Locked Out of Schools, Religious Groups Seek Alternatives  
By JEANMARIE Evelly

An ongoing tug of war over a city policy banning worship in public school buildings during non-school hours caused confusion this weekend, sending many churches that rent space from local schools scrambling to find sites to hold their Sunday services.

The ban, which went into effect Sunday, Feb. 12, following a federal court’s decision last spring that the Department of Education could legally evict the religious groups on the grounds of separation of church and state, was put on hold last week after a federal judge issued a temporary restraining order.

So while Bronx Household of Faith, the University Heights parish that has been waging a lawsuit against the city for 17 years for the right to keep holding services at PS/MS 15 on Andrews Avenue.

But on Friday afternoon, the Second Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the order would apply only to Bronx Household of Faith, the University Heights parish that has been waging a lawsuit against the city for 17 years for the right to keep holding services at PS/MS 15 on Andrews Avenue.

So while Bronx Household of Faith is allowed to remain — at least until Feb. 27, when federal Judge Loretta Preska is due to issue another decision in the case — other parishes had to find last minute alternatives.

Heavenly Vision Christian Center, which has been renting the audi-

NYPD ‘One Step Closer’ to Hit-and-Run Driver  
By DAVID GREENE

After releasing a building’s surveillance video that they say shows the driver of a stolen car who struck and killed a Norwood man on the morning after Christmas, police say they are one step closer to catching the suspect.

Josbel Rivera, 24, a Radio Shack employee, was struck and killed as he crossed Mosholu Parkway at Paul Avenue, at 4:24 a.m., on Monday, Dec. 26. At the time, police would only say that the vehicle was traveling westbound and the driver fled the scene.

On Feb. 9, the NYPD released a building’s surveillance video showing a man parking a stolen 1999 Suzuki Vitara at the corner of Review Place and West 238th Street in Kingsbridge, in the early morning hours of Dec. 28. Moments after the man exits the vehicle, the car burst into flames.

“There was one person seen exiting the vehicle, which was recovered at Review Place and West 238 Street,” said a police source who declined to be identified because they were not authorized to speak to the press. “The video came from a building in the area and it shows a male leaving the area and a few moments later, the vehicle goes up in flames.”

Despite the car being completely destroyed in the fire, investigators remain upbeat. “With this video, I believe we are one step closer to iden-

Business Beat

Fordham’s One-Stop Santeria Shopping Destination  
By MARCOS SIERRA

Stepping into Original Products Botanica on the corner of East 189th Street and Webster Avenue, visitors are welcomed with the aroma of fresh herbs, smiling employees and Spanish-Caribbean music playing from overhead speakers. It’s an expansive 15,000-square-foot store housing a vast collection of items — from altar tools and supplies, to ritual and saint candles, tarot cards and everything else in between.

Original Products Botanica’s services to its customers go back a generation, to the early 1930s and Spanish Harlem, when waves of Caribbean citizens began to immigrate to the United States.

“At that time, there weren’t any companies that understood the demand for these types of products, and it created a niche for us,” said second generation co-owner, Jason Mizrahi. “It all began with my uncle and dad.”

Albert Amateau opened his store, M&A Amateau, on East 115th Street, between Park and

IN ITS enormous store just below Fordham Road, Original Products Botanica sells all kinds of religious and occult practice paraphernalia.

(continued on p. 10)
In The Public Interest

BY JEANMARIE EVELLY

BP Diaz, Bronx Business Leaders Defend FreshDirect Funding

Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz, Jr., is looking to appease critics of online grocer FreshDirect, which was granted $127.8 million from the city earlier this month in exchange for staying in New York. The company had been considering another lucrative offer to relocate to New Jersey, prompting the Bloomberg administration to counter with an even bigger package of tax breaks and subsidies to convince it to move its headquarters to the Bronx’s Harlem River Yards instead. FreshDirect is currently based in Long Island City, Queens.

Some have lashed out against the deal as too generous to a company that pays 38 percent of its workers less than $25,000 a year, and doesn’t offer services to most neighborhoods in the Bronx. Some are also concerned about the increased truck traffic pollution the delivery service will bring to a borough with sky-high asthma rates.

“For the cost of these benefits package the city could give 4,385 students full, four-year scholarships to CUNY or hire 1,458 new teachers or pay for 350,000 GED test-prep programs or launch a micro-lending program for minority and women entrepreneurs,” City Comptroller John Liu said in a statement. “The EDC has not clearly justified why this much money should be used to subsidize this company.”

Diaz, who is allocating $1 million in capital grant funds under his control toward the project, sent out a press release last week announcing a “Memoandum of Understanding” between his office and FreshDirect, saying the company will make an effort to see that at least 30 percent of its new hires are Bronx residents, that it meet with Diaz by the end of June to discuss expanding its delivery services to more areas of the Bronx and continue efforts to get approval from the state to accept food stamp benefits, along with other provisions.

“FreshDirect’s decision to stay in New York City, right here in the Bronx, is a win-win for everyone,” Diaz said in a statement. “FreshDirect is a real home-grown success that will now continue to grow; creating almost a thousand new jobs in our borough, which is not only a victory for the Bronx but also the entire City.”

The agreement with the borough president’s office also calls for FreshDirect to make its fleet of delivery trucks more energy efficient.

In the living wage bill compromise struck last month between City Council Speaker Christine Quinn and supporters of the Fair Wages for New Yorkers Act, including Diaz, FreshDirect would be exempt from the mandate required of other publicly-subsidized companies, should the bill get passed, that direct workers get paid $10 an hour with benefits, or $11.50 an hour without.

