other paper can pull that off like they did. Honestly, the Daily News was my favorite newspaper and the only newspaper I ever bought. I don't know how it's going to affect the Bronx, but it will. I get a lot of my information from Channel 7 news. I don't really buy the newspaper anymore. It got too expensive actually. I also get it through social media as well.
Frank Pimentel
Yankee Stadium



I sometimes buy the newspaper when I go to school or when I come home from work. I don't know if the layoffs will have an effect on their coverage of the Bronx. I think all of the papers do a decent job covering the borough, but I'm not very concerned about it.
Gleyni Martinez
Mount Hope



I think it will have a negative effect. A lot of people losing jobs at the Daily News, they've been around so long. How are they going to push half their staff out that fast and be able to stay on point and up to date with all that's going on in the world today? Yes, we need it bad. I watch Eyewitness News every morning and I come out every Sunday morning and get the Daily News to get the news and get the coupons for my wife inside the paper. I also read the local papers or get it on my tablet and get what the Daily News doesn't give us. I understand that because they're online, but they don't give you everything online, whereas the newspaper tells you exactly what happened.
Garry Reynolds
Belmont

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Twin Donut Closes Suddenly, With No Word on Reopening

By SOPHIA EBANKS

A long-standing donut shop in Norwood closed suddenly towards the end of July without notice.

Twin Donut Plus, located at 3396 Jerome Ave. at the corner of East 210th Street, has inexplicably shut down since July 23. The eatery appears vacant, with a few tables left and dozens of handwritten “closed” signs taped to the windows. Passersby have paused in front of the fast food casual

restaurant, peering inside to spot tables and chairs left just where they’re normally spotted. The store was usually open 24 hours a day, serving sandwiches, donuts, and other desserts.

“They might come back. They closed for a while two months ago,” said Chris Cheong, a worker for Wok Wok restaurant across from Twin Donut Plus. “It might be because of the rent.”

Norwood News called the

Twin Donut Plus office in Yonkers, NY. According to Liz Camcran, an employee of the company, the building is “under renovation and they’re selling the franchise.”

The owner closed the store before for renovations as well with the expectation of selling it, but reopened shortly after. Representatives said that it is definitely expected to sell this time. They expect to know the potential buyer within the next month. So far, no con-



Photo by Sophia Ebanks

TWIN DONUT AT 3396 Jerome Ave. in Norwood has been closed since July 23.

Back To School

- Bic Pens \$1.39
- Portfolios Avengers, Incredibles, Minions 89¢
- Oxford Back Packs \$5.99
- Bic Highlighter 10 Pack \$3.99
- Poly Binder 99¢
- Elmers Glue 99¢
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- Sharpie High Lighter 99¢
- Stretchable Book Covers 99¢
- 2 Pocket Portfolios 5/99¢
- Construction Paper 99¢
- Index Cards 1/99¢
- Scotch Tape 99¢

struction permits have been filed with the New York City Department of Buildings to proceed with any alterations to the restaurant.

The store had been there for more than 50 years, according to Camcran.

It rests within the borders of the Jerome Gun Hill Business Improvement District, the ad hoc city agency that offers private sanitation and marketing services to more than 200 stores. There are currently three businesses that have closed and 11 total

vacancies since June of this year. Since April 2018, five new businesses have opened or are set to open soon in the district, including a boutique clothing store, frozen yogurt shop, and a dine-in empanada restaurant.

Norwood News called and left a message with the office of Alice Kulick, the real estate property owner of the Twin Donut location and the former, long-serving chair of JGHBID, but has not received a comment back as of press time.

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SALE ENDS: AUGUST 29TH, 2018 • WHILE SUPPLIES LAST

Bike Co. Puts Brakes on Bx. Expansion Plan

By JOSE A. GIRALT

Five days after the bike-sharing company dubbed ofo put the brakes on a Bronx pilot program providing dockless bikes, Citi Bike and JUMP Bike have stepped up to double the number of bicycles in the borough. JUMP pedal-assisted electric bikes officially became available on July 30. Citi Bikes will become available in mid-August, according to the city Department of Transportation (DOT).

Citi Bike and JUMP Bikes will now provide 200 bikes each. Ofo was originally chosen to make 200 pedal-assist bikes available in the area of Fordham University. However, on July 19, DOT announced that ofo was ceasing most of its North American operations.

Andrew Daley, head of ofo in North America, said, "As we continue to bring bikeshare to communities across the globe, ofo has begun to evaluate markets that present obstacles."

The original plan was part of an expansion to bring a bike-sharing program to the outer boroughs, several years after Citi Bike debuted in parts of Manhattan and Brooklyn. In his announcement, Daley did not offer specifics on why the company withdrew from the Bronx. In mid-July, the Chinese-based company pulled out from Chicago citing government-imposed restrictions it could not abide. Ofo bike-sharing programs in Seattle is currently in limbo.

With the number of bikes doubled, JUMP founder and CEO Ryan Rzepecki said in a statement, "JUMP bikes will help reduce traffic congestion, connect residents to public transportation, and make biking an even more viable and fun transit option in the borough." JUMP bikes are available for \$2 for the first half hour and seven cents a minute for each additional hour.

12 Indicted for Lesandro Guzman-Feliz Killing

By JOSE A. GIRALT

Twelve members of the Trinitarios gang have been indicted in the brutal killing of 15-year-old Lesandro "Junior" Guzman-Feliz that occurred last month outside a bodega in Belmont.

"We will not tolerate violence, especially by gangs, on our streets," said Bronx District Attorney Darcel Clark, flanked by prosecutors and NYPD Commissioner James O'Neill. "This indictment is an early step in the criminal justice process so I ask the community to be patient as the case takes its course."

Clark stated that all 12 men, ranging in ages 18 to 29, have been charged with second-degree murder, first-degree manslaughter, second-degree conspiracy, first- and second-degree gang assault, and fourth-degree criminal possession of a weapon. Five of the men have been charged with first-degree murder, including torture, a rare charge. Among those charged was Diego Suero, 29, the reputed gang leader of the Trinitarios set in the Bronx, according to police.

According to the police investigation, the offenders were part of the "Los Sures," a subgroup of the Trinitarios. A report by *The New York Times* states Los

Sures were based in Brooklyn and had infiltrated the Bronx. On the evening of Junior's murder, on June 20, Los Sures planned to commit violence against another subgroup of Trinitarios called "Sunset." The *Times* report also states the group had originated from Brooklyn and was in conflict with Los Sures. They came across Junior, mistaking him for another gang member, chasing him several blocks into the bodega in Belmont before dragging him outside and stabbing him to death.

All of the 12 offenders were arraigned this morning and have been remanded. They are due back in court on Oct. 25. If convicted of first-degree murder, the men can face up to life in prison without the possibility of parole.

O'Neill underscored the role that social media had played in garnering support for the investigation, which prompted in influx of calls to the tip line.

"In every single case, we need all New Yorkers' help," said O'Neill, "just like we saw how the good people of the Bronx have helped bring about justice for Junior."

