



NORWOOD NEWS

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**INQUIRING PHOTOGRAPHER:
DANGEROUS PARKS | PG. 4**



**HONORS FOR THREE AT BRONX WEEK
CELEBRATION | PG. 14**

THE \$1 MILLION PB RESULTS ARE...

Monies for countdown clocks, pothole repairs, and tech upgrades for district



Photo by José A. Giralt

COUNCILMAN ANDREW COHEN (left) announces the winning projects of the Participatory Budgeting vote at the Woodlawn Playground inside Van Cortlandt Park in Woodlawn on May 6. The playground will receive \$400,000 for renovations.

**By EMILY SUZANNE LEVER
And DAVID CRUZ**

Norwood Councilman Andrew Cohen announced on Monday that he'll be contributing funds for bus countdown clocks, pothole repairs, and technology upgrades for public libraries as

per the public through Participatory Budgeting initiative. The projects add up to \$600,000, part of the \$1 million the public has a direct say in spending through the initiative.

The lion's share, about \$400,000, will go towards

safety upgrades at Woodlawn Playground, with no specific projects for Norwood, unlike years before, which saw improvements to the Mosholu Public Library.

"No projects specific to Norwood were available to vote on," said Cohen, at a

news conference announcing the projects. "However, Norwood, will see the effects of district-wide street repaving and countdown clock installations." The countdown clocks, a favorite of constituents, determine the length

(continued on page 19)



**French Charley's
Dark Side
pg 3**



**New Anti-Gang
Initiatives Settle in
Five-Two | pg 8**



**Serve's Up!
pg 10**



**Out & About
pg 18**

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**IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST****Assemblyman With Norwood Ties Announces Congress Bid****By DAVID CRUZ**

The race for the 15th Congressional District seat may be more than a year away, but it's already the hottest political ticket, with another politico jumping into the race.

Assemblyman Michael Blake, the 79th Assembly District representative for the West Bronx and the vice chair of the Democratic National Committee, announced a run for the seat, which will be left vacant by the long-time officeholder, Congressman Jose Serrano. Serrano, who was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease, announced last month that he will not seek re-election.

Blake's rollout of his announcement veered away from standard rollouts. It was made via email while he was in Atlanta, Ga., according to his Twitter post.

"When we come together and believe in the Bronx, anything is possible – for our families, for our communities and for our collective future. With a member of Congress in Washington fighting for better-paying jobs, fighting for affordable housing, fighting for better health care coverage and education for children, fighting to protect the dignity of immigrants and our South Bronx families, and fighting for the funding and resources that our neighborhoods need, we will accomplish extraordinary things together. I want to be that fighter for you, which is why I have decided to run for the 15th Congressional District in the Bronx," Blake wrote to supporters.

For Blake, who was born at North Central Bronx Hospital and lived in Bedford Park in his early years, the prospect of running presents a major gamble. By announcing a run, Blake will have to not seek re-election for the seat he's held since 2015. Before becoming



Photo courtesy Facebook

ASSEMBLYMAN MICHAEL BLAKE is the fourth candidate to announce a run for the 15th Congressional District covering the South Bronx.

ing an assemblyman, Blake worked as a White House aide to President Barack Obama.

"I am asking the people of the 15th Congressional District to give me the opportunity to be our next voice in Washington, D.C. where I will use my federal and local experience along with my vision focused on equity to represent our district," wrote Blake.

Blake is the latest candidate in a race that's already drawing a slew of politicians vying for the seat that will be decided in a June 2020 primary.

Along with Blake, Councilman Ruben Diaz Sr. and newcomers Jonathan Ortiz and Tomas Ramos have declared a run for the 15th Congressional District, which spans the South Bronx. Ortiz was the first to declare a run well before Serrano had announced he will not be seeking the seat.

Other names under consideration include Councilman Ritchie Torres, who remains in the exploratory phase. For most candidates, the exploratory phase usually involves whether a prospective candidate can properly finance the campaign.

Blake has proven to be an effective fundraiser, raising \$359,748 during his unsuccessful run for New York City Public Advocate early this year. Though he won the Bronx, his support was concentrated to certain sections of the Bronx.

With Blake running for Congress, he cannot run for re-election in the Assembly (election law bars candidates to run for both a state and federal seat at the same time). His announcement will trigger a batch of candidates seeking to secure his Assembly seat come 2021.

Public and Community Meetings

COMMUNITY BOARD committee meetings are held on the following dates at the board office, 229 E. 204th St., at 6:30 p.m. unless otherwise noted: Housing, Land Use & Zoning Committee meets on May 14; Executive Committee meets on May 15; Health & Human Services Committee meets on May 21; Economic Development & Long-Term Planning Committee meets on May 22; and Veterans Affairs Committee meets on May 23. For more information, call the board office at (718) 933-5650.

At French Charley's Park, Dead Bodies Reveal Park's Dark Side

By **EMILY SUZANNE LEVER,**
DAVID CRUZ, and DAVID GREENE

On the morning of April 26, police found the body of a man who had apparently hanged himself from a railing on the stairs leading down into French Charley Park, the sprawling 718-acre park that connects Norwood to Allerton. He was not the first dead body to be found in that park this year.

