



NORWOOD NEWS

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INQUIRING PHOTOGRAPHER:
GOV'T. SHUTDOWN | PG. 4



STATE OF THE CITY: DE BLASIO
OUTLINES PLANS FOR BX. | PG. 10

STAGG TENANTS BATTLE FOR QUALITY OF LIFE

Vocal tenants ramp up demand for fixes at Webster Ave. bldgs.



Photo by Adi Talwar

NEIGHBORS ZXAVIER SIMPSON (l) and Shannon Terrell (r) inside Terrell's third floor apartment at 2985 Webster Ave. Terrell has filed papers at Bronx County Housing Court for an HP action, violations and alleged harassment against her landlord.

**By DAVID CRUZ and
JOSEPH KONIG**

Residents of three fairly new buildings on Webster Avenue that are owned and operated by The Stagg Group have gotten the ear of Community Board 7, which plans to hear from residents at its next Housing, Zoning & Land Use Committee meeting in Febru-

ary.

The Stagg Group, a construction and development company with multiple ongoing projects in Bedford Park and Norwood, told the *Norwood News* they will be sending a representative to the meeting to hear out the tenants' concerns.

The news is the latest in a

fight waged by tenants over conditions at the buildings at 2985, 2987, and 2999 Webster Ave. Since the *Norwood News* originally covered the story in October, tenants say their safety and quality-of-life concerns have not been fully addressed. Stagg Group CEO and founder, Mark Stagg, argues his company has been

responsive and made improvements to the properties, known collectively as Bedford Park Manor.

"I'm pro-tenant," Stagg said in a phone interview. He argued the complaints come from only a handful of people and he has already worked to correct some of the initial
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**IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST****New 5-2 CO Inherits Crime Spike of '18****By BOB KAPPSTATTER**

When Deputy Inspector Thomas Alps took over as commander of Norwood's 52nd Precinct this past November, he had his work cut out for him.

Overall crime in the precinct covering Norwood, Bedford Park, Kingsbridge Heights, Fordham, and University Heights, was up 5.52 percent last year.

Murders, though comparatively lower in number to past history, were up 250 percent, with eight murders last year compared to two in 2017.

Broken down, two of the murders were domestic, with at least one involving what Alps said was a stepfather and son, and two domestic partners; four involved disputes, one narcotics and the eighth a high-publicity mistaken identity murder in which members of the local Trinitarios street gang shoved a young man into traffic.

Crime in five of the seven major categories - rape, felony assault, burglary, grand larceny and grand larceny auto - was also up. Robberies held steady, with 332 committed last year and in 2017.

On the bright side, there were fewer shooting victims, down from 21 in 2017 to 18 last year, a 14 percent drop.

Alps, who worked as a cop in the precinct from 2000 to 2005, said he sees his new assignment as a challenge. "I loved it as a cop here; I was active and I enjoyed policing. Ultimately, I'm going to answer for the crime situation here, and they're going to hold me accountable for it. That's what I signed up



Photo by Bob Kappstatter

DEPUTY INSPECTOR THOMAS ALPS (pictured) is two months in commanding the 52nd Precinct in Norwood.

for. But it's an honor that they entrusted me with this many cops and resources," he said.

One of his prime targets with those cops and resources, he said, will be local street gangs, "a major issue in the precinct."

Nine of last year's 17 shooting incidents involved local gangs, as well as a highly publicized mistaken identity murder in which members of the local Trinitarios street gang allegedly shoved a young man into traffic in December.

Besides precinct cops and detectives, Alps said the NYPD's Gang, Narcotics and Major Case units are also targeting the gangs, which include Trinitarios, Bloods and Crips.

Alps said he is particularly interested "where the opportunity exists" in building federal cases, which carry extensive prison sentences.

Police have said that with potential federal sentences of 20 years to life, any number of gang members in past takedowns have turned witness against their fellow gang members.

Also key in that effort will be the precinct's Neighborhood Coordination officers (NCO), teams of two officers in each of the precinct's local sectors - in effect, super beat cops. NCOs within each sector they cover have routinely scheduled quarterly Build-a-Block meetings, with residents airing out any crime concerns.

"They have the community's ear," said Alps. "Very proactive officers addressing all the local conditions going on in their sectors, whether it's issues on Fordham Road or violence related to the gangs."

Alps said he was also proud of the work the precinct's regular officers have been doing, pointing to the precinct ranking first among the borough's 12 precincts in gun recoveries last year.

"We have a lot of talented, proactive officers who are addressing the violence through gun arrests," said Alps. "I'm proud of that."

CRIME BY THE NUMBERS

	2018	2017	% Change
Murder	8	2	250.0
Rape	30	26	15.4
Robbery	332	332	0.0
Felony Assault	550	520	5.8
Burglary	209	170	22.9
Grand Larceny	677	656	3.2
Grand Larceny Auto	106	105	1.0
Shooting Victims	18	21	-14.3
Shooting Incidents	17	16	6.2

SOURCE: NYPD

EDITORIAL

De Blasio Ratchets Up Progressivism to Pad Resume Ahead of 2020

In the days leading up to his annual State of the City address, Mayor Bill de Blasio turned up the volume on Democratic progressivism, announcing NYC Care, an initiative that offers super affordable health-care to New York City's low-income earners, roughly 600,000 in all. Half of those New Yorkers are undocumented immigrants.

The announcement happened in the Bronx. The plan will kick off in the Bronx.

In his State of the City address this year, de Blasio outlined an overdue but vague plan to draw the "best and brightest" teachers to public schools.

The schools to receive new teachers will only happen for the Bronx.

This year's State of the City address saw de Blasio put the Bronx on the map, a point not lost on Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr., a



Photo courtesy Michael Appleton/Mayoral Photography Office

MAYOR BILL DE BLASIO (first row, on the right) attends Governor Andrew Cuomo's State of the State address on Jan. 15.

vocal critic of the mayor who attended the address. De Blasio brought up the borough by name six times, more than he did in prior State of the City addresses.

But why? We tend to think that there's no place borough in need of progressive action than the Bronx, home to 28.4 percent living within the federal poverty level. And if de

Blasio wants to be the king of progressive causes as a means of raising his national profile on the same scale as say Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez or even Governor Andrew Cuomo he'd better turn to the Bronx. After all, what better way to position oneself as an uber-progressive than promising to help the marginalized? And the Bronx has no shortage of those forgotten by government when compared to the rest of the city.

De Blasio is arguably the original voice of progressivism. He ran on it in 2013, and is hoping it will pay off nationally.

In his remarks, de Blasio placed the city in the larger context of America, labeling it safest, and longing to make it fairest. Political observers have noted this is a blatant attempt for de Blasio to spread his wings across the country.



