

NORWOOD NEWS

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PRESIDENT OBAMA COMES TO THE BRONX

Visits Lehman College to push new nonprofit for young minority men



Photo by Adi Talwar

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA, at Lehman College, announces the My Brother's Keeper Alliance. It's his first visit to the Bronx, home to the country's poorest congressional district.

By **DAVID CRUZ**

Back in April, residents on a portion of Valentine Avenue were reeling over the death of 17-year-old Hakeem Kuta, who plunged to his death after fleeing cops who allegedly caught him smoking pot in a building. Neigh-

bors in the Bedford Park area had asked how a small-time crime could escalate to a death.

A month before, 18-year-old Jonathan Martinez was gunned down in the same neighborhood. Police determined it was a gang-related

shooting. Three people, including a 16-year-old Hispanic boy, would be charged with second degree murder.

These two victims were young minority men, whose deaths underscored the timeliness to President Barack Obama's first-ever visit to

the Bronx on May 4. It would likely be his only visit as a sitting U.S. President, with Lehman College serving as the stage to promote My Brother's Keeper Alliance, a nonprofit initiative aimed at setting minority men on
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IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST

Developing a New Roadmap to Upgrade Mosholu Parkway

By DAVID CRUZ

They're going back to the drawing board.

A 2007 blueprint to rehab Mosholu Parkway has been tossed out, and community members have offered new input on some of the priorities needed to fix the parkway.

At a forum on April 29, community residents broke up into teams of nine to pinpoint pockets of improvement for Mosholu Parkway, a freeway that cuts through the Bedford Park/Norwood community and towards the Saw Mill River Parkway. Pages of ideas are currently being sorted out and vetted by the offices of councilmen Andrew Cohen and Ritchie Torres to determine its feasibility.

"The idea is to get some real grassroots, on-the-ground feedback about what we think we would like to see," said Cohen, who opened the workshop with his comments. "Some of them are going to be possible. Some of them are not going to be possible."

Handed a printout that showed a portion of Mosholu Parkway, residents studied the map and jotted down some ideas, with Elizabeth Quaranta, president of the Friends of Mosholu Parkway, offering guidance. At one table, Betty Diana Arce a community resident, assessed that crosswalks were needed along the parkway. As it stands, pedestrians often take a chance of getting hit by a car while crossing the middle of the roadway.

"We need a crosswalk," said Arce, pointing to a section between Bainbridge Avenue and Van Cortlandt Park East, which measures a third of a mile. "Look at that span. People have created their own crosswalk."



Photo by David Cruz

RESIDENTS PUT THEIR heads together over how to improve Mosholu Parkway's infrastructure at an April 29 workshop.

"It's such a long distance between the next available space to cross," said JR Castaner, a nearby resident who joined Arce. "People dart across the parkway also."

At another table, Jay Shuffield, a community resident, sat at the same roundtable as Aaron Bouska, vice president for Government and Community Relations for the New York City Botanical Garden, proposing changes that include a reduction of extra lanes to widen the center medians, upgrading stormwater drainage, and improving the greenway's bike paths. Shuffield suggested that some issues can be immediately fixed with assistance from the city Department of Transportation, which utilizes its rapid response toolkit. "[The DOT] already did a nice job with the new sitting area they created by closing the unnecessary slip ramp at the end of the Grand Concourse," he wrote in an email.

But even if fresh ideas led to a new design plan, scouring for funding would likely be the most difficult

task. The original plan to fix Mosholu Parkway was conceived when the Bloomberg Administration was in office, though it fell by the wayside, with the de Blasio Administration showing little interest. Maintenance of the parkway happens routinely, though a comprehensive rehabilitation project has not been seen since 1979, according to Assemblyman Mark Gjonaj, who also offered remarks.

The original 2007 plan, championed by the Four Bronx Institution Alliance, put a focus on the parkway's primary three-lane roadway on the north and southbound sides, starting at an exit by Bronx River Parkway, cutting through the Bedford Park neighborhood, and towards the entrance to the Saw Mill River Parkway.

A spokeswoman for Cohen's office said another meeting will be scheduled following the office's assessment of proposals that will also be screened by various city agencies that include Transportation, Design & Construction, and Parks departments.

Public and Community Meetings

COMMUNITY BOARD 7 will hold its general board meeting on May 19 at Montefiore Medical Center's Cherkasky Auditorium, 111 E. 210th St. CB7 committees are held on the following dates at the board office, 229A E. 204th St. at 6:30 p.m. unless otherwise noted: Traffic & Transportation meets May 14; Housing/Land Use & Zoning Committee meets May 20; Education/Libraries & Youth Services meets May 21; Economic Development meets May 26; Community Relations/LTP meets May 26 at 7:30 p.m.; Parks & Recreation meets May 27. For more information, call (718) 933-5650.

COMMUNITY BOARD 7 will host a K2 Forum at North Central Bronx Hospital, 3424 Kossuth Ave., 17th floor, from 6 to 8:30 p.m. For more information, call (718) 933-5650.



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Lawmakers Demand Wakefield Shelter Shut Down After Killing of Its Director

By DAVID CRUZ

Elected officials and community stakeholders are calling for the closure of a Wakefield homeless shelter that once housed a client now charged in the shooting of its director.

That victim, Ana Charle, was shot to death April 27, as she ran naked from her attacker, West Spruill. The shooting has become a flashpoint over the safety of the shelter in a community that's seeing a number of shelters coming down the pipe.

At an April 30 news conference fraught with several moments of anger and disruption, elected officials painted a picture of lack of security at the shelter at 4380 Bronx Blvd. It was set against the backdrop of the shelter, with a line of supporters for homeless shelters standing in solidarity. Charle, a Spain native who lived in Queens, worked at the site managed by Project Renewal, a nonprofit shelter provider contracted by the New York City Department of Homeless Services (DHS). She was known for

having built rapport with clients, all homeless men with a majority of them suffering from mental illness.

Over the course of the last year, hundreds of 911 calls have been made from the shelter. It created a level of vulnerability for shelter employees that went ultimately unresolved, according to officials.

