



# NORWOOD NEWS

Vol 29, No 5 • PUBLISHED BY MOSHOLU PRESERVATION CORPORATION • MARCH 3-16, 2016



## CRIME SPREE THIEVES AT LARGE

*NYPD steps up patrols at Jerome-Gun Hill BID, where robberies/burglaries occurred*



Images courtesy NYPD

**THESE MEN ARE** wanted by the 52nd Precinct for questioning in separate crimes that happened along the Jerome-Gun Hill Business Improvement District in January and February.

By **DAVID CRUZ**

Business at one of Norwood's key shopping strips has returned to normal following a string of rare robberies and burglaries that shook up several establishments since January.

Seven stores were randomly hit with cash stolen. In every incident, the suspects fled, leaving the question over whether the thieves are gone for good or plan to strike again. Troubling shopkeepers more is the rarity of these

crimes in Norwood, a largely calmer community within the 52nd Precinct, whose jurisdiction falls within this neighborhood. Since then, patrols have been stepped up around the East Gun Hill Road area.

"[W]e are proactively seek-

ing the individual(s) responsible for these crimes," said Inspector Nilda Hofmann, commanding officer of the 52nd Precinct, in a statement. "I'm confident that with our efforts, combined with the as-

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## EDITORIAL

## A Suicide in Kingsbridge Barely Goes Noticed

At a low-income residence for the elderly in Kingsbridge, a resident opened their window one recent grey morning and plunged to their death, spattering on the pavement.

The suicide, happening at the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Webb Avenue Residence directly across from the James J. Peters Veterans Administration Hospital, startled plenty of onlookers even as a security guard draped a white blanket over the body. Many began their work day with the disturbing image burned in their mind, and plenty of questions.

The suicide wasn't even a blip in the local media's radar, except the *Norwood News*, which made note of the death with a brief statement from the home's spokespeople. Suicides are barely reported in the news media. They're deliberately kept discreet to avoid copycat suicide. Media practitioners simply don't want blood on their hands.

But there are exceptions to the media-suicide rule, this being one of them. After all, the suicide was an uncommon one at a well-respected institution that bills itself as a pleasant community.

There are so many unanswered questions, with the primary one being what led this resident to declare Feb. 24 to be the day they wanted to die? Why did they not seek help? Was it a man or a woman? Why are there no window guards except on the first floor? What could have prevented this? The bigger question: Did staffers at the facility notice any basic warning signs the resident was in trouble? The facility has on-site supportive services. What went wrong?

Here are some hard statistics on suicide:

- The Center for Disease Control (CDC) estimates older adults 65+ are more prone to committing suicide than the national average.
- The CDC sees older men kill them-



Photo by David Cruz

**POLICE SEAL OFF** section on Webb Avenue following the suicide of a resident at the Harry and Jeannette Weinberg Webb Avenue Residence.

selves more than older women: 30.9 percent within the age 65+ bracket, and 48.5 percent past 85+.

- The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention estimates one in four senior citizens in New York State commits suicide.

- Depression among senior citizens is a gateway to suicide.

And though senior citizens are at the greatest risk, only a handful of programs are available to them.

Seniors serve as the link to our past, living historians entering a rite of passage as they share a snapshot of yesteryear. But they can often feel neglected, viewed as an afterthought. With some friends and family out of the picture, loneliness creeps in to the point where nothing matters anymore.

The Harry & Jeanette Weinberg Webb Avenue Residence has always been an upstanding home, making this suicide more troubling even with its 11.6 percent residents who require anti-psychotics. Among its network of services are on-site training for its staffers to detect elder abuse, and a Speakers Bureau

that addresses suicide in the elderly.

- We would be remiss if we didn't include some basic tips in detecting suicide among seniors:

- Growing mental problems such as anxiety, bipolar disorder or schizophrenia lead to a higher propensity for suicide.

- Social isolation; staying in the apartment for long periods of time.

- Diagnosis of a fatal illness.

- A life change, such as the recurring illness or death of a spouse, financial hardships, and retirement.

Memorials are held at residences, but they soon go away. One hopes organizers at the Harry & Jeanette Weinberg Webb Avenue Residence can turn this tragedy into a learning experience by beginning a hard conversation on suicide while keeping a careful eye. It's an uncomfortable talk on a subject, which judging by statistics, could very well have crossed the mind of at least one resident there.

## Public and Community Meetings

**COMMUNITY BOARD 7** will host its general board meeting March 15 at 6:30 p.m. at the St. Nicholas of Tolentine Church, 2345 University Ave. CB7 committees are held on the following dates at the board office, 229A E. 204th St. at 6:30 p.m. unless otherwise noted: Public Safety & QOL committee on March 3; Education/Libraries & Youth Services committee on March 8; Senior Services committee on March 9; Parks & Recreation committee on March 9; Traffic & Transportation committee on March 10; Veterans committee on March 10; and Housing/Land Use & Zoning committee on March 16. For more information, call (718) 933-5650.

**THE 52ND PRECINCT COMMUNITY COUNCIL** will meet March 24 at the 52nd Precinct stationhouse, 3016 Webster Ave., from 7 to 9 p.m. For more information, call (718) 220-5824.





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# INQUIRING PHOTOGRAPHER

By DAVID GREENE

**This week we asked readers their thoughts on the recent string of slashing incidents happening across the city and what could be done to stop it.**



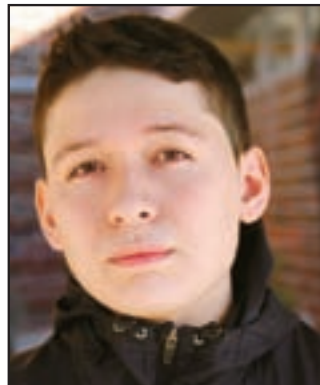
Well, I don't know if they can stop it. Nowadays people are just reckless and out of control. They don't really have a motive to do things; they just do it to impress their friends and stuff. It will be hard to stop because there are too many things going on. But I feel safe around here.

**Isaura DeLuna**  
Bedford Park



It's a big problem and I think they should crack down on that. I think it has to do with the gangs. It's probably something that would get you into the gangs; you have to go slash someone's face to get into the gang because they're not robbing people. It's hard to stop it. The only way to stop it is to have a gun or a knife to protect yourself.

**Fouad Ahmed**  
Norwood



Because of how rapidly it's happening, I feel like it is an initiation for a gang or something. That would be a reasonable motive for this. Because these slashings have been well publicized and a lot of people are talking about it and are aware of what's happening. I think social media can play a part in not just telling people what's happening, but how they can avoid it, because it can happen to anyone and this is serious.

**Michael Parra**  
Bedford Park



It is a serious issue. I think the solution is more cops on the streets, around the subways and project areas, walking the beat. The car patrol isn't doing it because the guy knows you're in that car. The most important thing is the men need to step up and we need to start meeting our mothers, or girlfriends and our wives at the bus stops and the train stations. That will alleviate some of the problem. Once you catch a slasher, you throw the book at him because they think this is the fad, like the knockout game.

**Robert Ford**  
Norwood



It's really bad what's going on. I think when they see one guy doing it, the other guy wants to copycat, and I have a feeling it's gang-related. They want to make some points or reputation, make their name and get it out. Cameras help, but nowadays people are not afraid of the cameras anymore and right away they disappear.