Letters To The Editor

Retaking Control of MTA

There is a simple legal solution to New York City Council Speaker Corey Johnson's call for City Hall to regain control of the New York City Transit bus and subway system.

In 1953, the old New York City Board of Transportation passed on control of the municipal subway system, including all its assets, under a master lease and operat-

ing agreement to the newly created New York City Transit Authority. Under late Governor Nelson Rockefeller in the '60s the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) was created.

Buried within the 1953 master agreement between the City of New York and New York City Transit is an escape clause. New York City has the legal right at any time to take back control of its assets.

This includes the subway and bus system. Actions speak louder than words. If Council Speaker Johnson or anyone else feels City Hall could do a better job managing the MTA including running the nation's largest subway and bus system, they have the legal option to regain control for management of both the subway and bus system.

It should also be pointed out that Mayor Bill De Blasio appoints four of the MTA Board members and one of the four MTA Capital Program Review Board (CPRB) members. A second member of the MTA CPRB is appointed by Bronx Democratic Assembly Speaker Carl Hastie. This sec-

ond member, just like the mayor's appointee, is an advocate for New York City interests.

All Five-Year MTA Capital Plans and any amendments require unanimous consent of all four CPRB members. Albany manages the MTA on behalf of City Hall who is the actual original legal owner of record. New York City has the legal right to change the management team if it so wishes.

Larry Penner

Larry Penner is a transportation historian and advocate who previously worked 31 years for the U.S Department of Transportation Federal Transit Administration Region 2 New York office.

Public and Community Meetings

COMMUNITY BOARD 7 will hold its general board meeting on Jan. 22 at Serviam Hall, 2848 Bainbridge Ave., at 6:30 p.m. CB7 committees are held on the following dates at the board office, 229A E. 204th St. at 6:30 p.m. unless otherwise noted: Executive Committee meets on Jan. 17; Economic Development & Long-Term Planning Committee meets on Jan. 23; Veterans Affairs Committee meets on Jan. 24; and Budget, Personnel, & Ethics Committee meets on Jan. 28. For more information, call (718) 933-5650.

The **52ND PRECINCT COMMUNITY COUNCIL** will meet at St. Brendan's/St. Ann's School at 268 E. 207th St. on Jan. 24 from 7 to 9 p.m. For more information, call (718) 220-5821.

INQUIRING PHOTOGRAPHER

By DAVID GREENE



This week we asked readers who's to blame for the partial government shutdown, President Donald Trump or the Democrats?



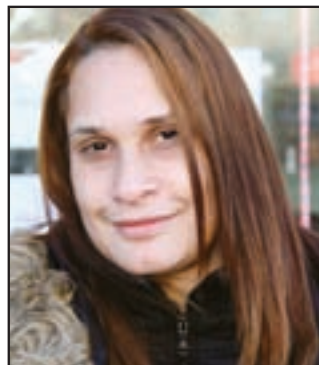
I blame the President because he wants his stupid wall. I feel like it's wrong and he's making everything worse. He wants to build a wall that's unnecessary at the moment. There's bigger problems right now, like three wars. I think it's going to end very, very badly and a lot of things are going to happen because of these little mistakes.

Sandra Velez
Allerton



Donald Trump is to blame for everything since he became President. He's cashing in, doing business while in office and a President has no business doing business. I don't understand why his wife is still continually standing by his side when she's an immigrant herself. El Chapo dug a tunnel underground, so what's a wall going to do?

Rene King
Kingsbridge



I really don't think we should have a wall, because we tried that 30 years ago. I don't think it's fair to the American people, what this President is doing to us. I feel bad for the people on public assistance, in public housing with a lot of bills they face. It's going to be a disaster here in New York City. People are going to start robbing each other and it's going to start bigger problems. I don't think the economy is good at all now, and I think it's the President's fault.

Miriam Alicea
Bedford Park



I think it's the Republicans and Trump. He's an actor and actors can play all types of roles and games. He's not a true politician. Is the wall truly crucial? I don't know, but I think the wall is a gimmick, a publicity stunt to get people to feel isolated. He could build it if he used his own money, but he'd never do that. He's going to be impeached because of Stormy Daniels.

Manny Purato
Norwood



I support security and a pathway to citizenship. If the wall will bring a process to citizenship, then yes. America is going through uncertainty at the borders and it will calm down when immigration laws are respected by all those that want to become American citizens. The Constitution of the United States has to be respected too, and yes, we need to make it possible for those seeking refuge from corrupted governments, the opportunity to come here, but not at the expense of the American people.

Irene Estrada
Pelham Gardens



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NEWS BRIEFS

Devoe Park Gates Installed

The city Parks Department has officially started locking the nine gates at Devoe Park beginning Jan. 7. Councilman Fernando Cabrera secured funding for the new gates aimed at improving the safety of University Heights, where the park is situated. He believes that this was necessary following yearslong complaints of illegal barbecuing, loud noises at night, and loitering. In the meantime, the park is closing a few gates at a time to make this a gradual change for the people who visit the park.

—Stephanie Garcia

18 for '18

In 2018 Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz was able to sponsor 18 bills, all of which were approved and signed into law by the governor. Some of these bills consisted of extending attorney-client privilege to legal referral services, banning smoking within 100 feet of libraries, and requiring that MTA funds be allocated for transit purposes unless otherwise authorized by the Legislature. These bills will end up affecting the state significantly. In 2019, Dinowitz will keep his seat with the Assembly Judiciary Committee, as well as his position in the other committees that he is also a part of.

—Stephanie Garcia

IDNYC Pop-Up in Fordham

IDNYC will be holding a pop-up event at the non-profit organization Part of the Solution (POTS) which is located at 2759 Webster Ave. This pop-up event will be held through Jan. 24, and will be open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. The IDNYC site will be closed every day from 1 to 2 p.m. IDNYC is the city's official, free ID card service that gives New York City residents access to free entry at certain events, access to a number of free services and programs, and many other benefits. Anyone can obtain this card as long as they are a New York City resident who is at least 10 years old.

—Stephanie Garcia

From Oath to Office

Assemblywoman Nathalia Fernandez Sworn Into Office

By DAVID CRUZ

Assemblywoman Nathalia Fernandez took the oath of office to be the 80th Assembly District representative, telling guests the state “must dream big.”

Alongside friends and family, Fernandez was sworn into office by New York State Supreme Court Judge Llinet Rosado at Jacobi Medical Center, which falls within her district.

Fernandez, a Democrat, laid out her support for a progressive agenda, and calling out skeptics. “To those who are naysayers and deniers, to those don’t believe a progressive vision is best for our community, we have one thing to say to you: that you are outnumbered,” she said in her remarks.