A stone's throw away, on the Metro-North tracks that run under the bridge to the park entrance on East 204th Street and Webster Avenue, the decomposed body of another man was found, his body decayed and frozen.

Though unrelated, the two deaths add to the mixed reaction of French Charley's Park, also known as Bronx Park, a sprawling green landscape with mostly uninterrupted paths. In a way, Bronx Park feels like a slice of wild forest between Webster Avenue and Bronx River Parkway. The forest floor is carpeted with violets and wildflowers. Dozens of huge fallen trees with trunks three- or four-feet thick lie on the ground. Rabbits scamper around, and red-breasted robins can be seen on the trees and turtles in the shallow, swampy ponds.

The park is not exactly untouched by human activity. Foot-worn paths meander around, and the whole space running parallel to the Metro-North tracks is littered with signs of partygoers: cans of Axe body spray, Country Club soda, Smirnoff Ice, flavored vodka, Bud Light, Corona bottle caps, and piles of cigarette butts, and used condoms.

It's been known to serve as an encampment for the homeless, who've traversed the park's leafier terrain to set up makeshift beds. On a recent day, signs of people living in the forest could be seen: a tattered jacket and mat piled on a dead tree trunk by the Met-



Photo by David Greene

AN NYPD PATROL vehicle is parked at East 204th Street near the Webster Avenue entrance of French Charley's Park in Norwood.

ro-North tracks, a gray sweatshirt and towel trampled into the mud a little further in, and two floral quilts laid out under the Mosholu Parkway overpass bridge. Their presence wasn't as pronounced in 2017 when a full-blown encampment complete with a plastic burlap that served as a shield from the rain was found.

"You can actually see couches and stuff down there," said a resident who went by Devin as he was walking towards Allerton.

Though just underneath a bridge at the southwestern end of the park abutting the New York Botanical Garden a muddy quilt, along with a box of chicken wings and empty juice bottles, can be spotted.

"The police don't do a thing," said another resident who went by Besim. "One told me you can't do anything because it's a free country. But you're not free to do anything you want, come on. But they're sleeping here. If you come here at 10 or 10:30

[p.m.], people are still here drinking. The police don't do s-t. Why the hell is that?"

Officers from the 52nd Precinct have broken up the encampments before, part of their routine patrol of the park. The city Department of Homeless Services' HOME-STAT teams also visit the park at least three times a week. It hasn't found any encampments.

The NYPD reported 20 serious crimes in Bronx Park in 2018, including 14 robberies and three felony assaults, up from 14 total crimes in 2017. Among them was the stabbing of a 14-year-old boy, who was chased through the park by alleged members of the Trinitarios gang-some of whom were also charged in the killing of Lesandro "Junior" Guzman-Feliz, which took place one day later.

During the day, a few local residents take walks through the park to meditate or look at the smooth green waters of the Bronx River. They barely ever venture inside at night, when it is pitch black. Others said they don't enter the park at all. One bodega owner of Webster Gourmet Deli at the corner of Webster Avenue and East 204th Street said he had worked in the area for 10 years and never set foot in it.

Willie, a homeless man who immigrated to the United States from Mexico 42 years ago, was one of the people living in a Bronx Park encampment. He said he'd been living there for a year and that he knew the man who had died on the train tracks in January and had seen his body.

"The raccoons were still eating him," Willie said.



Photo by David Greene

AN UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANT from Mexico who went by the name Willie heads into French Charley's Park, where he has slept for the past year.

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INQUIRING PHOTOGRAPHER

By DAVID GREENE



Following the death of a man in French Charley's Park, this week we asked readers their thoughts on the current state of local parks.*



This park is crack-infested, and at night all the homeless people live here. The park is supposed to close at 10 o'clock, but at that hour it's only the homeless who sleep here and shower in the fountain. This park is not safe. The police try and do something, but there's just too many [homeless]. The police do come because I was issued a summons for sitting here and having a drink on my birthday...but they don't come as often as they should. They need more lights and they need to fix the shelter system. The park was made for the kids, but the homeless have taken it over.

Jose Rivera
French Charley's Park



The Reservoir Oval Park is in complete disarray. I've lived here for 30 years and instead of seeing improvement, it's gone down because of the gangs that come at night. Yes, they run this park at night. No, I don't feel safe here. The lighting is pretty good, but you don't see many cops in here; they don't come around at night. I walk my dog at five o'clock in the morning and there's gangs everywhere here. Yes, gang members, so the police need to patrol here more. The park is supposed to close by law, but it doesn't. The gangs turn over all of the garbage cans everywhere. They're teenagers and most of them don't come from this neighborhood.

