



NORWOOD NEWS

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CITY BY THE SOUND | PG. 8

THIS IS YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

NORWOOD NEWS SPECIAL EDITION



Photo by Adi Talwar

A VIEW OF NORWOOD facing north from Jerome Avenue.



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Mosholu Preservation Corporation (MPC)

3400 Reservoir Oval East

Bronx, New York 10467

Phone: 718 324 4998

Fax: 718 324 2917

E-mail: norwoodnews@norwoodnews.org

Web.: www.norwoodnews.org

Publisher

Mosholu Preservation Corporation

Executive Director of MPC

Melissa Cebollero

Editor-in-Chief, Norwood News

David Cruz

Accounts Receivable

Dawn McEvoy

Proofreader

Judy Noy

Regular Contributors

David Greene, Adi Talwar

Contributors

Wendy Joan Biddlecombe,

Miriam Quinones

Intern

Tatyana Turner

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What's In Your Neighborhood?

How much does your neighborhood mean to you? For some, it's a place to reside. For others, it's a place to raise a family. Whether transient or a mainstay, we are all products of a neighborhood, charged up by its tempo and space.

In the Bronx, a kaleidoscope of communities east and west, north and south, give the borough a uniqueness unlike most of the city. If you look to the west, a bustling Fordham shopping district sees some 80,000 people overrun the ever-growing strip while City Island, resting at the eastern tip of the Bronx, offers a noise-free community more so than in all the five boroughs. Longtime Norwood resident Betty Diane Arce refers to her neighborhood as a little village. We happen to think so too (more on the neighborhood can be found on the next page).

In this neighborhood edition brought to you by the Norwood News, we take you around some neighborhoods in the borough, talking to residents on what makes their neighborhood a special one. The perspectives will range, particularly the first-person narrative piece on City Island found on page 8. For each neighborhood we profiled lay a common denominator: a resident's pride. You'll hear from residents who break down why their neighborhood fits them.

Admittedly, with only 12 pages for this edition, we wish we could



Photo by Adi Talwar

DAVID CRUZ

have included more communities. The Bronx holds a special place in my heart. It's one of those boroughs whose climb from its darkest days makes it a true underdog story. It's one of those boroughs still trying to reclaim a golden period once seen during the 1800s when it was seen as a new frontier. To build upon its recent successes is to use these solid neighborhoods as its foundation.

Lastly, good or bad, communities have a way of transform-

ing its residents. Like a human body, a neighborhood's lifeblood is comprised of its residents. If it's good blood, then good things will happen. Bad blood, something different altogether. Good communities don't just happen. It takes neighbors talking to one another to build upon a common good. The American writer, Pearl S. Buck, wrote that people isolated from others "will not succeed as a human being."

"His heart withers if it does not answer another heart. His mind shrinks away if he hears only the echoes of his own thoughts and finds no other inspiration," Buck concluded.

So pass along the *Norwood News*' "In Your Neighborhood Edition." We haven't devoted an entire edition to one theme in our almost 28-year history, and we thought this could certainly break the ice in our endeavor. Depending on the response of this edition, we could revisit this topic again in the near future.

Of course, we wouldn't be able to gauge readers without them reaching out to us. Send letters of praise or criticism to David Cruz, editor-in-chief of the *Norwood News*, at dcruz@norwoodnews.org. We hope you enjoy this edition and come back to the next edition on Sept. 1 when we resume our regular news coverage.

David Cruz

Editor-in-Chief

Norwood News

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Norwood: A Pizza Slice-Shaped Neighborhood With Plenty of Toppings

By DAVID CRUZ

It's unclear what the true story is behind the name Norwood, a moniker that's surprisingly common around the world (there's a Norwood in South Australia). It could be the namesake of Carlisle Norwood, a friend of Leonard Jerome, a flamboyant moneyman whose fame rewarded him with a street bearing his name. Or it could be a melding of "North Woods" as origin stories as far as some Norwood cities and towns go.