The ceremony was largely symbolic. Fernandez has already been on the job after winning a special election last April, serving as Interim Assembly Representative after former Assemblyman Mark Gjonaj, who was also Fernandez’ boss, stepped down after winning the seat for Council Member for the 13th Council District. Fernandez would go on to win the September Primary, where winners, at least in the Bronx, go on to win the November election. She did so.

Gjonaj was on hand, along with US Senator Charles Schumer, and newly-elected New York Attorney General Letitia James, who all showered her with accolades over her qualifications.

Fernandez is the first person of Cuban and Colombian descent to represent the 80th Assembly District, which covers Norwood and extends down to the Bronx neighborhoods of Morris Park,



Photo by Miriam Quinones

US SENATOR CHARLES SCHUMER (l) shares a moment with Assemblywoman Nathalia Fernandez of the 80th Assembly District, at her swearing-in ceremony Jan. 5.

Van Nest, Pelham Parkway, and Allerton. She also represents the growing number of women in Bronx politics, alongside Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and newly sworn in state Sen. Alessandra Biaggi.

For the last nine months Fernandez has made the rounds across the district, hosting events while representing the district in Albany. Her democratic agenda runs in line with basic democratic principles that include criminal justice reforms, education reforms, and

improving conditions in mostly minority communities.

“I’m here to speak for those who cannot,” said Fernandez. “I’m here to serve at the will of the people.”

Recently, Fernandez has established a district office at 2018 Williamsbridge Rd., the former joint campaign headquarters of Gjonaj and former state Sen. Jeff Klein, moving out of the Pelham Parkway South office.

Fernandez’ term runs for two years before having to run again.

Catholic Diocese School Supt. to Retire

Dr. Timothy J. McNiff, the Superintendent of Catholic Schools for the Archdiocese of New York, is retiring, compelling the diocese to find a replacement. A nationwide search is under way to replace McNiff, who plans to move back to Virginia to spend time with family. Deputy Superintendent Michael Deegan will assume the post of Interim Superintendent while the committee searches for a replacement. McNiff will officially leave his post in April.

—David Cruz

Marion Avenue is One-Way

It’s been over a month since the city changed Marion Avenue between Mosholu Parkway and Fordham Road into a one-way street. Community advocates pushed the city Department of Transportation to conduct a feasibility study nearly two years ago to determine whether a one-way street is doable. It was. New signs have now been posted warning drivers of the new rule.

—David Cruz

School Bus Overhaul Bill

The New York City Council unanimously approved a package of bills intended to increase safety and public oversight of public school buses. Under the new legislation, the city Department of Education (DOE) will be required to outfit all buses with GPS trackers in order to give parents and guardians access to the location of their child’s school bus at all times. The DOE will also report how school bus routes are drawn, how

long routes are scheduled to take, and how long they actually take—with one council member raising concerns about children having to sit through hourlong commutes to school. Another bill mandates the DOE publicly report investigations into school bus employees. The package was fast-tracked for approval following last November’s snowstorm, which left many parents frantically unaware of where their bused children were.

—Emily Suzanne Lever

CRIME FILE

By DAVID CRUZ



31-Count Indictment in 5-2 Shootout

The man allegedly involved in a wild shootout with plainclothes cops from the 52nd Precinct faces a 31-count indictment. Named and arrested is Edwin Castillo-Concepcion of Longwood with first- and second-degree attempted murder, and other related charges in the shootout at University Heights on Dec. 5, that left two people hurt by several stray shots that came from one of the officer's gun.

Castillo-Concepcion also faces robbery charges in a crime that happened moments before the shooting took place. Authorities said Castillo-Concepcion robbed two men at gunpoint inside 98 W. 183rd St., stealing a backpack before firing off a shot with a .25-caliber pistol. He quickly encountered Police Officer Juan Gomez and his partner, at which time he shot at the officers, according to the indictment. Gomez returned fire, shooting 27 times. Two people were accidentally shot by Gomez – a 12-year-old girl struck by bullet fragments in her right leg and another victim, Irene Urena Perez, who was hit in the stomach.

Alleged Sex Groper Caught

A Queens man faces a litany of charges, including sex abuse, for allegedly groping a 4-year-old girl on board a southbound #4 train. Kwame Johnson, 42, was picked up by police four days after the reported assault. The incident, which police said happened around 11:30 p.m. on Dec. 27 was on the train departing the East 183rd Street station, falling within the 52nd Precinct.

The man sat down next to the child and placed his right hand under her rear end, the girl's mother claimed. Neither the mother nor the daughter was identified in the police statement. Johnson also faces forcible touching, third-degree menacing, two counts of second-degree harassment, and acting in a manner injurious to a child.

Traffic Agent Attacked

An NYPD traffic agent was assaulted on Jan. 8 while performing his duties, and police need help tracking the assailant. Police said the incident occurred near the intersection of East Kingsbridge Road and East 194th Street.

The traffic agent was performing his duties when suddenly he was punched



in the face. He was taken to the hospital where he was treated for pain.

The suspect (above) wanted for questioning is described as Hispanic, in his early 20s, standing at 5'8" and weighing approximately 140 lbs. He was last seen wearing a red-hooded sweatshirt, black Nike sweatpants, and white/black sneakers.

Leaving Crash Scene

Cops need help identifying a man and car linked to a hit-and-run crash reported on Dec. 31 at around 11:15 p.m. in front of 2590 Bailey Ave.

Police said the suspect's car crashed with another car as the victim was leaving

the gas station. The victim then lost control of his car and hit an unoccupied parked car. The victim suffered pain and bruising to his body while his 33-year-old friend suffered an injury to her back. She was taken to a Manhattan hospital and was listed in stable condition. The suspect fled the scene southbound on Bailey Avenue in a gray, four-door sedan.



The suspect above is described as a light-skinned male, last seen wearing a light-colored hooded sweater, black pants and black sneakers. The suspect's vehicle is described as a Chevrolet Impala, gray in color, with damage to the front bumper and headlights.

Anyone with information on the attacked traffic agent or hit-and-run accident is asked to call the NYPD's Crime Stoppers Hotline at (800) 577-TIPS. All calls are kept confidential.

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Bodies Found in Two Separate Incidents in Norwood

By **DAVID GREENE**

Few details have been released on the discovery of two bodies found in two separate parts of Norwood over the course of a few days, with police remaining tight-lipped over the grisly discoveries.

According to the NYPD, MTA employees were conducting routine track inspections along the Metro-North line when at 11:54 a.m. on Jan. 3 they discovered “a human decomposed corpse” near the

railroad tracks abutting the entrance of French Charley’s Park at East 204th Street and Webster Avenue.

A dozen detectives and forensic specialists spent the day examining the body, described by witnesses as a man. The discarded sleeve of an air conditioner rested next to the body. One investigator noted that the body was partially buried by leaves and debris and had likely been there more than a few weeks.