Pols Launch Minimum Wage Hike Website

Lawmakers hoping to pass a bill that would raise the state’s minimum wage from $7.25 an hour to $8.50 launched a website this month to build support for the legislation, which was introduced by Democrats in the Assembly last month.

The site, www.raisethewageNY.com, contains videos, statistics and a petition in support of the bill, which is likely to pass in the majority-Democrat Assembly but could face an uphill battle against Republicans in the State Senate. Most of the state’s business interests oppose it, while both Gov. Cuomo and Mayor Bloomberg have expressed their support in raising the minimum wage.

According to a press release, 18 other states currently have higher minimum wages than New York, including Connecticut, Vermont and Massachusetts.

“New York isn’t typically a state that lags behind, but rather one that leads by example,” Bronx Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz said in a statement announcing the new website. “Providing hardworking families with a fair wage for the full bill, which is likely to pass in the majority-Democrat Assembly could allow us to pass legislation once again that the majority of Americans believe in— and respect.”

In an effort to encourage schools to provide activities for students that promote harmony and cooperation and discourage bullying and harassment.

“We have all heard about the tragic effects of bullying and the steps schools might have taken to prevent such tragedies,” Koppell said. “I am pleased to participate in the joint effort of the DOE and the Council to raise awareness of this issue and to help schools create an environment where all students feel safe and respected.”

Public and Community Meetings

• COMMUNITY BOARD 7’s committee meetings will be held at the Community Board office, 229A E. 204th St., at 6:30 p.m. on the following dates: Thursday, Feb. 23—Land Use & Zoning; Wednesday, Feb. 29—Education & Libraries; Thursday, March 1—Parks & Recreation.

• COMMUNITY BOARD 7 will hold a public hearing on its preliminary capital and expense budget on Wednesday, March 7, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

• THE 16TH ANNUAL BRONX PARK SPEAK UP will be held on Saturday, Feb. 25 at Lehman College’s faculty dining room from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. For more information, or to RSVP, e-mail bronxspeakuup@hotmail.com visit BronxSpeakUp.org.

• THE 52ND PRECINCT COMMUNITY COUNCIL will meet Thursday, Feb. 23 from 7 to 9 p.m. at the Moshulu Montefiore Community Center, 3450 DeKalb Ave. For more information, call (718) 220-5824.

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Moshulu Preservation Corporation is a not-for-profit support corporation of Montefiore Medical Center.
Claudine Williams fell just short of her goal of becoming Miss New York 2012. But before the January pageant, the certified math teacher and Norwood resident sat down with the Norwood News to talk about her upbringing in Jamaica, her views on the education system in this country, and the stigma attached to beauty pageant contestants.

You are originally from Jamaica. How was the move to the Bronx? I’m from Clarendon, Jamaica. It was amazing to grow up there. It’s nothing like here. We weren’t sitting in front of the TV, and we were so active in school. When I came here I wanted to go back, but I became a citizen over the summer, and now I live in Norwood.

Coming from Jamaica to the Bronx, how do the schools compare? It’s different. In Jamaica we are way more advanced. They teach you college work in high school and it’s not easy to get a 100. When I came here they wanted me to repeat a grade, and when they gave me my schedule, the math was something that I had done in primary school. I complained about it, but I had to complete the Regents.

I graduated in May of last year. I went to Farleigh Dickenson for undergrad and graduate school in a five-year program. I did my bachelor’s in math and my master’s in education. Now I’m a certified teacher, and I just got a job. (She started working at a Bronx charter school in January)

So what made you want to enter a beauty contest? I just want to let girls know, you can do whatever you want to accomplish. There’s a stigma with pageants and slim girls. I want girls in the Bronx to know that it doesn’t matter — if you set your goals, whatever your heart desires you can accomplish.

Do you think that stigma still exists? I think the stigma is still there, but what the pageant is promoting is fitness. It’s not a certain weight that they’re promoting, but it’s for everybody to look fit and be the right proportions in certain areas. They encouraged us to start working out, and lay off the sugar once we got into the pageant. They do not require it, but they encouraged us because they want to promote a healthy body, and during orientation, they had different people come in like nutritionists and personal trainers, but they warned us over and over ‘do not starve yourselves’.

Math teacher and beauty pageant winner, how are they connected? Students want a person to idolize. They are looking for someone on TV; they’re looking for this person to idolize, and if I could become Miss NY I feel like I will grab their attention more. I think it would be a great experience for them to have a teacher that has won a pageant.

Other than holding the title within your own classroom, what are your goals in winning this pageant? My cause is to promote better math scores among our youth, not only in the Bronx but in the city as a whole, because math scores are so low. Right now, I’m representing the Garvis school in Co-op City, where I volunteer tutor, and it doesn’t have to be math. I just want to have some program for families that have students struggling in school.

Another huge problem in the borough is people not taking care of dog waste. That’s a huge thing I would want to change.

Big plans for the future? Well, I do want to go for my doctorate and I want to model. Even if I don’t win the pageant, my main focus will still be teaching and finding a program to help some kids.

—Interview by EMILY PICCONE

Editor’s Note: You can follow Claudine on twitter at SuzzyW2 or check out her Facebook page.
A Dim Future for English Language Learners

By LIMER BATISTA

The College Board reported in September that the average SAT score fell across the nation this year. The reading score for the high school class of 2011 fell three points to 497, the lowest on record, writing fell two points to 498, and math one point to 514. The College Board attributes the decline to the increased diversity of the students taking the test. For example, about 27 percent of the nearly 1.65 million test-takers last year came from a home where English was not the only language up from 19 percent a decade ago.

