

NORWOOD NEWS

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INQUIRING PHOTOGRAPHER:
WINTER OF DISCONTENT | PG. 4



"ARTIFY NORWOOD"
MOVEMENT TAKES FIRST STEPS | PG. 5

CO-OP OWNERS SLAM FORDHAM BD.

faction of shareholders hire law firm to monitor May elections



Photo by Adi Talwar

SHAREHOLDER FRANK MURILLO (at mic) debriefs other shareholders of the Fordham Hill Owner Corp. over its intention to oust the cooperative's current Board of Directors.

By DAVID CRUZ

Board meetings for the Fordham Hill Oval Corp., a sprawling gated community, are often held at St. Tolentine Church, across from the neighboring co-ops. But on Feb. 10, a faction of some 100 shareholders gathered there to determine how it could unseat the current Board.

The group of shareholders, a fraction of the 1,116 tenants who live in Fordham Hill, took its first steps to stage an electoral assault on the current Board, and managing agent, Argo Real Estate Management, by hiring a law firm specializing in cooperative law. Their first order of business: corral enough share-

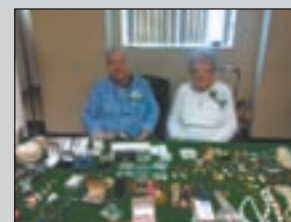
holders in good standing to run against the nine-member panel and to directly monitor the election process to ensure the bylaws are upheld.

The goal is to ensure there are enough votes, or quorum, to proceed with an election that in many cases has not been legally executed. It's become a main contention by the

fraction of shareholders who insist the current members were illegally voted in following no quorum.

Santamarina & Associates, a Manhattan-based law firm, agreed to represent the group for an undisclosed figure. Should mismanagement of the election be found, the firm

(continued on page 19)



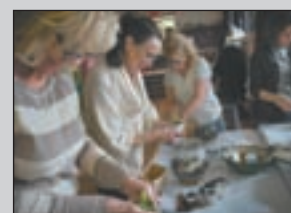
**BMCA Readies
for Flea Market
pg 3**



**Street Renaming for
Late Community
Activist | pg 6**



**Be Healthy: Heart
Awareness Month at
Monte | pg 14**



**Out & About
pg 18**

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IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST



Comptroller Stringer Backs Right to Counsel Bill

By DAVID CRUZ

The city's money man is standing behind a New York City Council bill that would provide public defenders to represent tenants going through Bronx Housing Court, a courthouse marred with delays and confusion.

But finding the money to fund Intro 214, known as the Right to Counsel Bill, is step two in determining whether the bill is even pragmatic, said Comptroller Scott Stringer, who met with housing advocates Feb. 4. His support comes ahead of the so-called budget dance, where special interest and community groups press the city for further funding for their causes. And though the Right to Counsel bill is still waiting in the wings in the City Council, Stringer is now asking his auditors to begin prodding the city's budget to determine the bill's feasibility.

"[W]e are certainly going to analyze the mayor's preliminary budget plan to figure out ways to prioritize what the city can do to subsidize a right to counsel process," said Stringer, standing outside Bronx Housing Court on the Grand Concourse alongside advocates for Community Action for Safe Apartments (CASA). Stringer added he's committed to heading to Albany with Mayor Bill de Blasio to convince the Albany Legislature to partially fund the bill.

Stringer's remarks came after touring the troubled courthouse. Taking note of some of his findings, Stringer saw that the court system lacks bilingual signage for an area that's largely made up of Latinos and Hispanics. He called the observation "depressing."

An analysis by CASA estimated it would cost roughly \$1200 to \$3200 to fund each housing-related case, while



Photo by Jenny Sharp

COMPTROLLER SCOTT STRINGER (at microphone) runs down the benefits of the Right to Counsel bill that would create a public defender apparatus for tenants going through Bronx Housing Court.

saving money in creating homeless shelters for evicted tenants. The bill, introduced by Bronx Councilwoman Vanessa Gibson and Manhattan Councilman Mark Levine, was introduced in December. Housing has remained a critical issue at a time when the de Blasio administration is looking to increase the affordable housing stock.

Housing advocates say the bill would improve the overloaded housing court, and also ease the burden of tenants who often rearrange their schedules to represent themselves before the court.

"The lines are long, the place is inadequate for the volume of people that come here. There's not enough information on the first floor. You have an information office on the second floor that is understaffed and unmanned and under budget as well," said Joseph

Cepeda, a CASA member familiar with the courtroom. He too observed the system, where tenants are often "lost and bewildered."

In many instances the deck is stacked against tenants left to interpret the housing laws on their own as a more skillful attorney representing the landlord understands the nuances to certain laws better.

Cepeda and other members suspect that landlords employ legal tricks to ultimately remove a tenant from a home and effectively increase the rent for the then vacant apartment.

Stringer expects the bill can also keep tenants in their home, reversing the homeless trend in the city. "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," said Stringer. "So if you stop an eviction, you stop someone from going through a system."

Public and Community Meetings

COMMUNITY BOARD 7 committees are held on the following dates at the board office, 229A E. 204th St., at 6:30 p.m. unless otherwise noted: Education/Libraries & Youth Services meets Feb. 19; Parks & Recreation meets Feb. 25; Senior Services meets Feb. 25 at 7:30 p.m. For more information, call the Board office at (718) 933-5650.

THE 52ND PRECINCT COMMUNITY COUNCIL meets at the Church of the Holy Nativity, 3061 Bainbridge Ave., on Feb. 26 from 7 to 9 p.m. For more information, call (718) 220-5824.

THE BEDFORD MOSHOLU COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION meets at 400 E. Mosholu Pkwy. So., Apt. B1 (lobby floor) on March 4 at 8 p.m. For more information, call (718) 367-2230.