Dennis Marlin
Williamsbridge Oval Park



I've been over here about nine years now. It's okay, but people are going to do what they do. If you mind your business and leave other people alone, you'll be alright. I used to drink and sit out here with everybody. I've been on the ground, but I picked myself up and I've got two years clean of alcohol and drugs and I'm doing good. Yes, I've slept here many nights in the cold until they took me to the hospital and I thought it just wasn't worth it. Yes, people sleep here and some have died here too. A guy froze to death here in February and one guy died sitting on the bench behind me. He use to have a pushcart and would pick up cans. The police come in and out at times, especially at night. They need to put the gate back around the park, so people won't come and sleep out here at night.

Delphine Sander
Van Cortlandt Park, East Gun Hill Road



Yes, this park is safe. When I was younger, in the 1970s, it was more drug-related. But today, there is hardly anything going on. There's still some drug activity, but not like it was. I haven't heard of any problems. Yes, I see the police and they also have a private security force around here.

Elliott Kaufman
Van Cortlandt Park South



St. James Park is beautiful, it's very nice. The only thing they need to improve is they need to keep the bathrooms clean and they need more activities that we don't have in the community. I think it would be better if the kids had more things to do to stay out of trouble. No, I haven't seen anyone selling drugs or anything like that here.

Angie Perez
St. James Park

*The name of each park corresponds with the park respondents are describing.



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NEWS BRIEFS

By ALONDRA VASQUEZ

New Bronx Bookstore

The Bronx finally has its own bookstore. “The Lit. Bar,” its name serving a double-meaning for literature and the slang term, “lit” often meaning exciting, had its ribbon-cutting ceremony on April 27 in Mott Haven. The owner, Noëlle Santos, a Lehman College alumni, told WNYC, “I carefully curate this store. I make sure the inventory reflects the community, which is mostly Latinx and African American population. So, we focused on marginalized voices, people of color, the LGBT community, people with disabilities, the whole range.” The Lit. Bar is not only a bookstore, but also a wine bar.

King Accused of Impropriety

There were numerous allegations brought against the chairman of the Committee on Juvenile Justice, Bronx Councilman Andy King. The allegations range from sexual harassment claims, to misuse of city resources, and nepotism. This is King’s second run-in with alleged ethics violations. The Council’s Ethics Committee had to discipline King for sexually harassing a former female staff member, prompting him to undergo sensitivity and ethics training. King is also accused of allowing his wife Neva Shillingford-King to perform “Council business.” Ethics Committee chair, Councilman Steven Matteo, told the *New York Times* that King did not cooperate with the committee’s investigation and refused to be interviewed.

De Blasio Earmarks \$75M For Early Voting

Mayor Bill de Blasio is pushing the city Board of Elections (BOE) to accept \$75 million in city funds to expand the number of early voting poll sites from 38 to 100. “We now have a real opportunity in New York to strengthen our democracy and drive up participation in our elections,” said de Blasio. Providing early voting sites for the November general election can help seniors, the disabled, parents, and many New Yorkers who struggle in

Home Run for Local Students



Photo by David Cruz

STRIKING A POSE ARE (l-r) Community Board 7 member and Education Committee chair Myrna Calderon; Academy of Mount Ursula students Serena Montero, Selena Rodriguez, Czarina Maysonet, and Konstantina Sgolombis; Community Board 7 District Manager Ischia Bravo; and CB7 Chair Jean Hill. The four college-bound students were each awarded a \$750 check from the New York Yankees Community Council Youth Leadership Award given to deserving Bronx students. Congratulations to the winners!

Five-Two Aims to Quash Increased Robberies And Scourge of Opioid Abuse

By JOSÉ A. GIRALT

Two pressing issues impacting the latest 52nd Precinct Community Council meeting took center stage: robberies and opioid overdose awareness.

“Year-to-date, we have 26 more robberies than 2018,” said Deputy Inspector Thomas Alps, the Five-Two’s commanding officer. “We do notice that there remain pockets of crime, like St. James Park and gang violence, that we see as a cause for the increase.”

Alps also introduced seven new officers assigned to the precinct, expressing hope that an increased police presence on the streets will help reverse the trend in robberies. They also look to quash the number of overdoses that continue to plague the precinct’s jurisdiction.

In addressing the growing number of overdoses, Alps mentioned that so far in 2019, officers have responded to 17 non-fatal overdoses and seven that were fatal. The area of Fordham bordering Bedford Park has consistently stood as a bedrock for opioid

abuse. In 2017, the Five-Two, in coordination with federal authorities, rounded up several suspects charged with running an open air drug street market on East 194th Street and Marion Avenue.

“Back in the day, people would ‘cut’ drugs, in other words dilute them, so they could sell more product and make more profit,” said Herbert Quinones, an overdose prevention trainer for the city Department of Health & Mental Hygiene, who was invited to speak to the audience. “Now the problem is they [drug dealers] ‘cut’ cocaine or heroin with Fentanyl and it’s faster to OD now.”

According to the Drug Enforcement Administration’s website, “Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid that is 80 to 100 times stronger than morphine. . . [It] is added to heroin to increase its potency, or be disguised as highly potent heroin.”

Another twist in the opioid crisis is that it’s not just the hard drug user that is overdosing. Quinones mentioned how “there are

people buying Xanax [commonly prescribed for anxiety] on the street, but it’s really Fentanyl.”