The elephant in the room is the issue of bilingual education.

There is a national debate about the effects of ineffective policies like No Child Left Behind. There have been discussions about standardized testing, innovative methods to encourage students, and ways to improve performance in the classrooms. But policies to help the 20.3 percent of children ages 5 to 17 who speak a language other than English at home are hardly ever considered.

What needs to happen for policymakers to wake up and commit to real education reform? Parents are alienated from their children’s education by the lack of translators and school information in the language they speak, and the students face the stigma of failing in a system that is not addressing their needs.

In spite of the obvious need, Arizona, California, Massachusetts and Georgia have moved to ban dual-language programs in the classroom, a measure of the impact of public opinion in education policy. Although only 30 percent of students in California were enrolled in bilingual education programs in 1998 (the other 70 percent were in all-English programs), bilingual education was identified as the cause of academic failure on the part of Latino students and the public voted to prohibit bilingual education. Instead, English Language Learners (ELL) were to be educated in English immersion programs for no more than a year. Three years after its implementation the scores of ELLs in state tests are declining rather than increasing.

Advocates for the movement known as Official English have long pressed for legislation mandating English as the official language of government, arguing that a common language is essential for the country’s cohesion and for immigrant assimilation and success. This movement overlooks the great diversity that has shaped the success of this country.

As a former high school tutor, I experienced the alarming situation of ELLs in schools right now. The lack of a program targeted to help the students master English and stay on track with other subjects frustrated them. But students never gave up. With bilingual education programs in place it would be easier for students to understand new concepts, and at the same time learn English. An analysis conducted by the National Literacy Panel (NLP) concluded that teaching ELLs to read in their first language and then in their second language, or in their first and second languages simultaneously, compared with teaching them to read in their second language only, boosts their reading achievement in the second language. Moreover, these programs allow the students to remain proficient in their first language, and for the rest of the student body, it is an opportunity to learn another language.

Our legislators must engage in an honest conversation about providing the support needed by the millions of students who are graduating high school with suboptimal skills. If we continue with the present trend of record low scores, ELLs are at an incredible disadvantage compared to native English speakers. We cannot expect them to be the leading scientists, doctors and engineers of tomorrow.

To compete against China, India and Russia, America needs to adopt aggressive policies that target the education issues that are pulling it behind. The lack of legislation and of effective education for English Language Learners is one of them. The country cannot wait.

Limer Batista is a Bronx resident and Baruch College student.

No Merit Pay: A No-Brainer

By JUDY NOY

The Inquiring Photographer question in your January 26 - February 8, 2012 issue asked about paying teachers based on merit and performance.

This subject has been in the news for quite some time and it would seem to be totally unfair to base teacher salaries on student performance.

There may be excellent teachers who have students struggling in a variety of subjects, which students, who for one reason or another, cannot grasp the subject matter enough to do well on final exams. It’s possible that even Einstein himself might be unable to get through to these students.

In schools where the ratio of teachers to students is too great, classes become overcrowded, it’s harder for students to receive individualized attention, and the struggling students may fall further behind. In some of these cases, these students could be encouraged to select vocational courses that would interest them, in order to be able to earn a living one day before they decide to drop out of school entirely, which, many times, ends up being the case. Not everyone is academically inclined or college material and to tell them they are is a disservice to them.

On the other hand, there may be so-excellent instructors who, by chance, could have extremely bright students in their classes who may do well on their exams.

Should the excellent teachers, therefore, receive no merit pay when, through no direct fault of their own, their struggling students may do poorly on exams, and should the less-than-excellent teachers receive merit pay based on test results of their brighter students who would probably do well on exams whatever their teachers’ abilities?

Student performance can be due to an abundance, or a lack, of a combination of factors, including individual abilities, home environment and encouragement, and academic help outside of school, and not merely through in-class instruction.

Ideally, those entering the teaching profession should teach to the best of their ability and not just do so because they think they may receive merit pay. Approving merit pay may cause good teachers to stop teaching in the less than desirable neighborhoods where they may be most needed or leave the profession entirely if they feel under appreciated.

The concept of offering teachers merit pay should be a no-brainer inasmuch as it shouldn’t be approved, but rather be done away with.

Judy Noy is a Norwood resident.
Inquiring Photographer

This week we asked readers about the sudden emergence of New York Knicks point guard Jeremy Lin and the Linsanity he’s creating.

I think he’s doing pretty good. He got an opportunity to play and he’s proving that he’s a good player. I think they will only improve when Carmelo Anthony comes back, and if they let Lin continue to play. I think they will do good this year and will win the championship.
Wilder Sanchez

I love the Knicks, they are my favorite basketball team.
Andy Sanchez

Lin has definitely stepped up. He needs a little more help with handling the ball, but other than that, he’s saved us so far. I’m about to watch the game tonight too, so I hope they pull out the win. I think Lin could take the team all the way. We have a strong, powerhouse team, we just have to keep it together.
Adrian Walker

I think he’s awesome and I think he’s going to take them to the championship.
Emelisa Ruiz

I think that they are definitely going to make it to the championship because they have a lot of new people, like Lin and Chandler. Now everyone’s loving Lin. At the beginning he was not doing very good, and then he was just amazing.
Elias Hadzovic
ON THURSDAY, Feb. 9, Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz, Jr. hosted a celebration in honor of Dominican Heritage Month, Norwood News photographer, Adi Talwar, was there to shoot all the action, including music and dance performances, speeches, awards and, of course, Dominican food! For more photos, visit norwoodnews.org and search: “Dominican heritage.”