Meantime, a street renaming is being planned to commemorate Junior's life.

A Refuge for Vets and LGBTQ Youth Opens in Univ. Hts.

By SOPHIA EBANKS

Several homeless military veterans and LGBTQ youth now have a place to call home with the opening of a new supportive housing residence in the University Heights section of the Bronx. A ribbon-cutting ceremony was held to celebrate the opening on July 17.

Walton House, located between Walton Avenue and East Burnside Avenue, holds 89 affordable housing apartments that have been leased to 56 military veterans and 33 young adults, 40 percent of whom identify as LGBTQ.

It's the third residence for veterans managed by the Jericho Project, a non-profit that provides housing and services for the homeless population. The \$35.6 million project overseen by the non-profit took four years to build. Its construction partner B&B Urban, and several financial investors like CitiBank and Wells Fargo, helped finance the project.

The 10-story development features a garden area, recreational space, communal kitchen, and library stacks. The building also has a basement area set aside for office space where tenants can meet with on-site case managers, life coaches, peer mentors, and career counselors.

"It's very healing to have a home where

you have services on site," said Tori Lyon, CEO of Jericho Project.

Karen Wharton, a resident at Jericho Project's Kingsbridge Terrace residence, believes that the organization's properties help "build up the community" for veterans, erasing the stigma around homeless veterans. Wharton served in the military and was away on duty when Hurricane Sandy hit in 2012. When she returned in 2014, she found her Coney Island home destroyed. By that time, Wharton said she missed the relief period and could find little help from the James J. Peters Veterans Administration Hospital.

"I returned home to a civilian life and ruined home," said Wharton at the ribbon-cutting for Walton House.

But Wharton came across Kingsbridge Terrace one day, deciding to apply for residence after seeing the building's mural which honors veterans and the armed forces. Her application was approved within three months.

"I didn't believe it until it happened," said Wharton. "But Jericho devises that safety net for those who fall through the cracks."

De Blasio: More Tenant Protections Ahead

By JOSE A. GIRALT

When Destiny Armstead moved into 1561 Walton Ave. with her son Destin, 6, last December, they were both excited.

"We couldn't even sleep the first night because everything was new and beautiful. It's like a dream come true for me," said Armstead.

Mayor Bill de Blasio came to Armstead's building in Mt. Eden to see an example of how his initiative to provide 300,000 affordable apartments by 2026 is progressing. After taking a tour of Armstead's \$509 per month two-bedroom apartment, led mostly by Destin, the mayor announced that the city financed more than 32,000 affordable homes in the 2018 fiscal year ending June 30.

The mayor also announced the creation of a Tenant Anti-Harassment Protection Unit within the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) office. The unit is a response to the increased amount of harassment complaints against developers. "Most landlords follow the law but there's an unscrupulous few who do a huge amount of damage," the mayor said



MAYOR BILL DE BLASIO

shortly after the tour.

Investigations from the new unit will allow the city to bring civil charges against landlords found harassing their tenants and forcing them to leave. The mayor also said that fines to landlords will range from "tens of thousands of dollars to start if they have done the wrong thing, easily going up to hundreds of thousands of dollars in penalties."

Armstead works at Whole Foods and spent two years looking for an affordable apartment. "I wanted to stay in this neighborhood," she said. "I'm here to stay. I'm not going anywhere. I love my neighborhood."

Campaign Champions Bronx Postal Banking System

By **CHRISTY RAE AMMONS**

Several proposals are under way to provide banking services, such as ATMs, paycheck cashing, bill payment, electronic money transfers and small-dollar loans, at Bronx post offices in hopes of making residents less reliant on alternative financial services.

While the proposals are being championed by the postal union and federal legislators representing the Bronx, Community Board 7's district manager, Ischia Bravo, worries about the Postal Service biting off more responsibility than it can chew. "Overall, and my board agrees, we think it's a good idea for a pilot program to begin; however, you know, given the underlying issues that the post office already has, like the long lines for the services they currently provide, I don't think it would be conducive to now add these [banking] services without more personnel," she said.

Nora Taggart, a postal union worker and advocate for Campaign for Postal Banking (a petition), spoke to Community Board 7 in early June. She explained that the Postal Service already does money orders and cashes checks for the Treasury, and the Campaign for Postal Banking wants to improve and expand those services. Taggart agreed that the Postal Service would have to hire more staff in order to put this proposal into action, but that the Postmaster needs to sign off on it first.

Taggart said the short term plan is to start a pilot program for postal banking in the Bronx by getting the Postmaster to agree to have paycheck cashing, bill payment, and ATM services at post offices which would only expand on the existing services. The long term plan would be nationwide

and would require congressional action so that the Postal Service could provide lending services as well.

According to statistics from New Economy Project, a citywide nonprofit organization, the Bronx has more check cashers and pawn shops than traditional bank branches, unlike New York City as a whole. These alternative financial services often have high fees and interest rates, causing further expense to low-income families who do not have access to traditional banking—the underbanked.

Government officials Congressman José E. Serrano and Senator Kirsten Gillibrand are supporting the proposal. In a letter to the U.S. Postmaster General, Serrano pointed out that 52.3 percent of Bronx households are underbanked, double the national average of 27.7 percent.

Deyanira Del Rio, co-director of New Economy Project, is less concerned about congestion at the post office, and more concerned about the future of loans provided by the Postal Service, and the unknown interest rates. "I think for one there's a lot of talk about postal banks and how it can make loans that could kind of help shore up the financials of the postal banking system. We think that that's kind of a dangerous path to go down," said Del Rio.

Bravo, aside from a lack of employees, thinks postal banking is a good proposal. "We want more personnel. We want to make sure that our community is getting the right services at a speedy time," she said. "The goal [of the postal banking initiative] is to offer cheaper rates than other banks [or services] and also to relieve some of the pressure that the Bronx already has."

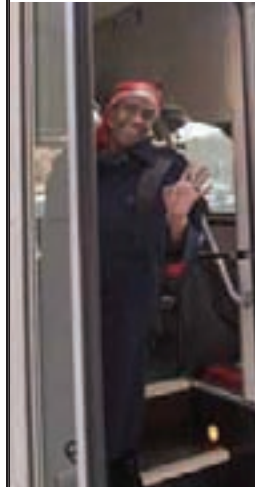


Image still courtesy BronxNet

DEPUTY DISTRICT DIRECTOR for Congressman Jose Serrano, Ramon Cabral (center front, holding microphone), comes before the Bronx Borough Service Cabinet meeting on June 6 to support a campaign that would see a so-called postal banking system implemented at post offices across the Bronx. Alongside Cabral is Nora Taggart, a postal union worker and advocate for Campaign for Postal Banking.

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Above Putnam Place, an Urban Garden Grows

By **CHRISTY RAE AMMONS**

Every day in the summer, Victor Khan, 72, of Norwood hobbles to his kitchen window, and carefully climbs onto the roof of the Sing Fei Chinese Restaurant from his fire escape overlooking Putnam Place and East Gun Hill Road to tend to his garden.

