

NORWOOD NEWS

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WHODUNIT IN VAN CORTLANDT VILLAGE



Photo by Adi Talwar

BRINGING SOME razzle dazzle to a homicide, The Murder Mystery Company invited audience members to join actors in solving a faux investigation at Vladeck Hall in Van Cortlandt Village on Jan. 26. The show, "Of Sound Mind and Dead Body," showcased raffles, a buffet dinner and magic show with proceeds benefiting the Van Cortlandt Jewish Center.

Bronx Reacts to Stop-and-Frisk Deal

By DAVID CRUZ

Mayor Bill de Blasio promised, and now he's delivered.

In what was a major campaign pledge during de Blasio's road to Gracie Mansion, the city will now settle two class-action lawsuits over the constitutionality of stop-and-frisk, a decision that sends ripples through a public that grew distant from the police.

The controversial practice had for years eroded relationships between police and minority communities, with Bronxites claiming it was an intentional form of racial profiling. The lawsuits—Floyd v. City of New York and Ligon v. City of New York—were largely different, yet at its core examined the constitutionality of the tactic. While the first claimed

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Business Beat Is Back!
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Be Healthy

Be Healthy: Benefits of Obamacare,
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Let There Be Light (Again),
p. 12

Lukewarm Welcome for Tracey Mailboxes

By SHAYLA LOVE

Amid ongoing renovations at Tracey Towers, a series of new mailbox banks can now be found in the building lobbies, and it's causing plenty of stir and controversy for tenants. That's because the mailboxes are blocking the view of the lobbies, infringing on what used to be empty space, according to Jean Hill, president of the Tenants Association.

As it stands, the existing mailboxes - which residents are still using for now - are affixed to the lobby walls. This design was initially thought to remain during renovations, but was ultimately nixed, according to Hill. "The first plan was to rebuild the mailboxes in the original space, but it was eventually decided that they had to reconstruct the whole thing," she said. "I knew the tenants wouldn't be happy about it because they were complaining in my ear. It was such a startling change."

At a meeting with Melvin Tuner, the onsite manager for the Norwood high-rises, Hill was told the mailbox change was mandated by the United States Postal Service (USPS), but wasn't given specifics. The *Norwood News* did find that the mailbox change complied with USPS regulations, specifically STD 4-C, imposed in 2006 for all new buildings with more than four units. In 2004, the USPS rewrote the regulations for commercial and residential mailboxes.



Photo by Shayla Love

THESE NEW larger-sized mailboxes will now be a fixture at Tracey Towers and it's been met with mixed support.

USPS Justifies the Switch

Since American mail use had changed drastically since the last rules were written in 1975, USPS determined it needed to get with the times. In the decade that followed, flat size mail deliveries steadily increased by 47 percent while package mail has increased by 42 percent, said mailbox producer Bommer Industries.

STD 4-C also calls for 20 percent larger mailboxes, improved lock mechanisms and

parcel lockers intended for oversized packages delivered by a letter carrier. By enforcing the regulation, the USPS said it will streamline services, part of a larger effort to save millions of dollars for the cash-strapped agency. USPS, however, maintains it will "improve access to the mailboxes by carriers and avoid the return of bulky, voluminous mail to the Post Office."

But the USPS has been lenient in terms of

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Fax: 718 324 2917

E-mail: norwoodnews@norwoodnews.org

Web: www.norwoodnews.org

Publisher
Mosholu Preservation Corporation

Editor-in-Chief
David Cruz

CEO, Mosholu Preservation Corporation
Roberto S. Garcia

Classified Advertising
Dawn McEvoy

Accounts Receivable
Dawn McEvoy

Proofreader
Judy Noy

Production
Neil deMause

Regular Contributors
David Greene, Adi Talwar

Interns
Shayla Love, Paolo Mossetti, and Justin McCallum

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In The Public Interest

Who's Gained and Lost in the New Progressive Council

Despite the Bronx political machine delaying their support of one of their own, City Council Speaker Melissa Mark Viverito (D-8th CD) still extended a hand of solidarity to several of her fellow Bronx political brethren by offering key roles in the City Council while leaving some in the lurch. We broke down a list of the borough's political haves and have-nots:

WHO REALLY GAINED



Ritchie Torres:
Councilman Ritchie Torres (D-15th CD) has gained the most, thanks to his early support of Viverito. He's the only

freshman councilmember to be included as a member of Viverito's leadership team, having accepted the prominent position of Deputy Leader for Public Housing. He also became chair of the Public Housing Committee, an important panel he sought given his background as former Housing Director for East Bronx Councilman Jimmy Vacca, his mentor. Torres' well calculated and cordial snub of Vacca for Council Speaker and resistance with party bosses was a gamble that Torres won, clearing his path as a rising star within the new liberal class of council members. So on top of his six-figure salary, Torres will earn another \$23,000 carrying the extra responsibilities, where he could very well hold hearings addressing NYCHA's historically poor performance record.



Jimmy Vacca:
Though he challenged Viverito in her quest for Speaker by running himself, Vacca (D-13th CD) managed to land a

spot as a member of Viverito's leadership team. On top of serving as Deputy Leader for Technology, Vacca will also chair the Technology Committee, a new post for Vacca who served as chair of the Transportation Committee for some time. For Vacca, his new roles appear to be a case of two steps forward, one step backwards given the less prominent post of the Technology Committee. Still, a bump as Deputy Leader is also a \$23,000 salary bump for the east Bronx legislator, representing Morris Park, Throggs Neck, Pelham Parkway, and City Island. For his part, Vacca promises on his Facebook page to be "the most tech-savvy member of the body!"



WHO GAINED
Andrew Cohen: In his first time out as councilman, the newly sworn-in Cohen (D-11th CD) assumes the post as chair of the Mental Health Services Committee from his predecessor Oliver Koppell. The post can be seen as an

opportunity for the relatively unknown Cohen to shine, though the committee is often viewed as less important compared to other committees, such as the ever-coveted Land Use Committee.



Maria del Carmen Arroyo: Arroyo (D-17th CD) comes out of the political fallout of the Viverito aftermath relatively unscathed, given

her support for Brooklyn councilman Dan Garodnick, moving from Health to Community Development Committee. Arroyo's re-appointment better suits her, given the nature of the committee that explores ways to reduce poverty in low-income neighborhoods. Arroyo can lend first-hand experience to the committee, since neighbors residing in her district fall largely below the poverty line.