"Just having beds is not going to do the job," said Councilman Andrew Cohen, who represents the Wakefield area. "Unless these service providers insist on contracts that are real, that are tenable, that are viable, that include wraparound support services, it's not a tenable model."

Spruill is an ex-con with mental illness, having recently lived at the site, according to officials. Police say Spruill, carrying a .40 Smith & Wesson, stalked Charle as she was leaving her job on April 27, luring her to her vehicle. He demanded she undress, and tied her hands. It was unclear if she was raped. Charle eventually escaped, her naked body running



Photo by David Cruz

COUNCILMAN ANDY KING denounces shelter that employed Ann Charle, shot to death by a former client. "Shut it down!" said King.

through the streets as Spruill chased her down. He caught up with her at 4366 Bullard Ave., shooting her in the face. She was rushed to Montefiore Medical Center and later pronounced dead.

Spruill, who was also naked, was quickly apprehended and charged with 2nd degree murder, manslaughter, and weapons possession.

The shelter has been open since early 2014 despite objections from community leaders not to open it from the start.

"The city deliberately withheld from us during that time that many of the people who were going to be housed there were convicted of violent felonies, and our understanding that 40 percent of the people who reside in this shelter are convicted sex offenders," said state Assemblyman Jeff Dinowitz, who represents the area.

Much of their anger was pointed at the Wakefield section becoming a hub for more men's only homeless shelters. At the news conference, Fr. Richard Gorman, the chairman of local Community Board 12, said that the neighborhood has seen its fair share of shelters when compared to other portions of the city.

The latest is the Mueller Center, a men's only shelter that will contain 200 beds. It's being housed in

an old military center on Nereid Avenue, just at the border of Bronx/Westchester County. The abundance of shelters in the area is one reason why Dinowitz recommended the city "put a moratorium" on the Mueller Center.

But the Coalition for the Homeless, an advocacy group for homeless shelter providers, said closing the shelter is the "wrong response to this tragedy." "Rather than taking the easy way out, we need our elected officials to contribute to real solutions," said Mary Brosnahan, the president and CEO of Coalition for the Homeless. "That means fighting to fund more supportive housing – which is proven to help those with mental illness get the help they need to stay off the streets."

Project Renewal expressed its condolences through a spokeswoman, adding that "Ana was a dedicated, wonderful, and loving person."

As for the somewhat lax security, Project Renewal said through a statement that it "did request that DHS provide additional security at the site and they did that and have since added even more security to the site."

DHS did not return emails.

Additional reporting by Janaki Chadha.



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Amid Activation of Filtration Plant, \$12 Mil for Pedestrian Bridge

By JANAKI CHADHA

Community advocacy for the building of a pedestrian bridge over the Major Deegan Expressway to connect the two sides of Van Cortlandt Park has gone on for over a decade. On May 8, community leaders and representatives announced \$12 million has been allocated for the proposed bridge, thanks to collective efforts from community, city, and state officials.

"It's a dream come true," said Christina Taylor, executive director for the Friends of Van Cortlandt Park, one of many activists who worked towards seeing funding for the project through over the years.

"This park, as you all know, is truly a gem of the Bronx and this pedestrian bridge project will ensure that even more visitors have access to [it]," said Mitchell Silver, Commissioner of the city Department of Parks.

The bridge will be built just near exit 13 the Major Deegan Expressway North, which dissects the park. The New York City Department of Design and Construction will spearhead the project, which will also see the formation of a pathway connecting the east and west sides of Van Cortlandt Park.



Photo by Jenny Sharp

BRONX BOROUGH PRESIDENT Ruben Diaz Jr. speaks at a news conference announcing the allocation of \$12 million in funds for the building of a pedestrian bridge over the Major Deegan Expressway.

The bridge is expected to be completed in 2019. Funding for the project came largely from the city, with state Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie and state Senator Jeff Klein footing the rest. Though this project was part of the original Van Cortlandt Park master plan, lack of funding had essentially delayed it. Councilman Andrew Cohen, whose entire district covers Van Cortlandt Park, was credited for prioritizing the reality of the bridge.

Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr. spoke about the importance of community activism in initiatives like this. "We have good leadership, leadership that listens," he said. "Maybe it doesn't happen at the exact time you want it to, but for those of you who have been activists, for those of you who are community leaders, for those of you who have been speaking your minds, continue to do so."

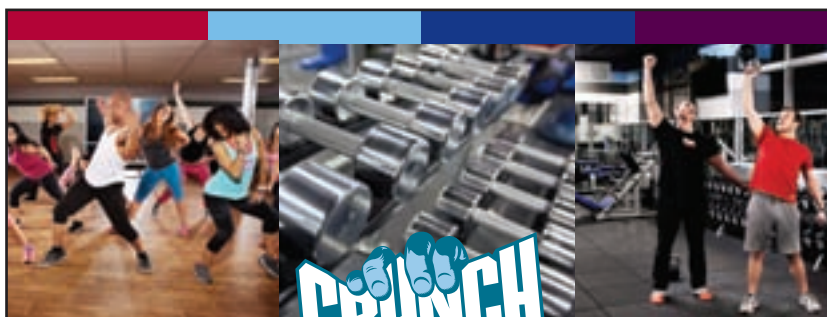
Many have wondered why solidi-

fying this project had taken so long. Diaz said this may not have happened had the current community, city and state representatives, namely Cohen, Heastie or Klein not been elected.

The timing of the project came just as officials with the New York City Department of Environmental Protection, which is using some funds to cover the cost of the bridge, quietly activated the long delayed Croton Water Filtration Plant, built underneath a portion of the park. Roughly 100 million gallons of water will flow through the plant daily, and to New York City homes. The bridge proposal was tied to a 2008 mitigation project linked to the building of the plant. DEP would ultimately conduct a feasibility study of the project.

Construction for the plant began in 2005. It was supposed to be completed in 2011 under a federal order, but was marred by the enormity of the project, which ultimately went \$3 billion over budget.

"I would not gloat over a project built four times over budget," said Assemblyman Jeff Dinowitz, a staunch critic of the plant. "It's not something to be proud of."