An automobile accident at age 15 partially disabled Khan, making him unable to move his hip and causing one of his legs to be an inch and a half shorter than the other. Using a chair to help boost himself out of the window makes it a little easier to get outside, but not much. The struggle leads to a burgeoning garden, a hobby he took up after retiring from Columbia-Presbyterian Hospital on West 168th Street, where he was a nursing attendant.

On the right hand side of the roof facing the street, tomato and gourd plants grow tall. Next to them in containers and repurposed trash cans are four potato plants, while hot peppers grow from a pot nearby. Sitting on the ledge of the store roof, a fresh jasmine plant fills the air with a sweet scent.

Khan's hope is to relocate his miniature farm to the roof of his apartment building by next summer, where his plants will get more sunlight and he will have more



Photo by Christy Rae Ammons

VICTOR KHAN SHOWS off three of his plants growing from his rooftop garden along Putnam Place. Khan's been growing his plants for about three years.

space to continue growing fresh vegetables for himself and his

neighbors. He first needs permission from the new landlord.

"I've lived in this apartment since 2003," Khan said. "Because of my age I don't do much, just watch TV. And then one day I thought, you know, since I'm interested in growing vegetables, why don't I put [some] outside. I went to the old landlord. His name is John. So I said, 'I want to grow tomatoes.' He said, 'where?' I said the rooftop on the top of your stores [outside my window], and he said 'Really? So give me some tomatoes,' and that was it."

While Khan has been living in the Bronx since 1981, his passion for farming flourished when he was a child in Pakistan. Though he was born and raised in the city of Peshawar, his mother's side of the family resided in the farm village, Sahiwal. "Every year at Christmas time and summer vacation, from school we would go to the village. And we would participate in them cutting the weeds because in the summertime you cut the weeds and harvest things. I was there

growing up, so I just had this interest in farming," he explained.

The plants in the garden are tended to carefully, and Khan is particular about what he uses to grow them. He mixes his own soil, adding five types of organic fertilizer, bone meal, blood meal and Epsom salt to store-bought dirt. Some of the gourd seeds used are purchased from India, and rodent traps guard the vegetables from hungry intruders. Khan mostly gets help from his son and a neighbor he recently met, Demetrius McCordian.

While farming is simply a hobby for Khan, McCordian believes Khan is doing important work that the community could get involved with. "For me, it kind of goes back to the roots of the Bronx as kind of a farming environment," McCordian said. "But even more so in neighborhoods like this, that are essentially a food desert and have very limited healthy food options, creating your own produce and being able to consume it is important."



Photo by Christy Rae Ammons

VICTOR KHAN'S CORNUCOPIA of crops (pictured) include tomato, gourd, potato and jasmine.

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Outrage in Edenwald Sparks Plan To Reveal Shelter Addresses

By DAVID CRUZ

Following acrimony by residents over the sudden boom in homeless men roaming the streets of the Wakefield and Edenwald sections of the Bronx, Comptroller Scott Stringer plans to share the locations of shelters that have quietly opened across the neighborhood.

Stringer, a critic of the mayor's handling of the homelessness crisis that's swept the city, promised residents that an investigation will be launched. He distinguished an investigation with an audit, which the latter can take a year and a half to complete.

"[Y]ou don't want that," Stringer told an audience at a town hall event his office hosted on July 24.

Councilman Andy King, representing the suburbanized neighborhoods, told Stringer that requesting addresses of newly opened shelters from the city Department of Homeless Services (DHS) yields no results. "When I ask, I can't get an address," said King.

The request was made shortly after Carolina James, an Edenwald resident, outlined her experience in noticing a larger homeless population settle around her area of East 216th Street and Willet Avenue near Regent High School.

"It's like taking, say, two big air balloons, putting a whole bunch of people in it and all of a sudden, this year, in just a few months, you see homeless people all over the place. All over," said James, drawing support from the audience.

Stringer initially answered the question without directly responding to it, blaming "siloed" city agencies like DHS and the city Department for Housing Preservation and Development for working exclusively of each other.

"The city has purposely come in and put them in our neighborhood," said James, referring to the homeless.

There are 379 buildings that are deemed shelters across the Bronx, though it's unclear how many are located in the Edenwald/Wakefield sections of the Bronx. DHS usually tells the community, through its community board and elected representatives, that a traditional shelter is coming one month before it officially opens.

The Comptroller's Office, deemed the city's chief accountant when it comes to the procurement of services, registers nonprofits contracted by the city to perform services. That often includes those nonprofits that operate homeless shelters. In most cases, nonprofits include the shelter address expected to open in the community. Confidentiality laws exempt domestic violence shelters from having their addresses revealed.

But the Comptroller's Office has found that even when a contract comes before registration, the shelter is already operating "a year or two before it comes to us for registration" as Deputy Comptroller Lisa Flores explained, creating a misaligned process.

"The Comptroller's given us a charge in holding DHS accountable for the safety of those shelters before we register them and there are many, many contracts for DHS that do not get registered until we have enough documentation," said Flores.

Stringer suggested forming a working group to get a sense of where possible shelters can be found. "[S]neaking around a community builds distrust, hurts the people who are struggling and doesn't do justice for hard working community people who also want to feel safe in the community," said Stringer.



Photo by David Cruz

COMPTROLLER SCOTT STRINGER, at podium, at a town hall he hosted on July 24 in Edenwald, takes questions from the audience.

Summer Ushers Open Fire Hydrants and Warnings

By JOSÉ A. GIRALT

Growing up in the South Bronx, Rafael Cartagena of Bedford Park has vivid memories of cooling off with an open fire hydrant in the 1970s. "Do you know what happened when we'd step in front of one of those fire hydrants? We'd go flying into the middle of the street," said Cartagena.

Today, even when kids aren't playing in the streets, some fire hydrants are left open to the detriment of Bronxites. Recently, Ken Small, a longtime Norwood resident, felt the effects of a fire hydrant running all night from July 4 to 5. "We had no water in our homes or apartments because of insufficient pressure," said Small. The next day he took water from the hydrant to bathe.

City officials are aware of the problems created by open fire hydrants and, as has been the case before, made the public aware of better options.

On July 16, New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Commissioner Vincent Sapienza and FDNY Commissioner Daniel Nigro announced a joint effort to reduce wasteful water practices, including illegally opening fire hydrants.

In a statement released to the public, Nigro welcomed the opportunity to work with the DEP "to educate New Yorkers about the risks associated with illegally opened fire hydrants." Of special concern to FDNY is the decrease of water pressure firefighters face when responding to a fire. An uncapped fire hydrant can release up to one million gallons in a 24-hour cycle.

People caught illegally opening a fire hydrant can face a fine of up to \$1,000 or go to jail for up to 30 days.

The practice of cooling off with an open fire hydrant dates back to the heat wave of 1896.



Photo by José A. Giralt

AFTER RESPONDING TO a fire at 222 E. 202nd St. in the Bedford Park section of the Bronx on July 20, a firefighter closes a fire hydrant. The fire was contained to a living room and no injuries were reported.