Vanessa Gibson: Having switched from the state to the city level, newcomer Gibson (D-16th CD) is now Public Safety Committee Chair, holding

the power to hold the NYPD's feet to the fire on issues related to Stop-and-Frisk. The level-headed Gibson is walking a fine line since the current top cop was picked by her boss, Mayor Bill de Blasio, which could likely give her less room to criticize the department.



Fernando Cabrera: Cabrera (D-14th CD) walks away from the Technology Committee and transitions to Juvenile Justice, a

spot he sought (his other preference was Higher Education Committee Chair). From Cabrera's standpoint, the post could help create more crime prevention programs to help steer young people away from a hard life. Now, whether he'll convince Vacca to honor his promise to re-review the NYPD's Crime Map remains to be seen.

LEFT IN THE LURCH



Andy King: Councilman Andy King enters his first official tenure as councilman without holding court over any committee chair posts. King, a former union organizer for 1199 SEIU, did not

back Viverito, whose background has been with the unions. On "Bronx Talk With Gary Axelbank," King explained that his unwillingness to initially support Viverito was largely due to other Bronx council members seeking the Speaker seat, namely councilmembers Annabel Palma and Jimmy Vacca. Still, King doesn't appear to be bitter over being cast aside as he told Axelbank he's a "team player."



Annabel Palma: Coming out of the Viverito/deBlasio transition limping is Councilwoman Palma (D-18th CD) who lost the spotlight as Chair of the

General Welfare Committee after a futile race for Speaker against Viverito. She starts the year empty-handed, relatively powerless, and seemingly bitter, telling Capital New York her committee chair strip was "retribution."

WHY THIS MATTERS

Chairperson assignments can often be seen as the reward for throwing support to a particular Council Speaker. The assignments also support the vision crafted by the new Speaker, who can serve as a behind-the-scenes power player. In the end, chairpersons can review intros, hold hearings and decide whether to kill a bill. Chairperson posts raises one's profile, and can help steer monies towards a given portion of the budget, particularly if it serves their district's interests. In a more nuanced manner, chairpersons can view the post as a political gravy train, where special interest groups could very well legally fund a chairperson's upcoming campaign war chest for a friendlier inquisition during City Council meetings. Of course, chairs who play ball with Viverito/deBlasio's agenda stand to score even more discretionary funding come Fiscal Year 2015.

—DAVID CRUZ

Public and Community Meetings

- FRIENDS OF THE WILLIAMSBRIDGE OVAL** meets on Monday, Feb. 10 at 7 p.m. on the second floor of the Williamsbridge Oval Recreation Center at Reservoir Oval East and Van Cortlandt Avenue. All are welcome. For more information, email Elisabeth Von Uhl at friendsofthewilliamsbridgeoval@gmail.com.
- COMMUNITY BOARD 7** will meet Tuesday, Feb. 18 at the Bronx Library Center, 310 E. Kingsbridge Rd., in the auditorium, lower level. CB7 committees are held on the following dates at the board office, 229A E. 204th St., at 6:30 p.m. unless otherwise noted: Health & Hospital and Environment & Sanitation committees meet Tuesday, Feb. 11; Community Relations/LTP and Economic Development committees meet Wednesday, Feb. 12; Senior Services and Traffic & Transportation committees meet Thursday, Feb. 13; Housing and Land Use & Zoning committees meet Wednesday, Feb. 19. For more information, call (718) 933-5650 or visit bronxcb7.info/calendar.

All meetings are subject to change. Call to confirm.

Bronx Reacts to Stop-and-Frisk Settlement

(continued from page 1)

the NYPD racial profiled, the latter asked whether the NYPD's Clean Halls program violated civil rights. Under the terms of the settlement, the city would install an independent NYPD inspector general to review the tactic for a period of three years. City officials also agreed to police reforms with input from stakeholders, putting the police under greater scrutiny.

Both cases were presided over by Manhattan U.S. District Court Judge Shira A. Scheindlin, who ultimately ruled the policy in both stop-and-frisk cases violated the Fourth and Fourteenth Amendments. Her decision in the Floyd case was reversed by the Second Circuit Court of Appeals, which also removed her from both cases claiming she may have personally shown bias before hearing the cases.

Proponents of stop-and-frisk have defended the practice for years, emphasizing that the tactic was a deterrent that's saved lives. It was a stance Mayor Bloomberg maintained throughout his mayoral tenure. But de Blasio's proposed settlement is not a done deal. Police unions have until Feb. 7 to file motions objecting to the city's deal. City lawyers have until Feb. 14 to respond.

Still, de Blasio called his decision a "defining moment for millions of our families, especially those with young men of color." The policy resonates more personally for de Blasio, the head of a bi-racial family. During his campaign, the mayor mentioned several times that his mixed-race son Dante could be stopped

and frisked at one point in his lifetime.

Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr., whose borough showed the second highest number of stop-and-frisk incidents in the city during 2011, said the policy had "driven a wedge between the police and our communities..." He hopes the move will now create an atmosphere where people are treated respectfully.

Stop-and-Frisk in the Bronx

Stop-and-frisk remained a lead hot button issue in the Bronx, a borough that's inspired murals on the practice along with the dual suits. The case was sparked after David Floyd, an African-American man, was stopped and frisked by police after attempting to open his apartment door in what police thought was a burglary. The genesis of the Ligon case also started in the Bronx, after plaintiffs claimed the Clean Halls program—where development managers allowed officers to patrol buildings to stop any apartment dwellers—gave police too much carte blanche in stopping passersby.

For each incident, officers are required to file UF-250 Forms for statistical gathering. In 2012, the number of stop-and-frisk incidents began to steadily drop, according to figures compiled by the New York Civil Liberties Union, one of the NYPD's harshest critics. In all, there were 59,104 stops in 2012, of which 4756 resulted in arrest and 2980 in summonses. Of that number, 57,060 were either black or Hispanic.

Public Service Area 8, a division of the NYPD assigned to housing developments



File Photo

WITH THE DE BLASIO administration's decision to settle two highly publicized stop and frisk cases, images such as this stop and frisk encounter could be seen less frequently.

within the 43rd, 45th and 47th precincts, saw the highest number of stop-and-frisk incidents with 7,315. Meanwhile, the 44th Precinct covering the Grand Concourse, Mt. Eden and Highbridge, saw the highest number of stop-and-frisk incidents for a Bronx stationhouse, reaching 6,262. The 52nd Precinct, covering Norwood, Kingsbridge, Fordham and Bedford Park ranked 7 out of 15 Bronx stationhouses in the number of stop-and-frisk cases in the Bronx.