Whatever the backstory, the Norwood section of the Bronx is unlike the others identified across the globe. A bygone feel courses through Norwood, one of the borough's leafiest neighborhoods, with one foot in its suburban past, thanks to century old single-family homes and one foot in the present, given the constant presence of development within the community's intricate network of streets (one can thank engineer Josiah Briggs, who also has a



Photo by David Cruz

NORWOOD IS HOME to 97,060 people, with a median income of \$35,852, according to U.S. Census figures. Pictured is Bainbridge Avenue and 206th Street.

Bronx street named after him, for the nifty layout). Those include Perry, Decatur and Hull avenues, streets named after famous officers involved in the War of 1812. Its perpetual foot in the past is solidified, thanks to some of the Bronx's oldest homes: the Valentine-Varian House and the Keeper's House, home of Mosholu Preservation

Corporation, which publishes the *Norwood News*.

Betty Diana Arce, a Norwood resident, arrived to her neighborhood more than 30 years ago. "The neighborhood was like a little village with all of the essentials," said Arce. "A good school (PS 56), supermarkets, hardware stores, beauty salons, three really good restau-

rants, nearby parks where my kids could play, and one of the best pizzerias in the Bronx."

Norwood is one of those areas whose strength in community lies in its amenities. Williamsbridge Oval Park is by far one of the key go-to parks in the neighborhood with a recreation center, a multi-purpose field that could host outdoor

movie nights, and a track and field, one of the few public ones in the Bronx. One could argue the park is Norwood's heart. After all, it lies directly in the center of the neighborhood whose boundaries—from Webster Avenue between East Gun Hill Road and Mosholu Parkway North, from East Mosholu Parkway North, between Webster Avenue and West Gun Hill Road—form a kind of pizza slice shape.

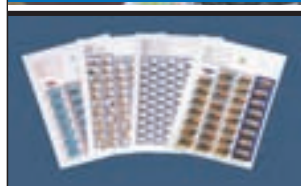
Some residents confuse Norwood with Bedford Park, its neighbor to the west. A much larger neighborhood, Bedford Park likely gets its name from Edward Thomas Bedford, an entrepreneur and friend of Leonard Jerome.

"Bedford Park is special due to the great mixture of private homes, rentals, and co-ops. It has great mass transit facilities which make for easy access to Manhattan, Westchester County and Connecticut," said Barbara Stronczer, president

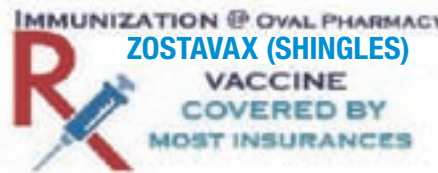
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Kingsbridge Heights Offers Green Space and Growth Potential

By **WENDY JOAN BIDDLECOMBE**

Kingsbridge Heights, which rises above the Kingsbridge neighborhood in the northwestern Bronx, draws its name from a historic bridge that has been gone for 100 years.

Kings Bridge, as it was first named, was constructed in 1693 and used by the American and British armies during the Revolutionary War. General George Washington used the bridge as he moved his troops up to White Plains after the battle of Harlem Heights in 1776—the future president's first battlefield victory during the war for independence. The bridge was the first to connect the Bronx and Manhattan, and stood at what is now 230th Street and Kingsbridge Avenue until 1916, the year the old Spuyten Duyvil Creek was filled in.

With plenty of green space, Kingsbridge Heights lures in new residents from the other boroughs and keeps at least a bit of the Bronx's agrarian roots.

Kingsbridge Heights' rough boundaries are the 100-acre Van



Photo by Wendy Joan Biddlecombe

AMONG THE MORE pressing issues in Kingsbridge Heights is the reconfiguration of the Kingsbridge Armory (pictured in background) into an ice center.

Cortlandt Park to the north, Jerome Park Reservoir to the east, Major Deegan Expressway to the west and Fordham Road to the south. The southern part of the neighborhood is home to robust commercial districts, and the eastern part of Kingsbridge Heights is distinct with its steep grade roads and pedestrian steps.

The neighborhood's green

space and history makes up its beauty and appeal, and a good excuse to explore and take photos, says neighborhood resident Anna Rodriguez, 20, who had lived here nearly her whole life. Rodriguez said that when she's in Van Cortlandt with her camera, she's looking for amazing landscape shots.