Before becoming President, Police Commissioner Teddy Roosevelt authorized New Yorkers to open fire hydrants as a way to cool off before air conditioning or refrigeration was available.

Fire hydrants still remain a popular way to stay cool, despite pleas from NYC officials. But now, the FDNY promotes a more environmentally safe way to cool off. Any adult can request a free sprinkler cap from their local firehouse and get it installed at their fire hydrant. The cap will reduce the amount water released from 1,000 gallons per minute to 25 gallons per minute.

A properly installed sprinkler cap reduces the dangers of allowing fire hydrants to run full blast. Cartagena remembers tenants complaining about low water pressure when the hydrants were open. "But it wasn't just about water pressure in the building," Carta-

gena said. "There was also a real concern about buildings burning down because there wouldn't be enough water to fight fires."

Open fire hydrants aren't just a problem from past decades though. A review of 311 calls by the *Norwood News* for the zip codes 10458, 10467, 10468, and 10470, found that complaints to 311 about open uncapped fire hydrants has increased by nearly 25 percent in 2018 over a similar period last year.

As he's traveled through the Bronx, Small has seen open fire hydrants in neighborhoods beyond Norwood like University Heights, Fordham-Tremont, and Mount Hope.

"It is sad that some residents of these communities don't value water," Small said. "We have people among us who treat it like it has no importance."

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Mental Health Mural Debuts in Mt. Hope



Photo courtesy New York City Health Department

THIS MURAL DUBBED "Our Everyday Heroes: Using Our Hidden Strengths to Overcome Adversity, Combat Mental Health Stigma and Help Our World," found at the 176th Street corridor between Jerome and Davidson avenues, debuted this summer as part of the city Health Department's awareness campaign for mental health. The mural was created by local muralist Jon Souza who said the mural "is the result of a lot of hard work, dedication, and creativity."



Drinking in the Summer: When Is a Drink a Drink?

By **PAULETTE GIAMBALVO, MPH, CHES**

During the summer, many adult Bronxites may find themselves drinking more fluids, including adult beverages ranging from beer to specialty drinks at restaurants or at home.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) notes certain groups should not drink at all, including those under the legal drinking age of 21, women who are or may become pregnant, people who are driving, planning to drive, or are participating in other activities requiring skill, coordination, and alertness. Also, people taking certain prescription or over-the-counter medications that can interact with alcohol, people with certain medical conditions and people who are recovering from alcoholism or who are unable to control the amount they drink need to avoid consuming alcohol.

For those who drink alcohol and are of legal drinking age, the *2015–2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans* notes that drinking should always be done in moderation, meaning up to one drink per day for women and up to two drinks per day for men. But what is a drink according to the guidelines?

When referencing a drink, there is a standard based on how much pure alcohol is included and how quickly it is processed by the body. The standard size of each type of alcoholic beverage changes depending on the proof or volume. Gen-

erally:

The standard drink for a beer is 12 ounces, or a regular sized can

The standard drink of hard liquor is 1.5 ounces, or a typical shot glass

The standard drink of wine is 5 ounces, or one-half of a small cup of coffee

Since craft beers and non-traditional wines could have higher percentages of alcohol, smaller-sized beverages can also vary greatly on their number of standard drinks. For example, a traditional mojito with 4.5 ounces of hard liquor has three standard drinks, a Long Island Iced Tea can have up to five standard drinks or 7.5 ounces of alcohol, and illegal drinks sold throughout the summer, like a Nutcracker, can have unknown amounts of pure alcohol. When counting drinks, monitoring standard drinks and not beverages can help a person stay within the guidelines, and avoid excessive drinking over the long summer.

Excessive alcohol use is a known problem in the United States and the third leading preventable cause of death. If you or someone you know has a drinking problem, consult with your personal health care provider or call 311 or the National Drug and Alcohol Treatment Referral Routing Service at (800) 662-HELP.

To learn more, visit the CDC website at: <https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/index.htm>.



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Weiler ED Unveils Expansion Plan



Photo courtesy Montefiore Health System

REPRESENTATIVES FROM JACK D. Weiler Hospital of the Albert Einstein College of Medicine Emergency Room presented their plans to expand the emergency room before community members at a meeting on July 24. The ER's square footage for its red, blue and yellow zones will increase from 11,364 square feet to 27,313 square feet, an 82 percent increase from its original space. New X-ray, CT scanners and more ultrasound and OB-GYN rooms are expected.

At NYCHA's Bailey Houses, Quality of Life Impacts Mental Health

By DAVID CRUZ

Though Tiesha Jones comes from a tight-knit family, hosting a holiday gathering with her extended family remains out of the question. Living for the past four years in Bailey Houses, a decrepit complex that's home to some 900 tenants, Jones is embarrassed over her living quarters.

From the first floor up to its last, a list of fixes is required at the 20-story property overlooking the Major Deegan Expressway. A faulty plumbing system, sloppy patchwork and caved-in ceilings characterize Bailey Houses, a property belonging to the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) that was built in 1972. Enduring years of disrepair, moreover, is causing undue stress to some residents.

Jones faced the same problem while living at Fort Independence Houses, Bailey Houses' sister property. There, a doctor diagnosed her as having clinical depression partly caused by conditions in her apartment she described as "horrifying," including a bathtub that only ran cold water. Jones was forced to warm pots of water on the stove and transport them to the bathtub for her kids to bathe in. She ultimately sought a social worker for some talk therapy and avoided taking medications.

For Jones, who serves as president of the building's Residents Council, it's clear that conditions are also threatening the mental health of her fellow tenants at Bailey Houses. Speaking to the *Norwood News* from her living room, where a large chalky patch of repaired drywall contrasts sharply with her navy blue wall, Jones describes how poor housing affects mental health.

"You come in your home – you got toilet stoppages, leaks, and so forth, your elevator not working – and it makes you depressed, especially when you have tickets that are put in and you have to wait such a long time to get repairs done. It takes a toll on you, especially mentally," said Jones, referencing the NYCHA repair tickets tenants must submit to have repairs made in their apartment. Repairs can take months.

While at Fort Independence, Jones spoke to a talk therapist to manage her depression. These days, Jones manages her depression by fighting for tenants.

Helene "Jake" Wilson, vice president of the Residents Council, feels the same way. In her case, she was forced

out of her 10th-floor apartment after a steam pipe exploded in 2016, destroying virtually everything inside. For six months Wilson lived with her son while repairs were made, only after she repeatedly complained and pushed for them to be undertaken.

"I was living in here with mold and mildew and my apartment was 102 degrees. I lost 15 pounds in here," said Wilson.

'It needs to be spoken about'

Depression had slowly set in.

"I thought I was going to have a nervous breakdown," said Wilson. "I had to take a leave of absence from my position [as Residents Council vice president] so that I can focus on what I needed to focus on."

Her waves of depression, and that of other tenants, underscore the costs of poorly maintained public housing for some of the city's most vulnerable. Conditions like asthma and lead poisoning may be widely recognized as affecting NYCHA residents, but mental health issues also loom large.