The numbers are sharply lower from 2011 when a total of 89,105 people were

stopped and frisked in the Bronx, according to NYPD statistics compiled by the NYCLU. Of that number, 80,629 were either black or Hispanic. The 2012 numbers suggest that the then NYPD Commissioner Ray Kelly was making attempts to decrease the tactic, heeding the call by an outraged public to tone down the number of stops.

Stop-and-Frisk Outcome

Whether this shift in tone will promote a friendlier relationship between police and public remains to be seen. While the policy will unlikely be phased out, experts suspect a more watered-down version of the tactic will result.

"You're seeing a suppressed force where they're not going to go out for fear of lack of support from this administration," said Monroe College Criminal Justice Professor Rob Gibbons, who retired as an NYPD lieutenant for the Detective Squad. In his estimate, a revision of stop-and-frisk, along with an exodus of retired officers and withdrawal of rookies from Operation Impact Zones could cause crime to spike.

Police Benevolent Association President Patrick Lynch blasted the decision, suggesting the process would hinder officers from doing their job. "Our goal is to continue to be involved in the process in order to give voice to our members and to make every effort to ensure that their rights are protected," said Lynch.

—Additional reporting by
JUSTIN MCCALLUM

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Borough President Takes Part in Crain's NY Forum



Photo courtesy Bronx Borough President's Office

BRONX BOROUGH PRESIDENT Ruben Diaz Jr. (center) sits publicly with heads of other boroughs to discuss economic development in the boroughs.

By **DAVID CRUZ**

Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr. pegged himself as a job creator and economic development booster in his first gathering with his new fellow heads of borough at a forum sponsored by *Crain's New York Business*. Diaz arrived as the most experienced borough president in the city these days, as his fellow BPs have just begun their

tenure as their respective borough's chief executive.

Crain's columnist Greg David moderated the morning program at the Yale Club in midtown Manhattan, peppering Diaz with questions related to jobs, economic development, and whether he conforms completely to Mayor Bill de Blasio's political agenda. Overall, Diaz stands behind de Blasio on several key issues such as expanding sick pay to small business workers while im-

posing more taxes on those making \$500,000 to help cover the cost of universal Pre-K, though he admitted he's not completely supportive of charging rent to charter schools housed in city buildings since some groups may be unable to afford it.

Diaz touched on his usual points—securing jobs for Bronxites by convincing online grocer FreshDirect to set up shop in Port Morris while leading the charge in converting the Kingsbridge Armory into a massive national ice center. He switched topics some, discussing possible expansion of Metro-North service to the east Bronx, a move largely supported by Albany. The BP let slip his future intentions to push for rezoning areas where the four Metro-North stations would be built. John DeSio, a spokesman for the BP, later clarified that more conversations are needed to flesh out possible re-zoning. “This is more about the potential for this project than any concrete plan,” he said.

Changing zoning laws as a way to entice further development could very well change the current look of neighborhoods where Metro-North stations in Hunts Point, Parkchester, Morris Park and Co-op City will be set up, should the Albany legislature vote in favor of incorporating the plan into the MTA's 2014 Capital Budget. Major rezoning has taken shape in the Bronx in recent years, including Webster Avenue, intended to draw further business to the borough.

Completing these projects is still years in the making, allowing for the borough's continued sky-high jobless rate to fester. The three-term BP intends to shatter the double-digit unemployment figure (now at 10.6 percent) so often linked to the borough, by convincing developers to primarily hire those from the Bronx, a caveat that was seen in the FreshDirect and Armory deals.

The forum was an ultimate indicator of the kind of talking points Diaz will run down during his State of the Borough Address on Feb. 20. He'll be delivering his key speech under a cloud of success with accomplishments that include sealing the fate of the Kingsbridge Armory while still determining how to fix the jobs problem.

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Crime File

By DAVID CRUZ



Prowler Itching to Burglarize

The 52nd Precinct's on the lookout for a burglar with a penchant for sneaking into apartment buildings and making off with property. Police say the suspected crook (pictured above) has been at it since November, with reports he broke into an apartment near Morris Avenue on Nov. 4 only to walk away empty-handed. He got even more brazen on Nov. 14 during a daylight burglary hit, walking into the front door of a Grand Concourse home and stealing a laptop. Police are asking anyone with information to call Crime Stoppers.



Pickpocket Mommy on the Loose

A snatch and grab thief, who took her baby along, is still out there, and police at the Five-Two need your help in tracking her. The thief, rolling a baby stroller, robbed someone of their wallet as the victim waited on line inside a Burger King at 215 E. Fordham Rd. on Jan. 4 at noon. The suspect came from behind and slowly lifted the wallet from the victim's purse, making off with \$80 and various credit cards. Surveillance video (photo above) caught the thief in action. Anyone with information is asked to call Crime Stoppers.

Catalytic Converter Thefts

An unusual crime is happening right underneath your car, and police are warning you about it. Reports have spiked throughout the Bronx over the theft of catalytic converters, mechanized car filters composed of a mix of precious metals that

often include platinum, rhodium and palladium. This past December the borough saw over 140 catalytic converters ripped from vehicles, with the 50th Precinct, covering Riverdale, Fieldston, Kingsbridge, Marble Hill, and Spuyten Duyvil seeing \$46,000 worth of converters taken. Thieves often scope out cars that have been left in isolated areas for a prolonged time, and once the coast is clear, they duck underneath the bottom of the car. Using a battery saw, the thief can cut the converter in less than a minute and make off with the piece. Cars without a converter tend to gravely roar when it starts. Precious metals are in high demand these days, which often run upwards to \$150 should a thief sell the metal to a scrap yard. Police departments are issuing crackdowns by heading to junk shops to ensure owners ask for ID to anyone bringing a converter. They also warn drivers to move their car periodically to prevent the thief from getting the upper hand.



Thief Strikes Twice

The Five-Two's on the hunt for a thief who struck twice in Kingsbridge this month, making off with hundreds of dollars in valuables. The suspect first broke into an apartment on Bailey Avenue on Thursday, Jan. 16 during broad daylight, stealing jewelry, cash and several Apple products. He struck again just a week later, copying the same steps as the previous crime by breaking into an apartment building during broad daylight and stealing jewelry, cash and several Apple products. Thankfully, no one was injured. Surveillance video (photo above) captured a picture of the suspect for the dual burglaries—a Hispanic man in his 40s, standing at 5' 9" tall with a medium build. He was seen wearing the same black hat, black and grey jacket with a white stripe, and black sneakers. The public is asked to call Crime Stoppers at 1-800-577-TIPS (8477) or submit tips by logging onto the Crime Stoppers website at www.nypdcrimestoppers.com or by texting their tips to 274637 (CRIMES) then enter TIP577.