The trend of users buying prescription drugs on the street has led to a significant jump in overdoses across the country.

As for what the public can do, Quinones holds training sessions in the administering of naloxone, a nasal spray that reverses the effects of an opioid overdose. A few steps must be taken to determine whether the victim will respond to a dose of naloxone, since it is meant specifically for opioid overdoses.

Those willing to be certified through the training receive a blue card to be carried at all times identifying them as a certified opioid overdose responder and receive an overdose rescue kit with two doses of naloxone.

Even if some aren’t willing to undergo this training, Quinones says we can all do something to help an overdose victim. “Call 911, tell them your location, and then tell them the situation of the person,” Quinones said.

their busy schedules to squeeze in time to vote. When administering elections, the BOE has provided a few voting polls with interpretation services but many people believe that they have not extended additional services to other poll sites.

NYPD Warning on Phone Scams

The NYPD is warning New Yorkers against scam phone calls from con artists pretending to be part of the Social Security Administration or another government agency. The NYPD reported that so far in 2019 they have received over 200 complaints. In total,

New Yorkers have lost nearly \$2 million through Social Security scams. “If you ever suspect a call to be fraudulent, don’t take a chance, just hang up,” said Chief of Community Affairs Nilda Hofmann, adding the NYPD has launched a public awareness campaign about these scammers. Many scammers use this technique called “spoofing,” a technique that manipulates caller IDs to show the names of agencies such as the Social Security Administration. The NYPD reminds New Yorkers they won’t receive a call from a government agency soliciting money or personal information over the phone.

Report: Fix Playgrounds

There are not enough playgrounds across the city, and if there are, they’re not well kept. That’s the message from city Comptroller Scott Stringer, whose office released a report detailing that the more than 2,000 public playgrounds in the city need major safety upgrades. The report points out that the city hasn’t kept up with the increased population of children and the number of playgrounds that could be built to meet the need. Stringer’s office made five recommendations, which include providing greater funding for park maintenance, and honor its schoolyards to playgrounds program.

Ribbon Cutting Ceremony At Norwood Gardens

By JOSÉ A. GIRALT

When the housing lottery became available last spring for the Norwood Gardens, the newly-built 11-story property in Norwood, Christina Donkor wasn't sure about her chances to get an apartment. But she submitted her paperwork and let the process play out.

During the ribbon-cutting event on April 9, Mark Stagg, CEO and founder of the Stagg Group, acknowledged Donkor and fellow resident Latoya Wilson who were present and praised them for their perseverance during the selection process.

"I'm grateful that it all worked out because I was looking for a place like this," Donkor said.

The building—a modern-looking edifice whose neon blue and purple lights on its facade can be seen from a distance—is located at 410 E. 203rd St. once the site of an empty lot. According to the Stagg Group, it is comprised of 118 affordable housing units ranging from studios to three-bedroom apartments. They also announced the inclusion of one unit for a live-in superintendent.

The inclusion of a live-in superintendent is a fight tenants won't have to con-

tend with at the new property, unlike the neighboring Bedford Park Manor, a Stagg-owned property on Webster Avenue near Bedford Park Boulevard that for years did not have a live-in super. Though the Bedford Park Manor had been built in 2015—a result of the 2011 rezoning of Webster Avenue—up until recently the building did not have a live-in super, but a porter.

To complete the construction of the Norwood Gardens, the Stagg Group put together more than 10 financing and development partners including the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD), New York City Housing Development Corporation (HDC), Chase Bank Community Development, and Richman Housing Resources.

"Getting a project like this done takes many partnerships," said Stagg. "And there are always things that come up to delay the process."

The waiting was also hard on Wilson. "It was a lot of paperwork but I knew that if I got in, it was all going to be worth it," she said.

Delays were also marred by work stoppages enforced by the New York



Photo by José A. Giralt

AT A RIBBON-CUTTING ceremony for the Norwood Gardens residential building, located at 410 E. 203rd St., Mark Stagg, CEO and founder of the Stagg Group, raises his hand holding a piece of blue ribbon in the Norwood section of the Bronx on April 9.

City Department of Buildings (DOB) in 2017 after the agency found that the required site safety coordinator was absent following an accident at the site that resulted in no injuries. A DOB spokesman at the time could not explain why the company-hired coordinator, who was hit with a violation, was not there. The spokesman did point out at the time that it was the second time a site safety coordinator was absent at the site, the first being on March 9, 2017.

A unique feature of Norwood Gardens is the inclusion of a 24-hour daycare on its first floor meant to provide services to children aged three to 12.

Some of their pre-school members entertained the audience of the ribbon-cutting event with renditions of "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" and "Baby Shark."

Final rents are determined by the income of applicants, but will range from \$865 per month for a studio to \$1,289 per month for three-bedroom units.

Stagg said his group is "committed to building high-quality housing for Bronx residents," and added that the Norwood Gardens "not only addresses the critical need for affordable housing, but one that includes attractive amenities to enhance our tenants' lives."