"Mental illness is becoming a main factor for residents in public housing," said Jones. "And it needs to be spoken about."

At Fort Independence Houses, Jones worried a lot for the safety of her kids given the ongoing conditions. For Jones, the children should have been worried about their upcoming test they prepared to take. "I'm surprised they passed," she said.

Substandard housing impacts children the greatest, according to a study by How Housing Matters, a housing advocacy group whose 2013 study of poor housing conditions and its impact on children was funded by the MacArthur Foundation. The study surveyed 2,400 low-income children, teens and young adults between the ages of 2 and 21 living in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty in Boston, Chicago, and San Antonio.

"Children exposed to homes with leaking roofs, broken windows, rodents, nonfunctioning heaters or stoves, peeling paint, exposed wiring, or unsafe or unclean environments experienced greater emotional and behavioral problems," states the report's executive summary. "Housing quality also was related to school performance for older children, with adolescents in poorer quality homes showing lower reading and math skills in standardized achievement tests."



Photo by David Cruz

TIESHA JONES AND her daughter, Dakota Taylor, in their apartment at Bailey Houses.

A 2016 study of five NYCHA developments in East Harlem by New York University NYU Langone Department of Population Health found 27 percent of the total 1,123 participating tenants rate their mental health as fair or poor. In the summary brief, researchers at NYU deemed the mental health finding a "critical concern for this community," blaming already existing poor health and economic stressors for it. Though no question was asked explicitly about the condition of the respondent's apartment and its relationship to mental health, Lorna Thorpe, PhD, MPH, lead researcher for the study, said: "It makes very plausible sense that it's a contributor."

Social workers

NYCHA employs 13 social workers who largely serve as a liaison for full service mental health clinics through direct referral and outreach. In the Bronx, there are three social workers, including a supervisor, assigned to monitor the network of 574 buildings.

In certain circumstances, social workers step in during psychiatric emergencies, traumatic incidents, domestic violence, child abuse/neglect and elder abuse.

With so few social workers on staff, their job often involves providing referrals, or referring residents to a NYCHA-operated social services cen-

ter. One center is available in the Morris Park/Pelham Bay section of the Bronx, roughly an hour bus ride from Bailey Houses.

While Jones has heard of the service, she and the tenants she knows in the building haven't utilized it. Wilson said this was the first time she's heard about it.

"They never brought [the social workers] here," said Wilson. "There's a lot of people who can use one."

In addition to employing the 13 social workers, the beleaguered agency trains other staffers to understand and manage mentally ill tenants through one-day trainings sponsored by ThriveNYC, the city's initiative to add greater understanding and compassion to the mentally ill. NYCHA staffers are trained to recognize the signs of anxiety and depression. Dr. Gary Belkin, executive deputy commissioner of mental hygiene for the city, told *Gotham Gazette* that "people residing in NYCHA housing or rental assisted housing, or either, are two to three times more likely to have what we call 'serious psychological distress.'"

In a statement, Michael Giardina, a spokesman for NYCHA, said the agency offers "youth, senior and social services to support household stability and empower all NYCHA residents with the services they need."

Giardina added, "We strive to provide all NYCHA families with safe, clean and connected communities."

Julie Cuevas, a 30-year tenant who works as a school bus matron, has battled bouts of depression on her own. An enormous hole inside her closet has yet to be patched up, and there has been no remediation of the mold growing in one of her closets. Her bedroom still awaits the paint job she requested in April. She may not see it until September. Outside her apartment, flickering lights need replacement. Waiting worsens her mood, a mix of frustration and sadness.

"You shouldn't have to feel stressed or depressed or feel in a bad mood when coming into your home," Cuevas, 37, said. "You should actually feel happy when you come into where you live."

This article was written as part of the 2018 Health Reporting Fellowship of the Center for Community and Ethnic Media at the Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism at CUNY and funded by a grant from News Corp.

Out & About

Compiled by JUDY NOY

EDITOR'S PICK

National Nights Out

The public is invited to the following National Nights Out Against Crime held by local police precincts on Aug. 7 as follows:

52nd - At Poe Park, Grand Concourse and Kingsbridge Road from 5 to 8 p.m. Events include Bingo, face makeovers, raffles, pony rides, games, face painting, food, and drinks.

47th - At Grenada Place between Ely and Laconia avenues (across the street from the 47th Precinct), from 4 to 8 p.m. Events include games, music, rides, ices, and entertainment.

Onstage

Bronx Library Center, 310 E. Kingsbridge Rd., presents **Concert: Songs Sinatra Sang:** featuring singer and musicians, Aug. 25 at 2:30 p.m. For more information, call (718) 579-4244/46/57 or visit www.nypl.org.

Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr. presents free **Bronx Summer Concert Series**, Sundays through Sept. 2, 1 to 5 p.m. on Orchard Beach's main stage at Section 9. Music includes salsa, calypso, reggae, bachata, merengue, R&B, and pop. For more information, call (718) 590-3500.

Events

Williamsbridge Oval presents the following events for ages 6 to 13: **Art in the Park classes**, Wednesdays in August from 4 to 6 p.m., in front of the recreation center; and **free sports**, daily through Aug. 30. For more information, call (718) 534-8672 or visit nyc.gov/parks or email sara.bishow@parks.nyc.gov.

Bronx South Division of Child Protection holds **Back-to-School Fair**, Aug. 3 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Poe Park, Grand Concourse and East 192nd Street. For more information, contact sharaon.reed@acs.nyc.gov.

NYC My Brother's Keeper initiative holds **Back-to-School Health and Literacy Community Fair**, Aug. 25 from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., at M.S. 45, 2502

Lorillard Place. For more information, call (718) 590-6012.

Bronx Museum of the Arts presents **Boogie on the Boulevard**, Grand Concourse from East 161st to East 170th streets, Aug. 26 from noon to 4 p.m. For more information, visit <http://www.bronxmuseum.org>.

COVE Youth Producers and Fashion Designers presents **Dream!**, Aug. 17 from 7 to 9 p.m. at Metropolitan College, 149th Street and Third Avenue. Donations welcome. For more information, call (718) 405-1312.

Montefiore Medical Center WIC Program presents **Breastfeeding Health Fair**, Aug. 21 from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Owen F. Dolan Park, 2551 Westchester Ave. Information and resources include breastfeeding support and information, food stamps, child care, and nutrition education. For more information, call (718) 829-4401.

Housing and Health Clinic with Catholic Charities present **Health Fair**, Aug. 11 from 1 to 5 p.m. at Bay Eden Community Center, 1220 E. 229th St. Events include health screenings, Zumba, nutrition workshop, landlord and tenant rights, raffles, legal services, free karate class (2 to 2:30 p.m./kids; 3 to 3:30 p.m./adults). RSVP by Aug. 10. For more information, call (718) 547-8854 or (917) 946-3542.

Bethel Hamliri Inc. presents free **Health Fair 2nd Edition**, Aug. 12 from noon to 7 p.m. at Crotona Park. Events include

National Diabetes Prevention Program, blood pressure, blood glucose testing, refreshments, Zumba class, and more.