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Mixed Reactions to New Tracey Towers Mailboxes

(continued from page 1)

enforcement with regard to the mandate, having exempted older buildings from having to replace their mailboxes. It's only if a building undergoes a "substantial" renovation that the law goes into effect.

Safety Issues

It's not the aesthetics of the Tracey Towers mailboxes that Hill doesn't like, but what it's done to compromise visibility and safety. She said that the placement impedes the security guards' ability to monitor the entire room.

The guards sit at stations at either end of the lobby, with the mailbox banks in-between them. "The guards can't see each other," she said. "Or, if you're standing in between the mailboxes, and somebody gets you - who would notice?" She said she is asking to have cameras installed parallel to the structures, to eliminate any blind spots.

Hill said that some tenants are also concerned about a quick exit in case of an emergency. She's inviting the Fire Department to the next Tenants Association meeting to perform practice drills and quell concerns. "There is more than one exit to the lobby," she said. "But people who haven't lived in high rises can get nervous about what to do."

Donald Miller, vice president of Public Relations at RY Management, said that the safety and comfort of the residents and guests of Tracey Towers is RY Man-

agement's number one priority, though he disputes the claim the change could inspire a security breach. The mailbox and lobby designs meet all NYC Department of Buildings and USPS regulations.

The installation is part of a large renovation project Hill considered "necessary" for Tracey Towers after noticing the roof "literally falling down on our heads."

The changes activated the USPS mandate, causing the architect to include a design for updated mailboxes in their renovation plans. "The new box, which is required, is twice as large as the current box," said Miller.

The current location of the mailboxes is too small to house the increase. The solution was to place the new larger boxes along a section of the lobby floor.

With 689 units, Tracey Towers is a bustling place. The lobby is a constant stream of tenants. Some walk idly past the new boxes; others stop to examine them.

Zayala McCallister, 16, has lived in Tracey Towers all her life. She said that the mailboxes were out of the way. "They're still better on the sides, because a lot of children play in the lobby and it's crowded," she said.

Ruby Bell, a tenant in the building since 1989, said the updated, modern feel was nice, but "in the way." "They block the view," Bell said. "Most people are upset about it."

Sally Caldwell, longtime resident and



Photo by Shayla Love

THE OLD MAILBOXES (seen here) are still in use at Tracey Towers, though a decades-old regulation by USPS will soon phase them out.

community leader in Tracey Towers, doesn't have a problem with them. "I love it," she said. "When people aren't used to that type of change, it's very hard. That's the process with some people. When all is said and done, I think it's going to be fantastic."

Bell said that the residents of Tracey Towers are not against improving their

building. "We're not against changes. People are concerned about safety," Bell said. "Safety first, beauty next."

Despite concerns, the mailboxes are up and here to stay. The switch to the new mailboxes will take place when renovations are completed. "They had to be updated," Hill said. "We just have to live with it."

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Bronx Youth Heard

SAT Prep Courses Drain Students of Funds

Editor's Note: Christa Cersosimo, one of Bronx Youth Heard's dynamite students for the Winter 2013/2014 issue, knocked it out of the ballpark with this fine piece.

When it comes to students taking what's arguably the most important test of their lives, several test prep institutions are taking that importance to the bank.

SAT prep courses such as the Princeton Review reap \$4 billion a year, while the yearly take home for the Kaplan Test Prep courses stands at \$2.2 billion a year. That's because the average student spends roughly \$1,000 on SAT prep courses, according to one test guide.

Up Your Score, publishers of several SAT prep books geared towards easing the anxiety of test taking, finds parents are "willing to spend up to \$1,000 on an SAT prep course." But in the Bronx, scrounging up SAT prep fees does not come easily for every family. Oftentimes, the students are helping to foot the bill.

Ani Akpan of Highbridge is a senior at Browning School, splitting the cost of paying for the extra help with his parents. From his own savings, he paid for books and \$750 for a one-year subscription to Method Test Prep, an online course. His parents covered the \$1,000 bill for weekly tutoring.

But not all students are as lucky as Ani. For instance, Nicholas Doron, 16, had to get by without the extra support. "My parents don't have the money so I had to borrow the book from the school," said Nicholas, who attends Lehman High School in Throggs Neck. "It wasn't that helpful."

Students like Nicholas are exactly what worries Bob Shaeffer.

The cost of SAT prep can put low-income students at a disadvantage, according to Schaeffer, public education director at Fair Test, an education think tank promoting fairness in test taking. The test preparation companies leave less affluent students further behind the eight ball," he told the Los Angeles Times earlier this year.

In 2012, 1.6 million students took the SAT nationally and the center that issues

CHRISTA CERSOSIMO



MERCHANTS HONOR CITY'S FINEST, BRAVEST AND STRONGEST



Photo courtesy Mosholu Preservation Corporation

HIGH HONORS went out to members of the NYPD, FDNY and Department of Sanitation for their efforts in improving the quality of life along Wakefield's bustling commercial spur. They were honored Friday, Jan. 31 by the East 233rd Street/White Plains Road Merchants Association, thanking the agencies for promoting safety and cleanliness while forging team efforts. Holding up awards are members of the NYPD, FDNY, DSNY and EMS. They stand with Mosholu Preservation Corporation Executive Director Roberto Garcia (far right) and MPC Deputy Director Marcia Cameron (far left).

the test made \$600 million in 2009, according to CNN news anchor and reporter Carol Costello.

Wealth is often linked to success. And while some families can afford for their children to take the test multiple times utilizing various testing resources such as tutors, books and classes to fuel their success, some families are not so lucky. A survey taken by The Washington Post in October 2013 found students whose family makes less than \$20,000 a year score an average 1326, a below average grade, while students who come from a family that

makes more than \$200,000 have an average score of a 1714.

Cost aside, some students think the SAT plays too big of a role in the college application process. Several students argue that the test only appeals to more academically focused students, leaving college admissions counselors to likely disregard one's extracurricular activities.

As far as Manhattan Community College student Shakema Barnison, 20, is concerned, the over emphasis of the SAT should be disregarded. "This test doesn't define who I am as a student," she said.

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Business Beat

The Brains Behind the Jerome–Gun Hill BID

By DAVID CRUZ

Editor's Note: The Norwood News has brought back *Business Beat*, a feature spotlighting business-related stories with the captain of the industry in mind. If you have a business-related story idea, please call (718) 324-4998 or email the Editor-in-Chief, David Cruz, at dcruz@norwoodnews.org.