"A lot of people don't know about this area, and they're missing out

on a great neighborhood," said Rodriguez, who attends Bronx Community College. "You can find the most beautiful things in the things other people find ugly. A lot of people find the Bronx ghetto and dirty, but it's not."

Kingsbridge Heights is home to 32,496 people as of the 2010 U.S. Census, with a 2.4 percent decrease in population from 10 years earlier. The neighborhood has one of the five lowest median asking rents, but has one of the highest rent-to-income ratios in New York City, according to the 2014 report by NYU's Furman Center.

Kingsbridge Armory: History in the Making

Gentrification fears are nothing new—a 1985 New York Times article stated that Kingsbridge Heights' stability made neighbors more wary that Manhattanites would move in, unlike another narrative asserting that unrest and devastation in the South Bronx might creep north.

(continued on next page)

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(continued from previous page)

But with the conversion of the world's largest armory at Kingsbridge Road and Jerome Avenue into the world's largest ice rink, the neighborhood is poised to grow as it never has before.

"I was hoping they would build a mall here, that would be good for the neighborhood," said Zahid Nazir, a 17-year resident of the neighborhood.

Feeding Kingsbridge

At 3010 Kingsbridge Terrace lies what a landmarks commission researcher once dubbed an "Italian Renaissance urban palace"—distinct from the other two- and three-family buildings on the surrounding blocks. The Beaux Arts style building was completed in 1903 to house what was then the 40th Precinct (the precinct would be redesignated four more times before it became known as the 50th Precinct in 1929).

Hearing that the police department was moving down the hill to Kingsbridge Avenue and West 236th Street, Mary McLoughlin,

Patricia Burns, and Janet Athanasidy started to work on making the building a community center. Together they created the Kingsbridge Heights Community Center (KHCC), which opened in 1975. Today, the center has grown to provide youth and adult services for 4,500 people a year. In 1986, the historic building was granted landmark status by the city.

Ten years ago, KHCC added a garden that has grown to span the width of three buildings. In the last few years, the kitchen at the community center started incorporating the fresh fruits and vegetables grown there to supplement the 300 meals they serve a day.

William Littleton, who directs the garden program, said that the majority of the community that KHCC serves is living below the poverty line and may have limited access to fresh produce. This summer, the garden is growing kale, squash, string and lima beans, okra, cilantro, and more. Since nearly three quarters of families served through the center are Latino, KHCC director

Margaret Della said many of the produce grown in the garden are chosen to reflect participants' native countries such as the Dominican Republic.

"The center is the nucleus of

the community. People from all different parts of the community come together—different ages, different demographics. Kids come from down the street and the other side of the reservoir."



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Morris Park: Traditions Abound

By DAVID GREENE

If one were to compare the Bronx to the human anatomy, Morris Park would be located where the heart should be. For years, residents of this middle class neighborhood enjoyed a quality of life only matched by Riverdale or Pelham Bay. But residents today worry the quality of life they have enjoyed for decades is quickly deteriorating, and they're fighting back.

Made up mostly of tree-lined streets and private homes, many residents enjoy life without the alternate-side parking quandary that dominates the Bronx as homeowners clean the streets in front of their property. The community enjoys some of the best hospitals, schools, and restaurants in the borough, if not the city.

The neighborhood is named after John Albert Morris, who brought horse racing to the area, the Morris Park Racecourse, which held both the Preakness and the Belmont Stakes in 1890.

An 84-year-old resident who went by "Josephine" has lived in the community since "she was five years old." Walking to the Big Deal Supermarket on Paulding Avenue, Josephine recalled raising her three now grown

children in the area, enrolling them in Catholic school. These days, Josephine admits, "Catholic schools are too expensive," claiming they run upwards of \$600 a month. She compares it with the price she paid to enroll her oldest daughter to St. Francis Xavier on Lurt-ing Avenue: \$25 per year.

"Now, when my kids come back they say, 'Mother, we see changes,'" said Josephine, adding, "They see it more than I do."

In her lifetime, Josephine has watched Morris Park go from an Irish, German and Jewish community to predominantly Italian, indicative of the red-, white-, and green-colored paint (the colors of the Italian flag) emblazoned in some parts of the roadway on Morris Park Avenue. Josephine gets feisty when the discussion moves to today's immigrants originating from India, Albania and Yemen.