Where Are the Early Voting Sites in the Bronx?

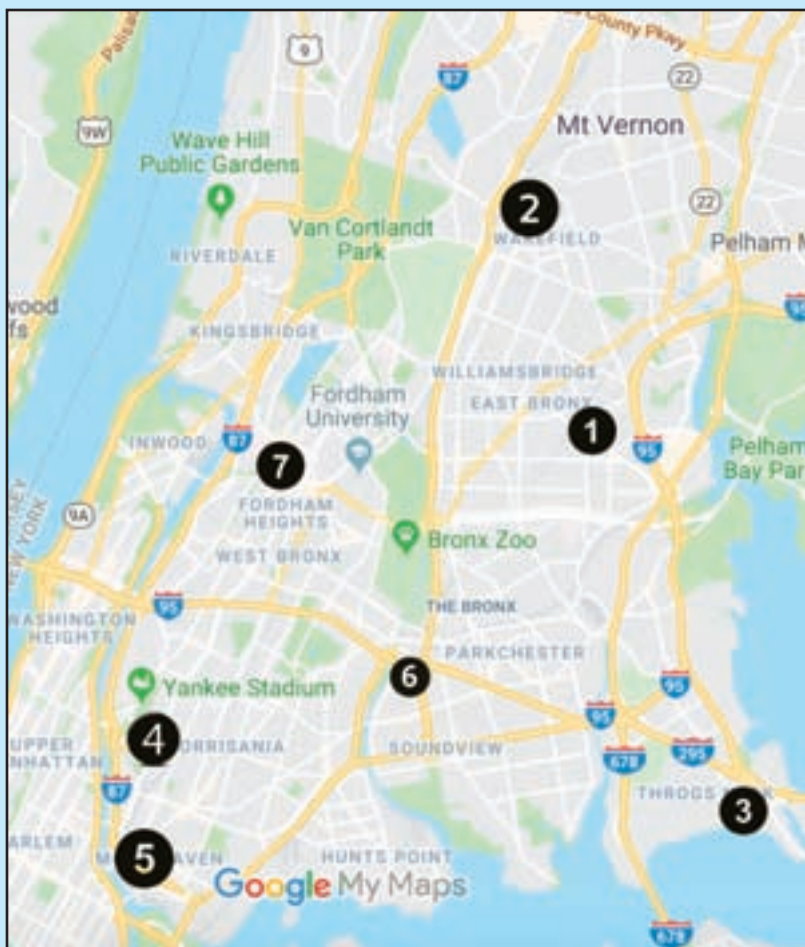
By EMILY SUZANNE LEVER

Voting is not just for Election Day anymore. New Yorkers can now vote in elections up to nine days in advance following the passage of a new early voting law by the state legislature. Prior to this measure, New York was the only state (plus Washington, D.C.) that did not offer some kind of early, absentee, or mail-in voting.

The New York City Board of Elections has chosen 38 early voting sites throughout the city. New Yorkers' first opportunity to cast early votes will be in this year's November general election. The following early voting sites, corresponding to the numbers on the map (left) will be open in the Bronx:

1. Holy Rosary Church, 2950 Eastchester Rd.
2. St. Anthony's Church, 4505 Richardson Ave.
3. St. Frances de Chantal Church, 190 Hollywood Ave.
4. Bronx County Supreme Court House, 851 Grand Concourse
5. Mitchell Community Center, 210 Alexander Ave.
6. Bronx River Community Center, 1619 E. 174th St.
7. Monroe College, 2501 Jerome Ave.

Norwood Assemblyman Jeff Dinowitz blasted the board for low-balling the northwest Bronx. "The closest site for many residents of the [Northwest] Bronx is at Monroe College," wrote Dinowitz on Twitter. "There are many seniors [and] other people who may have trouble getting there in order to cast an early vote. Let's do this right - we need more voting locations."





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New Anti-Gang Initiatives Added to Five-Two's Arsenal

By DAVID CRUZ

The presence of gangs across the 52nd Precinct's jurisdiction has become something of a staple.

While the weight of the police force can put a stopgap to gang culture that leads to arrest, the agency has expanded its use of anti-gang groups that, while not necessarily falling under the NYPD, have been given carte blanche to stymie gang violence. And they've begun to make their way to the 52nd Precinct.

David Caba, program director for Bronx Rises Against Gun Violence (BRAG), falling under the umbrella of Good Shepherd Services, leads the newest anti-gang initiative within the precinct's borders. Introducing the group at the 52nd Precinct Community Council, Caba said his group will be omnipresent in the Kingsbridge Heights, Fordham and University Heights sections of the precinct, known to the Five-Two as Sector B.

"You're gonna see us walking around, up and down, mediating conflicts, stopping the violence. Yes, we're going to work with the crews on this side, that side, the other side," said Caba of BRAG employees at a 52nd Precinct Community Council meeting on March 28. "You will see that we're supported in a major, major way."

BRAG embraces the Cure Violence model, created by a Chicago-based epidemiologist who treated gun violence as if it were a disease, identifying carriers that can spread its gang message.