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Left Turn Signal Lights Up on Bedford Pk. Blvd.



Photo by Jenny Sharp

LIGHT 'EM UP. The city Department of Transportation recently installed this left-turn traffic light at Bedford Park Boulevard, at the behest of Community Board 7. The Board noticed several near-miss accidents and rush-hour clogs at the busy intersection, warranting the two-way left turn light.

History Buff Morgan Powell Remembered

Friends and family of the late Bronx history buff, activist and blogger, Morgan Powell, gathered at Woodlawn Cemetery to pay their final respects.

At a ceremony on May 9, the Powell family brought his ashes to Woodlawn Cemetery's Woolworth Chapel to serve as his final resting place. Close friends of Powell purchased a memorial stone with help from an online fundraiser. Powell was known for conducting historical tours across the borough, often for free. His talks ranged from a tie-in between African-American history and the Bronx River to a who's who of renowned historical figures buried in Woodlawn Cemetery.

Powell was a well known history buff of the Bronx, who made the borough his home after relocating from his native Maryland. He died last year at age 41.

--David Cruz



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Gun-Toting Suspect Sought

The New York City Police Department is asking for the public's assistance with identifying a suspect wanted for a reckless endangerment offense within the 52nd Precinct. The alleged offense happened on May 7, 2015 at about 8 p.m., in front of 2734 Bainbridge Ave. near 196th Street in Bedford Park. Two men reportedly fired guns at that location, although no one was injured during the incident.

One of the suspects has been apprehended. The other is described as a black man, wearing red clothing. Anyone with information about this incident or the identity of the primary suspect is asked to call the NYPD's Crime Stoppers Hotline at 800-577-TIPS. The public can also submit their tips by logging on to the Crime Stoppers Website at www.nypdcrimestoppers.com texting their tips to 274637(CRIMES), then entering TIP577.

For the week of April 27 through



Image courtesy NYPD

SECURITY CAMERA PHOTO of primary suspect wanted in connection with May 7 reckless endangerment offense at 2734 Bainbridge Ave. near 196th Street in Bedford Park.

May 3, 2015, the 52nd Precinct saw a large overall reduction in the number of shootings, burglaries, and grand larcenies, compared to the same week last year, but modest increases in felonious assaults and petit larcenies. Reckless endangerment is not included within the major crime categories tracked by CompStat.

--Vivian R. Carter

First-Ever K2 Forum Sponsored by CB 7

By DAVID CRUZ

Across 24-hour bodegas in Norwood/Bedford Park, buying synthetic marijuana requires little to no screening. Its legality is caught in murky technicalities, and virtually no enforcement, leaving prosecutors little room to try a synthetic marijuana case.

Emergency room visits across the city have spiked because of synthetic marijuana, known by many nicknames—spice, AK-47, Scooby Doo and more commonly, K2.

It's unrelenting usage, particularly among younger Bronxites, has driven Community Board 7 to host a K2 forum scheduled for May 26, with members convening a panel of experts on the 17th floor of North Central Bronx Hospital.

"A lot of the Board had no clue what it is, we had no idea," said Adaline Walker-Santiago, the chairwoman of Community Board 7. "If you have kids, you'll get worried." Walker-Santiago organized the panel, with law enforcement officials from the 520nd Precinct and Bronx District Attorney's Office expected to be on hand.

Although state law has outlawed

K2, the drug remains on the streets. Its ingredients are inconsistent, but its side effects pack a punch, with substances such as rat poison often mixed into the drug.

"The hallucinogenic component of the drug is what sends them to another land," said Dr. Ernest Patti, the head emergency room doctor for St. Barnabas Hospital and the forum's keynote speaker. "They say they want to jump off buildings, they say they want to do crazy things like cross Fordham Road in the middle of traffic."

Patti routinely treats patients who've consumed K2. They often arrive at the ER, aggressive, paranoid and nearly uncontrollable. Other symptoms linked to K2 use include nausea, vomiting, high blood pressure, tremors, and seizures.

Its substance has crept up to Bedford Park's bodegas, where colorful K2 packets can be spotted over the counter at stores along 198th Street. Though the packets suggest that the substance is not for human consumption, and at times incense or pot-pourri, experts suggest that it's simply a ploy to avoid a fine.



Photo courtesy NYC Department of Health

PACKETS OF SYNTHETIC cannabinoids, known on the street as K2, are sold in various packets in bodegas.

Prosecuting Cases

But finding a legal basis to prosecute defendants has proven difficult, given some loopholes the Bronx District Attorney's Office runs into.

The DA's Office, known to turn away marijuana use cases, admits its hands are tied when prosecuting synthetic drug use cases given the lack of legal standard linked to its use.

"[W]e have not yet initiated [a case] because of the difficulty in getting the proof that's needed to sustain a prosecution under current laws," said Terry Raskin, spokeswoman for the Bronx DA.

The loophole exploited comes down to the availability of technology needed to quickly analyze the chemical makeup of synthetic drugs. Certain chemicals, for instance, contain rat poison, a legal chemical that's purchased over the counter and yet included in the cocktail of K2. That kind of testing is unavailable, giving K2 manufacturers, and users, the upper hand.

"Producers of K2 are constantly changing the composition of the drug, based not only upon availability of substances, but also to keep one step ahead of the law," said Raskin.

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First-Ever K2 Forum Sponsored by CB 7

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Photo courtesy NYC Department of Health

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President Obama Comes to the Bronx



(continued from page 1)

a path to success. Its initiatives' relevance to the Bronx is certainly tangible, given the borough's low high school graduation rate among black and Hispanic men, and an incarceration rate among blacks that is six times that of whites, according to the Pew Research Institute.

MBKA is an offshoot of a White House's initiative of the same name, which began in February 2014. Joseph Echevarria, a Soundview native, was appointed interim CEO of the nonprofit. Tethering the Bronx to the White House was Elias Alcantra, a Bronx native, Lehman College grad and director of intergovernmental relations for the White House, who helped make the visit happen.