"Some of the people are nice, but we're getting smothered. Some don't say 'hello,'" Josephine said angrily. "I have no respect for someone who doesn't learn the English language."

Morris Park is not impervious to crime. It does happen, though the Morris Park Community Association, a non-profit neighborhood watch group



File photo by David Greene

A CHILD GREETs a costumed character along Morris Park Avenue during an annual Bronx Columbus Day Parade, New York State's second largest parade honoring Christopher Columbus.

founded three decades ago, mobilizes when it notices an uptick. At a recent town hall meeting on July 27, members handed a flier to guests reading, "We're tired of being passive! It's time to take our neighborhood back."

At the same meeting, Captain Keith Walton, commanding officer of the 49th Precinct, which patrols Morris Park, reported burglaries, assaults, and thefts have led to a 17 percent crime increase. Residents were recently shocked as the heroin epidemic came to the community, claiming at

least two overdoses at nearby Loreto Park.

Despite policy mandates and only 220 police officers to patrol 3.8 square miles that make up the 49th Precinct, where 140,000 residents now call home, Walton remained optimistic, calling Morris Park "a very safe community."

"Obviously, we're experiencing a spike in certain index crimes like burglary and grand larceny, but we were able to identify certain patterns and to arrest the individuals responsible," said Walton.

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Norwood: A Pizza Slice-Shaped Neighborhood With Plenty of Toppings

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of Bedford Mosholu Community Association, a civic group. "The proximity of the Four Bronx Institutions [Montefiore Medical Center, New York Botanical Garden, The Bronx Zoo, and Fordham University] is also another plus for the community. Bedford Park also has several landmarked buildings said Stoncer."

Norwood's main business attraction is Bainbridge Avenue and East 204th Street, a strip once dominated by local mom and pops that's seen the introduction of regional stores. Walk up and down the corridor at any point and you'll find a kind of commercial buzz that could rival the local Jerome-Gun Hill Business Improvement District, an L-shaped commercial strip home to some 200 establishments.

With all its good, there is somewhat of a sense of waning community involvement from residents on a local level. With folks worried about putting food on the table, offering input on neighborhood issues is a luxury they just can't afford.

Its main roads, East Gun Hill Road, Webster Avenue, and Mosholu Parkway

give Norwood a transient sense. It's in Norwood's intricate warren of streets where you'll find neighbors who've carved a home there for some 50 years or more. An area once dominated by middle class Jews, Norwood later saw a burgeoning wave of Irish citizens that inspired a bevy of bars lining East 204th Street. A new wave of residents, including Bangladeshi and Hispanic families are now contributing to the local economy.

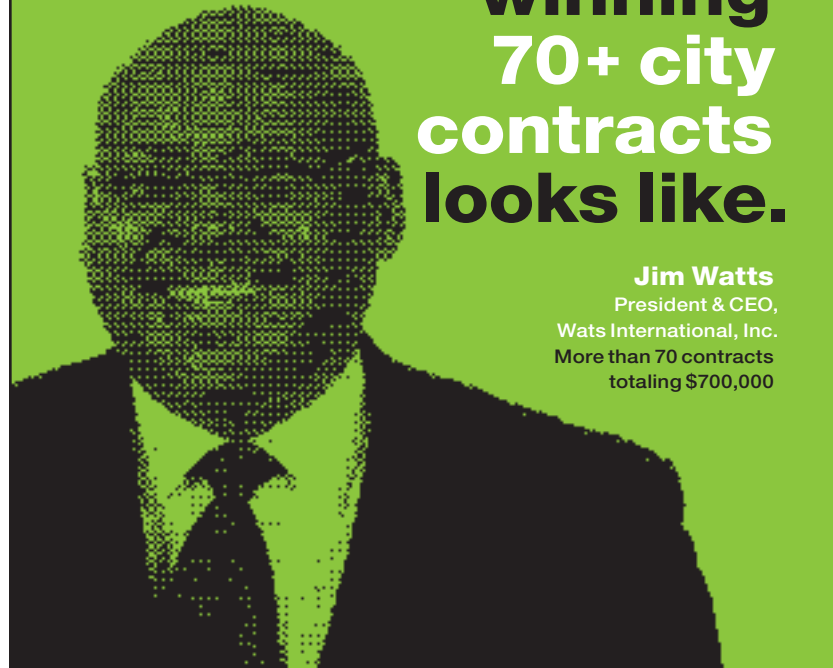
For some, caring for their neighborhood has become a lifelong project. It's been that way for Sally Dunford, executive director of West Bronx Housing, a tenant advocacy group. Dunford, a fourth generation Norwood resident, enjoys her stay in Norwood. It helps that her rent is "comparatively low," but it's an added bonus to her true intentions in raising four sons in Norwood.