**Amit Bachan**  
Westchester Square

**Editor's Note:** Have an idea for an Inquiring Photographer question? Send suggestions to [dcruz@norwoodnews.org](mailto:dcruz@norwoodnews.org).

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# Amid Slow Progress on Ice Project, Forum Tackles Timeline and Displacement

By DAVID CRUZ

At the tail end of a long-awaited community forum that assessed the dormant status of the Kingsbridge National Ice Center, Vera Navratilova finally got her turn to ask a pointed question left dangling for some time: when is the city going to release KNIC's lease, and when is the groundbreaking?

The question was directed at a dais of city officials and to John Neary, a principal of the highly-anticipated KNIC project, sitting at a seven-member panel on Feb. 17. The two-prong meeting put a sharp focus on the "unintended consequences" the large project could bring to the neighborhood, but also asked where the project stood.

"We will kindly and willingly give site control to the developer once they meet the conditions of financing," said Charlie Samboy, the government and community relations Bronx representative for the New York City Economic Development Corporation, an ad hoc city agency that's holding the lease in escrow. "There isn't a hard deadline by when they have to start construction, but there is a hard deadline when they have to have the first phase of the project done."

Neary, a soft-spoken man with snow white hair, offered a hint of movement between the EDC and KNIC but left it there.

"There is an active, ongoing dialogue with discussion between... EDC and the Kingsbridge team," said Neary before the packed crowd at Monroe College. "We don't know when they're going to be complete, but they're active. We're working diligently on them, we're working very hard on them."

Just what the two sides are specifically working on remained offline, with Neary deflecting questions from the *Norwood News* over the ongoing discussions.

Senator Gustavo Rivera, representing Kingsbridge Heights, a largely working class neighborhood, organized the meeting. For several weeks, community activists met with Rivera expressing concern over the project, viewed as a harbinger for the community and borough at large. The meeting also came amid KNIC's approval of a state loan to jumpstart the project.

Within the last year, neighbors have noticed an uptick in rents along



Photo by David Cruz

"**THERE IS AN** active, ongoing dialogue with discussion between...EDC and the Kingsbridge team," said John Neary, KNIC developer (with mic), responding to a guest's (standing) question.

the commercial spine of Kingsbridge Heights, with small-time shops bearing the brunt. Other groups have pointed to the sudden rise in Major Capital Improvement projects by landlords of residential buildings, who raise rents following renovations.

But Rivera was quick to delineate KNIC's position as a neighborhood partner rather than foe, casting landlords as opportunists speculating on a massive project.

"We have to realize that there are so many things [KNIC] could control as far as what's going on inside the building. The things that we are talking about are happening outside the building," said Rivera, doubling as a mediator throughout the meeting. "If an owner wants to be, pardon my French, a scumbag, he or she is going to be scumbag...Because it's happening outside, they have no control over it. But we can resist it as a community and push back."

At Rivera's behest, representatives from the New York City Small Business Services and New York City Housing Preservation and Development department were on hand to answer questions in a kind of one-stop shopping style approach. Residents and merchants who've experienced run-ins were made aware of the city agencies that would take landlords to task.

But much of the community's remarks were largely statements that edged on the brink of venting. Some moments became outright aggres-

sive, with plenty of heckles coming from Local 79 Construction & General Building Laborers, a labor union that appeared to verbally strong-arm KNIC into providing union-backed jobs.

Special interest groups aside, a broader consensus was reached from

the community: KNIC, and by extension, the city, should have a higher frequency of meetings to discuss the status of the project.

"Just make sure that these forums happen a little bit more often because it's very much needed," said Patricia Charles, a Bronx resident.

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# Mourning the Loss of a Tree Stump on Mosholu Pkwy.

By JASMINE GOMEZ

For a few moments, Elizabeth Quaranta sat in the middle of a big pile of dirt where a beloved treestump once stood.

Found along Mosholu Parkway South between Bainbridge and Marion avenues, the tree base once decorated with lilies and other ornaments was removed by the New York City Department of Parks on Feb. 18. The uprooting of the stump, once dubbed by Quaranta as the "Giving Tree," left many

community members mournful. To many, the tree stump served as the communal arbor for neighborhood residents, where many often met up to sit and chitchat.

"The community saw it as a sign of strength, as a sign of hope, and many community members took care of it," said Quaranta, who serves as President of the Friends of Mosholu Parkland, a volunteer group that looks to maintain the parkway's leafy landscape.

The tree stump was what was left of a enormous oak tree that toppled during Hurricane Sandy. Members of Friends of Mosholu Parkland had recently planted 500 daffodils and pink meadow flowers, and added 20 bags of soil to the area around the stump.

The community had also in the past enlisted teens from the city's Summer Youth Employment Program to care for and maintain the stump as one of their responsibilities. It was yanked by the Department of Parks as part of efforts to remove the remains of trees that had come down along the parkway.

"Recent tree and tree stump removals along Mosholu Parkway were done with the intent to plant new trees through our capital contracts," said a spokesman with the Parks Department. "We're appreciative of the community's love of trees and we look forward to giving them new ones."

The stump had been so well-decorated that Quaranta was told by Parks' removal crews at the scene that they weren't sure about removing it out of concern that it was a makeshift memorial.

Quaranta was unaware of the stump's fate until she stumbled upon the tree removal trucks at the park. Even after she leaped past the parkway's barriers, she noticed the stump had already been three quarters removed. If she had known sooner, she said, she may have been able to ask the Parks Department to spare the cherished stump.

Quaranta said the community is considering efforts to memorialize the tree stump by either creating a mural at a nearby playground, making it the cover of the Friends of Mosholu Parkland's calendar, or planting a garden or another tree in the stump's place.

"The tree stump was a broken soul," said Quaranta. "But it really had a positive effect on us."

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Photo by Jasmine Gomez/Facebook

**NEIGHBORHOOD RESIDENT ELIZABETH** Quaranta stares at the empty spot that was left after a beloved tree stump was yanked from its roots by the Department of Parks (inset).

# 81-Year-Old Driver Jumps Curb on Bainbridge; 'Miracle' No Pedestrians Hit

By DAVID GREENE

An out-of-control vehicle slammed against a light pole at a Norwood commercial strip, spooking bystanders and leaving the 81-year-old driver in critical condition. Police believed the driver might have suffered some type of medical emergency, causing the accident.

Police and paramedics were called to the heavily congested intersection of Bainbridge Avenue and East 205<sup>th</sup> Street on Feb. 25 after the out-of-control vehicle jumped the curb at the northeast corner and slammed into the corner pole.

Kirsis Lopez from the JSP Life Agency on East 204th Street was on the second floor having breakfast, when she heard, "a large crunching sound."

Lopez recalled, "I knew it had to be a car accident because it sounded like metal crunching," seconds before she believed the driver to have been traveling eastbound on Bainbridge Avenue, before losing control. The accident happened within the heart of Norwood's Bainbridge-204<sup>th</sup> Street commercial strip, home to some several dozen stores.

"There was a female passenger," Lopez continued, "and her face was all

bloodied." Of the driver, Lopez said, "he appeared to be sick and wasn't really moving."

"We're all amazed that there was no one at the corner, because people cross there for the bus stop," said Lopez.

One area resident called it "a miracle" that no one was hit given the substantial foot traffic by school children and customers walking along the popular commercial strip.

The NYPD reports the unidentified driver was rushed to Montefiore Hospital and remains in critical but stable condition. His two female passengers were taken to St. Barnabas Hospital, where they were being treated for minor injuries.