For a half hour, Mr. Obama touted the nonprofit's national goal, which would be funded through private donations. "In every community in America, there are young people with incredible drive and talent, and they just don't have the same kinds of chances that somebody like me



Photos by Adi Talwar

A LARGE AUDIENCE packs Lehman College to hear President Barack Obama's address on My Brother's Keeper Alliance.

had," said Mr. Obama, delivering remarks at the campus's music building. "They're just as talented, just as smart. They don't get a chance."

The White House version of MBKA served as a national mentoring program for black and Hispanic men, bringing in donations totaling \$300 million. A total of \$80 million has been committed to sustain the newly created program, largely from corporate sponsors, including PepsiCo and Sprint. Advisory

board members include retired NBA player Alonzo Mourning and singer/songwriter John Legend.

The initiative was well received by local officials, several of whom were present at the event. Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr., a legislator with a Puerto Rican background, was among the guests present for Mr. Obama's speech, sitting near Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie and Rev. Al Sharpton. Diaz chatted with Mr. Obama moments after the speech.

"I know firsthand the struggles young men of color face in this nation, and I know how challenging it can be to both lead one's own life on the right path while also guiding others in that same direction," said Diaz in a statement. "This initiative, which will combine public and private resources for the greater good, is welcome not only in the Bronx but across the United States."

The tone taken by Mr. Obama appeared more acutely personal, evoking a bold stance on the personal struggles of minority men plunging into a hole of disparity, which he argued could start at birth. The first black U.S. President, Mr. Obama has waged a campaign to level the playing field for minority men, who often feel left out. "That sense of unfairness and of powerlessness of people not hearing their voices, that's helped fuel some of the protests that we've seen in places like Baltimore and Ferguson and right here in New York," said Mr. Obama.

Mr. Obama's participation seemed

to offer a glimpse into his future. In his speech, he noted that he plans on being fully committed to MBKA once he leaves office. Until then, he will have no role in the Alliance nor how donations are screened, a measure that avoids any conflicts of interest.

Presidential visits to the Bronx are rare. Indeed, the last Bronx visit by a sitting U.S. President happened on Oct. 30, 2001, after then President George W. Bush threw the first pitch in Yankee Stadium during Game 3 of the World Series. It was a rare visit by a U.S. President, whose attentions are often focused on states where party loyalty can be skittish. Unlike Mr. Bush's visit, which served as a symbol to America's vitality following the 9/11 attacks, Mr. Obama's visit underscored a racial discrepancy that's experienced throughout communities in the Bronx.

Mr. Obama's appearance in the Bronx was confined to Lehman College, sidestepping visits across the borough that's home to the 15th Congressional District, deemed the country's most impoverished. The White House



Photo courtesy Office of Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr.
PRESIDENT OBAMA CHATS with Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr. following his remarks at Lehman College.

did not respond to emails requesting why Mr. Obama did not extend his visit beyond Lehman College.

Still, the President and MBKA Board members met with several Leh-

man College students at a closed-door meeting. There, a type of straight talk took shape, with members sitting at a round table to espouse the benefits of succeeding. "You matter," Mr. Obama

told the crowd of young men, including members from Lehman College's Urban Male Leadership program, which offers support programming to minority students to help balance their lives. Daniel Rodriguez, 19, a Lehman College student and member of the group, told the *Norwood News* that the pathway to success is education, a tactic Mr. Obama has constantly promoted.

"You can't get very far without education, without at least a bachelor's nowadays, and pretty soon you're not going to get anywhere without a Master's," said Rodriguez, who lives in Marble Hill Houses, a housing project.

A mile from the school, a group of black teens huddled at a street corner on 197th Street and Valentine Avenue, a low-income section of Bedford Park. Some heard of Mr. Obama's trip from the clamor of Marine One landing at Harris Field near Lehman College. Upon hearing Mr. Obama's message on MBKA, one 19-year-old black man, who asked not to be identified, simply said, "Nobody is aspiring in this place right now."

INQUIRING PHOTOGRAPHER

By **DAVID GREENE**



With President Barack Obama's recent visit to the Bronx, we asked readers what issues they would raise with the President if they had one minute with him.



Well, one issue that I would raise is the child support system that has caused a lot of people to be in a really precarious position, because if you have outstanding child support it oppresses you. You can't make any moves, you lose your license, and you can't work. It's something that hinders you from progressing. That's one thing that I would really like someone to address. That is one personal issue that should be addressed by someone.

Lincoln Lewis



The crime rate in the Bronx because there's a lot of schools around here. Since he's here in the Bronx, I would think he should pay a little attention to the little details that are going on around here.

Stephanie Ramnauth



I would say President Barack Obama: How are you handling the senior citizens of New York City? What can you do to help a senior citizen find a job? It is very hard for senior citizen that's been retired and been out of work for more than two years to find a job that someone will give you a chance. I was a professional for 36 years. I worked in collections of major accounts that if you don't pay your bills, I was there to help you. So it was a simple job, but it's been very hard for me personally to find a job as a senior citizen. Social Security doesn't make it. You have to have more than Social Security and your pension and your 401(k).

Shirley Lalande



h yes, crime is a problem here and he should be aware of it. There's too much crime here. Every day on the news you hear something else. I don't go out at night. If I go out at night, it's to Lehman College, maybe with a friend. But without a friend I won't go because of the crime. Crime keeps me home, I don't go out much anymore.

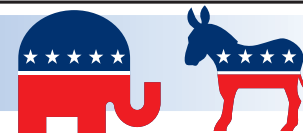
Carol Teig



I would ask the President where are all the federal dollars that are earmarked to fix the streets, the potholes and the cracks on the sidewalks. I would ask him about the MTA. The train stations are falling apart, they're dirty and they smell and they keep raising the fare.

Robert Cruz

Editor's Note: Have an idea for an Inquiring Photographer question? Send suggestions to dcruz@norwoodnews.org.



THE BRONX BELTWAY

By DAVID CRUZ

Mr. Obama's Visit to the Bronx

President Barack Obama's first visit to the Bronx was short and sweet, though attendance to see the Commander-in-Chief in person was somewhat of an exclusive affair, and away from the community at large. The *Norwood News* was granted access to hear the President's half hour address on a new nonprofit for young minority men (see front page story).