One resident of an apartment overlooking the scene, said, “This wasn’t a holdup because if it was, he had nice sneakers and nice pants. They would have taken all of that.”

The resident continued, “It could be my friend. I haven’t seen him in a few days and there’re crazy people in that park at night. It’s scary.”

The park is a known spot for the homeless, where a tiny encampment can be found inside the park’s wooded area.

Two days later and on the other side of Norwood, at 7:15 a.m. on Jan. 5, police received a call of an “unconscious male” inside the Sachkerah Woods Playground inside Van Cortlandt Park at East Gun Hill Road and Jerome Avenue within the confines of the 50th Precinct.

Police officials said “officers discovered a 33-year-old male unconscious and unresponsive with no apparent trauma.” Officials said the victim has been identified, but the release of his identification is being withheld until the family is notified first.

The Office of the City’s Medical Examiner (OCME) said an official cause of both deaths is still pending. The medical examiner said the office expects to have additional information when the autopsy

and toxicology results come back in another week.

For several years the area of Van Cortlandt Park near East Gun Hill Road has been a location where many homeless congregate and often sleep on park benches.

Recently the city opened the Jerome Avenue Men’s Shelter (JAMS) at 3600 Jerome Avenue, three blocks from Van Cortlandt Park’s entrance. Friends of the victim told News 12 the Bronx that the man was homeless, but it’s not known if he was from JAMS.

A recent client of JAMS told the *Norwood News* that JAMS had no medical staff on hand. The Department of Homeless Services (DHS) did not respond to a request for comment.



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Photo by David Greene

DETECTIVES AND FORENSIC experts examine the scene where MTA employees discovered a decomposed body along the Metro-North Railroad tracks near French Charley’s Park on Jan. 3.

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A Look at the Comprehensive Wellness Program at the Sheila Mencher School



Photo courtesy PS/MS 95 Sheila Mencher School
PRINCIPAL SERGE MARSHALL DAVIS with students from PS/MS 95 Sheila Mencher School.

By PS/MS 95 STAFF

Under the leadership of Principal Serge Marshall Davis, PS/MS 95 Sheila Mencher School has implemented a multifaceted and wide-ranging wellness program with opportunities for each child to learn about and maintain health and fitness.

Assistant Principal Eileen Rivera points out, “When I think of wellness, I think of the whole child: physical, emotional and mental wellness. The successful child is balanced.”

Assistant Principal Omara Flores has noted, “Wellness programs are essential because we have an obesity crisis throughout our nation and need to have nutrition education.”

Parent Coordinator Delis DeLeon presents information that may not otherwise be available to parents. She says, “It’s a great thing to have wellness programs in the schools because of the issues in the past that children weren’t aware of, but now can make good choices.”

Parent Daisy Masoud tells of many activities offered to families such as Fitness Nights of fun workshops in martial arts and yoga, as well as food events featuring healthy salads and tacos.

Health teacher Alyse Rosen incorporates the mental health component of wellness into the curriculum as a vital foundation for making healthy choices throughout life. Rosen adds, “We hope that what we’re teaching them will stick - both the basics as well as more advanced concepts and information to enable them to build a foundation to make smart choices.”

The school has made great strides, according to School Leadership Team Chairperson Francheska Rodriguez.

“Our school does really well. Over the years I’ve seen a change in the scope of the knowledge base of nutrition, of how much we have involved the parents and how much the programs have made a difference.”

Other programs integral to the health education of students include Wellness in the Schools, administered by Chef Marion; adolescent workshops run by the school-based Montefiore Community Health Organizer Jennifer Abu; cafeteria food service managed by Michelle Seaton; and the Wellness Committee chaired by Andrea Faulkner, which has obtained grant monies to provide supplementary physical activities for students.

Chef Ricardo explains, “These programs strive to improve the culture surrounding food and health at the school.”

This collegial approach to infusing wellness into the life of the school has been a positive influence on students to help them make good choices. Lucio Alcaide thinks that “as far as wellness in the schools, they have after school programs like the basketball team.” Mozel Holmes said, “I think gym is healthy because we learn movement that helps different parts of the body.”

When she thinks of healthy foods in school, Mariana Mena thinks of “strawberries, grapes and watermelon, broccoli, blueberries, baby carrots and granola bars.” Arianna Reynoso thinks about “eating fruits and vegetables and grains and how to judge foods with sugar.” Cristopher Diaz-Hildago said that the fruits in the cafeteria “are a basket of delicious.”

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State of the City 2019

Bronx Projects Take Center Stage

By DAVID CRUZ

Mayor Bill de Blasio's sixth State of the City address saw the immediate creation of a Mayor's Office to Protect Tenants, a plan for increased worker protections, expanded 3K program, while also promoting a plan for guaranteed healthcare and a paid two-week vacation proposal for employees.

Surprisingly, there were some specifics for the Bronx, a point that was not lost on Democratic colleagues like Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr., who's expressed interest in running for mayor in 2021.

Still, Diaz criticized de Blasio's proposal to take buildings away from landlords with a history of harassment and poor building management.

"We could talk about landlords who are not doing what they're supposed to be doing, but if you ask me, and many New Yorkers, the landlord with the most egregious examples of tenant violations is the New York City Housing Authority," said Diaz. "So, based on his logic, is he talking about giving up the New York City Housing Authority or taking it away?"

De Blasio did mention plans for NYCHA, including a broader goal of providing "new everything" to the beleaguered housing authority, where some 400,000 of New York City's low-income residents live. That will include "new roofs to new kitchens to bathrooms."

On housing matters, the mayor said the newly created Office to Protect Tenants will use task forces to root out bad landlords. "When a landlord tries to push out a tenant by making their home unlivable, a team of inspectors and law enforcement agents will be on the ground in time to stop it," said De Blasio. He didn't mention them by name, but he said the office will hold every city agency, including the city Department of Buildings and the city Housing Preservation and Development Department accountable in ensuring tenant protections.

"We'll use every tool we have. We'll fine the landlords. We'll penalize the landlords. But if the fines and the penalties don't cut it, we will seize their buildings," said de Blasio.

It's unclear whether the office's threat to remove a landlord from own-



Photo by Adi Talwar

MAYOR BILL DE BLASIO delivers his sixth State of the City address at the Peter Jay Sharp Theatre at Symphony Space in Manhattan.

ership of a poor building can hold. Legal action to seize apartments takes an act from the Albany Legislature, which is currently controlled by Democrats.

De Blasio leaned heavily on Albany Democrats in his speech to carry out his goals. State Sen. Jamaal Bailey, who represents Norwood, said several factors must be weighed first before building is completely taken from a landlord.