The New York Botanical Garden's **Farmers Market** is scheduled to be held Wednesdays through Oct. 31 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., just inside the Mosholu entrance and across the street from the Botanical Garden station of the Metro North commuter railroad. Also scheduled is **Aloha Night**, Aug. 4 and 18 from 6:30 to 10:30 p.m., featuring interactive hula lessons, cocktails and Hawaiian fare available for purchase (ages 21 and over: \$38/non members; \$28/ members; ages 2 to 12: \$18/non members; \$13/ members). For more information, call (718) 817-8700.

Wave Hill, a Bronx oasis at 675 W. 252nd St. in Riverdale, offers **Family Art Projects:** On Storytelling and the Land, includes storytelling and WH history, Aug. 4 and 5; Be a Bee, includes wings, antennae, a pollen cup and a kazoo (join parade at 12:30 p.m. and do a bee dance), Aug. 11 and 12; Fishy Fun, to make 3-D fish to swim through the air, Aug. 18 and 19; and Delicate Dragonfly Wings, to study the insects, then make wings, Aug. 25 and 26. all in the WH House from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Also scheduled are **Honey Weekend:** Aug. 11 and 12 - Learn about bees, hives, honey, and candle-making, including a variety of activities 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.; and **Sunset Wednesdays: Live Music on the Great Lawn at 7 p.m.:** Aug. 8 - Aurora & Zon del Barrio, featuring Afro-Boricua, salsa, merengue, bomba and boogalu (rain location for both: indoors). Grounds admission is free until noon Tuesdays and Saturdays all year. For more information and a schedule of events including tours and walks, call (718) 549-3200.

Library Events

Bronx Library Center, 310 E. Kingsbridge Rd., presents for children ages 5 to 12: **Maker Monday at 2 p.m.:** Creative Pencils, Aug. 6; Pencil Holder, Aug. 11; Bookmarks, Aug. 20; and Locker Picture Frames, Aug. 27; and **The Life of Mozart (Summer Reading Celebration):** Play about Mozart including music, Aug. 25 at 2 p.m. Adults can enjoy: **Computer Basics:** Aug. 14 at 2 p.m.; and **films at 2:30 p.m.:** "Dunkirk," Aug. 4; "Kong: Skull Island," Aug. 11; and "Black Panther," Aug. 18. For more information,

call (718) 579-4244/46/57 or visit www.nypl.org.

Mosholu Library, 285 E. 205th St., offers for children to age 10: **Summer Dance Party (Summer Reading Celebration):** includes puppets and Hawaiian leis (supplied), Aug. 14 at 2 p.m. Teens/young adults can enjoy **films at 1:30 p.m.:** "A Wrinkle in Time," Aug. 11; and "Peter Rabbit," Aug. 25. Adults can attend **Knitting Circle:** Thursdays at 3 p.m. For more information, call (718) 882-8239.

Jerome Park Library, 118 Eames Place (near Kingsbridge Road, offers for children ages 3 to 12: **Face and Hand Painting (Summer Reading Celebration):** All supplies provided, Aug. 15 at 3 p.m. Adults can attend: **Computer Basics at noon:** Aug. 2, 9, 16, 23, 28 and 30. The entire family can enjoy **film:** "The Labyrinth," Aug. 18 at 2 p.m. For more information, call (718) 549-5200.

Public Service Announcement

The *Norwood News* begins its traditional summer hiatus with this issue and will resume publication on Aug. 30. We wish all our readers a happy and healthy summer.

NOTE: Items for consideration may be mailed to our office or sent to norwoodnews@norwoodnews.org, and should be received by Aug. 20 for the next publication date of Aug. 30.

Bronx Night Market Showcases Bronx Fare



Photo by José A. Giralt

A CHEF FROM Beatstro Restaurant & Lounge in Mott Haven cooks a batch of so-called Summer Shrimp Dirty Rice at the Bronx Night Market in Fordham Plaza on July 28. The Bronx Night Plaza showcases food, culture, and entertainment mostly from the Bronx. The festival is held on the last Saturday of every month from June through October. The next one is expected to take place on Aug. 25 from 4 to 10 p.m.

Stringer Calls for Changes to Security Deposit Payments

By DAVID CRUZ

City Comptroller Scott M. Stringer is proposing new ways for New Yorkers to pay for security deposits because of the alarming number of issues specifically faced by low-income tenants.

A report released by Stringer's office shows that in the Bronx, tenants are paying on average more than 10 percent of their annual income to secure an apartment. In Melrose, Longwood, and Hunts Point, tenants are paying 15.8 percent of their annual income, and in Claremont-Bathgate they pay 25 percent.

"Every day, New Yorkers are working harder and saving less – and right now, huge proportions of their annual incomes are being held hostage in security deposits. These may just be considered the costs of being a renter in New York, but it's not right and it's not necessary," Stringer said in a statement. "For too long, the deck has been stacked against New York's working-class renters but we're taking a step forward to reimagine how the housing system works in our City."

As New York City becomes increasingly more unaffordable, homelessness spikes, and the city wants to avoid that additional cost. By making improve-



File photo

COMPTROLLER SCOTT STRINGER (pictured left).

ments to housing regulations and keeping people in their homes, the City hopes to save money.

Some recommendations by Stringer—including a cap on security deposits, preventing landlords from charging more than one month's rent on a one-year lease—would have to go through the State Legislature, which regulates the housing market.

Stringer also wants to make it easier for tenants without large savings to afford the cost of moving by allowing se-

curity deposits, pet deposits and move-in fees to be paid in installments instead of up-front. Rather than being forced to put out thousands of dollars upon moving in, tenants would be able to pay off their security deposits over a period of months. Of course, tenants could opt to pay the entire cost up-front.

As an alternative to paying a security deposit, Stringer suggests tenants take advantage of new startup companies to pay the entire deposit. Renters would be able to pay a smaller monthly or one-

time fee for the company to insure the property from damages. These startups have virtually no requirements, such as a credit score. However, renters would not get the money back afterwards even if there was no damage to the apartment. Despite being unable to receive the payments back, Stringer thinks using an insurance alternative would prevent tenants from having to pay steep deposits when first moving in, helping low-income renters from depleting their savings.

With money extremely tight for low-income renters, and stories of landlords not returning security deposits, Stringer proposes the money instead be held by a third-party.

The initiatives Stringer is calling for are supported by David R. Jones, CEO/President of the Community Service Society, an anti-poverty group. According to their annual survey, two out of every three low-income households claim they are unable to afford moving within their borough.

"[S]o a hefty security deposit could leave them with nothing to fall back on if a medical emergency or another crisis hits, and more at risk of rent arrears, eviction and homelessness," Jones said.

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Free Air Conditioner

Free air conditioners are available to Bronx residents who either receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, Temporary Assistance (TA), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and did not receive an air conditioner by the Home Energy Assistance Program. Income-eligibility requirements also apply. For more information, call (212) 331-3126, or visit the Department of Human Resources Administration at 1932 Arthur Ave., Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Free Legal Help

Councilman Andy King hosts a mobile van offering free civil legal services on Saturday, Aug. 4, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. outside the Evander Childs H.S. football field, 800 E. Gun Hill Rd. Legal assistance will include domestic violence/family law, orders of protection, divorces, custody/visitation, child support, and immigration. For more information and required appointment, call King's office at (718) 684-5509.