POTUS gave the proper shout outs to local elected officials, including Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr., Assemblyman Carl Heastie and Councilman Andrew Cohen, boasting over the President's remark that he's doing a "great job." But perhaps the President's biggest nod, and one for the Bronx (so far), went to former White House aide turned Assemblyman Michael Blake, who was introduced ahead of everyone else. "You gotta stand up, Mike," said the President, as Blake slowly rose from his seat. "We're still trying to teach him about politics."

There were rumblings within

the Bronx community, who thought Obama's visit could've been better publicized. Though the sounds of Marine One chopper can be heard by anyone within earshot of Lehman College, there was not much of a mention to this rare visit by a sitting U.S. President. Perhaps a lameduck Commander-in-Chief can skip a tour of the country's poorest congressional district. It would have been good to see him among the masses. The White House didn't return calls for comment.

Kudos to the Bronx, which now has seen three heads of state stop by the borough in 2015 (from the United States, Albania, and Israel). Bravo.

Rivera at BMCA

As promised, a dapper Assemblyman Jose Rivera (usually dressed down in the Bronx; he was in Albany), stopped by the Bedford Mosholu Community Association for his long-awaited talk with the community.

Among some assurances Rivera made: a sit down with the Bronx

Assembly Delegation over how to secure state funding for the revitalization of Mosholu Parkway, now in the period of brainstorming. BMCA will likely hold him accountable for that task. They've done so with his attendance.

During his 10-minute remarks, Rivera tried passing the buck on future appearances to Kenny Agosto, District Leader for the 78th Assembly District, who will arrive in his stead. But BMCA brass didn't buy that, pressing Rivera to personally stop by the group's monthly meetings. "I wish I went back in the New York City Council when we only met once a month," said Rivera.

Golden Age of Politics?

The Bronx Beltway mused whether we've settled in a Golden Age of Bronx politics. It's been evident in Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr.'s outlook, thanks to some political juice in Albany.

In recent comments, Diaz pegged the Bronx's new Albany influence on Speaker Carl Heastie and Independent Democratic Conference leader and state Senator Jeff Klein, who doled out a combined \$4 million needed for the long-awaited pedestrian bridge over the Major Deegan Expressway in Van Cortlandt Park.

"We no longer beg, now we are where in the political situation in the Bronx where we ask," said Diaz Jr., suggesting this project wouldn't have advanced quickly without them. "What we asked, they gave us everything."

Diaz Jr.'s take on Heastie certainly runs counter to an intriguing piece in City & State that chronicled Heastie's rise in politics through some behind-the-curtain workings of the Bronx Democratic County Committee. One operative refuted the piece, calling it an article instead of report. "A report states facts."

And the Numbers Are In...

Councilman Ritchie Torres' exercise in handing over a fraction budgetary power to his constituents, commonly known as Participatory Budgeting, ended with five projects listing what \$1 million in capital funds would be allocated towards. The less costly, \$80,000

for security cameras in public, garnered the most votes, 1,352. Runners up included \$450,000 for Bronx park improvements, grabbing 1,323 votes, NYPD security cameras, netting \$315,000 and 1,288 votes, air conditioning for public schools, earmarked for \$145,000 and 1,236 votes, and bus countdown clocks, costing \$80,000 and earning 935 votes.

Councilman Andrew Cohen also tallied his PB numbers:

\$200,000 for renovating MS/HS 141
\$120,000 for bus countdown clocks
\$70,000 for technology expansion at PS 24
\$400,000 for Spuyten Duyvil Playground
\$300,000 for Van Cortlandt Library

Sadly, there were not enough PB votes for Norwood or Bedford Park projects, but Cohen threw \$450,000 towards auditorium repairs at PS 8 in Norwood and \$350,000 for Mosholu Library's Window Replacement. Capital funds tend to be earmarked for projects that can see shovels in the group by 2019. Hopefully that's not the case.

DEP's Slap in the Face

One would think that the city's near completion of its largest project would come with cartwheels, balloons and plenty of political speechifying. But the Croton Water Filtration Plant, which finally went online May 7 after years of delay, was given nothing more than a press release sneaked in by the New York City Department of Environmental Protection.

The plant, which cleans up to 290 gallons of drinking water daily, has been tied with an avalanche of outrage since the start of its construction, which went \$3 billion over-budget. Nice timing that the press release by the DEP was released on a Friday—way to contain the attention.

Activists who have followed the filtration plant's exhaustive saga couldn't help but feel slighted by the news. Fr. Richard Gorman, Community Board 12 chair, called the lack of notice "incredibly rude" while Assemblyman Jeff Dinowitz, a staunch critic of the plant, said, "To me, there's nothing to celebrate."

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NEIGHBORHOOD NOTES

Small Business Workshops

Monroe College School of Business and Operation HOPE host free small business development workshops Wednesdays through July 29 from 6 to 8 p.m. at the college's Ustin Hall, 2375 Jerome Ave. (184th Street). Participants will learn how to start a business, build a business plan, and look for funding. For more information or to register, call (201) 381-8798 or email pedro.barry@operationhope.org.

Understanding Colitis

An educational program on inflammatory bowel disease, Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis takes place May 21 at Montefiore Medical Center's Tishman Learning Center room #1, 111 E. 210th St. Free registration and light snacks provided. For more information or to register, call (646) 388-9290.

Park Cleanup

Volunteers are needed to clean up a portion of Mosholu Parkway South on May 16 from 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Meet at the Comfort Station on Webster Avenue and Mosholu Parkway South. For more information, email bedfordmosholu@verizon.net.

Food Assistance Programs

Information on several food assistance programs including the federal SNAP/food stamp program, WIC, school and summer meals, senior meals, and more is available by calling the New York Coalition Against Hunger office at (212) 825-0028. Information on Bronx food programs is also available in English at <http://bit.ly/1FksQB3> and Spanish at <http://bit.ly/1aYB1GG>.

Free Tutoring

Free tutoring in math, history, English and science is available for students ages 12 to 21 at Sistas & Brothers United, 103 E. 196th St., 3rd fl., Mondays to Fridays from 3 to 6 p.m. For

more information, call (718) 584-0515 ext. 243 or (347) 481-6180.