"Everything is contextual," said

Bailey. "Are you creating an uninhabitable condition for the tenants? Are there things that have been dis-repaired for years and years and years? What's the nature of the disrepair? How flagrant are the violations?"

De Blasio also seeks Albany's help in improving the deteriorating subway system, pleading to Democratic lawmakers to fund the system by April 1, the day the state budget is due, or "lose our very best opportunity to ad-

(continued on page 12)

Bronx Gets Priority in de Blasio's NYC Care Initiative

By ALONDRA VASQUEZ

Mayor Bill de Blasio announced a plan that would guarantee healthcare for 600,000 low-income New Yorkers, with Bronx residents expected to get priority. Coverage will also apply to undocumented immigrants.

But how to pay for it became the biggest question during de Blasio's announcement.

"Health care is a human right. In this city we are going to make that a reality. In this city we are taking that ideal and putting it into practice. From this moment on in New York City everyone is guaranteed the right to health care," said de Blasio, sitting alongside advocates and First Lady Chirlane McCray on Jan. 8.

De Blasio, announcing the NYC Care initiative at Lincoln Hospital, said about 600,000 New Yorkers do not have any health care coverage at all. The plan appears to be an alternative to the Affordable Care Act passed under the Obama administra-

tion.

The Bronx, a borough with poor health outcomes compared to the rest of the city, will be prioritized, officials said.

NYC Care will be launched in the summer. The program will cost at least \$100 million a year. The goal is to connect New Yorkers who cannot afford coverage or are ineligible for health insurance, including undocumented New Yorkers, with a primary care doctor. The idea is to avoid going to an emergency room for non-emergency situations, freeing up the ERs for their intended purpose. Typically, the uninsured go to an emergency room for their medical care.

This plan will ensure that every New Yorker who needs a doctor has access to a primary care doctor. According to de Blasio, the message will be, "Go get the health care you need when you need it. Don't wait, don't feel like it is not for you."



Photo by Alondra Vasquez

MAYOR BILL DE BLASIO (foreground at mic) announces a plan to offer low-cost or free health insurance to low-income New Yorkers.

When asked where funding was coming from, de Blasio said funding will be prioritized in the city's budget that'll be hammered up during the first few months of the year.

The City's plan is to boost enrollment in Metro Plus and strengthen

it. MetroPlus offers free or affordable health insurance that connects insurance-eligible New Yorkers to providers.

City officials plan to reach out to low-income New Yorkers who qualify.

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State of the City 2019

(continued from page 10)
dress these problems.”

Midway through his speech, de Blasio touted a plan to extend ferry service to the Ferry Point section of the Bronx, adding to existing ferry service in the neighborhood of Soundview. Soundview will also be included in the mayor’s expansion of the 3K program, which offers free education to three-year-old children in New York City.

The Bronx was the only borough mentioned for a new plan that will see more teachers in some of the Bronx’s poorest neighborhood schools. “[W]e’re launching a new plan to attract the best and brightest teachers, get them to those schools, keep them in those schools in the Bronx that need them the most.”

De Blasio, however, did not get into specifics of the plan.

In his overarching quest for equity, de Blasio has put the Bronx first on some occasions, mostly recently on Jan. 8 when he announced NYC Care, a plan that guarantees affordable healthcare to low-income New Yorkers, including undocumented immigrants. The Bronx, a borough with a



Photo by Adi Talwar

BRONX BOROUGH PRESIDENT Ruben Diaz Jr. speaks with a television reporter after Mayor Bill de Blasio’s sixth State of the City address at the Peter Jay Sharp Theatre at Symphony Space in Manhattan.

history of poor health outcomes, will be introduced to the program first.

Citywide, de Blasio announced a

revamping of the city’s Department of Consumer Affairs, which will now be called the city Department of Con-

sumer and Worker Protection.

“When a home healthcare aide – when their pay is withheld or any worker is mistreated, the Department of Consumer and Worker Protection will intervene,” said de Blasio, earning applause. “Whether you’re an employee or a temp, whether you’re paid by check or cash, whether you’re documented or not, if you work in New York City, then we will work for you.”

The hourlong speech was not without hints of a yearning by de Blasio to enter the national stage. De Blasio, who’s been asked several times whether he’d like to run for President of the United State in the future, pointed to the city’s accomplishments under a progressive Democratic tent, suggesting a greater ambition ahead.

“It certainly had a lot of national overtones, and perhaps that’s the reason why New York City-based issues like NYCHA were given less of a thought,” said Diaz.

Notwithstanding any insinuation of his political future, de Blasio, who was given 115 rounds of applause during his speech, noted “There’s more to do in this town.”

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13 Warning Signs of Mental Illness

By **BRENDA BOATSWAIN, Ph.D., CGP**

Here are 12 signs of mental illness you might notice in yourself, a friend, or family member that are good reasons to reach out to your medical provider.

These signs are not always universal. Some people may show changes in behavior, physical symptoms, and/or changes in mood. Note that men and women may show signs of mental health issues differently. If you recognize any of these signs for more than several days in yourself, a friend, or family member, seeking help should always be your first step so you or they can get the care they need.

- Feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness or depressed mood.
- Withdrawal from friends, family and activities you normally enjoy.
- Changes in sleeping and eating patterns.

- Anger, rage, overreacting to criticism, guilt, or poor self-esteem.
- Feeling tired or exhausted all the time.
- Troubling concentrating, thinking and making decisions.
- Struggling in school or work, with performance dropping.
- Restless, anxious, agitated or irritable movements and behavior.
- Regular crying.
- Neglect of personal care, such as not showering.
- Reckless or impulsive behavior.
- Physical symptoms, such as headaches, digestive problems or chronic pain that persists and do not respond to routine medical treatment.
- Thoughts about death or suicide.

See your medical provider if one or more of these signs persist for more than

several days. Your medical provider will talk with you about available treatments. There is treatment – and treatment works!

To learn more about mental health, visit the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) website at www.samhsa.gov. You

can also call SAMHSA's National Helpline, a free, confidential, 24/7, 365-day-a-year treatment referral and information service in English and Spanish.

Dr. Brenda Boatswain is the Wellness/Wellbeing Coordinator for Montefiore Health System's Community & Population Health.

Meet Monte's First Delivered Baby of 2019



Photo courtesy Montefiore Health System

MONTEFIORE STAFFERS WELCOME its first delivered newborn of 2019 at 12:50 a.m. on New Year's Day. Jeremy Martinez, being held by mom Mirian Lopez, was born at Montefiore's Jack D. Weiler Hospital. Jeremy's daddy, Yery Martinez, is 3rd from right. The couple lives in West Farms. Congratulations to the family!