As they've done so across the Bronx, BRAG's role largely involves reading the terrain, catching any hint of any reprisals shortly after a gang-related attack has occurred.

Hitting the pavement around some gang hotspots is one aspect to the initiative. Much of BRAG's success—which worked well in the 46th and 47th precincts in the last few years—is credited to so-called "credible messengers," once hardened gang members who have reformed, sharing the consequences gang life has left on themselves and the communities they live in and building trust. It's that hallmark that sets it apart from the Police Department, taking an outsider's approach to ridding street gangs.

"They've been shot and sent to the hospital, almost died. Some even on our team have flatlined and came



Photo by Adi Talwar

GOOD SHEPHERD SERVICES' Bronx Rises Against Gun Violence (BRAG) team members--outreach worker Joel Richards (second from right), and violence interrupter Bobby Robinson (right)--talk to young people while handing out BRAG literature at St. James Park in Fordham.

back twice," said Caba, whose office within the 52nd Precinct will be opened at 1 E. Fordham Rd. in May.

Stopping beefs from touching off is delicate work. For Caba, recruiting from within the community is an essential component to their success. Their firsthand experience in gang culture, and the understanding into the mindset of that culture, serves as major tools toward quelling any violent encounters. BRAG staff usually adapt their hours according to when gangs usually operate—mid-afternoon into the late evening. Caba and his team usually adjust their hours during the weekend, operating from 4 p.m. to midnight.

Being proactive is the preferred method for BRAG, which has established anti-gang programs at MS 15, East Fordham Academy of the Arts and Walton High School. Should a gang-related shooting happen within its catchment area, BRAG enters into first responder mode that lasts three days.

BRAG dispatches "violence interrupters" to the scene to assess the crowds, identify any known gang members that can share information

to determine any hints of retributive action by a rival gang. Specially-trained responders are then sent out to the local hospital (for BRAG, it's St. Barnabas Hospital), where they interact with families and offer services depending on several factors. This can include whether the victim is a gun owner, affiliated with a gang, or had done time for gang-related activity. Not all gang members take BRAG's offer, which includes help in obtaining employment, education, job training, or mental health services either in the office or off-site.

The third day following a shooting, BRAG holds a demonstration with community stakeholders equipped with signs and a bullhorn as a way of calling attention to the violent incident. "The community has the full power to stop that, to reject that, to make sure that disease of violence does not spread," said Caba.

In steering young people away from gangs and guns, BRAG also offers a free, 12-week recording studio program funded by Councilman Fernando Cabrera where young people learn the inner workings of the music industry.

As BRAG hits the streets hoping its message of reform resonates with gang members, Rev. Loren Russell is taking on a different tact similar to BRAG, relying on a contingent of federal authorities, prosecutors, and community-based groups to spread an anti-gang message to the city's more high-risk offenders.

The program, dubbed "Ceasefire," is a variation to the cure violence embraced by BRAG. For Ceasefire, that involves convincing gang members to reform or face stiff consequences, including serious jail time if convicted by a federal grand jury.

Drawing gang members into the program usually happens during a "call in," where local precincts reach out to gang members on parole and probation and ask them to arrive to a meeting. The presentation, usually organized every three months, often involves a forewarning on the consequences to gang violence.

"The choice is up to them whether or not they will take it. It is up to them. I ask them and I encourage them. I said look, 'I am out here not because I get paid. I am out here because I love

(continued on page 10)

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Video still courtesy NYPD

POLICE HAVE CUFFED Romero Rasdell (pictured), charged with second degree robbery and petty larceny related to an incident where he allegedly punched a store clerk at the CS 99 Cents Store & Plus at 368 E. Gun Hill Rd. in Norwood after the clerk found he was using a fake \$20 bill to buy a bag of shirts. Police say the incident happened on April 28 at around 3:30 p.m.

Serve's Up!

Serving Tennis and the Community at Oval Park

By JOSÉ A. GIRALT

Before the start of the third season of Papi Tennis at Williamsbridge Oval Park, its founder Daniel Arzuaga, is busy clearing the puddles left from an overnight rain.

"There's a real community aspect to tennis because it's played all over the world," says Arzuaga.

As members of the group begin to appear on the nearly dried courts, the special bonds of the participants are clear as they hug, say hello, and laugh before the more advanced players start their serves accompanied by grunts and yelps.

"I like to think of this group as a tennis family," Arzuaga says.

Founded in April 2017, Papi Tennis plays on the eight courts of Oval Park and is free to all. The skill levels vary from no tennis experience to more advanced players. On this day, three courts included singles and doubles matches with a fourth court used for beginners' practice.

Olivia, affectionately known as the "Church Lady" because of her work at a nearby house of worship, always wanted to play tennis but had never taken formal lessons. "I'm so happy I found Papi Tennis. [Arzuaga has] been so helpful to me and all the others at Oval Park," says Olivia.

In the 1970s, when Arzuaga was growing up in the Morrisania and Claremont Village neighborhoods, his parents considered nearby tennis courts too dangerous to play in. "It wasn't until after my 40s that I started to play seriously," Arzuaga says.