In the eclectic tailspin of Jerome Avenue and Gun Hill Road, where the rumble of the elevated 4 subway mixes with sounds of foot traffic, shopping bags and cash registers, an economic force has spent years fine-tuning the shopping strip. Behind it is a Jamaican-born businesswoman who sought the American dream.

She's Marcia Cameron, executive director of the Jerome-Gun Hill Business Improvement District (JGHBID), having settled into the job since July of last year after serving as director of the Bronx Women's Resource Center. Her latest mission: to encourage shopping at the BID, an L-shaped corridor in Norwood. It begins at Jerome Avenue and Mosholu Parkway before cutting right onto Gun Hill Road, a main thoroughfare that's home to a hodgepodge of diverse restaurants, clothiers and cute flower shops.

For Cameron, the BID serves as a 24/7 promotional rollercoaster, intended to "drive foot traffic to the businesses in the district." It's no wonder the BID has relied heavily on Montefiore Medical Center, the neighborhood hospital abutting the BID. The hospital is viewed as a potential economic boon for merchants, given Montefiore's 20,000 staffers and number of daily visitors who stop by the campus. Cameron, ever the numbers person (she's a Sudoku fanatic), sees this as an opportunity to help increase sales by instituting a Montefiore Associate Discount Program, offering reduced prices to staffers.



Photo by Adi Talwar

SAY HELLO to Marcia Cameron, Executive Director of the Jerome-Gun Hill Business Improvement District, a busy L-shaped commercial strip in Norwood that's home to 228 stores.

"I've actually to my surprise hear people say 'I'm a Montefiore employee. Where's my discount!'" recalled Cameron. "I was like, 'Yes!'"

Business owners can also rely on the BID's mass emails, alerting 1600 community organizations and leaders to spread word of a new store opening, or a promotional gimmick. The latest looks to bank on Valentine's Day, a major retail holiday that shoots up business following the holiday rush. Patrons who shop in select stores qualify to take part in a raffle contest, where prizes include gift cards, free breakfast or a dinner voucher for two.

Promoting the BID

Cameron certainly has a full plate these days, juggling all her tasks with what appears to be some kind of internal balance. But even as she doubles as deputy director for the Mosholu Preservation Corporation, pursues a master's degree in accounting/finance, and attends Coro New York business training, Cameron's priority remains the BID. As far as she's concerned, the agency functions as the prime motivator to spread word on the 228 restaurants, drugstores and big chains canvassing the BID. "We are their cheerleader, we're here to promote their

district," said Cameron, a soft-spoken Bronxite who arrived to the states nearly 20 years ago, after being raised by her grandmother in Portland, Jamaica.

Cameron's also the BID's protector. Her role often involves rooting out unlicensed street vendors who compete with brick and mortar merchants, subsequently threatening the BID's business interest. Cameron serves as the eyes and ears of the area, calling the 52nd Precinct to weed out unwelcome vendors. Though licensed vendors pepper the area, their presence does raise the potential for rent-paying merchants to close their shop for good, something Cameron wants to avoid.

Spreading the Message

The BID's responsibilities mirror the other nine BIDs scattered throughout the Bronx. And with an economic upswing taking shape in the Bronx in recent years, more BIDs have cropped up, with the Westchester Square BID being the latest to form.

On top of sanitation and graffiti removal services, JGHBID also boasts an aggressive marketing campaign for its merchants. For the past 12 years, the BID has hosted the Fall Festival, a large September venue Cameron considers "a great opportunity for the merchants to engage the community." "We provide entertainment and sponsorships. And our merchants come out on the streets. They all promote their services," she said.

The BIDs have their own cheerleader—the city's Small Business Services, the agency that carries out each respective BID's message while also functioning as a liaison between BIDs and city agencies that help clean up.

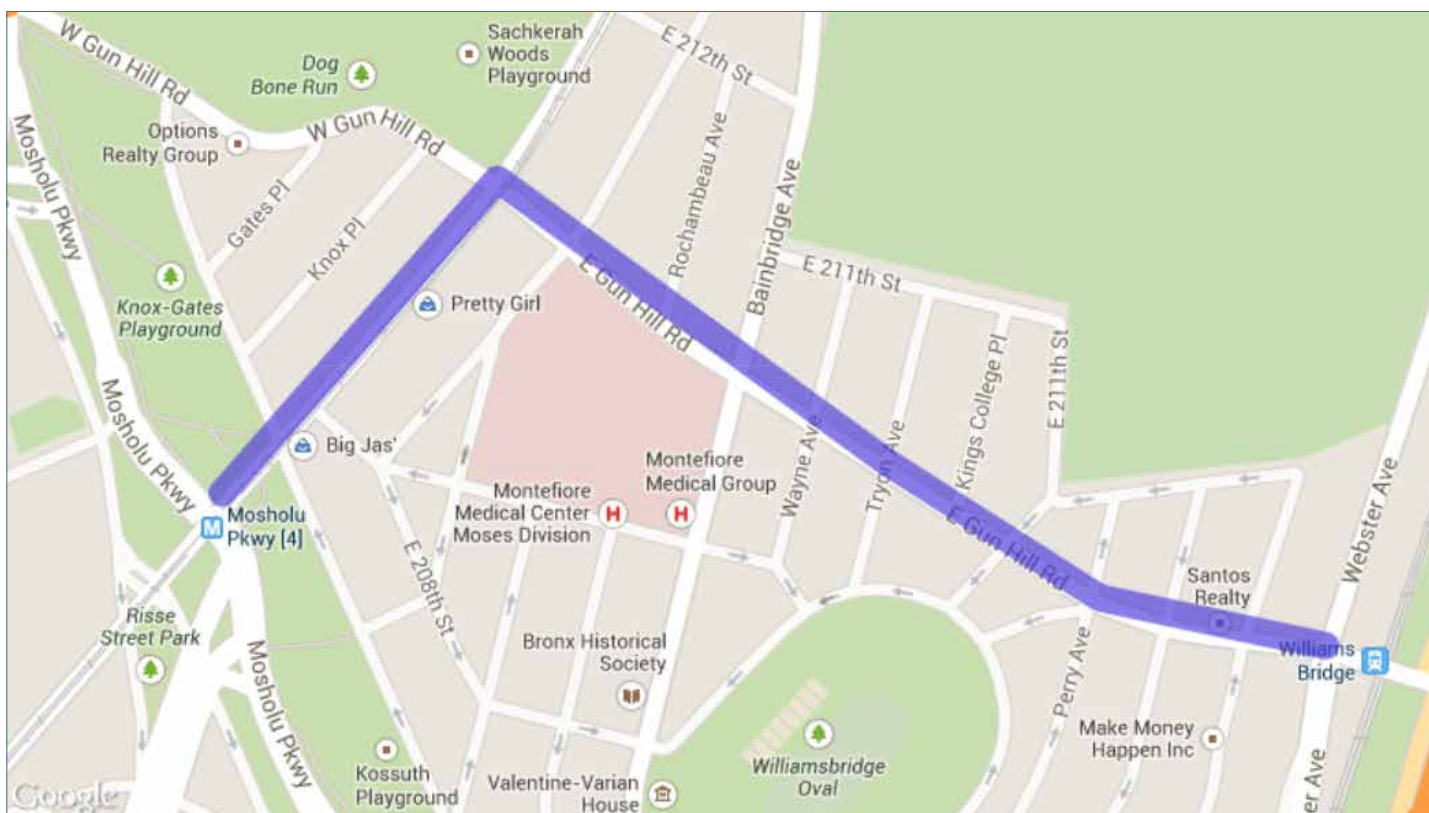
JGHBID is certainly not the newest kid on the block. Formed 17 years ago after a lengthy process, the BID was signed into law by then Mayor Rudy Giuliani. All BIDs are required to be legally established since its operating costs come in the form of an assessment, a special tax that's agreed upon by the property owners who are likely to pass the cost on to business owners in the form of rent. The BIDs finances add up to \$259,000, earmarked towards amenities that clean up the business stretch while spreading word on the BID through advertisement.