NJ Suspect Nabbed for Bump Dumped in Norwood



ANDRE JAMAL THOMPSON

Photo courtesy Bergen County Prosecutor's Office

By **DAVID CRUZ**

Authorities in New Jersey have charged a man linked to the death of a Fort Lee man found dead in the trunk of a car in Norwood last month.

The Bergen County Prosecutor's Office says that Andre Jamal Thompson, known by associates as "Boogie," was charged with felony murder for the homicide of Jordan Johnson. The victim was found in a black BMW on 211th Street and Tryon Avenue just off the Major Deegan Expressway and overlooking the Woodlawn Cemetery on Jan. 15.

Investigators learned that Thompson allegedly lured Johnson to an apartment in Fort Lee. Johnson was then attacked and later strangled. His phone, keys and car were later taken.

Thompson would then use Johnson's phone to get his live-in girlfriend out of their apartment so Thompson could rob it of jewelry and cash, according to prosecutors.

After leaving the body in the car, Johnson soon left the state, holing himself up in a hotel room in Laurel, Maryland. He was apprehended on Feb. 5 and brought back to Bergen County with a bail set at \$2 million.

The case brings about a sense of closure to the Norwood community, where many believed this to be the first homicide of 2015 for the 52nd Precinct. The police had stumbled upon the body, using an automated license plate scanner.

The body had been left in the vehicle overnight in what's considered a very sleepy part of the neighborhood.

Bedford Pk. Woman Dies in Weekend Blaze

By **DAVID GREENE**

An electrical fire at a Bedford Park apartment claimed the life of a 78-year-old woman on one of the coldest nights of the year so far.

Firefighters rushed to 2874 Grand Concourse at Minerva Place at 3:32 a.m. on Feb. 15, finding the victim unconscious and unresponsive. Fire officials would declare the victim, later identified as longtime resident Margaret Henry, dead.

An FDNY spokesman said officials ruled the overnight fire as accidental, with no working smoke alarms in the apartment. It was unclear whether the fire started in the kitchen, as was pre-

viously stated, or if a portable heater or cooking oven sparked the blaze.

Rubber gloves and a woman's housecoat were found on the floor outside of Henry's third floor apartment door, next to a dried pool of blood.

Questions on the possible cause of the deadly fire that was contained to Henry's third floor apartment were fueled by chilly conditions inside the building's lobby and two separate handwritten messages near the building's mailbox that read, "We need heat." The FDNY typically sees an uptick in fires during the height of the winter season as temperatures

plunge and residents seek to warm up their apartments.

Several building residents said that the landlord refuses to give heat and have registered complaints to 311, though no reports on those heat complaints were filed to the city during the winter season.

Firefighters brought the fire under control within the hour and no other injuries were reported.

Repeated attempts to contact the building's owner Concourse Apartments, LLC were unsuccessful. Multiple calls to the building's managing agent, M.P. Management on Cruger Avenue, went unanswered.

BMCA Gears Up for Yearly Flea Market

By **JENNY SHARP**

Community groups employ a number of techniques to engage the public and fund their charitable operations. There are auctions, raffles, local concerts, and, in the case of the Bedford Mosholu Community Association (BMCA), flea markets.

On Saturday, March 7 the BMCA will once again host its flea market fundraiser in the hopes of refilling its yearly budget. But it's first relying on the public to donate knickknacks, tchotchkes and other items prior to the event held at St. Mary's Orthodox Church, 360 Bedford Pk. Blvd. near Decatur Avenue. Everything, except clothing, is accepted and appreciated.

At the BMCA Feb. 4 meeting, Barbara Stronczer, the group's president and the flea market's lead organizer, emphasized that any donation helps, even a cup or a plate. "If you have toys that you don't use anymore or dishes—it doesn't have to be a set, a couple of plates or glasses, please wrap them up and come and visit us," said Stronczer.

The BMCA is a community organization that has been active in the Bedford area since 1975. It holds meetings on the first Wednesday of every month, providing a public forum for anyone and everyone with an opinion on local matters and a desire to voice it. The group also facilitates volunteering opportunities, mainly park cleanups.

However, the BMCA provides these services with a relatively small budget. The flea market is their only fundraiser, with monies used throughout

the year on utilities and upkeep of their headquarters.

A flea market is an event that engages the public on multiple levels, allowing Bronx residents to purge themselves of the old, acquire the new, and support community projects simultaneously.

But this success is contingent upon

volunteers. The flea market itself exists each year due to collaboration. It relies on the posting of fliers by group members, on the generosity of Bedford residents as donors and buyers, and on the collective power of word of mouth.

"We need a lot of help," said Stronczer. "It's not a one or two person thing."

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INQUIRING PHOTOGRAPHER

By DAVID GREENE



This week we asked readers on how they've been coping with all the snow and how the city has dug itself out of a series of snowstorms.



Hey, it's a piece of cake; the city's doing good. I've been getting along fantastic. I don't own my own home, so I don't have to shovel. It's Mother Nature, that's all.

--Sean Slattery, Norwood



I've been dealing with it the best I can as far as paying attention to the weather reports and getting out when I have to get there and get back when I have to get back. I think there's been more snow in years past, but this year it's been a little bit colder. They've been doing a good job, but one Sunday a couple weeks ago all the black ice was all over the place and people were falling down.

--Reginald Tucker, Allerton



It's not too bad, but the last few weeks it's been very cold. The city has done a much better job this year removing the snow.

--Himan Al Nimir, Bedford Park



At my age I don't shovel the snow anymore. I have people shovel the snow, so I've been basically staying in. So this way, at my age, I don't get hurt in my late 50s. The city's been having a hard time with the snow and the cold. I think what the mayor did last time by shutting the city down, really saved lives. But I can't wait for the summer.