After graduating from Yale University with a degree in English, Arzuaga went on to receive his law degree from Boston College Law School in 1992.

While living in Dubai in 2014, in addition to playing, Arzuaga started giving tennis lessons. When he returned to the Bronx the following year, he noticed that the eight courts inside Williamsbridge Oval Park were never fully occupied.

"In Manhattan, some [tennis] courts are really strict about how long you can use them. I still need to take out a permit to play [in Oval Park], but it's a more relaxed atmosphere," says Arzuaga.

The first two years of Papi Tennis' growth was



Photo by José A. Giralt

DANIEL ARZUAGA (FOREGROUND), founder of Papi Tennis, leads members through introductory lessons at the Williamsbridge Oval Park tennis courts in the Norwood section of the Bronx on April 13.

due mostly to social media and word-of-mouth. Last fall, however, Arzuaga formally organized the group as a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit group, allowing him to apply for grants from organizations such as the United States Tennis Association (USTA).

Organizing as a non-profit will allow the group to expand its membership and provide rackets to those who cannot afford to buy one. Currently, Papi Tennis lends the rackets and balls to those without any equipment.

Just as important as the business side of Papi Tennis, Arzuaga wants to ensure that the family spirit on display today continues. He introduces Jason Christie, a baker who runs "The Baking Room" from his home and sometimes provides cakes for the tennis players. "He's an example of how our group is a family, a network, and more than just tennis," Arzuaga says.

As Arzuaga looks at the 22 members of Papi Tennis present at Williamsbridge Oval Park on a beautiful spring day, he remembers the first session in 2017 with the first six participants.

"I always knew I wanted to make this group a tennis family. A place where everyone feels like they belong," Arzuaga says.

New Anti-Gang Initiatives Added to Five-Two's Arsenal

(continued from page 8)

you.' I really do, and I don't want to see any of them go to jail," said Russell.

Ceasefire's secondary component lies in community-based groups offering immediate services or resources in the way of jobs or free education to selected gang members. Ceasefire clients identified within the 52nd Precinct receive a customized letter offering the services/resources that applies not only to the clients, but

those affiliated to the client's gang members.

The offer of employment worked in one instance, according to Russell. "[H]e came while we were talking to his mother on the phone. He came in and we gave him the message. He was very receptive to it. I asked him, 'What to do need?' He said, 'I need a job.'"

The NYPD does not track the recidivism rate of participants who have gone through the program, though

Russell estimates more than 80 percent have embraced the services. The rates of homicide have dropped. Last year, homicides dropped 38 percent and shootings decreased 13.4 percent compared to 2017.

While gang violence is often among members, there are some bystanders, including Jessica White, a Mott Haven woman killed by a stray bullet while protecting her kids from a gang-related shootout in June 2016. Federal authorities later charged Stiven Siri-

Reynoso, who they said was the leader of "Dominicans Don't Play," for ordering the shooting intended for members of the Trinitarios. Siri-Reynoso was sentenced to life in prison. Meantime, Russell conducted White's funeral services.

"She got killed because somebody was shooting at somebody else and she jumped in the way to save her children and she caught a bullet right in the heart. I don't want to see that anymore," said Russell. "I am tired of that."



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The Fail-Safe Fight Against Obesity

The Norwood News, WFUV Radio, and BronxNet Television complete their five-part series focusing on health-related struggles impacting the Bronx.



Photo courtesy St. Barnabas Health System

ST. BARNABAS HOSPITAL in Belmont, houses the Center for Weight Loss Surgery.

By **DAVID CRUZ**

Jennifer Hernandez, 43, of Soundview faced a brick wall when it came to losing weight. At 248 pounds, Hernandez attempted to reverse the outcome for her obesity, a disease that's often a nexus to even more debilitating conditions such as heart disease or diabetes.

And so it goes for the 28 percent of Bronx residents considered obese, according to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's 2015 Health Rankings. Stubborn obesity genes can be the culprit, with poor eating habits, lack of exercise, and poor sleep the engines to obesity.

“I tried a lot, and I wasted a lot of money,” said Hernandez of the variety of diets she adopted, adding that eating smaller food quantities just couldn't do it.

So even after all the rigorous dieting and exercise, Hernandez, who makes her living as a school bus driver in the borough, couldn't make dieting work anymore.

“The gain was still there,” said Hernandez, who was referred to her primary care doctor to consider sleeve surgery, where surgeons dramatically reduce the size of a stomach by removing large sections of it altogether.

“Your stomach is not what it used to be,” said Hernandez, estimating that at least 80 percent of her stomach was removed.

There was some homework on Hernandez' part, including quitting smoking and reducing the size of her liver by cutting out alcohol. The idea was for Hernandez' surgeon, Dr. Nissin Nahmias, director of the Center for Weight Loss Surgery at St. Barnabas Hospital Health System in Belmont, and his team to get to her stomach.