Character Building

Each BID tends to have a unique character, whether it's basing the economic strip around a major venue (the 161st Street BID's success is arguably driven by foot traffic from Yankee Stadium) or even a major thoroughfare (the Fordham BID is settled along Fordham Road). For Cameron, finding the BID's identity is on her list of challenges.

"When you say you're going to the Square, everyone knows you're going to Westchester Square. When you say you're going to Fordham, you know you're going to the Fordham BID," said Cameron. "I think it's about having that identity where it's just a one-word phrase where you're going to shop. And to do such a good job where people come, they shop, they take advantage of all the services in this community."

Businesses wishing to learn more about the JGHBID can call (718) 324-4946.



Map courtesy Google Maps

AN AERIAL LOOK at the Jerome-Gun Hill BID, an L-shape commercial strip that begins at Jerome Avenue and Mosholu Parkway East and ends at East Gun Hill Road and Webster Avenue.



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The average yearly cost for a family's health insurance (Source: Kaiser Family Foundation and the Health Research & Educational Trust)

Vital Stats

Spreading Word on Affordable Care Act

By DAVID CRUZ

For those in the clergy, civic and business communities, the new federal healthcare law remains somewhat of a mystery. The Affordable Care Act, having gone into effect Jan. 1, is intended to help provide coverage for those who couldn't previously afford it. Since Oct. 1, thousands of Bronxites have signed up, though 250,000 more remain without healthcare.

So in its long-term quest to encourage every resident to sign up for healthcare, Montefiore Medical Center urged these key Bronx groups to crystallize the merits of the new law to their members during a healthcare forum on Jan. 27. Healthfirst co-sponsored the forum, facing a large crowd, with Congressman Charles Rangel lending some political star power.

The 20-term Congressman, known as the "Chairman" within the Bronx political sphere, helped pass the law through the House of Representatives, understanding the correlation between no insurance and the financial hardship that results the moment the uninsured walk into an emergency room.

The forum served as a workshop, with health experts demystifying the confusion often linked to the federal law that's served as President Obama's signature piece of legislation. Under the federal mandate, those who either have pre-existing conditions, were suddenly dropped by a carrier for no reason, or were aged out, can now be covered.

But the law precludes coverage for undocumented immigrants. It's a fact Dr. Steven Safyer, Montefiore's CEO and president, pointed out as a key reason behind the 250,000 Bronxites who remain uninsured. "We believe



Photo by Adi Talwar

CONGRESSMAN CHARLIE RANGEL delivers the keynote speech at a forum that focused on the Affordable Care Act. The event was sponsored by Montefiore Medical Center and Healthfirst.

that healthcare is not a privilege, but it's a right, a human right," said Safyer. "And we stand by that."

New York is one of 16 states in the country to offer insurance through a so-called exchange marketplace, taking the form of a website—www.nystateofhealth.ny.gov. The site, which organizers boast hasn't crashed since it launched on Oct. 1, lists health plans Bronxites can directly buy insurance from. There are 16 types of health insurance providers in New York State, ranging from Healthfirst to Health Plus, with nine of them located in the Bronx. Panelists also outlined the new tax credits Bronxites can take advantage of once they sign up for healthcare.

"The cost of coverage through the marketplace is 53 percent lower than it was last year," said Danielle Halohan, Deputy Director for New York State of Health, deemed the official health plan marketplace.

Throughout the state, over 7,000 certified assistors have fanned out, representing the State Health Department or insurance companies to guide Bronxites into understanding what type of coverage works best for them. Those who avoid buying insurance can face fines.

On the business front, Nicholas Capano spoke directly to his fellow captains of industry about the importance of sharing information on several benefits of the law, including a tax credit of 50 percent on premiums small business employers pay on behalf of employees enrolled through a Small Business Health Options Program Marketplace. "Fifteen minutes to sit with a specialist can save you hundreds of thousands of dollars in the long run," said Capano, a managing partner at Vantage Etc., a business solutions firm.

In outlining the program's benefits, Reverend Que English of the Bronx Christian Fellowship Church, pressed the healthcare field to further partner with clergy groups to make forums a regular part of the overall faith-based experience. "We have to be in the know, 'cause ignorance is dangerous," said English. "We hear the deadlines... and if we're not at the forefront of this, our people are going to miss out."

New coverage for Bronxites is set to take effect on March 1, with residents still able to sign up for healthcare by March 31 or face a penalty fee in the form of taxes. Those who haven't signed up by then will have to wait until November to apply for coverage that would start Jan. 1, 2015.

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Before picture by Sheila Sanchez, after picture by Paolo Mossetti

THE BROKEN pedestrian light between Bainbridge Avenue and East Mosholu Parkway, before and after it was repaired.

Public Outcry Helps Fix Crooked Light

By **PAOLO MOSSETTI**

It was a mysterious sight along Norwood, yet somewhat familiar—a ruptured pedestrian traffic signal left hanging from its steel pole. And even though the damage lasted for only a day, talk of the damaged sign was discussed on Facebook. That was until the city Department of Transportation dispatched a squad to fix it.