--Robert Ford, Norwood



I believe that we received a lot of snow, but not as much as they have said we'd receive. The first storm they announced, they over-dramatized it. They made me leave work early because they said I couldn't drive or you would get a ticket. I believe that the cold has come down too much that the snow has turned to ice and that's the most dangerous thing. A lot of people have been having a lot of problems with this.

--Francisco Marte, Norwood

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Artify Norwood Movement Connects Business With the Arts

By **MONICA MELTON**

An 'Artify' movement is coming to a neighborhood near you. And it starts in Norwood.

The movement is the brainchild of Fernando Tirado, founder of Neighborhood Initiatives and Economic Development Strategies, and Anne Leighton, a consultant to musicians and artists. Together the pair has set out to make Norwood a focal point for all art forms, and a collaborative space for local businesses to take in artists.

Tirado and Leighton suggest that the burgeoning movement is a way for local artists to have a venue while attracting more people to the area, which is a plus for local businesses. To the pair, the trades can be mutually beneficial to each other. "The arts are a way to break the cycle of poverty. I wanted to do something that was both artistic and provide more than exposure for local artists, but a way for them to get paid," said Tirado.

In bringing an arts culture to the neighborhood, Artify Norwood intends to create a demand for local businesses and provide opportunities for residents. The movement will match businesses with artists, who will be compensated for their work by the business owners.

Tirado and Leighton plan to work with the East 204th Street and Bainbridge Avenue Merchants Association to connect artists to businesses. Its lead organizer is Eli Garcia, owner of Beso Lounge, which has welcomed an art scene that's helped increase the restaurant's popularity and demand. "They've had poetry night, comedy nights, live performances and they've become a fixture in this community," he said. "We're pitching it as a marketing concept that giving back to your community and providing a space for artists to make money and perform is actually good for business. It's a draw."

Leighton, working with a number of Bronx artists, sees Artify Norwood as a way for the local artists to get noticed. Leighton notes the movement may have a much broader reach. "There are also possibilities we may hook some of the local arts businesses that already exist with national

and international companies as well," said Leighton.

Already there is potential to bridge communities across all of the Bronx and have a transformative effect through art and local business incentives. Leighton has reached out to Ellen Pollan, the deputy director of programming for the Bronx Council on the Arts. Pollan specifically works with the south Bronx arts scene.

Artify Norwood's premiere event will be a logo design competition at the Mosholu Library on Feb. 21 at 2 p.m. Locals artists are encouraged to come out and submit their designs for a logo that will represent the movement. There is also an upcoming event at Beso Lounge on March 28.

Tirado and Leighton have a number of ideas to make Norwood a destination for the arts including mural spaces, using Williamsbridge Oval Park as a concert venue, and Whalen Park as a place for smaller art events.

The duo conceived the idea of the arts revitalizing local business following the economic success of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. A town that saw an economic collapse after steel mills closed, locals began creating venues for art shows a few years later, according to Tirado. "Slowly Bethlehem, PA was able to transform itself into an arts haven. So we're saying let's look at the Bronx," Tirado said.

The Bronx is known as the birthplace of hip hop, but Tirado and Leighton see potential for it to be known for its other art forms. They believe art will draw more people to the neighborhood, which they admit is already a major transportation hub and will promote local spending and artists. This movement will also inspire other communities across the Bronx to incorporate more art, according to Leighton.

"Who knows, there may be an Artify Allerton, or an Artify Morrisania, or Hunts Point. We can create this movement that every community has its own Artify," Tirado said.

Artists and business owners can contact: info@artifynorwood.com to start a project and get more information.



Photo by Adi Talwar

MEET THE PARTNERS behind Artify Norwood--Anne Leighton (left) and Fernando Tirado. The pair has teamed up to help put Norwood's artistic side on the map.

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De Blasio Clears Way for Margaret Mack Triangle

By KIMBERLY JACOBS

The de Blasio administration has honored the Norwood/Bedford Park community's request to have a street renamed on behalf of a community activist who passed away last year.

Greenstreet Triangle, abutting Tracey Towers on West Mosholu Parkway South, will be renamed Margaret Mack Triangle. It's a fitting tribute to Mack, a longtime Community Board 7 member who served as chair of the Board's Parks Committee. She died last year after a long battle with cancer.

For years, Mack was known as a stalwart in Tracey Towers, the twin high-rises that house thousands of tenants. She lived there with her husband Joe. Haranguing management to improve conditions was part of her daily civic responsibilities, a type of activism that earned her recognition.

"She really helped turn this building around," said Jean Hill, Mack's neighbor and friend.

"Margaret Mack was a good neighbor in the truest sense of the term. She spent many years on the Tracey Towers Tenants Association where she



Photo by Jenny Sharp

GREENSTREETS TRIANGLE NEAR Tracey Towers will be renamed Margaret Mack Triangle after the late community activist.

was a leader for her fellow residents, fighting for cleaner hallways, better working elevators, as well as heat and hot water," said Councilman Andrew Cohen, who lobbied the de Blasio administration to include her name in the list of street re-namings. "One of the greatest tests of her leadership was

when she rallied her fellow tenants and took their case to court, fighting against management's proposed rent hikes upon the lower- and fixed-income residents, for over two years," he continued.

Besides the work she did in her building on the board of the Tracey

Towers Tenants Association, Networking Committee, and other civic organizations, her work on CB7 the last seven years of her life proved impactful as several Board members stood in front of Mayor Bill de Blasio on Feb. 5 when he signed off on the street re-naming.

"She would always say it was an honor working with me as the chairman, but it was truly an honor for me to work with her," said Adaline Walker-Santiago, chairman of Community Board 7. "She was always happy and working to make others happy."