Initial reports by the NYPD's Crash Investigation Squad believed the driver "possibly lost control after a possible medical episode."

In March 2013, Bedford Park resident Sook-Ja Kim was struck and killed as she walked along the pedestrian footpath at Mosholu Parkway after a still-unidentified 22-year-old driver suffered a similar medical emergency.

No charges in that crash were ever filed nor any citations issued to the driver. That crash was later deemed an accident.

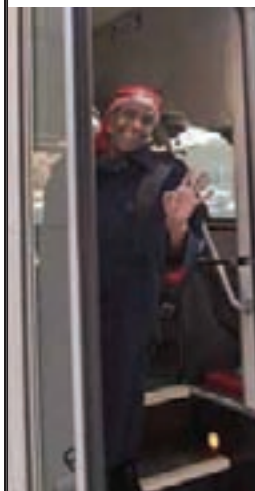


Photo courtesy Michael Vermong

**POLICE SEAL OFF** a portion of Bainbridge Avenue and East 205th Street in Norwood after an out-of-control vehicle slammed into a pole, injuring all three inside the car. No one else was hurt.

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# Fight for \$15 Comes to the Bronx

By DAVID CRUZ

On the heels of raising the minimum wage for state employees, Governor Andrew Cuomo stopped by the Bronx demanding corporate giants doing business in New York State increase the wage to \$15.

"Fifteen is fair," said Cuomo, a Democrat, offering remarks before at a rally held at the Madison Square Boys & Girls Club in Belmont. Supporters included labor unions, who all stand to gain from Cuomo's campaign.

"The history we are making is returning this city to working people," said George Gresham, 1199 SEIU's president, adding the inflated wage could ease the scramble for people working two to three jobs, and endangering family dynamics. "Rather than you raising your family, unfortunately, too often the streets are raising your family."

His latest stop is part of the Mario Cuomo Campaign for

Economic Justice, a pet crusade named after his father, the late former New York State Governor Mario Cuomo. Riding a tour van, Cuomo intends to use his campaign to convince other states across the country to push for a higher hourly pay.

Last year, the younger Cuomo bypassed the State Legislature to okay a grad-

ual \$15 wage to state college workers and fast food employees that would be in full effect by 2018 in New York City. The current New York State wage rests at \$9 an hour, while workers within the five boroughs are paid \$10.50 to keep up with cost of living. In exchange for paying a higher salary, corporations are of-



Photo by David Cruz

**SUPPORTERS FROM THE** Retail Wholesale & Department Store Union, the New York Hotel Trades Council, Transit Workers Union and 1199 SEIU, rally with Governor Andrew Cuomo, pushing to increase the minimum wage to \$15 for all New Yorkers.



Photo by David Cruz

**STUMPING FOR A** minimum wage of \$15 an hour for New Yorkers, Governor Andrew Cuomo (pictured) stopped by the Bronx to deliver his message and enlist some allies in the fight.

ferred tax breaks should they hire workers age 16 to 20 years old.

As it stands, a handful of corporations operating in New York adhere to the federal minimum wage of \$7.25, which translates to \$15,080 a year should a person work 40 hours a week. The figure puts a worker below poverty level, offering a monetary subsidy

of \$7,000 in social benefits.

"Why are we subsidizing McDonald's workers? Why are we paying McDonald's employees?" asked Cuomo.

Some economists, however, warn that should corporations be shoehorned into increasing the wage, it could mean less hiring of workers or an exodus of businesses leaving the state.

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# Repeating 2014, Two Bronx Legislators Back Espaillat for Congress

By DAVID CRUZ

A pair of Bronx legislators is once again backing state Sen. Adriano Espaillat for the 13th Congressional District, which covers Norwood.

But an endorsement from the Bronx Democratic County Committee (BDCC) appears unlikely.

Espaillat, a Democrat, grabbed support from his Democratic colleague, Senator Gustavo Rivera, along with state Assemblyman Victor Pichardo, a Democrat. The endorsement is a familiar move, as both legislators backed Espaillat in both Congressional elections. His first order of business should he win: opening a Congressional office in the Bronx.

"I think the people of the Bronx have been lied to," said Espaillat, sitting alongside Rivera and Pichardo at New Capital Restaurant in Kingsbridge Heights. "I pledge that on day one, people from the Bronx will not have to trek all the way downtown to get their services. They deserve to have something right here, right now. They have not been served well because there hasn't been a presence here in the neighborhood."



Photo by Jasmine Gomez

**THIS IS THE** third time state Senator Gustavo Rivera (l) and state Assemblyman Victor (r) Pichardo have endorsed state Senator Adriano Espaillat (c).

Espaillat intends to run on a platform to increase access to well-paying jobs, health care, and increasing affordable housing options.

This is Espaillat's third run for the

13th Congressional race, a seat long held by Congressman Charles Rangel for more than 40 years. But the third race is a completely altered dynamic than his first and second runs, given Rangel's decision not to run for office.

Rangel's imminent retirement has opened the door for a swell of candidates to announce a run for the seat, which mostly covers Harlem and Upper Manhattan. The Bronx side of the district includes Fordham, Kingsbridge, Kingsbridge Heights, and all of Norwood, which Espaillat secured during his first and second attempts for the seat.

Candidates vying for the seat include career politician Adam Clayton Powell, former U.S. Ambassador for International Religious Freedom Suzan Cook, Mike Gallagher, state

Sen. Bill Perkins, former teacher Guillermo Lianares, Pastor Clyde Williams, and state Assemblyman Keith Wright, who recently picked up an endorsement from Rangel. The seat, once Rangel vacates it, will once again be reduced to a junior seat, with much legislative influence from it siphoned off.

Espaillat's campaign war chest ranks as the third highest among the candidates, with \$123,700, according to campaign filings. The amount is meager when compared to Wright's campaign kitty of \$345,000, with a large portion of the monies coming from the real estate industry, according to campaign records. Ranking at the bottom is Perkins, who raised just over \$10,000 since he announced his run.

Wright may be poised for an endorsement from the Bronx Democratic County Committee, which has remained quiet on the matter. Espaillat, who won the majority of votes in the Bronx, did receive an endorsement from BDCC in 2014. This time, Wright reportedly secured the county's support in January 2015 following his withdrawal from the race for Assembly Speaker, an influential title now held by Assemblyman Carl Heastie.

Espaillat remained confident that Rivera and Pichardo can help him deliver the votes from the Bronx.

"If you walk the streets of Washington Heights, the streets of the Bronx, you're basically talking about the same votes, the same issues, the same things that he's fought for in Washington Heights," said Rivera of Espaillat.

Assemblyman Marcos Crespo, who heads the Bronx Democratic County Committee, declined to comment over whether he will back Espaillat.

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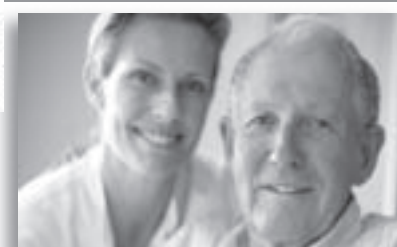
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# NORWOOD NEWS

## SNAPSHOTS



Photo by Miriam Quinones

**DOUG CONDIT AND** Betty Arce man the table for Friends of Williamsbridge Oval Park, a group of volunteer park activists serving as the Norwood park's eyes and ears. They were on hand for the annual Bronx Parks Speak Up, a networking event for park enthusiasts held at Lehman College on Feb. 20.