Free Legal Help

Free legal services are available at the office of Councilman Andy King, 940 E. Gun Hill Rd., Fridays through June 26. Legal consultations include criminal, NYCHA, tenant/landlord, public assistance, wills, healthcare proxies, contract disputes, family law issues, and civil litigations. For more information and to schedule an appointment, call (718) 684-5509.

Bird Walks

Bird Walks at Van Cortlandt Park are available free, Saturdays from 8 to 9:30 a.m. until November. Anyone interested can meet at the Nature Center, 246th Street and Broadway. For more information, contact Joseph McManus at McManus638@aol.com.

Healthcare & Benefits Screening

The Northwest Bronx Resource Center is offering help for several services: healthcare enrollment and benefits screening every Monday and SeedCo will help with healthcare applications, benefits (SNAP, WIC, etc.), finding free and low-cost healthcare, finding a doctor and other programs. Community Service Society is available to assist with applying and/or questions regarding benefits, including SNAP, WIC, Disability, etc. For more information, email Jumelia@unhp.org or (718) 933-2539.

MMCC Services

The Mosholu Montefiore Community Center, 3450 DeKalb Ave., offers services for children, teens and senior citizens including pre-K classes, day camp, adult education classes and wide-ranging services for senior citizens. To learn more, call MMCC at (718) 882-4000.

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Montefiore Honored for Hearing Out Westchester Sq. Residents

By JASMINE GOMEZ

A local civic group in the east Bronx has recognized Montefiore Medical Center for its outreach efforts.

The Westchester Square Civic Association, headed by Lou Rocco, honored Roberto S. Garcia, Senior Director of Community Relations for Montefiore Medical Center, and Mark Brutus, the hospital's Director of Engineering, for taking significant steps towards making community-conscious improvements to the hospital's Westchester Square Campus.

"I am very grateful to Montefiore because of what they did as a community-oriented hospital. We brought our plight to them and they immediately took response," said Lou Rocco, president of the Westchester Square Civic Association.

Garcia, doubling as the Executive Director of the Mosholu Preservation Corporation, said he was "extremely flattered" to have received recognition. "In my role as the Senior Director of Community Relations, it was important that we work together to come to a solution to the problems and the concerns that the community raised," said Garcia, who joined other officials

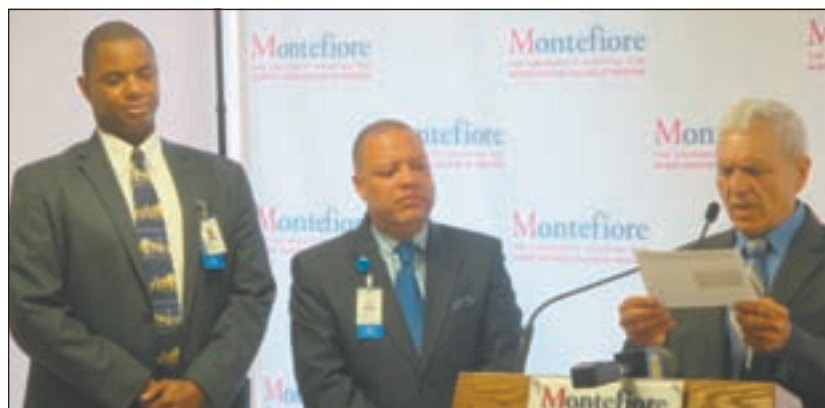


Photo by Jasmine Gomez

MARK BRUTUS, DIRECTOR of Engineering at Montefiore Medical Center and Roberto Garcia, Senior Director of Community Relations at the hospital (l-r) stand by as they wait to accept an award from Lou Rocco, president of the Westchester Square Civic Association.

for a tour of the facility.

When Montefiore purchased the rundown Westchester Square Medical Center in March 2013 to convert it into the state's first free-standing emergency room, they also inherited a series of problems that included a noisy hospital-owned generator. Residents were unhappy with the constant noise and air pollution, with some worried that the fumes expelled from the generator exacerbate their asthma. The

hospital, when it was acquired, also featured an outdated laboratory and flawed electrical and plumbing equipment, making the hospital appear dingy and past its prime.

When Montefiore purchased Westchester Square Medical Center, they had several goals in mind, to invest in a location that would preserve both healthcare access and job opportunities for Westchester Square community residents, and plans to expand

clinical services beyond the emergency room such as access to primary care.

Montefiore has since updated the facility ten-fold, having created more than 200 jobs, expanded their services to include a sleep center, a brand new cat-scan room, a renovated laboratory, and perhaps most pleasing to its Westchester Square residents, a brand new cap on the old rusty generator pipe and a sound barrier door on the generator causing quality of life issues for some.

Upgrades at the Montefiore Westchester Campus will continue as the hospital expects to complete renovations to its radiology department soon, and hopes to expand services to include primary care access by the end of the year.

"Whenever you have a new organization that goes into a community like Montefiore did when we acquired Westchester Square, it was extremely important for us to continue to develop the relationship with the community and community-based organizations and civic associations to force the good will and compromise and relationships," said Garcia.

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Out & About

Compiled by JUDY NOY

EDITOR'S PICK

Free Bronx Week Finale

Culminating a week of events in the Bronx for the borough's annual Bronx Week celebration, all are invited to attend the free Grand Finale to be held on Mosholu Parkway and Bainbridge Avenue on May 17: Noon - Parade featuring marching bands, celebrities, schools, and more with a reviewing stand at Mosholu Parkway East at Van Cortlandt Avenue; noon to 6 p.m. - Bronx Food & Arts & Music Festival which includes free health screenings and information on health insurance at Mosholu Parkway and Bainbridge Avenue; noon to 6 p.m. - Grand Finale Concert: Visitors can dance to the sounds of hip-hop, R&B, salsa, bachata, bomba y plena and more.

See additional listing under "Events." For more information and a detailed schedule of events, call (718) 590-3500.