**THE BRONX’S DOMINICAN FIESTA**

Photos by Adi Talwar

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  - Form 1099-G if you received unemployment insurance in 2011.
  - Form 1099-INT if you received interest from a bank account in 2011.
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- $50,000 with dependents
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Fordham’s One-Stop Santeria Shopping Destination

(continued from p. 1)

Madison avenues, in an area that would be later established as La Marketa, an important social and economic venue for Hispanic New York at that time.

Armed with an unassuming smile and a Judeo-Spanish language known as “Oriental” Ladino, a 14th- and 15th-century Spanish dialect spoken in Turkey and Rhodes, Amateau was able to seamlessly blend into his surroundings and tap into his customers and vendors, opened his marketplace — the Bronx.

Jack Mizrahi, known as “Jacko” to his customers and vendors, opened his first retail store in 1959 on Bathgate Avenue. He remained there until 1975, when he had the opportunity to move into the site of a former A & P supermarket; a cavernous space just off Fordham Road.

In 1998, Jacko’s son, Jason Mizrahi, who grew up on 171st Street and the Grand Concourse, assumed the reins of the company and began implementing his vision of becoming the premier distributor of top quality spiritual, religious and mystical supplies.

His first successful step came in 2002, when Jason decided to merge his main retail operation with the mainly wholesale operation of his cousin, Steve Amateau (Albert’s son who took over in 1983), to create a veritable mega-store: the first and only of its size on Fordham Road.

“Due to our size, we are able to offer a much larger variety of products. It’s one-stop shopping that a smaller retailer can’t keep up with,” said Jason.

Steve added, “I had a small wholesale operation and Jason had a small retail operation, so we decided to merge, and the rest is profitable history.”

“Another big part of our success is our employees,” Jason said. “We have a great staff that has been with us for a long time, between 10 to 15 years. It’s a close knit group who care for each other, and our customers.”

Despite their success, Jason has concerns. “I want to expand, which would require capital investment for equipment and employees that would create more jobs, but I couldn’t get the financing,” he said. “When you have been successful for the past 50 years, and have a product that a guy in a suit can’t understand, it makes borrowing extremely difficult. It’s just no!”

“It’s getting harder and harder for the guy who’s just starting out, and I’m sad about the general direction in which things are working in this country,” he added.

Jason credits the Fordham Road Business Improvement District (BID), of which he is a member, with getting more businesses involved in the neighborhood and giving the area a different feel. “It’s the big-box feel without all the puff and fluff.”

Jason doesn’t follow any of the faiths and mystical supplies.

Seeking Ways to Assist Bronx Entrepreneurs

Immigrants and minorities who want to start and expand businesses in the Bronx face many obstacles, but most entrepreneurs are not aware of the programs out there that can help them overcome those obstacles.

A recent survey by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, showed a staggering 92 percent of current business owners aren’t even aware of programs that are designed to help entrepreneurs like them. That was the theme at a recent forum held at Hostos Community College.

The survey, presented by Claire Kramer, Community Outreach Manager at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, highlighted two key issues which are fundamental to the growth of immigrant and minority small business owners: the lack of using technology and, even more importantly, a lack of financing.

“Since 2008, the credit market has severely tightened making it even more difficult for small business owners to get the capital they need,” said Kramer.

“Our policies with regard to small business are (years and years) outdated,” Public Advocate Bill de Blasio said. “It’s programs and discussions like these that show our commitment to making it easier for immigrant and minority entrepreneurs, not only in the Bronx, but in all five boroughs.”

—MARCOS SIERRA

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Initiative Puts Focus on Teens’ Reproductive Health

By JEANMARIE EVELLY

As federal lawmakers in Congress continue to debate over whether health insurers should be required to cover the costs of birth control, a recent city initiative is looking to curb teen pregnancy rates in the Bronx, where it is higher than in any other borough.

The program, called Bronx Teens Connections, will offer affordable reproductive health services to the borough’s teenagers, as many here lack health insurance coverage and live below the poverty line. In New York City overall, one out of every 10 teenagers is uninsured, according to the Department of Health (DOH).

“ Teens in the Bronx face many challenges as they approach adulthood,” said Dr. Jane Bedell, assistant commissioner at the Health Department’s Bronx District Public Health Office. “A community-wide effort will allow us to work together to invest in the well-being of our teenagers by providing access to services and making sure that teens are knowledgeable about sexual health and empowered to act on this knowledge.”

The new program will team the DOH up with the Department of Education to implement a new sexual education curriculum to be taught in ninth and 10th grade classrooms at 20 different Bronx high schools. Called “Reducing the Risk,” the lesson plans will stress the importance of using birth control and condoms, the risks involved in sexual activity and the benefits of waiting until they’re ready to have sex. A similar curriculum will be introduced through the city’s Administration for Children’s Services to reach teens in foster care.

“We want to help young people reach their full potential and make better choices in life,” said Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr., who is a partner in the program. “I believe that this community effort will help our youth improve their knowledge and understanding about sexual health, making them more confident to make the choices that are right for them.”

Additionally, the program will partner with high schools, youth-serving organizations, and teen-friendly community-based health centers, to help young people easily gain access to birth control and testing for sexually transmitted diseases. The city’s Human Resources Administration will work to enroll Bronx teens in the Family Planning Benefits Program, an insurance program that covers reproductive health care services.

The pregnancy rate for 15- to 19-year-olds living in the south Bronx dropped by more than 23 percent between 2002 and 2009, though more teens get pregnant in the Bronx each year than in the other four boroughs.
A Bronx Guide to the PSAL Basketball Tournaments

By ALEX KRATZ

The Public School Athletic League playoffs kicked off last week with a slew of early round matchups. But now the tournaments hit the pause button as the city’s schools take the week of Presidents Day off.