Photo courtesy Our Lady of Refuge School

**CATHOLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS** from Our Lady of Refuge in Bedford Park hosted Cardinal Timothy Dolan, who stopped by the school Feb. 17 for mass and a tour of the parish. The Cardinal made another visit to the Bronx on Feb. 23 at St. Clare of Assisi in Morris Park.



Photo courtesy NYC Health + Hospitals/North Central Bronx

**ATTENDEES AT NYC Health + Hospitals/North Central Bronx** enjoyed a "Black History Month" celebration on Feb. 29. The event included historical speeches, poems, a fashion show and interim executive director Greg Calliste receiving an award for outstanding service (pictured here). Left to right Vanessa Eaddy, Gregory Calliste, Christina Contreras and Deone Holder.



Photo courtesy Police Athletic League

**YOUNG PEOPLE FROM** the Bronx tested their athletic prowess at the annual Police Athletic League's Games Day Tournament of Champions on Feb. 17. Children as young as age 5 challenged their peers in some brain-crunching games including checkers, ping pong, trouble, and UNO while squaring off in more physical games including long jumps, sit-ups, jump rope and the PAL's Paper Table Challenge



Photo by Miriam Quinones

**EVAN BISHOP OF** 320 Body Art (right) offers empowering advice during "The Soul of a People 2016" at Beso Lounge Feb. 18. The event was held in honor of Black History Month, and organized by Your Miracle Skin Grow. The event also featured original slam poetry presentations and sample demonstrations held by the skin cream group and 320 Body Art.

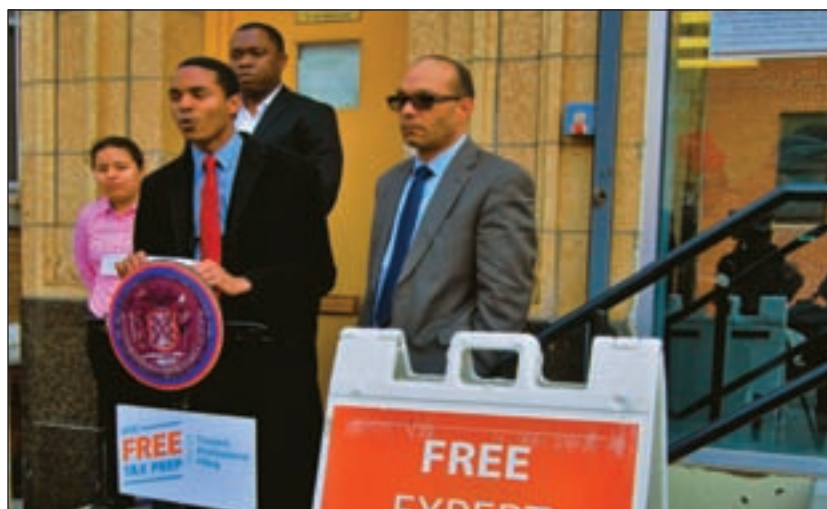


Photo by Miriam Quinones

**COUNCILMAN RITCHIE TORRES** (at podium) announces free tax preparation services available at his Fordham office during the tax season. Torres is flanked by representatives of Urban Upbound, which provides the free tax services (See the Norwood News' Neighborhood Notes section for how to schedule an appointment).



# SPARX Program Ignites Interest of Coding to Young Girls

By DAVID CRUZ

Zaleen Julia, 12, stood carefully monitoring the group of 10 young girls staring intently at their Dell computers. They sat inside the boxy computer lab at St. James Park Recreation Center, learning how to code, or giving a computer program a voice.

But the tedious work transformed into a thrilling exercise for the girls, utilizing a program dubbed Python, software that helps visualize the coding process. There were girls as young as 10 years old in the class, all decked out in pink T-shirts. Zaleen, a student at MS 244, wants to be a dancer, but she's certainly kept an eye on coding.

"It's pretty fun, it's pretty cool, and it's like a new experience for me because I never did that in my life before," said Zaleen, wearing a pink shirt that read, "NYC SPARX; Imagine, Invent, Inspire." The phrase is a reference to the after school pilot program teaching young girls such as Zaleen to code. For the past several weeks, Zaleen has been developing a smartphone app that pinpoints the whereabouts of a user with help from a watch or bracelet.

SPARX, privately funded and admin-

istered by the city Parks Department's Computer Resource Center, exclusively recruits young Bronx females ages 12 to 18 to acquire tech-based skills. Its title is not an acronym, but a play on the word "parks," given the agency that's adopted the program.

As it stands, females have barely broken into the tech sector. Even worse, the industry in the Bronx is far behind other boroughs such as Manhattan and Brooklyn, making opportunities for young girls scant. For minority girls, the statistics are even more of a concern.

"They're poorly represented in higher level technology," said Ana-Maria Campos, director of the Computer Resource Center. "Not all these girls are gonna go on to technology. Some of them go into what they're interested in. But it's the exposure that is the key piece here."

Embedded within the program's framework is Science, Technology, Engineering and Math education (STEM), lessons amalgamated to application design or coding. Should students complete a course, it can work towards a tech credit that's accepted by schools.



Photo by Jasmine Gomez

**LAIRA REID (R) LEADS** a class of young girls at the SPARX program at St. James Recreation Center.

The program is free, thanks to a \$100,000 grant from the Butler Foundation, which went to the hiring of Laura Reid, SPARX's computer science program instructor. Two part-time employees were also hired, working at the St. Mary's Recreation Center in Mott Haven. At the St. James Recreation Center, Reid utilizes a program that illustrates the basic coding process to help create a simple smartphone app.

"When they first come in they're like, 'Oh we're going to make apps, this is going to be so cool,' and then when they're doing it, it's like, 'this really is cool cause I'm controlling and I'm making an app do something that I want to do,'" said Reid.

**Editor's Note:** To learn more about the program, go to [sparx.crc@gmail.com](mailto:sparx.crc@gmail.com) or [sparx@parks.nyc.gov](mailto:sparx@parks.nyc.gov).

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# 2016 STATE OF THE BRONX

*In Yearly Address, BP Ruben Diaz Jr. Bolsters Bronx's Accomplishments, and Looks Ahead*



Photo by Adi Talwar

**BOROUGH PRESIDENT RUBEN** Diaz Jr. (at podium) made biting remarks against the city's response to the Legionnaire's outbreak that killed several people in the Bronx, while still flirting with the premise of making a run for mayor.

By **DAVID CRUZ**

In his yearly address highlighting accomplishments while pushing a heavy agenda, Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr.'s seventh State of the Borough speech addressed more city matters than in previous addresses, further underscoring his ambition to run for Mayor of New York.

In the 44-minute speech, rife with 59 rounds of applause, Diaz took jabs at the city's response to last year's Legionnaire's disease outbreak, its approach to

its lofty rezoning plan, and made clear his support for charter schools, conflicting with the lukewarm take of Mayor Bill de Blasio.

Issues relating to the borough, of course, took center stage in his 20-page speech held at Cardinal Hayes High School. Reinforcing the long-running theme of development as a motif for progress, Diaz noted the \$2 billion invested into the borough. His more ambitious project is a multi-million dollar facelift for Orchard Beach's pavilion.

"[W]e are actively guiding the progress of the Bronx, and doing everything we can to ensure that the future is for everyone," said Diaz.