As Parks and Recreation chair, Mack constantly tried to maintain the look and upkeep of that area. "The upkeep had to be the best in the middle of the triangle," said Walker.

The growing bush in the triangle was a pet peeve of hers due to it covering the area preventing drivers from seeing where to enter and also making it dangerous for pedestrians waiting for the bus and trying to cross the street.

"She would threaten to trim the hedges herself if the Parks Department didn't do it," said Hill. "We would tell them this all the time."

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Report Finds NYCHA Buildings in Disarray With Little Accountability

By ROSE ITZCOVITZ

In a city of thousands of building landlords, a pair of Bronx lawmakers has pegged the New York City Housing Authority one of the worst landlords.

At a news conference, Sen. Jeff Klein (34th Senate District) and New York City Councilman Ritchie Torres (15th Council District), flanked by government officials and members of housing advocacy groups, said money and accountability are necessary to fix rundown conditions of New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) buildings throughout the city.

Keeping their message fresh on the minds of public opinion, the pair released a study of NYCHA complexes throughout the city. The report found consistent problems included stairwell and hallway fires, malfunctioning heating systems, leaky roofs, mold and more.

Klein's Independent Democratic Conference, on which he serves as its president, teamed with Torres' office to draft the study, randomly choosing five NYCHA housing complexes to represent each borough. The Bronx was represented by Marble Hill Houses, an 11-story complex that geographi-

cally falls in the borough but belongs to Manhattan. According to Klein, no one borough fared worse than the other.

"The sad part is that they're all the same," Klein said. "We found the same type of debris in hallways in the Bronx as we found in Manhattan."

Senior citizens often comprise some of NYCHA's demographic, which can be a burden to living in the building, according to state Sen. Adriano Espaillat. "What worse can happen to a senior citizen who lives on the 17th floor than to have—you know, months—without their elevator working properly," Espaillat, a Democrat, said. "That's inhumane."

Klein said more funding is needed to fix the deteriorating buildings. His group proposed it gets the money from \$5 billion in legal settlements worked out between the state and financial institutions. The funds are due to New York State this year.

Klein and Torres also proposed the state and city each invest a total of \$500 million in funds to fix NYCHA buildings.

"One option is to simply stand by idly and watch the public housing stock



Photo by Rose Itzcovitz

SEN. JEFF KLEIN (at podium) outlines conditions in public housing that were published in a report his office and Councilman Ritchie Torres (behind podium) drafted.

deteriorate beyond repair," Torres said. "Or the second option is to save it; for the city and the state to come together, form a partnership, and make a real coordinated effort to preserve our public housing stock."

It's not just money that's needed to fix these nagging problems, but transparency on where allocations from lawmakers to NYCHA went. Klein has consistently questioned where money invested in NYCHA has gone. "I've allocated hundreds of thousands of dollars to individual and NYCHA developments in my district," Klein said. "That money still hasn't seen the light of day."

A NYCHA spokesperson did not comment about the missing monies, but agreed with legislators in allocating more funds to preserve housing.

"As a landlord, NYCHA recognizes the urgency and enormity of the problems that affect our residents' quality of life, and the de Blasio administration has made it a priority to address this since day one," said the NYCHA spokesperson in a statement. "Thanks to [Mayor Bill de Blasio's] unprecedented support, NYCHA has streamlined repairs and made safety and se-

curity upgrades. There is still much more work to be done."

Despite Klein's stance that allocations to NYCHA were unaccounted for, the "Worst Landlord" report cites NYCHA burdened by an operating shortfall of \$60 million annually, depleted reserves and a 27 percent reduced workforce headcount since 1998.

At Marble Hill Houses, some residents said deplorable conditions are often ignored even when they called the city's 311 system.

"All they want is their rent money," Tito Astacio, a 23-year-old Marble Hill Houses resident, said. "They don't care that there's roaches out here, rats. They don't care, they just fix the little things to make it look like it's good, but it's not really good."

Other residents said conditions could be worse. Pedro Hernandez has lived in one of NYCHA's Marble Hill buildings for 47 years. He said tenants are to blame because they litter and don't take care of their homes. "Unfortunately, some tenants make it bad for others," Hernandez said. "Other than that, the buildings are mostly well-kept, well-maintained."

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THE BRONX BELTWAY

By DAVID CRUZ

The stories you'll hear about in the world of Bronx politics.

State of the City

The Bronx was mentioned by name five times during Mayor Bill de Blasio's State of the City speech, where he outlined an unheard of \$200 million capital improvement project intended to spruce up the still dormant South Bronx waterfront. Funds will be earmarked for parks, schools, commercial development and 4,000 more units of housing, mostly affordable, keeping in track with de Blasio's agenda of more equity around throughout the city. He also pledged a plan to include ferry service from the southeastern community of Soundview to Manhattan.

There was also a mention of the Jerome-Cromwell neighborhood, a burgeoning community that can see more affordable housing. It first needs upzoning options, which Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr. may consider. Speaking of which...

State of the Bronx

Diaz is running high ahead of his annual State of the Borough speech slated for Feb. 19 at the new Macy's mall in Bay Plaza. His political pal, Carl Heastie was voted Assembly Speaker (no doubt he'll sing Heastie's praises), crime continues to drop (the NYPD shaved off crime in the Bronx by 3 percent in 2014), and major developments have been completed under Diaz's tenure.

Economic Development, an influx in housing and the creation of four Metro-North stations in the east Bronx will no doubt be touted accomplishments. But it's worth wondering whether the borough's rise in homeless shelters and supportive housing will be mentioned, along with the troubling drug culture hurting central and South Bronx.

Arrests on the Horizon?