Here’s a breakdown of all the Bronx contenders and Cinderellas in division A and AA.

Boys AA Division
Overview: The PSAL is broken up into divisions based mostly on competitiveness, not size. The AA Division is the best of the best. There are seven Bronx teams in AA and all but the worst team didn’t make the Big Dance.

Contenders: Wings (4 seed), JFK (10). Wings finished the season undefeated (16-0) in league play before falling to JFK in the borough title game. They are led by superstar guard Justin Jenkins, one of the city’s best players, who can score from anywhere on the court and has proven clutch when the game is on the line. JFK just barely missed a first round bye (the top nine seeds automatically advanced to the second round), but the Knights appear to be peaking at the right time.

Cinderellas: Gompers (15), Eagle Academy (20). If not for two extra wins forfeited to them by Eagle, Gompers would have finished the season at 29-8. They play at 2 seed Boys & Girls in the second round. Eagle plays Wings in a tough second round matchup.

Girls AA Division
Overview: The girls AA division is even smaller than the boys. There’s a Bronx/Queens/Manhattan division, two Brooklyn AA divisions and A Division team (McKee) from Staten Island that is included in the AA playoffs. Murry Bergtraum has won 13 city championships in a row.

Early Action: The AA playoffs don’t start until after this week’s break. JFK and Harry Truman both have legitimate shots at the title. JFK Coach O’Neil Glenn isn’t concerned about the long layoff. “I don’t think it matters,” Glenn told the New York Post. “It gives the girls a chance to refresh their legs. I like it. We have time to work on things.”

Boys A Division
Overview: In the A Division, the road to the Big Dance is simple. If your team wins as many games as it loses, you’re in. That means there are 45 teams in the A Division tournament, eight from the Bronx. Last season, DeWitt Clinton, seed ed 29th, came out of nowhere to crash the Final Four.

Contenders: Mott Haven (1), Evander Childs (6), Clinton (11), Mott Haven, which is moving up to the AA Division next year, has been the best A Division team all year. If they don’t take the title, it will be an upset. Evander enjoyed an exceptional season, finishing 16-3, including two close losses to Mott Haven. After a four-game mid-season losing streak, Clinton reeled off six straight wins before falling to JFK in the borough playoffs. They play Stuyvesant at home on Feb. 29.

Cinderellas: Adlai Stevenson (17). Stevenson is another interesting team that may make some noise. They were trounced by Evander early in the season, then came back to beat them later on.

Girls A Division
Overview: The girls A Division is off to an early start, having already completed most of the first two rounds by the break. Out of the Sweet 16 still remaining in the field, three Bronx Schools remain: Mott Haven, Lehman and Wings Academy.

Contenders: At this point in the girls A Division, everyone is a contender. Third-seeded Wings Academy takes on Mott Haven (14), while Lehman (15) awaits the winner of Curtis (2) and West 50th Street Campus (31).

Ed. Note: Check out the Bronx Sports Report every Thursday on the Norwood News’ blog, Breaking Bronx.
Bicycles, Basketballs Could Be in Armory’s Future

By JEANMARIE EVELLY

There’s less than a month left for those vying to take over the Kingsbridge Armory to submit their proposals to the city, and a number of organizations have come forward with ideas for filling the long-vacant, 600,000-square-foot building.

Recently, a group of cycling enthusiasts who have been campaigning to turn the Armory into a giant bicycling center have teamed up with New York Gauchos, a Bronx-based youth basketball program, as well as several other sports-oriented groups, with the intent of converting the structure into an enormous sports, recreation and wellness center.

“There’s a lot of enthusiasm for our vision,” said Rocky Bucano, vice president for Teamwork Foundation, Inc., the nonprofit that runs Gauchos. “They know the previous roadblocks were the pure retail plans, which were not a good fit for the community.”

It’s been two years since a previous plan to turn the building into a giant shopping mall was killed by the City Council after a tense political battle between the developer and local activists over wages. During his State of the City speech in the Bronx in January, Mayor Bloomberg announced that the city would once again be seeking pitches from developers interested in the Armory, with a deadline of March 22 for submitting proposals to the Economic Development Corporation.

The current Request for Proposals does not rule out the possibility of another mall project, though local activists and politicians have long advocated for a more community-based use for the building.

Since last fall, the National Cycling Association (NCA) has been trying to raise money to build a velodrome inside the Armory — an angled, oval bicycle racing track — in the hopes of turning the space into the site of a 6-day professional bike racing event the group wants to host this spring.

That original plan was met with some skepticism from local activists. Desiree Pilgrim-Hunter, a member of the Kingsbridge Armory Redevelopment Alliance (KARA), a coalition of residents, clergy and community groups advocating for responsible development of the Armory, told the Norwood News in November that the NCA’s plan seemed to offer little benefit to the community.

“This is a temporary idea for next spring that does nothing for the surrounding community,” Pilgrim-Hunter said at the time. “They will make money, the community will not.”

Now, NCA is teaming up with New York Gauchos, indoor rock-climbing gym Brooklyn Boulders, and a BMX skate group from Staten Island — under the umbrella name the Armory Sports and Entertainment Group — to submit a proposal for a massive recreational center that would offer a variety of sports programs for neighborhood residents, according to Bucano.

In addition to the proposed velodrome, the group’s vision includes a 5,000-seat sports arena, professional basketball courts, rock climbing walls, a skate park, a “hostel-style” hotel for visiting sports teams, sports medicine clinic and wellness center, Bucano said.