That future came in support of more funding for tech-based firms in the Bronx, a borough whose tech sector is incredibly scarce when compared to Manhattan and Brooklyn. That included the opening of Doran Jones, an upstart software testing firm, an increase in computer science classes at Bronx schools, and an imminent release of a comprehensive report detailing how the Bronx can catch up to the rest of the city.

"There is no reason why we cannot be the next Silicon Valley," said Diaz, earning several rounds of applause.

For the past year, Diaz's profile has spiked with help from allies such as Governor Andrew Cuomo. Last year, the borough saw state funding of four Metro-North stations in the East Bronx, a project where he publicly thanked "my

good friend, Governor Andrew Cuomo for his strong support and commitment to funding its completion."

A raised profile allowed Diaz to cleverly use the Bronx as a launchpad to discussing citywide issues, a type of litmus test on how he would respond to issues should Diaz ever become mayor. In some instances, Diaz hinted at some interest at becoming mayor, explaining his strong stance on continued mayoral control of schools for any future mayors, "whoever they might be."

"Who doesn't want to play around with the idea of being mayor for the City of New York?" came a rhetorical ques-

tion from state Sen. Ruben Diaz, the father of the younger Diaz.

Education issues were mentioned, with some proposals, including a proposal for the New York City Department of Education to pay for remedial classes at city-funded colleges. "We cannot give diplomas to unprepared students and pass along the costs to them," said Diaz. "The City should take responsibility for college readiness."

On housing matters, Diaz pegged himself a champion of affordable housing by recalling the building of affordable housing in the South Bronx and starting a "Green Development Fund." Though not mentioning him by name, Diaz once again took aim at de Blasio's blanket rezoning plan, which received tough criticism by Bronx community boards in November.

"How can we dramatically alter something so profound as how our city is built with a broad stroke?" asked Diaz. More housing, he says, can help reduce the issue of homelessness, laying out an agenda that would ask the city to "mandate apartments in new development of working people currently living in the shelter system."

But absent in his speech were signature projects he once touted, including the Kingsbridge National Ice Center, a \$348 million project that's staggeringly lost steam in 2015, though showing recent signs of activity of late.

Diaz was unavailable for comments shortly after his speech, a departure from his usual practice of speaking with reporters following his address.



Photo by David Cruz

**BOROUGH PRESIDENT RUBEN** Diaz Jr. following his seventh State of the Borough speech, this time bypassing a news conference soon after he was done.



Photo by David Cruz

**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN** Governor Andrew Cuomo (c) and Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr. (r) has shown increased signs of a forged alliance. Here, the two are spotted at a rally in the Bronx that called for an increased minimum wage of \$15.





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# Harkening Back to a Rail Yards Proposal in Bedford Park That Fizzled

By DANIELA BEASLEY

The Concourse Yards Development proposal is an innovative idea but not the first time that this airspace has been looked at to become something more for the Bronx.

For years, a number of projects similar to Diaz's current proposal languished in development, with starts and stops that cost the city millions, or ignored completely. It's a fate that could or could not mar the proposals this time around.

An original proposal dates back to 1961 when a plan to create a platform over the Concourse Yards in Bedford Park was proposed by Bronx Community College (BCC). The platform would have served as the foundation to build an expanded campus.

According to a *New York Times* article published in December of 1961, an expansion of BCC was needed to keep up with the popularity among the growing student population. The project cost was estimated to be more than \$10 million and located between Jerome and Paul avenues.

In the original plans, BCC wanted nine buildings, a swimming pool, gymnasium, theatre, auditorium and



Photo courtesy Office of the Borough President

**THIS RENDERING PRODUCED** in the 1960s shows an expanded Bronx Community College campus, settled in what would have been on a constructed platform over the Concourse Yards in Bedford Park.

places to house administrative, academic, medical, science and recreation rooms.

The first sign of trouble came in July of 1969 when it was reported that the New York City Department of Education (DOE), then known as the Board of Education, had rejected all the bids. Only two contractors ultimately submitted their proposals, with the lowest bid valued at \$103 million, surpassing

the projected budget of \$45 million.

In February 1970, a groundbreaking ceremony, also covered by *The New York Times*, was held for the new campus priced at \$61 million. Dropping from nine buildings to six, the campus was expected to be move-in ready by September 1973.

But during preliminary construction it was discovered that the structural columns, costing \$840,000 each,

were not the right size, costing the project more delays.

Three years and \$16 million later the project was officially abandoned and funds were instead used to renovate the existing BCC campus.

Fast forward to the 1990s when Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz, now representing the area that holds Concourse Yards, proposed building an additional school to the DOE. Dinowitz believed that adding schools in the area would relieve some overcrowding issues, given the size of the Concourse Yards.

Although the DOE didn't adopt his idea, Dinowitz seemed to be overjoyed that the Concourse Yard will finally be taken advantage of.

"[T]here is just tremendous opportunity and potential for those rail yards, so I am very pleased [Borough President] Diaz is doing this," Dinowitz told the *Norwood News*.

Despite the previous failures, Diaz is returning to the Concourse Yards with a proposal that according to Dinowitz, "is a once in a generation opportunity for the Bronx to do something that is really going to have a positive effect."

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# City Slashings Inspire Talk of Safety and Media Hype

By JASMINE GOMEZ

Despite a surge in knife slashings across the city, Norwood businesses are shrugging it off, having pointed to their own internal protocols should someone seek to buy a blade.

Tony Enamorato, an employee at Jerry's Hardware doesn't let his guard down. He told the *Norwood News* that before selling a box cutter or knife to a patron, the weapons of choice for the recent slashings, he always checks ID and their demeanor, to make sure that the person is not under the influence.

Enamorato also pointed out that the surveillance cameras within the store offer an extra level of security. Police can access a live feed of the security cameras in the store from their patrol car just by obtaining Enamorato's IP address.

But the cause of the increase in slashings still remains unclear. While some say the boost in slashings is a result of a copycat mentality, where media coverage on the knife attacks inspire other criminals to do the same, one criminal justice professor believes the surge can be attributed to a lack of police presence.

Dr. Darrin Porcher, a professor at



Photo courtesy New York City Mayor's Office

**NYPD COMMISSIONER BILL** Bratton, holding a radio at a news conference introducing CompStat 2.0 on Feb. 23, alluded to the media's aggressive attention on citywide slashings as a reason for increased worry among the public. Mayor Bill de Blasio is at left.

Monroe College and a legal analyst and consultant in criminal court cases, believes that the slashings may be attributed to a lack uniformed police officers in areas where the slashings have occurred. "Criminals are opportunists and they strike when the opportunity

presents itself to them to commit these crimes," he said. "As of lately, the opportunity has presented itself to criminals to commit these crimes and therefore they are following through with the slashings."

Porcher dismissed claims of copy-

cat slashers, pointing to the number of victims who knew their attacker.

At a news conference on Feb. 23, NYPD Chief of Detectives Robert Boyce noted that slashings and stabbings have indeed gone up to 567, compared to 470 last year, about a 20 percent increase. And 56 of these attacks have occurred in the Bronx, the latest happening at East 181st Street and the Grand Concourse, where a man was slashed on his hand and wrist. Boyce assured the public the police have the manpower to tackle the incidents, given the extra 2,000 cops now walking the beat.