Commercial Lease Help

Northwest Bronx Community & Clergy Coalition offers free legal help to small businesses in negotiating commercial leases with their landlords. Businesses have to be in New York City, must be non-franchise, have a household income below 500 percent of the federal poverty guideline, and have a new or renewal lease. For more information, contact Evy Viruet at (718) 584-0515 ext. 100.

Rent Freeze Programs

University Neighborhood Housing Program offers assistance in

applying for a rent freeze through the state SCRIE/DRIE programs. Eligible applicants must be at least 62 years old, have someone in their house at least 62 years old, or disabled (receiving SSI/SSD benefits). Sessions are available Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Refuge House, 2715 Bainbridge Ave. (corner of East 196th Street). For more information and to RSVP, call (718) 933-2539.

Free Prep for H.S. Equivalency

SUNY Bronx Educational Opportunity Center, 1666 Bathgate Ave., offers tuition-free programs for ages 18 and over preparing for the high school equivalency exam, including instruction in writing, grammar, math, science, and social studies. In-person registration is on Mondays and Wednesdays at 8:30 a.m. with required documents. For more information on required documents, call (718) 530-7000 or visit bronxeoc.org/register.

Free Tenant Help

The city's Tenant Support Unit will hold two free workshops from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., for tenants at risk of displacement or experiencing harassment, Aug. 2 at 2175 Jerome Ave. in the office of Assembly Member Victor M. Pichardo; and Aug. 2 and 16 at 910 Grand Concourse in the office of Assembly Member Latoya Joyner. The city's Rent Freeze Team will hold a free workshop at the office of Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr. at 851 Grand Concourse, room 915 to help with any rent freeze assistance. For more information on these services, call 311 or go to nyc.gov/tenantsupportunit and nyc.gov/rentfreeze.

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GETTING PRIMED FOR

(continued from page 1)

posed of Democratic voters, the winner of the Democratic primary usually goes on to win the November General Election.

But not all political intrigue has been chronicled in a blow-by-blow spectacle. The *Norwood News* brings you two races and one inside-baseball political play that have an impact on the north-west Bronx.

Fernandez: The Unopposed Candidate

On a recently humid and cloudy morning, clusters of community leaders shared remarks on the newly-minted Whalen Park in Norwood. Among them, Assemblywoman Nathalia Fernandez who briefly relayed the thrill in seeing it open to the neighborhood.

“I really can’t be more happy that this park is how it is,” she said. “I’m shocked.”

As an elected official, ceremonial ribbon-cuttings are par for the course. For Fernandez, a Democrat, it also functions as a campaign stop.

Fernandez, technically the interim Assemblywoman for the 80th Assembly District, is running unopposed. The district covers parts of Norwood, Allerton, Pelham Gardens, and Morris Park. In an April special election, Fernandez won the seat vacated by current city Councilman Mark Gjonaj, her former boss. Gjonaj, along with Governor Andrew Cuomo, also her former boss via her stint as Bronx Regional Representative, endorsed Fernandez for the seat.

Fernandez won over four percent of the district’s eligible Democratic vote in the special election, 1,500 more votes than her Republican challenger, Gene DeFrancis, who managed to secure more than six percent of his party’s vote.

In a predominately blue district, Fernandez, 30, has no Democratic primary opponent, and is poised to secure her seat come November.

“Even though I’m running unopposed, I’m trying to be out in the community every single day,” Fernandez told the *Norwood News* from the McDonald’s on East 204th Street and Perry Avenue.

The ribbon-cutting ceremony to anoint Norwood’s revamped Whalen Park was one of the many community events Fernandez believes was impor-



Photo by Jose A. Giralt

COUNCILMAN ANDREW COHEN and Assemblywoman Nathalia Fernandez appear at a ribbon-cutting ceremony for Whalen Park in Norwood on July 24.

tant for her to attend. “I’m visible. I’m letting the community know that I’m here,” she said. The prior week, Fernandez attended the unveiling of the “Norwood Column,” a public art installation on East Mosholu Parkway and Grand Concourse.

Although just three months into her tenure as an Assembly member, Fernandez knows her way around the block, having attended numerous community meetings and helping out at events sponsored by Gjonaj.

“The only new part to me,” Fernandez said, referring to her nascent role as Assemblywoman, is “the legislative process and how much communication is needed on your part. But, I caught on quick.”

In June, she introduced her first piece of legislation: a bill to disclose the mental health records of incarcerated individuals to the state’s Commission of Correction. “Mental health,” Fernandez said, “that’s definitely a growing crisis in society.” She added, “My intention is to bring to light the issues and bring solutions as best I can.”

Along with addressing what she views as a mental health epidemic, Fernandez said she’s also committed to improving the educational opportunities for people in her district, noting some schools utilize trailers to work as classrooms.

“I’m really trying to fight for fund-

ing, getting these trailers removed,” she said, “being more in tune with my superintendents and principals.”

While not specifying which schools in her district utilize trailers, Fernandez said they’re not a viable fix for overcrowding. “This is unacceptable by our city’s education system,” she said. “Attempting to teach children in a trailer is harmful to the students’ education experience.”

It’s unclear what she plans to replace the trailers with, but Fernandez intends to work with school officials to address the issue.

Fernandez is part of a new generation of Latina women reshaping New York’s political scene, like newly-elected Queens Assemblywoman Ari Espinal and Queens-Bronx Democratic candidate for Congress, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. And she believes more women in politics means more work gets done.

“Speaking bias-ly as a woman, I think we work incredibly hard,” Fernandez said. “Should the field be more female? I think it can only lead to more productivity.”

Judge Andrew Cohen?

For more than four years, Councilman Andrew Cohen has represented Norwood at the ready, overseeing a robust constituent services department, regularly appearing at community meetings across the 11th Council Dis-

trict, and carrying himself wholesome and scandal-free.

But despite his popularity among constituents, political rumblings originating in Riverdale indicate Cohen is considering a judgeship nomination that’s guaranteed, triggering a vacancy, according to several sources who spoke to the *Norwood News*.

Cohen, a Democrat in his second term, was upfront about the rumors, telling the *Norwood News* he is mulling over the prospect of serving on the bench. “If it comes this year, I’m going to be ready; if it comes next year that would be good,” Cohen said. “I’d be thrilled to serve in that capacity.”

Cohen is a trained attorney, having served as a clerk for Bronx Supreme Court Judge Edgar Walker before being elected councilman in 2013, succeeding his predecessor, Oliver Koppell.

It’s unclear what prompted Cohen to consider leaving office. A total of nine vacancies for court judge across the system—three Bronx Civil Court judgeships and six Supreme Court judgeships—are on the ballot for the September primary, increasing Cohen’s chances of obtaining a seat.