“This is all community focused,” he said. “We would offer low-cost youth programs where the kids could get training. We would have a recreation center open to the community, where they could get fitness work. The community programs are essential to what we’re doing.”

The coalition is in talks with a number of developers to finance the project, Bucano said, and is conducting a feasibility study to determine the plan’s economic viability.

The New York Gauchos has been operating since 1987, offering a competitive basketball program to hundreds of children and teens each year, with a focus on getting the students into college. The group has been working out of a gym in the south Bronx for the last several decades, Bucano said, but has long since outgrown the space.

“We’re kind of stretching at the seams over here,” he said.

Other sports groups have expressed their interest in setting up shop at the Armory. As the Norwood News reported last month, a group of investors — including New York Rangers star Mark Messier — want to turn the space into an ice rink and the region’s biggest hockey complex. World Changers Church International, an Atlanta-based, nondenominational parish led by television evangelist Creflo Dollar, has also been eyeing the space, and sent several representatives to a walk-through of the site earlier this month, according to Ornais’s New York.

But to Bucano, basketball is a natural fit for the Bronx.

“I’m not against hockey but I don’t know anyone in that neighborhood who plays hockey. It’s like putting a round peg in a square hole,” he said. “Basketball is a very cheap game to play. It’s the sport of New York City. But I’m biased.”

POLICE SAY that the man getting out of the car in this grainy still photo taken from a surveillance video is responsible for the hit-and-run death of Norwood resident Josbei Rivera.

NYPD ‘One Step Closer’ to Hit-and-Run Driver

(continued from p. 1.)

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torium at the Walton High School Campus, was forced to split its service into three separate sessions on Sunday in order to fit everyone into the small chapel space they own on Jerome Avenue.

“It was chaos here,” said Pastor Salvador Sabino. “We have grown so much, we have over a thousand people in the Bronx alone, which is why we had to start renting from schools in the first place.”

The parish also holds services at IS 52 in northern Manhattan, and congregants there were locked out of the school on Sunday. So the church held its service on the sidewalk outside, Sabino said.

“It was out there in the winter, but God blessed us with 42 degree [weather],” he said. “We have become a semi-nomad church.”

Another parish, Cross Way Church and Christian Center, which has held services in the auditorium of MS 101 on Lafayette Avenue for the last year and a half, found out late Friday that they would not be able to get into the school on Sunday.

“We didn’t have a place to go,” said Pastor Mark Gregori. So the 100 or so of the church’s congregants got creative, he said, and instead visited one another’s homes or called each other over the phone to pray.

“He feels that the Senate bill is very broad, and would allow any organization to come into the school,” said Sheldon staffer Kerri Biche. “He’s glad it’s being addressed in the court since it’s a constitutional issue. He looks forward to the court’s decision as a guide for any legislation.”

The Assembly is on legislative break until Feb. 28.

Earlier this month, the City Council held a public hearing to discuss whether to pass a resolution in support of the bill. Opponents argued that allowing religious groups to operate in schools breaches the required separation of church and state, and gave preferential treatment to Christian groups.

“They are overwhelmingly Christian churches as the vast majority of schools are only regularly available on Sundays, they pay below market rents (as little as $2 an hour to use a classroom), they tend to dominate the schools on the day they use them, and some use the school address on their letterhead and website, while others blanket the neighborhood with postcards listing the school as the church’s address,” said Donna Lieberman, executive director at the New York Civil Liberties Union.

But opponents of the ban argue that the religious services are only taking place during non-school hours, and that the city’s policy is unfairly discriminating against religious groups, since other community organizations are permitted to rent school space.

“When we’re there on a Sunday, no one’s around and we don’t have access to classrooms,” Gregori said. If the city’s concerned about the overlap between churches and schools, he added, then public schools would have to also stop renting space from buildings affiliated with religious organizations — like the Bronx New School (PS 53), which this fall moved to a building in Crotona owned by St. Martin of Tours Parish.

“It’s unfortunate that the churches that don’t have a building in their communities to go to are the poor communities,” Gregori said. “I never thought I would see the day where I would see ministers being arrested, and people being displaced from a meaningful facility where they’re being ministered to, and cared for, and where their needs are being met.”
**Become Your Own Boss**

Project Enterprise and the University Neighborhood Housing Program are conducting a free self-employment session at the Concourse House, 2751 Grand Concourse on Thursday, Feb. 23, from 6 to 8 p.m. Learn how to start or expand your own business. For more information or to RSVP, call (212) 678-6734 ext. 17 or visit info@projectenterprise.org.

**Bronx Mentors Sought**

The Abbot House, a multi-faceted agency that serves families and youth in the Bronx and NYC, is looking for mentors in the Bronx area. If you are looking to make a positive impact on a child’s life, call mentoring coordinator at (718) 329-4968 ext. 3454.

**Flea Market Donations Needed**

Donations are needed for the Bedford-Mosholu Community Association’s March 10 flea market. Bring new and used items (except clothing) to the BMCA office, 400 E. Mosholu Pkwy. So., apt. B1 (lobby floor), on Wednesday, Feb. 29 and Saturday, March 3 from 1:30 to 4 p.m. or Wednesday, March 7, from 7:30 to 9 p.m.

**Free Parenting Classes**

The Mercy Center, at 377 E. 145th St., is offering free parenting classes to parents age 21 and under. Classes are held Thursdays from 5 to 6:30 p.m. from Feb. 23 through April 26. For more information or to schedule an appointment, call (718) 933-2789.