"The real reason we've stayed has been our neighbors. We've always had great neighbors," said Dunford. "The colors of the faces have changed and the language spoken has changed, but we have always been surrounded by caring people."

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The City By the Sound: My life raising three “Clam Diggers”

By MELISSA CEBOLLERO

I have been a proud “Mussell Sucker” for more than a decade. If you are not a City Islander, named for those living in the City Island section of the Bronx, you may be asking yourself, “What in the world do you mean?” The legend goes as far back as the early 1900s, when the term referred to City Islanders who were not native to the island. Back in that century, it literally meant that you were not born on the island once tethered to the nearby town of Pelham in Westchester County.

If you were literally born on the island (home births were a normal occurrence at the time), or having parents who lived there before having you, you had the title of “Clam Digger,” also known as a native City Islander! My three children get the privilege of being Clam Diggers, though the oldest made it by the skin of her amniotic sac.

Scratching your head again? Well, it’s a cold Monday morning on Dec. 19, 2005. I’m 35 weeks pregnant with my first baby due to arrive in late January. Although the morning is cold, I head out of my parents’ house with an unusual pep in my step. We are on our way to the obstetrician for a checkup and sonogram.

My brain quickly goes to the waiting room of my doctor’s office, a beautifully decorated space with carefully chosen seating that perfectly supports one’s lower lumbar. I am hopeful that this morning is not completely overbooked. Days like today are inflexible. As important as this sonogram was for me and my husband, that morning we were also expecting another first: the closing of our first home on City Island, a three-story brick house nearly identical to the home in the Castle Hill neighborhood of the Bronx where my sister and I were raised.

We were overwhelmed with nervous excitement. What a Monday it would be! First we’d get a peek of the ever-growing baby (we chose not to know the baby’s gender until she was born) who was struggling to claim space over my rib cage, then we’d head to midtown Manhattan for the closing.

We found the house back in the summer of 2005. Having friends on the island and spending many summer evenings there, we always dreamed of raising a family on City Island. Having been raised in the East Bronx and at



Photo by Miriam Quinones

BELDEN POINT AT the end of City Island has recently been upgraded to form a sitting area for neighbors and out-of-towners.



Photo by Miriam Quinones

RESTAURANTS SUCH AS the Sea Shore Restaurant make City Island a go-to destination for seafood dining options.

tending grammar school there, the tree-lined streets on the island, the single-family homes, and the mom and pop shops along City Island Avenue made me feel right at home. There was a sense of peace that came over me when I contemplated raising my own family there.

So it wasn’t a surprise when a friend called one July afternoon telling me and my husband to immediately get to the island and see a house under renovation. We were at home in our “quaint” one-bedroom co-op in Riverdale overlooking Van Cortlandt Park. It was beautiful and perfect for a young couple starting off on their own, focused on establishing their careers and saving some money. But then the universe says, “Sorry! New plan!”

Like a confused GPS system, we were instantly re-routing and in need of a second bedroom and in-house laundry room.

We drove across the borough and sat in perpetual summer traffic to cross the historic City Island Bridge (I still miss you!). After driving well into the island, we turned onto the picturesque street with American flags proudly waving from the front doors of the houses and meticulously trimmed hedges lining the sidewalk. As with most streets on City Island, this was a dead end that culminated in a small, private beach at the end of the block.