Winding the gears would be the Bronx Democratic Party, which will likely nominate Cohen to a judgeship through the Bronx judicial convention, where Bronx delegates nominate office seekers to fill vacancies for Bronx court judges, according to several political observers across the Bronx who asked not to be named. The Bronx Democratic Party can convene a judicial convention between Sept. 18 and 24 this year.

It’s a strategy the party took when securing a judgeship for former Bronx District Attorney Robert Johnson, who resigned after his primary win in 2015 to become a Bronx Supreme Court judge. Johnson was appointed judge by the judicial convention. The empty district attorney slot was filled by Darcel Clark, a move largely criticized by good government groups at the time for its underhanded orchestration.

Assemblyman Marcos Crespo, who doubles as the Bronx Democratic Party chair, was unavailable for comment.

Should Cohen relinquish his seat, Mayor Bill de Blasio would have to call a special election shortly afterward. The 11th Council District covers Norwood, Bedford Park, Kingsbridge, Riverdale,

THE BRONX PRIMARY

Van Cortlandt Village, Woodlawn, and Fieldston.

This would speed up plans for at least one challenger who already filed papers to run for Cohen's seat in 2021, Dan Padernacht. Padernacht, an attorney who once served as chair of Community Board 8, has deep ties to the Riverdale community, a stronghold for the 11th Council District. In 2010, he ran against former State Senator Pedro Espada of the 33rd Senate District, but withdrew from the race "for the good of the Democratic party." Gustavo Rivera ultimately won the seat.

"For me, running for City Council is an opportunity to expand my role in public service and to take the next step in public service," Padernacht said in a recent telephone interview with the *Norwood News*. "For 10 years I've been a member of Community Board 8 and I've had an opportunity to get engaged in dozens—more than dozens—of local issues where we've been able to inform the community and help the community."

Much of the pressing issues Padernacht would address as councilman would be the preservation of affordable housing and decreasing overcrowding in schools. His Norwood connection is limited to personal experience, having friends who grew up in the neighborhood. Padernacht intends to door knock in the neighborhood.

But Padernacht is not the Bronx Democratic Party's main choice, according to sources. For years, speculation has abounded that Eric Dinowitz, son of longtime Assemblyman Jeff Dinowitz and Cohen's closest political ally, was positioning for the seat. Eric, a special education teacher at Walton High School and district leader in the 81st Assembly District who's been groomed for public office, told the *Norwood News* he has formed a campaign committee to "be prepared for when Andy Cohen steps down."

"Running for public office is something I want to do," said Eric in a telephone interview. Eric said he's been encouraged to run by community residents.

Assemblyman Dinowitz's seat in the 81st Assembly District overlaps with the 11th Council District.

The winner of the seat could theoretically be in office for at least a de-



Photos courtesy Padernacht Law and Ben Franklin Reform Democratic Club

POTENTIAL CANDIDATES IN a possible 11th Council District race include attorney Dan Padernacht (l) and public school teacher and 81st Assembly District Leader Eric Dinowitz (r).

cade, finishing out Cohen's term and later completing two consecutive terms should they win election and re-election.

Political machinations aside, Padernacht intends to give it all he's got in vying for the seat. "I'll be at subway stations, I'll be at bus stops introducing myself to many residents in our area," he said.

Klein v. Biaggi

A sliver of Bedford Park serves as the lynchpin to the 34th Senate District, where newcomer Alessandra Biaggi has mounted a challenge against incumbent and longtime legislator, state Senator Jeff Klein.

Though the neighborhood tethers the east and west portions of the district, it's certainly not its battleground. That distinction belongs to Morris Park and Throggs Neck, strongholds that comprise a Democratic, though socially conservative, voting bloc.

For Biaggi, a progressive Democrat, being a registered Democrat isn't enough. Espousing its principles into law is better. She's used that premise to criticize Klein, who served as leader of the Independent Democratic Conference (IDC), which dismantled in April. Biaggi, along with numerous critics, has blasted the eight-member IDC over the years, claiming it only enabled Republicans to block certain Democratically-led initiatives. The IDC has caucused solely with Republicans on legislative matters, drawing ire from progressive

Democrats.

"[Klein's] blocked progress in the state Senate for his own personal benefit," said Biaggi in a telephone interview with the *Norwood News*. "He's demonstrated through his voting record and through his lack of prioritizing bills that come to the floor, despite having the power to do it, that he doesn't really care about that type of progress."

Klein, in a separate interview with the *Norwood News*, countered Biaggi's claims that he isn't a 'true blue' Democrat.

"How someone should be judged whether or not they're a good Democrat is whether they can deliver real Democratic priorities," said Klein. Describing what being a Democrat means to him, Klein explained, "Well, I guess to pass important, progressive legislation. Not just stand on the sidelines and make grand promises."

Emphasizing his record of passing and supporting progressive legislation, Klein referred to his sponsoring of bills related to paid family leave, universal pre-K, the banning of assault rifles in New York State, and his work to secure the state's \$15 minimum wage plan.

"I think these are core legislative achievements," Klein said. "And by the way, these are core progressive achievements."

But Biaggi, who served as an attorney in Governor Andrew Cuomo's Counsel's Office, has criticized Klein for not pushing for the Reproductive Health Act, which would officially sty-

mie any future U.S. Supreme Court ruling that would override *Roe v. Wade*. Last month, Cuomo called on the state Senate to reconvene and vote to protect women's reproductive rights.

Championing reproductive rights stands as one of 13 issues Biaggi highlights on her campaign website. She has also called for the repeal of the Urstadt Law, which allows state control over the city's rent laws.

Klein has held his current position as state senator since 2004. In 2016, he was re-elected to the Senate with over 90 percent of the vote. He began his career in public office as an elected official covering Norwood in the 80th Assembly District.

Klein currently represents a Senate district that stretches across the Bronx from Riverdale to Hunt's Point, and reaches north to Pelham in Westchester County, where Biaggi was raised. Biaggi's grandfather was 10-term Bronx Congressman Mario Biaggi, who represented Bedford Park.

"Public service is something I grew up with in my blood," Biaggi said. "It was just a very important part of the fabric of my identity. I also knew that it is one of the best vehicles to transform people's lives in a very positive way."

Klein and Biaggi have lifelong ties to the 34th Senate District, a key talking point for both candidates. Presence and borough authenticity was indeed a theme that played in the race between Congressman Joe Crowley and primary challenger Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. Crowley's loss was largely blamed on his absence around his district, which covers the Bronx and Queens.

Political observers have drawn parallels to the Biaggi/Klein and Ocasio-Cortez/Crowley race, but Biaggi sees little similarities. "The one similarity [Ocasio-Cortez and I] have is that we are young women who are running against entrenched, incumbent men," Biaggi said. "But, we are running in incredibly different races."

And unlike Crowley, Klein remains omnipresent, attending a variety of neighborhood events and regularly appearing at civic meetings, a trait Biaggi says she'll adopt if elected. "I'm from the Bronx," Klein said. "Born and raised, educated in Bronx public schools. And I am in touch with every portion of my district."

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