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NEIGHBORHOOD NOTES

Tenant Support Unit

The Mayor's Tenant Support Unit offers tenant outreach help to New Yorkers at risk of displacement or tenant harassment. Residents can get connected to free legal services, learn about their rights, get help applying for rent freeze programs and more on Jan. 17, 24 and 31, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., at the Office of Assemblyman Victor Pichardo, 2175 Jerome Ave.; Jan. 17, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. at UNHP Refugee House, 2715 Bainbridge Ave.; and Jan. 18, 10:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Office of Assembly Member Jose Rivera, 1 Fordham Plz. For more information, call 311.

College Scholarships for DREAMers

TheDream.US is offering scholarships for qualifying students pur-

suating an associate's or bachelor's degree who are recipients of DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) and TPS (Temporary Protected Status). Applications are accepted through Feb. 28 at thedream.us/scholarships/.

Small Business Services

The office of Council Member Fernando Cabrera will offer free services for local small businesses on the second and fourth Tuesday of each month starting on Jan. 24, at 107 E. Burnside Ave. For more information, call (347) 590-2874 ext. 209.

ATTAIN Computer Lab

The SUNY Bronx Education Opportunity Center is offering a free, four-week Microsoft Office

Certification class. The first session is Jan. 22 from 9:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Interested students should sign up beforehand at bronxeoc.org/attain. For more information, call (718) 530-7034.

Heating Assistance

Applications for the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) for older adults and low- and middle-income New Yorkers will be accepted by local departments of social services. Eligibility is based on income, household size and how the home is heated. Residents can apply online at <https://on.ny.gov/2Fn062M> and mail it to NYC DSS/HRA/HEAP, P.O. Box 1401, Church Street Station, New York, NY 10008. For more information, call (212) 331-3126

Right to Counsel

Right to Counsel (RTC)— which assigns a free attorney to those sued for eviction in housing court and in NYCHA termination of tenancy hearings and who are income eligible—is available to tenants who live in Bronx zip codes 10457, 10467, and 10468. If a tenant is not income-eligible, they have the right to a one-off legal consultation or advice session. Tenants facing eviction or harassment from management can call Nova Lucero at the Northwest Bronx Community & Clergy Coalition for support at (917) 952-5494.

Crime Victims Support

Crime Victims Support Services, a 501(c)3 group at 1138 Neill Ave., offers victims help in navigating the criminal justice system.

Free confidential services include claim assistance, case follow-up, crisis counseling, and victim advocacy. The group accepts donations. For more information, call (718)823-4925.

Lehman College Choruses

Two Lehman College choruses are accepting new members. Residents are welcome to join, and participation is free. Lehman College Chorus meets Mondays and Wednesdays from 3:30 to 5 p.m. The first rehearsal is Jan. 28. Lehman College Community Chorus meets on Tuesdays, 7 to 9:30 p.m., and starts rehearsals Jan. 29. Both choruses rehearse in the Music Building on Lehman campus at 250 Bedford Pk. Blvd. W. Some previous choral experience is recommended. For more information, call (718) 960-7795.



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Alvin Ailey Registration Starts:

Monday, January 7th for Members
Wednesday, January 9th for Non-Members
Classes are 1x week for 8 weeks
Prices Starting for Members: \$176

Mixed Martial Arts Registration is Open:

Registration ends on December 2nd
Classes are 1x week for 8 weeks or
2x week for 8 weeks
Prices Starting for Members: \$65

Capoeira Registration Starts:

Monday, November 19th for Members
Wednesday, November 21st for Non-Members
Classes are 1x week for 8 weeks
Prices Starting for Members: \$112

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Swim Registration Starts:

Monday, January 2nd for Members
Wednesday, January 4th for Non-Members
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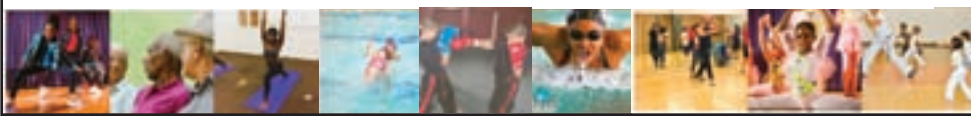
STEM Registration is Open:

Registration ends on February 9, 2019
Classes are 1x week for 8 Weeks
Payment plan is available
Prices start from \$450

Salsa Registration Starts:

Monday, December 3rd for Members
Wednesday, December 5th for Non-Members
Classes are 1x week for 8 weeks
Prices Starting for Members: \$96

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Out & About

Compiled by JUDY NOY

EDITOR'S PICK

Last Licks to Extend Holiday Season

New York Botanical Garden's annual Holiday Train Show, featuring miniature replicas of many NYC building replicas made from natural materials including bark, twigs, fruit and pine cones; and All Aboard With Thomas & Friends, featuring a fun-filled sing-along mini-performance adventure (two to four performances daily); end on Jan. 21. For more detailed information, show schedule, rates, and tickets, call (718) 817-8700.

Onstage

Lehman College's Center for the Performing Arts, 250 Bedford Pk. Blvd., W., presents **Ballet Hispánico**, Jan. 19, featuring contemporary dance with a Latin program (tickets are \$25 to \$55; \$75/VIP; \$10/to age 12); and **Roberto Roena y Su Apollo Sound**, Jan. 26, featuring salsa including various performers (tickets are \$50 to \$65; \$100/VIP); both at 8 p.m. VIP tickets include pre-concert reception at 6:30 p.m. with wine and hors d'oeuvres. For more information, call (718) 960-8833.

Bronx Arts Ensemble presents BAE All-Stars, featuring jazz band in a **tribute to legendary Charles Mingus**, Jan. 27 at 4 p.m. at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church, 627 E. 187th St. For more information, call (718) 601-7399.

Events

Williamsbridge Oval presents free classes during January: **Bodywork Details** on Tuesdays from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m., for teens, adults and

seniors (includes use of barbells and weights). Each week focuses on a different body part. Equipment is provided; and **Zumba** on Sundays from 1:30 to 2:30 p.m., for all ages (includes Latin, international and popular music to create dance routines). A lock is required. For more information, call (718) 543-8672:

The Bronx County Historical Society presents a **mid-winter event**, Jan. 22 followed by cocktails and dinner from 6 to 9 p.m. at Zero Otto Nove, 2357 Arthur Ave. \$25 will benefit the Society collection and historic preservation. For more information and to RSVP, call (718) 881-8900 by Jan. 14.

Wave Hill, a Bronx oasis at 675 W. 252nd St. in Riverdale, offers **Family Art Projects**: Freedom Quilting Bee, to create a quilt, Jan. 19; and Papers and the Stories of Eric Carle, for storytelling and create colorful images, Jan 26; both in the WH House, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Grounds admission is free until noon Tuesdays and Saturdays all year. For more information and a schedule of events



Photo courtesy Joshua Bright

RESIDENTS CAN CRAFT some gorgeous compositions out of squares of fabric on Jan. 19 at Wave Hill (see Events for more information).