On Feb. 21, two other slashings occurred just hours apart, one on Holland Avenue off Burke Avenue and another along East 173rd Street and Southern Boulevard.

NYPD Commissioner Bill Bratton, also at the news conference, said that media attention gives the impression that overall crime in the city is higher, when, in fact shootings and murders are down.

"If it bleeds, it leads – that's your business. Right now, the stabbings, the slashings, the cuttings – you have a tendency to conflate it because it is very confusing," said Bratton.

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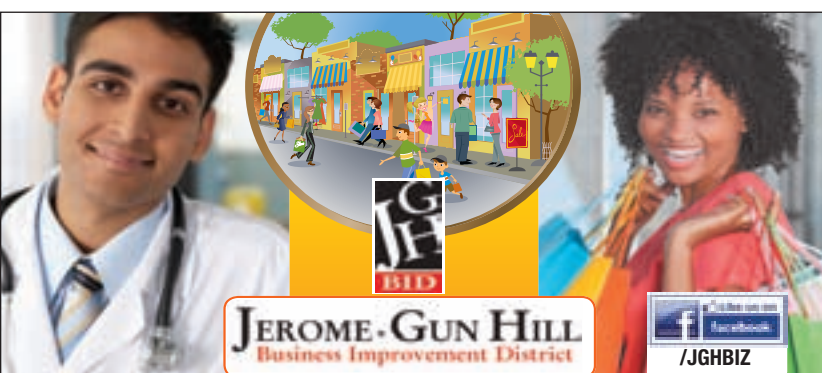
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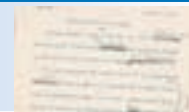
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The Eastchester Library, 1385 E. Gun Hill Rd., hosts free tax services for anyone earning \$62,000 or less,

Thursdays through April 7 from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Spanish-speaking volunteers will be available. For more information, additional sites, and what to bring, call (718) 653-3292.

### Free Income Tax Guide

A free copy of the "2015 Income Tax Guide" by the Financial Advisors Group is available to anyone. The guide covers current tax law provisions, capital gains and losses, and plenty more. Call (347) 575-5045 to request a copy.

### Online Survey

The Women of Woodlawn seeks opinions from the Woodlawn community on the expansion of the Judith K. Weiss Woodlawn School PS 19, 4318 Katonah Ave. The survey is available online, [tinyurl.com/heqyclq](http://tinyurl.com/heqyclq).

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ing for students ages 12 to 21 in the subjects of math, history, English, and science, Monday through Friday from 3 to 6 p.m. For more information, call Crystal Reyes, College Access Coordinator, at (718) 584-0515 ext. 243.

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The Office of Councilman Fernando Cabrera, 107 E. Burnside Ave., offers immigration and legal services. For more information or to schedule an appointment, call (347) 590-2875.

### Foreclosure Prevention

The Northwest Bronx Resource Center, 2715 Bainbridge Ave., hosts a foreclosure prevention workshop every first and third Thursday of each month from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Speak to a specialist from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to learn how to stay in your home. For more information or to schedule an appointment, call (718) 933-2539.

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# Clock Ticks for The First Tee Event Set for March 6

By DAVID CRUZ

Fore! The next Tiger Woods could be at a golf outing in Mosholu Park-way.

And so can be young athletes whose burgeoning skills can be refined through the game of golf, according to Tee Time, an international program that uses the game of golf as a character-building apparatus. The First Tee has a local chapter, The First Tee of Metropolitan New York City, which opened in 2001 at the Mosholu Golf Course, a sprawling public course.

For Peter Aloisio, head coach of The First Tee at Mosholu Golf Course, drawing parallels to the game of golf and personal integrity are intertwined. After all, golf, a largely quiet sport, requires players to demonstrate controlled prowess, patience, sportsmanship and ability to handle the elements, life skills that arguably advance a person's life.

"And it's making a difference," said Aloisio of the program. "Our research proven programs are having a positive impact on participants, their families and their communities."

An Open House is scheduled for



Photo courtesy The First Tee

**KIDS TAKE PART** in The First Tee, a nonprofit program with a chapter established at the Mosholu Golf Course since 2001.

March 6 at the Mosholu Golf Course for Tee Time, with golfers as young as 9 years old expected to meet with The First Tee's bevy of new golf trainers. The golfers will be part of the 10.5 million children and adolescents who have been taken under the wing of The First Tee since the nonprofit established in 1997. For neighborhood children in Norwood, mostly minority, it could be their first taste at golf,

a program whose player demographic is primarily white.

"It will be the first chance for many participants and their parents/guardians to tour the facility here at Mosholu and meet our new staff," said Aloisio.

For Tee Time, mastering the putter or birdie takes more of a back seat at the program, with character-building lessons coming at the forefront in-

stead. Much of the lessons are taught at Mosholu Golf Course with instruction also given at area schools.

**Editor's Note:** *The event runs from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Mosholu Golf Course, 3545 Jerome Ave. A complimentary continental breakfast will be available to participants. For more information, or to RSVP, email [programs@thefirstteemetny.org](mailto:programs@thefirstteemetny.org).*



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# Foursome Brings Motown to the Bronx Library Center

By VIVIAN CARTER

You could call Cody Childs and The Ladies of Soul the “staple singers” of local public libraries. For at least a decade, the quartet’s wildly popular performances paying tribute to classic soul artists like Nat “King” Cole, Sam Cooke, Marvin Gaye and Curtis Mayfield, and groups from The Shirelles to The Temptations, have become outer borough mainstays, particularly in the Bronx and Queens.

Judging from the diverse and enthusiastic standing-room-only crowd that filled Bronx Library Center’s auditorium to hear Childs and his backup trio on Feb. 27, the group’s following is in no danger of dwindling.

Cody Childs and The Ladies of Soul is a somewhat offbeat concept, but it’s hard to find a quartet of baby boomers working city performance venues with a more appealing act. Childs, a charismatic guy with a deep baritone voice and smooth moves on stage, shares the space with an energetic, but unlikely, three-part ensemble made up of his Aunt “Peaches” (Lisette Armstrong-Smith) on drums, Debra Robinson on bass guitar, and Roxann McDade, on keyboards.



Photo by Vivian R. Carter

**CODY CHILDS AND** The Ladies of Soul greet audience members after their Feb. 27 performance at the Bronx Library Center. The group includes (l-r): Roxann McDade, Lisette “Peaches” Armstrong-Smith, Debra Robinson, and Cody Childs.

The group is a particular audience favorite in the Bronx Library Center on Kingsbridge Road, with at least two performances a year. And the combo’s members make no secret of the fact that they love the “Boogie Down Bronx,” where there is dancing in the

aisles and lots of grooving in the seats. Childs savors belting out the historic oldie, “Money,” recorded in 1959 by Motown’s first artist, Barrett Strong, and later covered by The Beatles. When he sings “Money” in the Bronx, it’s traditional for someone from the front row to start waving bills at him – all in good fun.

This passionate troupe owns the stage from the moment they play their first note, sharing their big talent and infectious energy and love for classic soul (a genre also called Rhythm and Blues, or R&B, to some). Don’t forget that they are usually playing in libraries, churches, union halls and senior centers, which tend to offer a modest flat fee to group acts. The public enjoys the concerts, free of charge. It seems obvious that the foursome is not doing it for the money.