**Charter School Open House**

Tech International Charter School invites students in the 5th grade interested in becoming part of its middle school, and their parents, to its open house at the Kingsbridge Library, 291 W. 231st St., Thursday, March 1, from 5 to 6 p.m. and Wednesday March 14, from 6 to 7 p.m. The school is scheduled to open in August 2012. For more information, contact Steve Bergen at sbergen33@gmail.com or call (731) 953-9699.

**Community Workshops**

The Department of City Planning will hold interactive community workshops in University Heights, Saturday March 3, from 1 to 4 p.m. in Monroe College’s gymnasium, Uston Hall, at the corner of Jerome Avenue and 190th Street, and in Melrose, Saturday, March 10, from 1 to 4 p.m. in Boricua College’s 4th floor conference room, 890 Washington Ave., to encourage participation in exercises that address important community issues. For more information or to RSVP call Shawn Brede at (718) 220-8065 or email sbrede@planning.nyc.gov.

**ESL Assistance for Access-A-Ride**

The New York Lawyers for the Public Interest invites passengers using Access-A-Ride service who require language interpreters, to contact them for assistance. Access-A-Ride is a van service for people with disabilities in New York. For more information, call Jenny Veloz or Aditi Shah at (212) 244-4664.

**Healthy Body Images at The Y**

The Riverdale Y, 5625 Arlington Ave., is hosting a free body-image workshop on Saturday, Feb. 25 from 8 to 9:30 p.m., to help mothers and teens. The discussion, led by Ariva Braun, LCSW, will concentrate on the importance of mothers modeling a healthy image for their daughters. For more information, call Lisa Bruskin at (718) 548-8200 ext. 241.

**Bronx Parks Speak Up**

The Friends of Van Cortlandt Park will conduct its annual Bronx Park Speak Up which will include presentations and hands-on workshops, Saturday, Feb. 25, from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. in Lehman College’s Faculty Dining Room. This year’s theme is “Green Space for All Generations.” For more information, visit BronxSpeakUp.org or e-mail bronxspeakup@hotmail.com.

**Small Business Courses At Lehman**

Lehman College School of Continuing and Professional Studies, is offering business courses for entrepreneurs and new and established small business owners starting in the spring. Courses include Starting Your Own Business, Management, and Marketing and Advertising. For more information or to register, call (718) 990-8512.

**Free Tax Prep Help**

• LIPT-The Bronx, a non-profit organization serving the Bronx for the past 12 years, offers numerous services for those in need, including job searches, housing, childcare and healthcare services, and legal services. The new office at 2381 Belmont Ave., will host several tax prep events to assist low-income individuals and families. For more information or to sign up, call (718) 733-3897 or email bronx@liptcommunity.org.

• The University Neighborhood Housing Program is sponsoring free Federal and State Income Tax Assistance to low-income residents of the Bronx provided by IRS certified tax preparers at Refuge House, 2715 Bainbridge Ave. (near East 190th Street), by appointment only. Services are provided on Wednesdays from 3 to 8 p.m. on Feb. 29, March 7, 28, April 4, and 11; and Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Feb. 25, March 24, 31, and April 14. For more information or to RSVP, call (718) 933-2539.

For more Neighborhood Notes online, go to www.norwoodnews.org and click on “Neighborhood Notes” in the right-hand column.
HELP WANTED

Personal Assistant Needed: We are looking for an office assistant. Duties include greeting clients, answering phones, and routing mail, data entry and retrieval, scheduling and calendar maintenance. Ideal candidates will have proven customer service skills in an administrative setting and experience with Microsoft Office applications. Email resumes to anthonyadams0012@gmail.com.

POSITION WANTED

Nurse’s Aide with 25 years’ experience in hospitals, nursing homes and private residences seeks employment. Will live in or out. Call (718) 364-7771.

SERVICES AVAILABLE

Tutor: K-9 teacher NYS certified, ESL certified, former NY Times cartographer/staff editor. (718) 644-1083.

Yoga: Stretching, meditation, drumming or dancing on Fridays and Sundays. $10 per session. RSVP (718) 644-1083 or email jnorQ@aol.com.
Onstage

The Lehman Center for the Performing Arts, 250 Bedford Pk. Blvd. W., presents The Original Tribute to the Blues Brothers, featuring songs from TV and movies, Feb. 25 at 8 p.m. (tickets are $25 to $40); Forever Freestyle 6, featuring a variety of performers, March 3 at 8 p.m. (tickets are $45 to $60); and Ballet Folklórico de Antioquia Colombia, featuring music and dance, March 4 at 6 p.m. (tickets are $25 to $40; $10/12 and under). For more information, call (718) 960-8833.

The Pregones Theatre, 575 Walton Ave., presents Line C3, a free concert performed by group of percussionists, March 7 at 7 p.m.; and Sabrina Lastman Quartet, featuring jazz, South American rhythms, and new music, March 10 at 8 p.m. Tickets are $12 and up; discount for seniors and students. For more information, call (718) 585-1202.

Events

The Bronx Museum of the Arts, 1040 Grand Ave., presents its First Friday on March 2 from 6 to 10 p.m., featuring film, art performances, music and other special events. For more information, call (718) 681-6000.

The Bronx Council on the Arts presents An Evening of Fun, Food, and Entertainment, featuring a talk and video of work of choreographer George Faison, performances by two dance groups of young dancers, and a performance of “The Wiz,” free, at the Owen Dolen Recreation Center of NYC Parks & Recreation, 2551 Westchester Ave. (at East Tremont Avenue), on Feb. 24 from 6 to 8 p.m. For more information, call (718) 931-9500 ext. 33.