“I have never seen something like that in this area before,” said Sheila Sanchez, who first noticed the vandalized sign at the intersection of Bainbridge Avenue and Mosholu Parkway East on Jan. 22.

Sanchez, a community activist and member of the Northwest Bronx Dem-

ocrats, may not have been the first to notice it, but she was the first to snap a photo with her cell. “It’s not something that can be ignored for too long,” she said. “It was almost surreal.” But even after complaining to Community Board 7 and haranguing 311, news of the broken light had reached the DOT.

The pedestrian light was not completely disconnected from the seven foot pole. The light was indeed functioning despite its cockeyed position.

The Department of Transportation, for its part, said it normally gives maximum priority to broken traffic and pedestrian lights, in order to avoid excessive disruptions. Much of the legwork in alerting

the agency of these problems comes from complaints. “While we had not received this complaint earlier, we inspected and made any necessary repairs,” said Nicholas Mosquera, a DOT spokesman.

About the possible causes of such an occurrence, Sanchez has no doubts: “From what I saw, the wind was so strong this week and the days before, the lights got broken. Another traffic light post was half torn off at Mosholu Parkway on East 204th Street.” Sanchez dismissed the idea this could have been a case of vandalism. “If somebody wanted to destroy or steal a traffic light, why leave it still hanging from the mast? It doesn’t make any sense.”

Defacement of walls and wreckage of public property is not unusual in an area with an ongoing graffiti war and teen crews contending for territory. But the damage typically involves other targets. “Kids often assault the benches on Mosholu Parkway,” Sanchez said. “They rip the wooden plank apart, and use them as sticks to play with or improvise fights among themselves. Officials can’t do much. Unless they catch them on the spot, it’s impossible to stop them.”

Still, despite the back story, Sanchez was relieved to see DOT’s rush to remedy the broken light issue. “It was fixed by DOT the day after we called them,” said Sanchez. “It was very quick.”

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Out & About

Compiled by JUDY NOY



Photo courtesy Lehman Center for the Performing Arts

LEHMAN CENTER for the Performing Arts presents **Guitar Passions of Sharon Isbin**, featuring the musical stylings of guitarist Sharon Isbin (center), along with jazz artists Stanley Jordan (l) and Romero Lumbambo.

Onstage

■ Bronx Arts Ensemble presents **classical music**, Feb. 9 at 3 p.m. in the Whitehall Auditorium, 3333 Henry Hudson Pkwy. (\$25). For more information, call (718) 601-7399.

■ Lehman College, 250 Bedford Pk. Blvd. W., presents **Haifa Symphony Orchestra of Israel**, performing classical music, Feb. 6 at 8 p.m. (tickets are \$25 to \$75; \$10/ages 12 and under); **The Guitar Passions of Sharon Isbin**, Feb. 9 at 3 p.m. (tickets are \$25 to \$35); and **Soweto Gospel Choir**,

Feb. 15 at 8 p.m. (tickets are \$25 to \$45); (all in the Center for the Performing Arts); **The Met: Live in HD**, Dvorak's *Rusalka*, Feb. 8 at 12:55 p.m. (free) in the Lovinger Theatre; and **Lehman Chamber Players**, performing classical music, Feb. 16 at 2 p.m., (free), in the Music Building Recital Hall. For more information, call (718) 960-8833.

■ The Bronx Library Center, 310 E. Kingsbridge Rd., presents **Jazz by the New Amsterdam Musical Association**, Feb. 8; and **Tosca Music**, performed by the NY Opera Forum, Feb. 15; both at 2:30 p.m. For more information, call (718) 579-4244/46/57 or visit www.nypl.org.

■ The Mosholu Library, 285 E. 205th St., presents **Renato Thomas**, featuring Latin percussion, Feb. 15 at 2 p.m. For more information, call (718) 882-8239.

Events

■ Bronx Council on the Arts, presents a free **family craft workshop** featuring headdresses, Feb. 15 from 12:30 to 3 p.m. at the Huntington Free Library, 9 Westchester Square. For more information, call (718) 931-9500 ext 33 or (718) 829-7770.

■ Mosholu Montefiore Community Center's Northside Annex, 3512 DeKalb Ave., presents a **ribbon cutting open house**, Feb. 6 at 3 p.m. The public is invited to a cooking demonstration at MMCC's newly refurbished 12-station kitchen. For more information, call (718) 882-4000.

■ Boricua College, 890 Washington Ave. (near Third Avenue and 163rd Street) invites the public to a **College Information Day/Open House**, Feb. 15 at 11 a.m. Learn about the admissions process, financial aid and take a college tour. For more information and to RSVP, call (347) 964-8600.

■ Bronx Museum of the Arts, 1040 Grand Concourse (165th Street), presents free **First Friday**, Feb. 6, 6 to 10 p.m., featuring film, art performances, music and other special events. For more information, call (718) 681-6000.

■ Wave Hill, a Bronx oasis at 675 W. 252nd St. in Riverdale, offers **Family Arts Project**: Hearts, flowers and Lovebirds, to make Valentine's Day cards, Feb. 8 and 9; and Exotic Desert Dwellers, to sketch, use paper maché, and paint, to make a paper plant, Feb. 15 and 16; at the WH House from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Additional event includes

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Haifa Symphony Orchestra

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Thursday, February 6th, 2014 - 8PM

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(*includes prime seats and pre-concert reception)



Guitar Passions of SHARON ISBIN

GRAMMY AWARD WINNING GUITARIST
Featuring Jazz Legend **STANLEY JORDAN**
& Brazilian Virtuoso **ROMERO LUBAMBO**
Sunday, February 9th, 2014 - 3PM

Tickets: \$35, \$30, \$25 | Children 12 and under, \$10 any seat



Soweto Gospel Choir

THE TWO TIME GRAMMY-AWARD WINNERS
AND INTERNATIONALLY ACCLAIMED
WORLD MUSIC SENSATION.

In honor of **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.** and
in Memory of President **Nelson Mandela**.
Saturday, February 15th, 2014 - 8PM

Tickets: \$45, \$40, \$25 | Children 12 and under, \$10 any seat



Krasnoyarsk National Dance Company of Siberia

THE ETERNAL TREASURE OF FOLK CULTURE
Sunday, February 23rd, 2014 - 6PM

Tickets: \$45, \$40, \$25
Children 12 and under, \$10 any seat



Forever Freestyle 8

THE LATIN-FLAVORED '80S DANCE MUSIC SENSATION!