Childs, employed full-time as a software specialist, started singing in a Brooklyn church choir when he was a teenager. He later studied jazz vocals at City College in Harlem, and picked up degrees in engineering and information science. He began singing professionally in 1990. Armstrong-Smith, a registered nurse, took up drums as a preteen, sharing a love of music with her mother (Child’s maternal grandmother), who often sang gospel and blues songs at family gatherings.

Robinson, a retired elementary school teacher, was another friend of Armstrong-Smith’s from their Bedford-Stuyvesant church choir. She

had been playing bass guitar since childhood, influenced by her father, a professional gospel quartet member. So, she joined Childs and his aunt to become the Cody Childs Trio, which started booking performances in Bronx libraries and other city venues in 2006.

After five years of performing, the threesome decided that they needed a keyboardist and versatile backup vocalist who could sing both gospel and R&B. McDade, an Air Force veteran who had been a church pianist for years, was brought on in 2011. The group’s evolution would be forever tied to the Bronx, since her first performance with The Ladies of Soul was at a Bronx Library Center gospel concert in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King that year. The group’s popularity grew, and more bookings in five borough library branches followed. Today, they perform all over the metropolitan area.

Childs says he is passionate about spreading the joy of classic soul music, and the inspiring stories of its pioneers. His goal is to retire in 5 to 6 years, and begin to book even larger performance venues.

To see the group’s upcoming concert dates and repertoire of themed musical tributes available for booking (for public or private events), visit [www.codychilds.com](http://www.codychilds.com). Their next performances in Bronx branch libraries are scheduled for April 2 at St. George and April 9 at Soundview. Details at [www.nypl.org](http://www.nypl.org).

## Have an Opinion On What You’ve Read In Our Paper?

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Letters should be 400 words max, and include writer’s name. Anonymous letters will not be published, but names will be withheld upon reasonable request.



# Webster Wash & Fold Newest Business on Growing Strip

The east side of Norwood now boasts a bright, shiny, new place to wash your clothes--Webster Avenue Wash & Fold Super Laundromat, at 3150 Webster Avenue, south of Gun Hill Road, right next to the Family Dollar Store.

Establishment owner Carmine Testa welcomed the community for a grand opening celebration on Feb. 27, with free offerings that included hot dogs, popcorn, cotton candy and balloons for the festive event.

The roomy, 4,700-square-foot facility opens at 6:30 a.m. Monday through Saturday and at 9 a.m. on Sunday. Last wash is at 10:30 p.m. The Laundromat

features washing machines in several sizes, from the standard 20 pound load capacity to a behemoth machine that can wash 80 pounds of laundry at once. Your king-size comforter will fit in "Big Poppy" with no trouble!

The management provides complimentary soap at all times. To add even more value, customers who bring in the newspaper coupon or promotional postcard by Saturday, March 5, will get a free dryer use (one per washer customer). Other specials will be offered in the coming months, so watch for news from Webster Avenue Wash & Fold.



**SAY HELLO TO** Webster Avenue's newest business: the Webster Wash & Fold Super Laundromat at 3150 Webster.



**TO MARK THE OPENING** of the Webster Wash & Fold Super Laundromat, residents around the neighborhood were treated to some fine fare that included hot dogs.

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**Maundy Thursday**  
**Holy Communion Service**  
**March 24, 7:30 pm**  
**Sermon: "Follow My Example"**

**Good Friday, March 25, 11 am**  
**Sermon: "Shout of Triumph"**

**Easter Sunday, March 27, 11 am**  
**Sermon: "Good News of Hope"**



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# Out & About

Compiled by JUDY NOY

## EDITOR'S PICK

### BMCA Flea Market

The Bedford Mosholu Community Association will host their annual flea market on March 5, at St. Mary's Orthodox Church, 360 Bedford Pk. Blvd. (at Decatur Avenue) from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Kitchen items, books, and other knickknacks will be sold at deep discounted prices. Proceeds go to the organization's yearly operating budget. For more information, call (718) 584-1900.

## Onstage

The Albert Einstein Symphony Orchestra presents Gilbert and Sullivan's **H.M.S. Pinafore**, March 13 at 2 p.m. at Albert Einstein College of Medicine's Robbins Auditorium in the Forchheimer Building, 1300 Morris Pk. Ave. Contributions are suggested. For more information, visit [www.einsteinorch.site50.net](http://www.einsteinorch.site50.net).

Lehman College's Center for the Performing Arts, 250 Bedford Pk. Blvd. W., presents **Forever Freestyle 10**, featuring 1980s music, March 5 at 8 p.m. (tickets: \$55 to \$100), and **The Moscow Festival Ballet**, performing "Sleeping Beauty," March 13 at 4 p.m. (tickets: \$25 to \$45; \$10/12 and under); both in the Concert Hall; and

**Faculty Recital - Guitar & Bass**, featuring classical, jazz and pop, March 10 at 12:30 p.m. in the Recital Hall, 3rd floor, Music Building (free). Programs are subject to change. For more information and program details, call (718) 960-8833.

The Bronx Arts Ensemble presents **classical music**, featuring pianos and violin, March 6 at 3 p.m. in the home of Ben and Michele Cohen, 620 W. 252nd St. (\$25); and **Three Billy Goats Gruff**, March 13 at 1 and 2:30 p.m. at International Caterers, 3243 Ampere Ave. (\$8). Programs are subject to change. For more information, call (718) 601-7399.

The Bronx Library Center, 310 E. Kingsbridge Rd., presents **Concert**,

performed by Celia Cruz High School Orchestra, March 5; and **Dance and Percussion of Africa**, March 12; both at 2:30 p.m. For more information, call (718) 579-4244/46/57 or visit [www.nypl.org](http://www.nypl.org).

Hostos Center for the Arts & Culture presents **Vol. 9 Universal Love**, March 5 from 2:30 to 5 p.m., in the Main Theatre, featuring music, dance, spoken word, hip-hop, and arts showcase, and a **community access fair and vendors**, at noon in the C-Atrium (free HIV testing), at Hostos Community College, 450 Grand Concourse (149th Street). Admission is free (tickets are required and must be picked up at box office). For more information, call (718) 518-4455 or visit [www.hostoscenter.org](http://www.hostoscenter.org).

## Events

The NYC Department of Parks offers a **Martial Arts - Self Defense Program** for all ages at the St. James Recreation Center, 2530 Jerome Ave., for beginners on Mondays, and for advanced and beginners on Wednesdays, both from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Uniform and registration fee required. For more information or to register, call (347) 867-0995.

St. James Recreation Center, 2530 Jerome Ave., offers a **Golden Age Senior Program**, Mondays to Fridays from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Center membership is required. Activities include games, sports and fitness, health, computer classes, and more. For more information, visit [www.nyc.gov/parks](http://www.nyc.gov/parks).

**Lloyd Ultan**, the official Bronx Borough Historian, prolific author and respected lecturer, who is widely regarded as the leading authority on Bronx history, will conduct a course, **History of The Bronx**, at the Riverdale Community Center, 660 W. 237th Street (inside the Riverdale Kingsbridge Academy, MS/HS 141), every Tuesday in March from 7 to 8 p.m. The course is open to the general public. For more information or to register, call (718) 796-4724 or visit [www.riverdalecommunitycenter.org](http://www.riverdalecommunitycenter.org).

Wave Hill, a Bronx oasis at 675



**DON'T MISS THE** annual Flea Market sponsored by the Bedford Mosholu Community Association on March 5 (See Editor's Pick for more information).