We drove to the end and made a u-turn coming back half way up the block to the house. When we reached

the house it felt like the first time you look into a puppy’s eyes: you can’t imagine raising the pup but you know in your soul that you will do whatever it takes to own it. We knew that would be where we would bring our first child home no matter what it took.

Back to the morning of Dec. 19. We are called in for our visit surprisingly on time. All is well with the world. We will make our closing right on time and maybe even have a few minutes for a snack (I was still eating for two). But again that GPS goes into re-routing mode!!! New plan: baby coming today. “What!?! No! We have four more weeks! No! Today doesn’t work! We have our closing!” My obstetrician was throwing us a major monkey wrench. “Oh my God. What now!?!”

Our baby girl was born at 10:40 p.m. after our super speedy closing earlier that afternoon. She was officially a Clam Digger. During this past decade, she has been joined by two more Clam Diggers. We live in our house on City Island that instantly became a home that cold winter night.

I am grateful for the neighborhood we get to raise our children in. City Island is well known for its seafood restaurants, its nautical ambiance, and its small town feel. It is all that for sure. But for us, City Island is home base. As soon as we are on the bridge crossing over, there’s a swift shift in our mental state. As the native scents of the ocean and fried shrimp fill your nostrils, it sends a message to our psyche that we are home.

City Island has raised our children just as much as we have. They generally don’t leave the island Monday through Friday. They attend school there, go to after school programs there, have play dates there, have membership at the local Girl Scouts there, and so much more. My oldest is now asking to go for walks alone or meet her friends at the playground. This unique seaside neighborhood will become her guide.

So that’s what City Island means to me. It’s everything you have heard or read before: great tourist attraction, its colorful sunsets, lazy seaside walks, great Sunday brunch, even better Mother’s Day dinners, and not too shabby on tropical frozen drinks. It’s historic and civically engaged. But at its core, it’s a parent’s partner, it’s a safe haven, it’s a warm embrace, it’s HOME.

Woodlawn: An Emerald Enclave Within City Limits

By TATYANA TURNER

A small yet distinct slice of the Big Apple sits at the northernmost part of the Bronx. Largely surrounded by tall trees and shamrock decorated corner stores, Woodlawn is a close-knit area that has been home to the Irish-American community for generations.

Its ties to Ireland are understated yet pronounced. Green-colored awnings dominate Katonah Avenue, Woodlawn's main street, home to an array of pubs and bakeries that pay tribute to auld sod.

To help preserve the green oasis, a little over a dozen women formed a civic group in 2014 called the Women of Woodlawn (WOW), joining a list of other storied neighborhood groups that include the Woodlawn Taxpayers Association. WOW includes women living in either Woodlawn or McLean Heights, which serves as a buffer between New York City and Yonkers in Westchester County.

"One of the things that I think makes our neighborhood so great is the population for the most part comes here to the United States, to New York, to Woodlawn, to create a brighter future for themselves," said Erin Lee, president of WOW. "So they tend to be incredibly hard working, community-oriented people."

With Van Cortlandt Park, Woodlawn Cemetery and Webster Avenue forming a natural barrier, further adding to its enclave feel, Woodlawn could almost be considered hidden. Single-family homes dominate the neighborhood, imbuing a kind of suburb one would find in nearby Westchester County.

"Feels like you're getting an escape from the city life," said Kim Holocher-Furletti, vice president of WOW.

WOW successfully put their community in the spotlight. Woodlawn was chosen as one of the "Six to Celebrate," an annual list of historic neighborhoods in New York City that is granted more attention and preservation. To qualify, a local group must submit an application that describes its

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Erin Lee,
President of WOW

strength and historical value.

The education system in Woodlawn is facing an issue with overcrowded schools. With Judith K. Weiss PS 19 serving as the only kindergarten to eighth grade public school in the area, parents who tried enrolling their child into kindergarten are being turned away because of space restrictions. Recently, P.S. 19 enforced a new system where children who have siblings already enrolled in the school get priority. Classrooms are typically capped at 25 seats. This year, there were 24 kindergarten children who had siblings.

"We are working with the school and Councilman Andrew Cohen to bring light to this matter," said Holocher-Furletti. "It has been moving along...there is a general plan waiting for approval to expand the school."