Photo courtesy Lehman College Art Gallery

"CASTLES IN THE SKY: Fantasy Architecture in Contemporary Art," is now open through Jan. 26 at the Lehman College Art Gallery (see Exhibitions for more information).

including tours and walks, call (718) 549-3200.

Exhibits

Lehman College's Art Gallery, Lovinger Theatre in the Speech and Theatre Building, 250 Bedford Pk. Blvd. W., presents **Castles in the Sky**, free, through Jan. 26, Tuesdays to Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. For more information, call (718) 960-8710.

The Museum of Bronx History, 3266 Bainbridge Ave. (208th Street), presents **Women's Suffrage and New York City: A Centennial Celebration**, through April 11, 2019; and **His Muse: The Women of Edgar Allan Poe's Life**, through April 7, 2019. For more information, call (718) 881-8900.

Bronx Museum of the Arts, 1040 Grand Concourse (167th Street), presents **Image of an Image**, featuring the work of Bronx-born native Rochelle Feinstein, through March 3, 2019. For more information, call (718) 681-6000.

Bronx River Art Center (BRAC), 1087 E. Tremont Ave., presents **River Rising**, through June 30, 2019, featuring an exposition of science, art and technology, located in Starlight Park. For more information, call (718) 589-5819.

Cuban Art Show free exhibition, **We Have Ire: Afro-Cuban in the U.S.**, is scheduled through March 9, 2019 at the Casita Maria Gallery, 928 Simpson St., 6th floor, weekdays from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. It documents the stories of four Cuban artists, focusing on their influences and dreams. A **live performance of excerpts** will be held on March 9

from 2 to 2:45 p.m. combined with a **Family Storytelling Workshop** from 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. For more information, call (718) 589-2230.

Library Events

Bronx Library Center, 310 E. Kingsbridge Rd., presents for children ages 5 to 12 (preregistration required): **Arts & Crafts at 3:30 p.m.**: Hands on projects using a variety of skills, Jan. 20 and 27; and **film**: (ages to 12 years), Jan. 22 at 4 p.m. Adults can enjoy **films at 2:30 p.m.**: "Ocean's 8," on Jan. 19 and "12 Strong," on Jan. 26. For more information, call (718) 579-4244/46/57 or visit www.nycl.org.

Moshulu Library, 285 E. 205th St., offers for children: **Crafty Fridays at 3 p.m.**: crafts, Jan. 18 and 25; and **STEM: Kids Science at 3 p.m.**: Colors, Jan. 22 and 29; both for ages 5 to 12; and **Toddler Storytime**: (ages 18 months to 3 years), interactive stories, action songs, fingerplays, and crafts, Jan. 24 at 11 a.m. Teens/young adults can enjoy: **film**: "Solo: A Star Wars Story," on Jan. 26 at 1:30 p.m. Adults can attend **Knitting Circle**: Thursdays at 3 p.m. For more information, call (718) 882-8239.

Jerome Park Library, 118 Eames Place (near Kingsbridge Road, offers for children **Afternoon Arts**: (ages 6 to 12), arts & crafts project, Jan. 28 at 3:30 p.m.; and **film**: (ages 5 to 12), Disney Christopher Robin, Jan. 19 at 2 p.m. Adults can enjoy: **Computer Basics at noon**: Jan. 24 and 31. For more information, call (718) 549-5200.

NOTE: Items for consideration may be mailed to our office or sent to norwoodnews@norwoodnews.org, and should be received by Jan. 21 for the next publication date of Jan. 31.

Stagg Tenants Battle for Quality of Life

(continued from page 1)

issues tenants had. “We’re doing everything that we can to maintain the quality of life and we’ll continue to do that. We want to do that.”

Still, tenants are unsatisfied.

Zxavier Simpson, a resident at 2985 Webster Ave., has led the charge in organizing efforts for improved conditions. Having moved from Harlem three years ago, Simpson admits to holding the building to a higher standard. After all, the buildings opened in 2016.

“I think that for a building that’s been here for three years it shouldn’t have so much issues,” Simpson told the *Norwood News*.

Some residents, including Shannon Terrell, are beginning to pursue grievances, taking the Stagg Group to Bronx Housing Court. Last week, Terrell petitioned the court over shoddy repairs in her apartment, complaints she alleges have fallen on the landlord’s deaf ears, and a bombardment of “paper notices for rent that is not owed” and unjustified eviction notices.

“These are baseless claims,” Stagg told the *Norwood News*. He said similar cases have been dismissed in the past. “We pride ourselves on communication, so these complaints are not falling on deaf ears.”

In October, the *Norwood News* reported on the building’s condition, focusing on water damage, security lapses and Band-Aid fixes to larger issues. In a recent visit to the building by the paper, improvements appeared to have been made, but residents say there are still far too many issues for a building so new.

For the last few years, Stagg has expanded his residential empire into Bedford Park and Norwood, opening a total of five apartment buildings in the neighborhood. A few blocks from Bedford Park Manor, Stagg recently opened Norwood Gardens at East 203rd Street and Webster Avenue. The developer’s self-described signature property, the 13-story Mosholu Grand, is currently under construction on Van Cortlandt Avenue East between Mosholu Parkway and the Grand Concourse.

The complaints at Stagg’s three Webster Avenue buildings have been growing. The city Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) has logged 44 complaints from various apartments at 2985 Webster Ave., as of press time. Complaints include the existence of bedbugs, mold, and no heat or hot water. At 2987 Webster Ave., 59 complaints have been logged, including broken locks, sporadic power outages, and the existence of mold. The property at 2999 Webster Ave. saw the fewest number of complaints, with 16.

Disruptive Neighbors

Meantime, tenants have pointed to the number of disruptive tenants, many believed to be “warehoused” by supportive service nonprofits that do little in the way of servicing their clients.

An initial visit by the *Norwood News* showed that at least one transitional service nonprofit provider named Pibly had a client in the property. Pibly is contracted by the state Department of Health and Mental Health (DOHMH) to scout for livable apartments on behalf of clients. Should the client be considered disruptive, the transitional service provider will find another suitable home for them while increasing the number of visits.

“The problem is you know you think that everyone is going to have a lease directly with the company but they don’t,” Thomas Hurless, a resident of 2987 Webster Ave., said. “They have leases with these organizations... that’s the problem.”

James Plastiris, a spokesman for DOHMH, told the *Norwood News* that state law bars the agency from disclosing whether mentally ill clients are housed at the properties.

The agency was vague on what types of supportive services are required for tenants living in regular apartment buildings, how many tenants are referred there, and how much in rent subsidies it offers nonprofits to cover client rent costs.