Onstage

• The Bronx Library Center, 310 E. Kingsbridge Rd., presents **Matuto in Concert**, featuring Brazilian folk forms, American bluegrass, and Louisiana jams, May 16 at 2:30 p.m.; and **Take the 4 Train**, concert performed by the Celia Cruz H.S. Latin/Jazz Band, May 27 at 6 p.m. For more information, call (718) 579-4244/46/57 or visit www.nypl.org.

• Lehman Center for the Performing Arts, 250 Bedford Pk. Blvd. W., presents **Un Especial a Las Madres en Concierto (A Concert Special for Mothers)** featuring singer and band, May 16 at 8 p.m. (tickets are \$25 to \$50). For more information, call (718) 960-8833.

Events

• Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr. invites the public to a series of free events during **Bronx Week**: May 14, 7 to 8:30 p.m. - **Yoga** at the Bronx Museum of the Arts, 1040 Grand Concourse (free admission and bar); May 15 - **Health Day**, at Joyce Kilmer Park and Lou Gehrig Plaza at Bronx Borough Hall, 161st Street and the Grand Concourse, variety of fitness exercises (8 a.m. to noon); at Montefiore's East Garden, 111 E. 210th St., free screenings (10 a.m. to 2 p.m.); and at Morris Heights Health Center, 57-69 W. Burnside Ave., health screenings, salsa, zumba, kids aerobics and face painting (2 to 4 p.m.); May 16 - **Flagging of Graves**, to volunteer to place flags on graves at Woodlawn Cemetery of those who served our nation (9 a.m. to 4 p.m.); includes picnic lunch; and May 17 at 11 a.m. - **Bronx Walk of Fame inductions** on the steps of the Bronx County Building, Grand Concourse at East 161st Street where Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr. will unveil street signs bearing their names. For more information, call (718) 590-3500.

• PS x33, The Timothy Dwight School, 2424 Jerome Ave., holds its annual **Health Fair**, May 22 from 8:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. in its schoolyard. Events include face painting, arts & crafts, reading corner, music, health information including insurance, free giveaways, and more. For more information, call (718) 584-3926.

• Wave Hill, a Bronx oasis at 675 W. 252nd St. in Riverdale, offers **Family Art Projects**: Shield Me With a Turtle Shell, to make a turtle shell backpack from fabric and leather scraps, followed by a slow turtle-like parade, May 16 and 17; and WH Celebration Parade, to make flower shakers and leafy costumes, May 23 and 24; both in WH House from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Also included is a **Nature Presentation: Let's Talk Turtles**, to learn about turtles and meet some live ones, May 17 at 1 p.m. in the WH House. Grounds admission is free until noon Saturdays and Tuesdays all year. For more information and a schedule of events including tours and walks, call (718) 549-3200.

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 May 14, 21 and 28; **Hands-On Projects** (ages 7 to 12): Chicken Nest Making: May 14 at 4 p.m., Bookmark Making: May 16 at 2 p.m., Lamb Making: May 17 at 2 p.m., and Sun Making: May 28 at 4 p.m.; **film**: May 17 at 3:30 p.m.; and **Build a Soap Powered Model Boat** (ages 7 to 11): May 26 at 4 p.m. Kids can sign up at the Children's Information Desk for **Spring Into Reading!**: Reading club, Sundays through May 31 ending with a celebration. Includes reading aloud, movies, puppet shows, craft workshops, and more. Reading logs will be kept at

the children's information desk (free gift when you sign up). Teens/young adults can join **Make on Demand: Garage Band**: May 14 at 4 p.m.; **Scavenger Hunt**: May 18 at 4 p.m.; and **film**: May 22 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 adults **Jewelry Class at 11 a.m.**: bring your own materials to create original jewelry, May 14, 21 and 28; 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: **Get Active Fridays**: (ages 5

to 12), dance and zumba, May 15 at 3 p.m.; **Pajama Party** (ages 18 months to 12 years): to make a craft and read aloud, May 18 at 6 p.m.; and **Toddler Time** (18 to 36 months): stories, action songs and nursery rhymes, May 20 at 11 a.m. Teens/young adults can enjoy **Documentary**: creative life of the South Bronx from Puerto Rican migration and Cuban rhythms to salsa. Refreshments will be served. 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 May 18 for the next publication date of May 28.



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At Fordham School, a Sculpture Intertwines Humanity and Nature

By JENNY SHARP

A seven-foot-tall sculpture by a Japanese artist has found a home in Fordham.

The piece, entitled "A Child" and crafted by Akihiro Ito, adorns the entryway of local school IS 254. It will reside there permanently as a marker of artistic partnership and culture within the Fordham community.

Made from pieces of cherry wood, the sculpture resembles the abstracted form of a child, with a circular structure atop a cone--shapes similar to a head upon a torso. It now stands in an alcove high above the school's main doorway, visible both to those within the Washington Avenue school and also to passersby on the street.

At the unveiling ceremony on May 6, Ito expressed his great happiness to be able to donate the statue, a process that was facilitated in large part by the Fordham Business Improvement District (BID).

"We are very thankful to the Fordham BID," said Principal Alexis Marrero, who is in his first year at the helm of the middle school. Marrero said he plans to have lights installed beneath the sculpture so that it can be