According to Lee and Holocher-Furletti, there are many charity drives dedicated to residents who are ill or struggling to pay their bills.

"There was a house just down the street [from 236th Street] here a few months ago that was ravaged by a pretty bad fire," said Holocher-Furletti. "People came

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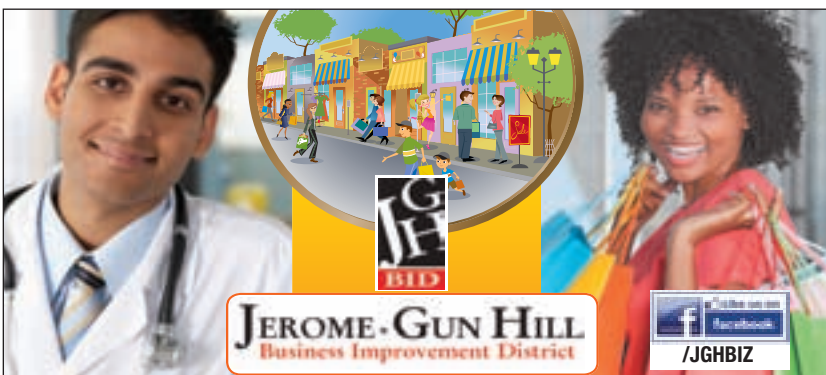
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flooding in with gift cards to give [the victims] so that they could rebuild their lives.”

Teens and children have a second home to go to, known as the Woodlawn Arts & Music House. A beloved resident of Woodlawn, the late Martin O’Grady, bought property and donated it specifi-

cally for instructors to give music and dance lessons to children in the community. Though he was not in charge of the music school, he took care of rent and utilities, hoping to keep the school open to help keep kids off the streets.

“Something that goes hand in hand with the Irish is that unfortunately they like to drink, and

sometimes teenagers go drinking in the park,” said Holocher-Furletti.

Outside of WOW, Lee is a mother and an occupational therapist who specializes in geriatric care. Holocher-Furletti is also a mother and the founder of a consulting business called Rosewater Media. Together, they are part of the middle class fabric in a neighborhood largely home to the city’s civil servants. The pair hopes to attract more visitors to

the neighborhood so people can learn more about the community.

“We want to preserve the heritage and culture,” said Lee. “We don’t want to be like a Park Slope or Williamsburg where gentrification has made it become unaffordable. We want it to be a comfortable place for Woodlawn families.”

Additional reporting by David Cruz.



Photo by Miriam Quinones

AMONG THE MORE popular hangouts in Woodlawn is The Rambling House (pictured) on Katonah Avenue at East 236th Street.

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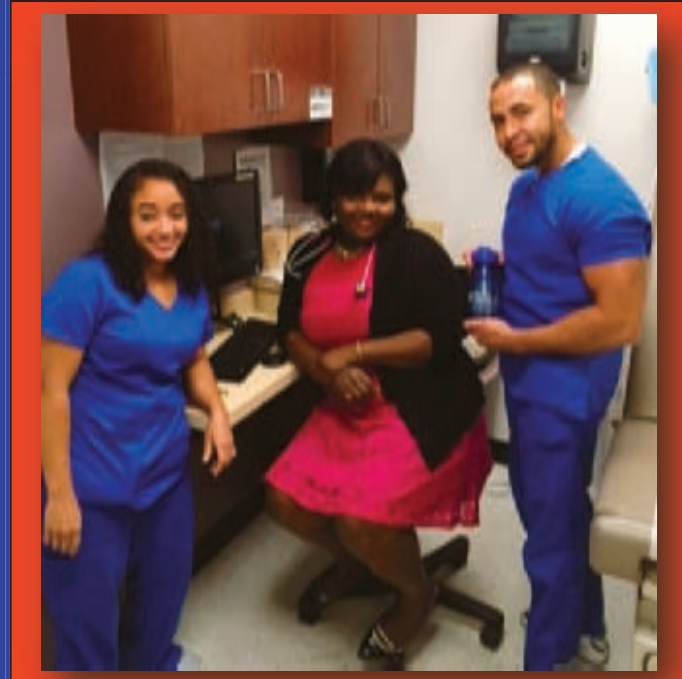
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