W. 252nd St. in Riverdale, offers **Family Art Projects**: Give a Winter Bird a Home or a Feeder, to make a birdhouse using a milk carton, natural materials, a perch and seeds, March 5 and 6; and A Living Wall With Green Golly, beginning with classical music, comedy, and story theatre for children in the Sarah and Geoffrey Gund Theatre at noon, followed by making green collages, then participating in a group installation project – a green wall, March 12 and 13; both in WH House from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Also offered: **Concert**, featuring Sweet Plantain, string quartet performing jazz, Latin rhythms, and hip-hop, March 6 at 2 p.m. in Armor Hall (tickets: \$28; \$22/members; \$15/ages 8 to 18; \$12/members). 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 ext. 251.

## Library Events

The Bronx Library Center, 310 E. Kingsbridge Rd., presents the following event for adults: **Microsoft Word 2010 for Beginners**: March 3 at 2 p.m. (in person advance registration required). For more information, call (718) 579-4244/46/57 or visit [www.nypl.org](http://www.nypl.org).

The Mosholu Library, 285 E. 205th St., offers for teens/young adults: **film**: "The Voice of the Voiceless," March 12 at 1 p.m. Adults can attend: **Free Computer Classes**: to learn email and basic computer information, Wednesdays, 10:30 to 11:30 a.m. For more information, call (718) 882-8239.

The Jerome Park Library, 118 Eames Place (near Kingsbridge Road), offers for kids: **Kids Get Active Fridays**: (ages 5 to 12), to enjoy dance and zumba, March 4 at 3 p.m. Adults can attend **Computer Basics at noon**: March 3, 10 and 17. For more information, call (718) 549-5200.

**NOTE:** Items for consideration may be mailed to our office or sent to [norwoodnews@norwoodnews.org](mailto:norwoodnews@norwoodnews.org), and should be received by March 7 for the next publication date of March 17.



Photo courtesy Wave Hill

**THERE'S ALWAYS SOMETHING** to do at Wave Hill, including a Festooned Hiking excursion.



# Crime Spree Thieves At Large

(continued from page 1)

sistance that we are asking from the public, the people responsible for these crimes will be apprehended.”

The crime pattern became neighborhood gossip for the dozens of merchants established within the Jerome-Gun Hill Business Improvement District, where the incidents occurred. Officers rank a robbery as the forcible removal of goods from an establishment or person, while burglaries constitute the unwanted entry into a home or business that results in the removal of goods.

## The Crimes

In late January, a man armed with a hammer casually walked to the Marconi's Pizzeria and Restaurant, and with a swift blow shattered the glass door. He did not go inside the store instantly, but instead waited long enough to know whether the burglar alarms, silent or not, would trip. They didn't. The suspect went for the cash register, making off with several hundred dollars, before fleeing. Marconi's Pizzeria was the first pizza shop to have been targeted. Just up the road, Mario's Pizza was burglarized Feb. 9.

The Marconi's incident bore the hallmarks of a burglary that happened at VIP Café during the overnight hours of Feb. 19. There, a thief kicked out the glass door window, waited before entering, and soon ransacked the eatery. The thief, captured on surveillance video, rummaged through a hidden compartment where cash was kept. He also made off with a handful of coins, and several top shelf bottles of alcohol before fleeing.

“One pizzeria after another pizzeria, and now us,” said Thomas Larous, co-owner of VIP Café. The eatery, a popular spot for the neighborhood, had been hit in 2003. Since then, things have died down, said Larous, who has no plans on closing.

The similarities to the two robberies were undeniably striking, according to Marconi's Pizzeria & Restaurant owner, who only went by Adnan.

“VIP [Café] looked the same as mine, so I know for a fact it was the same person,” said Adnan.

A block up, El Caribe, a corner eatery serving as the nexus between the Jerome Avenue and East Gun Hill Road sides of the BID, was robbed. There, a stickup man approached the express window of the Spanish food restaurant on Jan. 26, brandished a gun



Image produced by David Cruz

**THIS MAP SHOWS** the number of burglaries and robberies along the Jerome-Gun Hill Business Improvement District. Not pictured is the Jan. 10 robbery of the DSS Wireless cell phone store.

and demanded money. The cashier, a woman, immediately closed the sliding windows, leading the suspect to rush inside and rob the restaurant. Police said the same thief is responsible for knocking over a DSS Wireless cell phone store on Jan. 10, and the 99 Cent Store on Feb. 2. The clerk manning the 99 Cent Store has not returned to work since.

For Jasmine Familia, El Caribe's owner, recouping the money is meaningless when compared to the peace of mind that's been compromised within the commercial spine of the BID. “Things have changed,” said Familia, in a phone interview. “The area is not the same. Business used to be better before.”

Robberies were not just confined to East Gun Hill Road. A pair of thieves struck the 24-hour Rite Aid on Jerome Avenue on Feb. 20, swiping a pair of shaving razors, and catching the attention of the on-duty clerk. One of the suspects asked the store employee, “Do you want to get shot?” before both darted out.

## Staying Safe

The Jerome-Gun Hill BID, an L-shaped commercial corridor home to 200 small businesses, is heavily trafficked. BIDs work as ad hoc city agencies, where an agreed upon special property tax billed to landlords goes to extra sanitation services and promotion in an attempt to raise foot traffic. The BID's day-to-day is man-

aged by Mosholu Preservation Corporation (MPC), a nonprofit whose goal is to stabilize neighborhoods (The *Norwood News* is published by MPC).

“MPC is under new leadership and is aggressively addressing input from merchants on security and quality of life along the BID corridor,” said Melissa Cebollero, doubling as MPC's executive director and senior director for community and government relations for Montefiore Health System.

A long held argument among business owners is that the East Gun Hill Road side of the BID is mostly neglected, with officers routinely patrolling the BID's Jerome Avenue side more so than East Gun Hill Road. But both sides are equipped with NYPD surveillance, which were funded by the BID.

The 52nd Precinct boasts two dedicated officers who walk about the BID, targeting unlicensed vendors or simply maintaining a presence to keep the peace. It's worked in the category of robbery, which dipped 25 percent when compared to the same time a year ago.

Burglaries, however, increased significantly, with 50 percent more reported cases than the same time last year. Overall crime within the 52nd Precinct ticked up 8.92 percent from the same time last year, reaffirming the precinct's status as one of the busier ones in the Bronx. Its

heavier crime load rests at the southern end of Bedford Park, according to the NYPD Online Crime Map.

Though Familia of El Caribe saw the recent incidents as damaging to the business character of Norwood, she was in the minority when compared to other shop owners, shrugging over their losses.

“You hear it all the time. Someday it's going to happen to you to. What am I going to do?” said Larous of VIP Café, though he admitted feeling angry over not one eyewitness stopping the thief. “We know already that people saw this before I got here. So they should say something.”

That went ditto for Adnan, offering a blasé response in the form of “What are you going to do?” and “It is what it is.”

But Familia hasn't taken the spate of incidents lightly. Every time the robbery pops into her mind, she can't help but think of the fear imposed on her employees and any potential revenue loss from customers unwilling to frequent the BID. “We want our neighborhood safe,” said Familia, adding she'll keep her business open.

Larous, on the other hand, prided himself on the BID's strength in numbers, which could be used to prevent another outbreak. “People should watch for the stores, keep an extra eye,” he said. “Since they broke into already two to three stores in the same neighborhood, probably someone around here is going to be next.”

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