Aside from U.S. Attorney Preet Bharara issuing a coded message of more political corruption cases coming down the political pipeline, rumors are swirling over whether the feds are eyeing Bronx legislators

involved in alleged voter fraud and corruption.

Several recent political stories are suggesting so, including a Facebook blog post by roving political reporter Bob "Kappy" Kappstatter, who continues to maintain the political pulse of the Bronx. The reports indicate the feds are investigating possible voter fraud in two separate races for the New York State Assembly. Looking back, there were issues involving the race between 86th Assembly District lawmaker Victor Pichardo and perennial candidate Hector Ramirez, who lost the election by a mere two votes. Quite an anomaly.

Last check the Bronx District Attorney's Office was investigating, recently offering a simple two-word response—"Investigation ongoing." As prosecutors look into that, an undisclosed Senate race in the Bronx is supposedly under review.

All this negative attention puts pressure on newly appointed Heastie to address corruption on the state level. However, his line that the State Legislature as a "few bad apples" makes us believe the comments could have been said with a dash of wishful thinking. Guess we'll have to "stay tuned."

Klein's Squeaky Clean Plan

Sen. Jeff Klein has said good-bye to litigating in a show of support for Governor Andrew Cuomo's renewed anti-corruption efforts. In early February, Klein unveiled a four-point plan that looks to ban outside income, setting aside outside income in escrow, closing disclosure loopholes and limiting per diem stipends.

Klein's martyrdom has yet compelled other lawmakers to do the same, though the plan is, on its surface, gaining support from Heastie.

Serrano Lobbies Pope

Congressman Jose Serrano, representing virtually the entire South Bronx, is hoping Pope Francis considers a visit to the Bronx's open air cathedral—Yankee Stadium.

Previous pontiffs have carried the tradition in holding service at Yankee Stadium. But Pope Francis' visit would be different—he'd be the first to christen the new Yankee Stadium as being the first Pope to hold mass at the South Bronx stadium.

Other electeds have joined the holy fight to host His Holiness, a liberal clergyman by most standards. His visit could give major brownie points to the Boogie Down and New York City, home to 2.6 million Catholics.

311 Tracking System

The 311 call system could use an online tracking system to ease frustrations and build accountability, according to Councilman James Vacca. The chair of the City Council's Committee on Technology, Vacca introduced a bill that would allow New Yorkers to determine how far their complaint has gone. The service is already available through a mobile app—Vacca's bill simply expands it. So, if enacted, the bill would clear the mystery on whether that noise, garbage or heat complaint has made it through.

Rangel

The political season is starting early in the 13th Congressional District, held by career legislator, Congressman Charles Rangel. He most certainly will face the challenger, Adam Clayton Powell, who's already organized a kickoff fundraiser in Spanish Harlem for Feb. 25. Organizers are asking for donations starting from \$100 and up.

Rangel has made spotty and boisterous appearances in the borough, more notably the Bronx Democratic County dinner where Heastie was the man of the hour. Rangel's district, redrawn a couple of years ago following the 2010 U.S. Census, covers a slab in the Bronx, including Norwood. Though Rangel has pledged at least a mobile office within the Bronx side of his district, nothing has materialized so far.

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Managing Student Debt Subject of UNHP Workshop on Feb. 24

By JENNY SHARP

Student debt is often deemed a looming financial crisis with no bailout in sight. With student debt at \$1.2 trillion in 2013, the financial burden of finishing college has reached a zenith extending beyond graduation.

But student loan applications are as baffling as they are expensive. There are federal loans, private loans, subsidized and unsubsidized, consolidation, forgiveness, cancellation and more.

Resources to navigate the logistical quagmire of personal finances are available. The University Neighborhood Housing Program (UNHP) and Northwest Bronx Resource Center is hosting a student loan resource fair on Feb. 24 aimed at offering students and graduates tips to manage debt.

One trick for students is to develop a student budget, according to Brian Bier, a financial coach scheduled to attend the event. "Taking consideration of their parents' financial situation can prevent headaches in the future," said Bier in an email. "Apply for all the scholarships out there.



Photo by Jenny Sharp

COLLEGE BOUND STUDENTS can stop by the Concourse House, 2751 Grand Concourse (pictured), in Bedford Park, for a workshop focusing on managing student loan debt.

Even the very low amounts can help. CUNY and SUNY colleges provide a great education and can save you lots of money."

Budgeting can certainly work as a long-term strategy that helps avoid the pitfalls.

"A lot of times people apply for these student loans thinking that it's not as serious as it really is and

then come time for graduation they are faced with an enormous amount of debt," said Nikki Quiterio, an event organizer at UNHP.

This combination of naivety and a shortage in disposable income has led to 7 million student borrowers to default on their loans, causing credit issues in the long run.

The event, "Paying for College:

Before & After," runs from 6 to 8 p.m. at the Concourse House-- 2751 Grand Concourse. Representatives from Bronx Legal Services, New York Immigration Coalition, and The Financial Clinic will be available to offer insight in the entire loan process.

This resource fair is part of a larger mission of UNHP, a 30-year community-based group that offers wide-ranging advice to Bronx residents. Each Tuesday and Wednesday the group's financial resource center is available by appointment.

"It's important to realize that maybe the solution for one person isn't necessarily the solution for another person," said Quiterio.

Student loans have the potential to be good debt if managed correctly, said Jumelia Abrahamson, director of Northwest Bronx Resource Center. "There's a fine line between making student debt good and favorable to being too overwhelming," said Abrahamson. The key to balancing the potential benefits and disadvantages is knowledge.

To RSVP to "Paying for College: Before & After," please visit unhp.org/events.

At Amalgamated Houses, a New Center for Teens Courtesy of MMCC

The Mosholu Montefiore Community Center (MMCC) teamed up with the Amalgamated/Park Reservoir Housing Development, to officially open a Boys & Girls Club in the Amalgamated Houses.