City Councilman Andrew Cohen, whose council district covers the buildings in question, has been in touch with both Stagg and concerned tenants.

“I told Mark that I’d be happy to try to make sure that if there are people in need of services that we’d hook them up,” Cohen said. “And I made it clear to the tenants that if they have issues and they need legal representation, legal services, I’m happy to help with that too.”

On Jan. 15, Cohen walked through one of the buildings with Stagg. After the walkthrough, the Councilman felt the building was “well maintained” and did not “get the impression there is systematic problems.” Instead, he believes, many of the building’s issues can be linked back to “one or two problem tenants.”

“The nature of the landlord-tenant relationship is often adversarial,” Cohen said. “I’m just not convinced that this is a quote unquote bad building and that it’s a building wide problem.”

Need for a Super

Despite the large number of units per building, where general upkeep is needed, there is no live-in super

on each of the properties. City law requires a super who lives in the building or a maximum 200 feet from the property to be available to provide cleaning services. Stagg, in 2017, had skirted the law, forcing the city Housing Preservation and Development agency to step in and issue a violation to the Stagg Group, which then complied with the law by hiring an offsite super.

But compliance is one thing. The quality of its upkeep is a different matter for Simpson, who conceded that the building does have roving custodians, only they do little when it comes to proper maintenance.

If work is shoddy, the best one can do is take it up the management chain, according to HPD spokesman Matthew Creegan. “If a tenant is concerned about conditions in their building, they should first inform their landlord to address the issue. If that doesn’t work, tenants should call 311 so HPD’s enforcement team can schedule an inspection,” said Creegan.

Simpson and other residents have begun to circulate petitions throughout the three buildings, demanding a full-time super. Stagg argued the current arrangement is working just fine. Currently, a super does not live onsite, but is around the buildings from 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. and on-call at all hours.

Security Concerns

During the *Norwood News*’ initial investigation into the properties last October, several security cameras appeared to be missing, leaving holes in the ceilings of the hallways with loose wires. At the time, tenants expressed concern because of their experience with squatters and drug users who made themselves comfortable in the buildings’ basements.

Since then, the Stagg Group appears to have replaced most of the missing cameras. Property manager Javier Monroy showed the *Norwood News* an app on his phone connected to the buildings’ many cameras. Still, residents have concerns.

On Nov. 27, Frank Giger, a 31-year-old U.S. Army sergeant and Iraq War veteran, was found dead on the pavement outside the buildings. It appeared, according to eyewitness accounts and photos obtained by the *Norwood News*, Giger fell from the roof of the building. According to a police representative at a Jan. 2 Bedford Mosholu Community Association (BMCA) meeting, the NYPD has not ruled it a homicide. But the tragedy sparked renewed interest in the buildings’ security.

“We don’t have no proper surveillance in the building,” Simpson said at the Jan. 2 BMCA meeting. “How the hell are we living in this building... and we can’t feel safe.”

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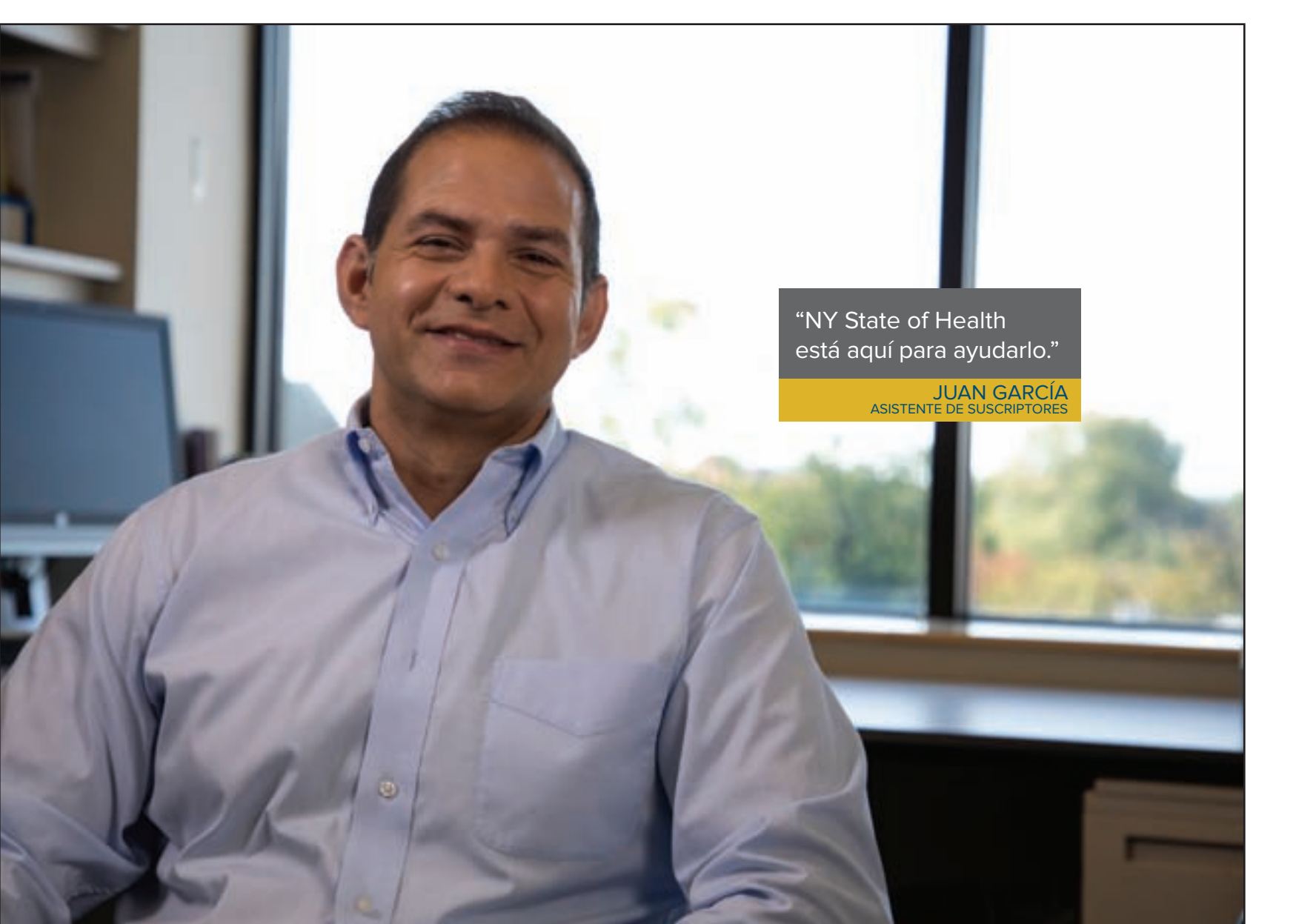
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