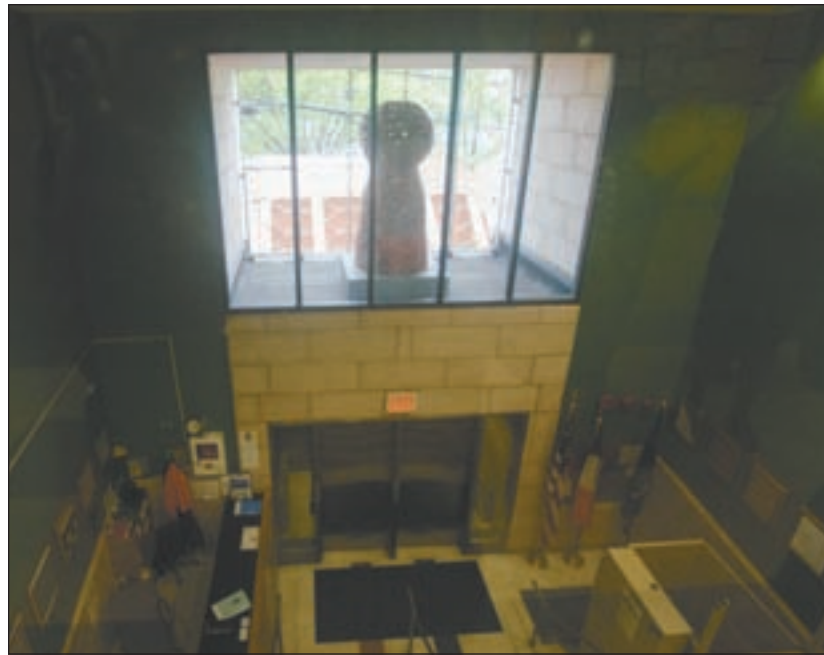


Photo by Jenny Sharp

THE SCULPTURE ENTITLED "A Child" by Japanese artist Akihiro Ito sits atop its new home at the entrance of school IS 254 in Fordham.

seen clearly during the day and night by anyone outside the school, a symbol of the revitalization within the community, he said.

However, for the artist, the sculpture has a more personal message.

"The children are the next generation and I want them to preserve nature," said Ito, explaining that he hopes the sculpture will inspire the students of IS 254 to become engaged with environmental issues.

Ito's artistic process and choice of materials strengthen his message. He uses mostly natural materials such as wood and stone as opposed to commercially produced products like canvas, paint, and metals. Wood, like that used in "A Child," is a more renewable resource and produces less waste during the sculpture's creation.

For the Fordham BID, the installation of "A Child" is part of a greater effort to bring art to a changing borough. Another sculpture by Ito, called "Tomorrow" was placed for 11 months at the corner of Fordham Road and Webster Avenue as part of a Department of Transportation program.

"It's a statement," said Fordham BID director Wilma Alonso. "It defeats the perception of people that the Bronx is burning." Alonso explained that the Fordham area is a major shopping center for all of New York City, continuing to develop and grow economically, and should therefore be both a cultural and commercial center.

Marrero agreed that the acquisition of "A Child" represents "the change happening in the community," standing as a reminder for future Bronxites at the doors of their middle school.

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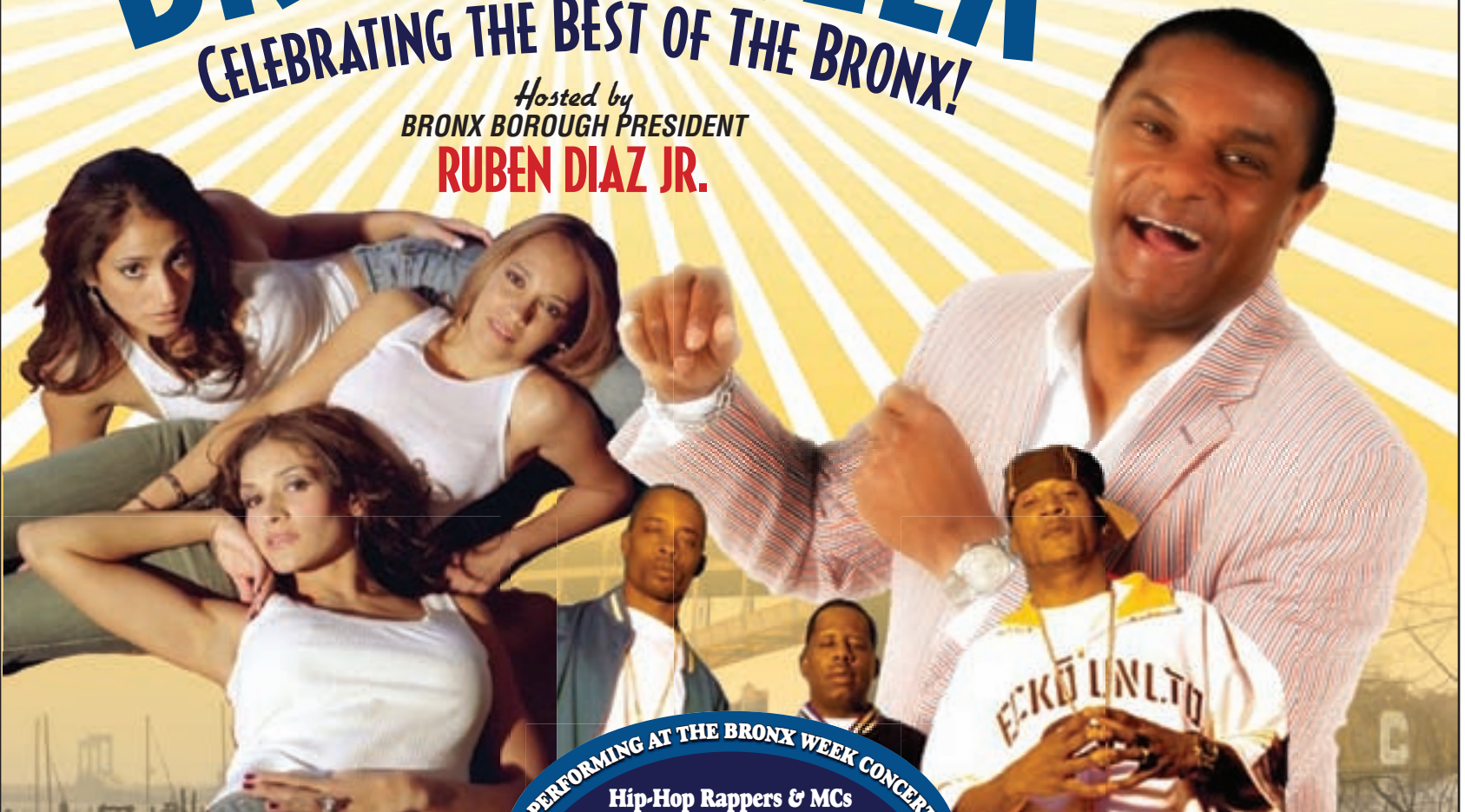
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