The AmPark Boys & Girls Club Teen Center can be found at 130 Gale Pl. Councilman Andrew Cohen, who allocated funds to open the center, helped cut the ceremonial red ribbon during its grand opening on Feb. 5. He did the honors alongside MMCC Executive Director Donald Bluestone.

"I am overjoyed to see the completion of the AmPark Boys & Girls Club Teen Center. At the beginning of my term, I was happy to partner with Mosholu Montefiore Community Center and contribute \$35,000 from my expense funding for the free educational and recreational activities that will be available for local teens," said Cohen, adding the Boys & Girls Club commits to "invaluable service" to the Bronx. The latest B&G center is the sixth to be found in the Bronx.



Photo courtesy MMCC

A NEW BOYS & GIRLS club is open at Amalgamated Houses in Van Cortlandt Village courtesy of MMCC, with officials and children standing behind the ceremonial red ribbon.

Jeffrey Dinowitz, Senator Jeff Klein and Doris Spencer, Education Director of the Amalgamated/Park Reservoir Housing Development were also in attendance.

Donations to the club included a 60-inch flat screen TV from Sharp Electronics Corporation and com-

puter components donated by Boys & Girls Clubs of America.

"For years, Doris Spencer and I have been talking about creating a teen center for the youth of the community," said Bluestone. "This is a real win-win situation with the construction of this space with the help

of the co-op, having the funding from Council Member Andrew Cohen and our ability to run programs and bring in other stakeholders. We are just delighted to work with everyone to create this beautiful Boys & Girls Club Teen Center."

AmPark is slated to offer services that include tutoring, arts, sports programs and computer classes. A variety of activities include game room with pool, ping pong and foosball tables, recording studio, computer lab, career exploration, drama, drumming, basketball, boxing, flag football, volleyball, ELA, writing, science, Intro to Film, hip-hop dance, painting, photography, robotics classes and full kitchen for cooking classes.

Teens will have the use of the gym at MMCC two nights a week for exercise and weight training. It is open Wednesday and Thursday evenings from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. and Friday and Saturday evenings from 7 to 10 p.m.

For more information, please call Director Anthony Friedman at (718) 796-9300.

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Ranking number on where the Bronx stands for cardiovascular disease cases.

(Source: New York State Department of Health)

Vital
Stats

An Afternoon Stroll Kicks Off Heart Month at Montefiore

By DAVID CRUZ

A cavalcade of Montefiore employees, mainly those from the Center for Heart and Vascular Care, strode around the perimeter halls of the Moses Campus in Norwood on Feb. 5.

It was four laps. Four laps to form a “Montefiore Mile,” make a statement and kick off the hospital’s annual Heart Healthy Month. The hospital has committed 28 days of events to spur the talk on keeping a healthy heart.

“We’re bringing cardiology out into the community,” said Dr. Steven Safyer, the hospital’s CEO, who offered remarks prior to the celebratory walk. “Along with that, all the proper advice on how to prevent heart disease.”

Scheduled events included food demonstrations, exercise classes and weekly tips on proper heart maintenance. Among the common tips—taking a brisk walk for 30 minutes a day, three times a week.

“When you [exercise] you basically improve your good cholesterol and decrease your bad cholesterol,” said Dr. Mario Garcia, chief, Division of Cardiology at Montefiore, and co-director of The Montefiore Einstein Center for Heart and Vascular



Photo courtesy Montefiore Medical Center

DR. MARIO GARCIA (L), chief of cardiology at Montefiore Medical Center and co-director of the Montefiore-Einstein Center for Heart and Vascular Care, has a heart to heart with Dr. Steven Safyer, Montefiore’s CEO, at an inaugural walk to kick off Heart Health Month.

Care. Weaving exercise into one’s daily life, even for the busy, also works, he said.

“If they work in their office on the third floor... don’t take the elevator, take the stairs to go back and forth in your office,” Garcia said. A cardiolo-

gist at Montefiore for five years, Garcia oversees a team of cardiologists and heart specialists throughout Montefiore’s network, with its number of hospitals boasting heart centers throughout. The hospital performs 30 to 35 heart transplantations yearly, according to the doctor.

Heart disease serves as the umbrella term for various ailments that include coronary artery disease, heart arrhythmias and congenital heart defects. Other conditions, usually falling under the cardiovascular disease term, include heart attacks, chest pain or stroke. The Centers for Disease Control ranks heart disease as the leading cause of death in the United States. The Bronx ranks sixth in the state for the most cardiovascular disease cases, according to state health records.

Over the years, statin drugs—treatments used to block the body’s bad cholesterol output—have been the subject of major debate, though Garcia urged heart sufferers to take the statin drugs. “Most people question whether they should take one of these drugs or not,” he said. “When a physician says take them, they should.”

A full list of events can be found at <http://www.montefiore.org/heart-month-calendar>.

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NEIGHBORHOOD NOTES

Flea Market Donations Sought

The Bedford Mosholu Community Association, 400 E. Mosholu Pkwy. So., Apt. B1 lobby floor, seeks donations of new and used items (excluding clothing) for its flea market. Donations can be brought to the office on Feb. 25 from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m., Feb. 28 from 1:30 to 4 p.m., and March 4 from 7:30 to 9 p.m. For more information, call (718) 367-2230.

Snow Removal Employment

The City needs temporary snow removal laborers for major snowstorms. Workers must be at least 18 years old and eligible to work in the U.S. Those interested can register at any District Sanitation Garage from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m., Monday through Saturday. For more detailed information, visit www.nyc.gov.