A LEHMAN CENTER FAVORITE! Featuring **Stevie B**,
Lisa Lisa, **TKA/K7**, **Safire**, **Cynthia**, **Johnny**
O, **Lydia Lee Love**, **Nayobe**, and **Sammy Zone**.
Sunday, March 1st, 2014 - 8 p.m.

Tickets: \$100, \$65, \$60, \$55



250 Bedford Park Boulevard West, Bronx, NY 10468



Program Subject to Change.
Box Office Service Fees Apply

Concert: The Crossroads Project, a multi-disciplinary presentation of art and science (\$32; \$28/seniors; \$18/ages 7 to 18; WH members \$22; \$12/child; RSVP to ext. 251). Grounds admission is free Saturdays until noon all year, and free all day Tuesdays in February. Glyndor Gallery **tours** take place Tuesdays and Saturdays at 2 p.m.; garden **walks** are held Tuesdays and Saturdays at 11 a.m. and Sundays at 2 p.m., from the Perkins Visitor Center. For more information and a schedule of events, call (718) 549-3200.

Exhibits

■ The NY Botanical Garden presents **Close: A Journey in Scotland**, through March 16, featuring creations of 21 notable contemporary designers and artists working in the Scottish landscape. For more information, call (718) 817-8700 or visit nybg.org.

■ Bronx Museum of the Arts, 1040 Grand Concourse, 2nd floor North Wing, between 161st and 164th streets, presents free: **Paulo Bruscky: Art is Our Last Hope**, through Feb. 9; and **Tony Feher; and Orchard Beach: The Bronx Riviera**, both through Feb. 16. Admission is free. For more information, call (718) 681-6000 ext. 131.

Neighborhood Notes

Annual St. Brendan's Blood Drive

St. Brendan's Parish, 333 E. 206th St., holds its annual blood drive for the Hudson Valley Blood Bank on Sunday, Feb. 9 from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. in the school cafeteria. Blood donations are urgently needed. Donors under the age of 18 must have written parental consent (photo ID is required). For more information, call (718) 547-6655.

Free Tax Prep

Ridgewood Savings Bank hosts free tax preparation days to eligible filers at 3445 Jerome Ave., on Sunday, Feb. 9 and also at its branch at 4101 White Plains Rd. on Feb. 15, both from 9:45 a.m. to 4 p.m. For more information, call (718) 881-3430 or (718) 882-0440.

Free Tax E-Guide

The Financial Advisors Group offers free tax e-guide until Feb. 17. For more information and the guide, call (347) 545-5075.

Monroe Softball Academy Tryouts

The Monroe Mustangs are holding tryouts for the Softball Academy on Saturday, Feb. 15 at noon at the Monroe Athletic Complex, 19 Lecount Pl., New Rochelle, NY. Applicants must be high school seniors, and bring a copy of transcripts, current physical exam results, sneakers, gloves and wear appropriate clothes. For more information, call Keri Meyer at (914) 740-6510.

Library Events

■ The Bronx Library Center, 310 E. Kingsbridge Rd., presents programs for adults including: **Single Stop/Government Benefits at 9 a.m.:** Feb. 6, 11, 13, 18 and 20; **Computer for Beginners:** Feb. 6 at 2 p.m.; **Internet for Beginners:** (in-person advance registration required), Feb. 18 at 2 p.m.; and **Microsoft Word 2010 for Beginners:** (in-person advance registration required), Feb. 20 at 2 p.m. Children can enjoy **Toddler Play Time at noon:** Feb. 6, 13 and 20; **Heart Animal Making:** Feb. 6 at 4 p.m.; **Family Time:** (ages 3 to 6), reading aloud and crafts, Feb. 8 at 11 a.m. (preregistration required); **Carnegie Kids: Elena Moon Park and Friends:** musical performance, Feb. 16 at 2 p.m.; and **Animal Mask Making:** Feb. 20 at 4 p.m. For more information, call (718) 579-4244/46/57 or visit www.nypl.org.

■ The Mosholu Library, 285 E. 205th St., offers for seniors and adults: **Knitting Circle:** Thursdays at 3 p.m.; **Wii Program:** Tuesdays at 3 p.m.; and **Computer and Mouse Basics:** (ages 50+), Feb. 12 at 10:30 a.m. (in-person advance registration required). Children can enjoy **Reading Aloud Story Time:** (ages 3 to 12), Feb. 10 at 4 p.m. English language learners can attend **English Conversation Program for Speakers of Other Languages:** Feb. 11 at 6:30 p.m. (in-person advance registration required). For more information,

Coat Drive

New York Cares is collecting coats for the needy this winter through Feb. 7. Bronx donation sites include the Office of the Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr. at 851 Grand Concourse (room 209) from 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Other drop-off sites include the 52nd Police Precinct, 3016 Webster Ave. For more information, visit www.newyorkcares.org.

Apply to Your Community Board

Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr. invites Bronx residents to join their local community board. Applications are available at your local board office or at Diaz's Community Board office and will be accepted for all 12 Community Boards for Bronxites who reside, work or have professional or other significant interests in the Bronx. Deadline is Feb. 7. For more information, call (718) 590-3543/8977, or apply online at bronxboropres.nyc.gov.

Summer Camp Applications

The Fresh Air Fund is accepting applications for its free 2014 summer camp program for eligible children ages 6 to 12 for the Volunteer Host Family Program, and ages 8 to 15 for the camping program in Fishkill, NY. For more information, call (800) 367-0003 or go online to www.freshair.org.

For more Neighborhood Notes online, go to www.norwoodnews.org and click on "Neighborhood Notes."

EDITOR'S PICK

Attention: Golden Anniversary Celebrants

Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr. and Healthfirst present their **7th Annual Sweetheart Luncheon** on Feb. 13 for Bronx couples who have been married for 50+ years. For more information, eligible couples may call (718) 590-6248.

call (718) 882-8239.

■ The Jerome Park Library, 118 Eames Place (near Kingsbridge Road), offers: **Kids' Active Health at 4 p.m.:** (ages 5 to 12), Feb. 7 and 14; **Toddler Story Time:** (18 to 3 months), Feb. 11 at 11 a.m.; and **Chess:** (ages 5 to 12), Feb. 18 at 4 p.m. For adults: **Computer**

Basics at noon: Feb. 6, 11, 13, 18 and 20. For more information, call (718) 549-5200.

NOTE: *Items for consideration may be mailed to our office or sent to norwoodnews@norwoodnews.org, and should be received by Feb. 10 for the next publication date of Feb. 20.*

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