The Bronx Museum of the Arts, at 1040 Grand Concourse (165th Street), invites the public to submit up to five historical or contemporary photographs of anyone playing baseball, from amateurs to pros, of any age or gender, in neighborhoods, parks, schools, etc., for its Baseball in the Bronx exhibition, to be held April 13 to May 13. Submission deadline is March 16. Photos will be returned only if they are submitted with a self-addressed stamped envelope with proper postage. For more information of submission rules and details, call (718) 681-6000 or write bronxitesinbaseball@gmail.com.

In celebration of Black History Month,
The public is invited to ride the March 7 free Bronx Culture Trolley, which transports visitors on the first Wednesday of every month (except January and September) to Bronx hot spots, all featuring a variety of entertainment options and ends at Sweetwater’s Bar & Grill for music, food and drink. Trolley night starts with a 5 p.m. reception at the Longwood Art Gallery at Hostos Community College, 450 Grand Concourse (at 149th St.). From there, the trolley departs at 5:30, 6:30 and 7:30 p.m. New attractions are added monthly; admission to most venues is free. Riders can get on and off at any scheduled stop and spend as much time as they wish at any or all of the featured venues. For more information and a detailed schedule, call (718) 931-9500 ext. 33 or log on to www.bronxarts.org.

Woodlawn Cemetery’s Memorial Chapel will host author A’Leila Bundles, Feb. 26 at 1 p.m. to discuss her upcoming book, “Joy Goddess: A’Leila Walker and the Harlem Renaissance.” Walker is the daughter of the first African-American millionaire Madam C.J. Walker and hosted many famous people of her era at soirees at her salon, The Dark Tower. Tickets are $15; $10/students/seniors.

The Bronx Museum of the Arts, at 1040 Grand Concourse (165th Street), South Wing Galleries presents Juan Downey: The Invisible Architect, on view through May 20. Admission is free on Fridays. For more information, call (718) 681-6000.

**Exhibits**

- The Lehman College Art Gallery, 250 Bedford Pk. Blvd. W., presents Under the Influence: The Comics and Contemporary Art, featuring works of both established and emerging artists; and Michael Ferris, Jr., The Bronx Series and Other Work (figurative sculpture), free, Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., through May 12. Reception is on March 19 from 6 to 8 p.m. For more information, call (718) 690-8731.

- Lehman College’s Leonard Lief Library, 250 Bedford Pk. Blvd. W., presents Above the Underground Railroad, Stories in Quilts and Canvas, featuring quilts that detail the methods slaves used to communicate with one another while on their quest for freedom, free, through Feb. 29. For more information, call (718) 960-7963.

- The Bronx Museum of the Arts, at 1040 Grand Concourse (165th Street), South Wing Galleries presents Juan Downey: The Invisible Architect, on view through May 20. Admission is free on Fridays. For more information, call (718) 681-6000.

**Library Events**

- The Bronx Library Center, at 310 E. Kingsbridge Rd. off Fordham Road, presents programs for kids including Preschool Story Time, Feb. 23 at 11 a.m.; Baby Story Time, Feb. 25 at 11 a.m.; Toddler Tales for the Teeny Tiny (ages 3 to 5), March 3 at 11 a.m.; Mad Science Workshops at 4 p.m. (ages 5 to 12; registration required): Nature, Feb. 28; Global Partners, Jr. (ages 5 to 12), students connect worldwide via the Internet, Feb. 29 and March 7 at 4 p.m.; and Light, Color, Action! (ages 5 to 12), March 6 at 4 p.m. Adults can attend Single Stop/Government Benefits, Feb. 23 and 28 at 9 a.m.; Black History Month Movie Screening, (“Daughters of the Dust”), Feb. 25 at 2:30 p.m.; Understanding Money & Credit, Feb. 28 at 10 a.m.; International Women’s Month Series of Craft Workshops at 2 p.m. (room 505), March 2: Photo Collaging; and March 9: Scrapbook Making; Family Resource Day (parents/caregivers), March 3 at 10 a.m.; and Budgeting for the Family, March 6 at 10 a.m. Teens and young adults can join College and Career Fair, Feb. 25 at 1 p.m. For more information, call (718) 579-4244/4657 or visit www.nypl.org.

- The Mosholu Library, at 285 E. 205th St., offers Knitting Circle, Thursdays at 3 p.m.; and Wii Program, Tuesdays at 3 p.m., each for seniors and adults. For children, there’s Be Tobacco Free (ages 3 to 12), Feb. 28 at 4 p.m.; Toddler Story Time, March 1 and 8 at 10:30 a.m.; Dr. Seuss Stories (ages 3 to 12), March 2 at 3:30 p.m.; and Shakespeare, the Bard (ages 5 to 12), March 6 at 4 p.m. For teens and young adults: movie, Feb. 23 at 4 p.m. Speakers of other languages (ages 16+) may attend free English Conversation Program (intermediate level), Sundays from 6:30 to 8 p.m. through March 13. For more information, call (718) 882-8239 or (212) 340-0918.

- The Jerome Park Library, at 118 Eames Place, offers Cooking, Feb. 23 at 4 p.m. and Dance, Feb. 24 at 3:30 p.m. (both for teens and young adults); and Arts & Crafts (ages 5 to 12), March 5 at 4 p.m. For more information, call (718) 549-5200.

**NOTE:** Items for consideration may be mailed to our office or sent to norwood-news@norwoodnews.org, and should be received by Feb. 27 for the next publication date of March 8. Find more events at www.bronxnewsnetwork.org.
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