Senior Affordability Survey

The Independent Democratic Conference is looking for senior citi-

zens to take its Affordability Survey. Respondents can express their opinions on utility costs, senior housing options, and other topics. To take the survey, visit https://www.survey-monkey.com/s/senior_affordability_survey.

Paying for College: Before & After

The University Neighborhood Housing Program, 2751 Grand Concourse, is sponsoring a college financial aid and student debt workshop on Tuesday, Feb. 24 from 6 to 8 p.m. Attendees can receive support and assistance with FAFSA applications, student loan management, and more. For more information or to RSVP, call (718) 933-2539.

Free Computer Training

The Christ Disciples International Ministries, 3021-31 Webster Ave., offers free computer classes for seniors 60 years and older on March

2, June 1, Sept. 14, and Dec. 7. Graduates with perfect attendance will receive a free computer and LCD monitor. For more information, and to register for one of these sessions, call (646) 294-7726 or email session preferences to Project Coordinator Mark Challenger at emaeyak@christdisciples.org.

Free Tax Preparation

Free tax preparation is available from VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program) at the following locations: 1) Councilman Ritchie Torres' office, 573 E. Fordham Rd., Tuesdays through Saturdays during tax season. Photo ID and Social Security card are required. For detailed information and to schedule a required appointment, call (718) 842-8100; 2) Ridgewood Savings Bank hosts a tax prep session from 9:45 a.m. to 4 p.m. at 4101 White Plains Rd. on Feb. 21 (718-882-0440). Call in advance for details on require-

ments and eligibility, and required appointment.

Grant Opportunity

We Are The Bronx is offering an opportunity for grants for Bronx-based groups. The application is due by April 1 at 5 p.m. For more information and to apply, go to <http://wearethebronx.org/grant/>.

Financial Workshop

University Neighborhood Housing Program will host free Getting Ahead Financial Education Workshops, Thursdays, Feb. 19 and 26 from 6 to 8 p.m. at Concourse House, 2751 Grand Concourse. Topics include handling wage garnishments, debt collectors, credit cards, and student loans. For more information and to RSVP, call (718) 933-2539.

To submit items for Neighborhood Notes, email dcruz@norwoodnews.org, subject line "Neighborhood Notes."

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Out & About

Compiled by JUDY NOY

EDITOR'S PICK

Celebrating Black History Month at Bronx Library Center

The Bronx Library Center, 310 E. Kingsbridge Rd., presents the following programs in celebration of Black History Month. For more information, call (718) 579-4244/46/57 or visit www.nypl.org.

Feb. 23 at 6 p.m. - **Panel discussion** of African-American Women Entrepreneurs & Innovators Making a Difference in the Bronx, presented by the Bronx Women's Business Resource Center. Among the panelists will be Marcia Cameron, deputy director of the Mosholu Preservation Corporation, which publishes the *Norwood News*.

Feb. 28 - **Harlem Remembered**: Plays, poems and songs from the Harlem Renaissance by Xoregos Performing Company, at 2:30 p.m.; and **Bronx Literary Festival**, at 5:30 p.m.

Onstage

• Lehman Center for the Performing Arts, 250 Bedford Pk. Blvd. W., presents **Tango Buenos Aires**, Feb. 22 at 4 p.m. (tickets are \$25 to \$35). For more information, call (718) 960-8833.

• The Bronx Library Center, 310 E. Kingsbridge Rd., presents **Richard Wagner's Siegfried (Act 3)** and **Götterdämmerung (Act 3)**, performed by the New York Opera Forum, Feb. 21 at 2:30 p.m. For more information, call (718) 579-4244/46/57 or visit www.nypl.org.

Events

• The Williamsbridge Oval offers free activities including **Tiny Prints** (ages 5 and younger) featuring play, yoga and art; **Shape Up Family Fitness**, featuring aerobics; and **Family Fun Night**, featuring use of game room and arts and crafts. For more information and a detailed schedule, call (718) 543-8672.

• The Bronx County Historical Society presents a free **Power Point Show** on the feasibility of new streetcar lines for the Bronx which includes a look back at the Bronx's historical transportation systems, Feb. 21 at 1 p.m. at the Archives Building, 3313 Bainbridge Ave. For more information, call (718) 881-8900.

• Wave Hill, a Bronx oasis at 675 W. 252nd St. in Riverdale, offers **Family Arts Projects**: A Desert Under Glass, to visit the Cactus and Succulent House in the Marco Polo Stufano Conservatory, sketch and paint the desert dwellers, then make a desert mirage, Feb. 21 and 22; and Give the Winter Bird a Home and a Feeder, to learn how birds survive the winter, and make a home or feeder with

recycled materials, Feb. 28 and March 1; both in WH House from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Also featured are two concerts at 2 p.m. in the WH House: **Zodiac Trio**, featuring contemporary and traditional music, Feb. 22; and **Composer/Pianist Michael Brown**, performing classical music, March 1 (tickets for each are \$28; \$15/ages 8 to 18; \$22/member; \$12/member child; registration is required at www.wavehill.org or at the Perkins Visitor Center). Grounds admission is free until noon Saturdays and Tuesdays all year. For more information and a schedule of events including tours and walks, call (718) 549-3200.

• The public is invited to ride the free **Bronx Culture Trolley**, which transports visitors on the first Wednesday of every month (except January and September), to free Bronx hot spots. 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. Next ride is on March 4. 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.

Library Events

• The Bronx Library Center, 310 E. Kingsbridge Rd., presents for children: **Preschool Story Time at 11 a.m.**: (ages 3 to 5 years); and **Toddler Play Time at noon**: (ages 18 to 36 months); both on Feb. 19, 26 and March 5; **Hands-On Projects**: (ages 7 to 12): **Animal Mask Making**: Feb. 19 at 4 p.m.; **Ship Book Making**: Feb. 22 at 2 p.m.; and **Pot of Gold Making**: March 5 at 4 p.m.; and

film: Feb. 22 at 3:30 p.m. For teens/young adults, there is **SAT Math**: learn strategies to improve in math, Feb. 19 at 3:30 p.m.; **SAT Verbal/Writing**: practice problems and learn new strategies, Feb. 26 at 3:30 p.m.; and **film**: Feb. 20 at 5 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 children: **Tales of Snow**: (ages 3 to 12), performance with songs, masks, stories and snow, Feb. 20 at 3:30 p.m.; **Toddler Story Time at 10:30 a.m.**: (ages 18 to 36 months), stories, songs, and rhymes, Feb. 26; and **Winter With Bilingual Birdies: Spanish**: (ages from birth to 12 years), live music, dance parties, and theatre-based games (instruments are provided), March 3 at 11 a.m. For teens/young adults, there is **film**: "Guardians of the Galaxy," Feb. 28 at 1:30 p.m. Adults can enjoy **Jewelry Club at 11 a.m.**: bring your own materials to create original jewelry, Feb. 19 and 26; and **Knitting Circle**: Thursdays at 3 p.m.

For more information, call (718) 882-8239.

• The Jerome Park Library, 118 Eames Place (near Kingsbridge Road), offers for kids: **How the Monkey Tricked the Crocodile and Other Trickster Tales**: (ages 5 to 12), Feb. 20 at 3 p.m.; **Toddler Time**: (ages 18 to 36 months), stories, songs and nursery rhymes, Feb. 25 at 11 a.m. (call to confirm); **Kids Get Active**: (ages 5 to 12), dance and zumba, Feb. 27 at 4 p.m.; and **Kids' Pajama Party**: (ages 18 months to 12 years), crafts and read-alouds, Feb. 27 at 6 p.m. For teens/young adults, there is **Beautiful Words, Beautiful Writing**: Learn and use calligraphy (material provided), Feb. 26 at 4 p.m. For more information, call (718) 549-5200.

NOTE: Items for consideration may be mailed to our office or sent to norwoodnews@norwoodnews.org, and should be received by Feb. 23 for the next publication date of March 5.

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Co-op Owners Slam Fordham Board

(continued from page 1)

agreed to take their case to Bronx Supreme Court to challenge the results.

"So we're gonna get you from A to Z, and hopefully that would mean electing nine people onto the Board that represent your interests, that care about your property and your finances and that would do everything possible to decrease costs instead of increasing maintenance fees," said Alina Levina, an attorney with the firm, who briefed shareholders at the meeting, which was raucous at times.

Internal Feud

The latest news caps years of infighting between shareholders and the Board, comprised of other shareholders. The group contests the Board is illegally operating since there was no quorum to proceed with last year's election, subsequently barring members from any decision making. Nonetheless, the Board's eight-year president, Desiree Pilgrim-Hunter, was re-elected since no quorum to move forward with the election was reached.

Shortly after the elections, the Board voted to increase maintenance charges and impose a \$30 cable fee that would go into the cooperative's re-

serve funds for projects. This outraged shareholders who felt blindsided by the increase that was later withdrawn.

Pilgrim-Hunter declined to be interviewed for this story. In newsletters to shareholders, Pilgrim-Hunter disputed that the Board is closely allied with Argo Real Estate Management, which employs its own security, administrative and emergency personnel to manage the property.

The acrimony also comes amid a stalled project to renovate the front doors to each of the complex's buildings that's inconvenienced shareholders.

"The Fordham Hill overall redevelopment project is progressing, but unfortunately has encountered delays due to weather, Board approved changes, the permit process, unexpected material shortages and unforeseen findings of rock or large boulders and utility lines during excavation," said Thea Linscott, a spokesperson for Argo Real Estate Management.

Reviewing Argo Real Estate

While plenty of frustrations were aimed at the Board, shareholders also vented their anger towards Argo Real Estate Management, which they be-

lieve has mismanaged the cooperative's finances. An audit of Fordham Hill was conducted last year, though shareholders alleged to have been barred from reviewing it. Management said the allegation is not true, adding the financial state of Fordham Hill is in good shape. Shareholders agreed a more thorough look of the audit would be in order should a new Board be installed. Another item includes the removal of Argo Real Estate Management, according to Frank Murillo, a shareholder who has led the charge in replacing Board members.

Argo Real Estate Management was also accused of warehousing vacant units that have since been purchased by the management firm by auction. Fordham Hill's bylaws state no management firm can own more than two units. Linscott disputed the claims by shareholders, saying management "does not and never did own any apartments at Fordham Hill."

May Elections

Shortly after the meeting, several shareholders signed up to run for the Board, where all seats are up for reelection in May.

Convincing shareholders to vote ap-

pears to be the group's challenge. In a complex comprised of over a thousand shareholders, priorities are often elsewhere. In some cases, many shareholders do not live in the building, but rent out their space to a tenant who has no voting power.

To get around that, Levina insisted shareholders directly vote or send in a proxy vote, where a shareholder grants a neighbor or adult to vote on their behalf. Proxy rules are in place, though confusing, according to Murillo. "I mailed my proxy with my candidates," said Murillo. "You're not supposed to do that. That's why we didn't have quorum."

Levina proposed increasing notices on proxy voting throughout the building and establishing a clearer definition of the election rules to give shareholders a better understanding of the process. The election is audited by Adkinson-Thorne Enterprises, LLC.

"We're going to make sure [Adkinson-Thorne Enterprises, LLC] gets your proxies, they get your votes so that Argo Management can't say 'we didn't have a quorum' because I would know," said Levina. "I would personally send all the proxies."

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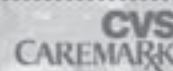
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