“It's definitely not going to be cured by surgery. It's a lifestyle, and education, and understanding of all the possible reasons why people end up in this situation. It's multi-factorial, and it's not simple,” said Dr. Nahmias. Bariatric surgical procedures can help prevent, slow the progression of, or even reverse certain obesity-related conditions, by restricting the size of the stomach. In some ways, the sleeve procedure resets the clock, allowing those who were once deemed obese to eat the kinds of nutritious foods that won't tip the scales. At his center, Dr. Nahmias and his team offer patients who weigh up to 350 pounds a minimally invasive way to transform their lives.

In September, Hernandez underwent the procedure. Today, she's at 164 pounds with a goal of coming down to 140 pounds.

In some ways, obesity's headstrong nature can be attributed to the variety of genes inherited in families that slow down one's metabolism, presenting surgery as the only viable option.

“Many people have inherited genes that promote being overweight,” said Dr. Nahmias. “On top of that, cheap, calorie-dense, but nutrient-deficient food is readily available to everyone, especially in a food desert like in the Bronx. “Stress, sedentary lifestyles, and sleep problems add to the risk. It's a perfect storm for weight gain.”

Hernandez is now a pescatarian, foregoing chicken and beef meals to only consume fish. It's a lifestyle she hopes Bronx residents can embrace. But it's not for everyone, according to Hernandez.

“If you don't have that mindset of this-is-what-I-want and I'm going to do it, it's sad to say, but you're going to fail again,” said Hernandez. “You're wasting your time.”



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Bronx Week Underscores Borough's Best With Three Honorees

By NORWOOD NEWS

What does a musician, prizefighter, and planetary scientist have in common? They all had roots in the Bronx. And they're being celebrated for it by Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr. during the perennial Bronx Week celebration. Though the name implies seven days of highlighting the finer points of the borough, Bronx Week is actually an 11-day event that begins May 9.

Diaz Jr. will be honoring the following individuals on May 19, whose names will be immortalized in the Bronx Walk of Fame located on the Grand Concourse near East 161st Street:

Regina Spektor

Born in the Soviet Union, Spektor began studying classical piano when

she was six. Her family emigrated in 1989, landing in New York City, where she continued her classical training. Spektor eventually studied composition at the Conservatory of Music at Purchase College where she graduated with honors. Spektor's commercial breakthrough came in 2006 on her fourth LP, "Begin to Hope." Spektor's songs have appeared in TV shows and movies including "Orange Is The New Black," "Grey's Anatomy," "Weeds," "How I Met Your Mother," "Veronica Mars," "The Good Wife," and "(500) Days of Summer." She played for the Obamas and guests at the White House and performed as part of philanthropic campaigns for Tibet, Doctors Without Borders, and many more. In September 2016

Spektor released her seventh album, "Remember Us To Life."

Iran Barkley

Iran Barkley was born on May 6, 1960 in the Bronx. He lived with his parents, Frank Sr. and Georgia Barkley, and his seven siblings in the Patterson Houses. Growing up he was exposed to gang activity and ended up becoming a member of the Black Spades gang at an early age. One of his older siblings, his sister Yvonne, was a professional boxer and introduced Iran at boxing 13 years old. As an amateur boxer, Barkley won several medals between the years 1981 and 1982. December of 1982 is when Barkley went pro and adopted the nickname "The Blade." In 1988 he won the WBC Middleweight title by



Images courtesy Wikipedia

(L-R) AND THE HONOREES ARE... musician Regina Spektor, prizefighter Iran Barkley, and planetary scientist Carolyn Porco. The three will be honored for their contributions to their fields and their connection to the Bronx.

knocking out Thomas Hearns in the third round. It was voted, by *The Ring* magazine, as the biggest upset of that year. When Barkley returned to action in 1991, he had two victories under his belt as the Light Heavyweight champion. He retired in 1999.

Carolyn Porco

Born and raised in the Bronx, Porco is a

planetary scientist who is responsible for many of the discoveries and stunning images from the Voyager and Cassini missions. Porco earned her PhD from Caltech in 1983. She then joined the faculty of the University of Arizona planetary sciences department, where she worked until 2003, when she became a senior researcher at the Space Science Institute

in Boulder, Colorado. She has also become a regular public commentator on science, astronomy, and planetary exploration and served as a science consultant on such productions as the 1997 movie "Contact" (based on the novel by fellow astronomer Carl Sagan), the 2009 movie "Star Trek," and the 2017 documentary "The Farthest: Voyager in Space."

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NEIGHBORHOOD NOTES

UFT Bronx Fair

United Federation of Teachers and NYC Department of Education Bronx office hosts a fair at the UFT Learning Center, 2500 Halsey St., May 31 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., for students and families highlighting agencies, colleges, and vendors to assist students with special services and options when going from high school to college or the world of work. Events include meeting with professionals and student workshops. For more information, call (866) 509-5921.

Free Workshops at NYPL

The West Farms Library, 2085 Honeywell Ave., holds two free workshops: Personal Budgeting on May 11 and Credit Scores and Loans on May 25, both from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. For more information and for required RSVP, call (718) 579-6990.

Free Diabetes Workshops

Montefiore is hosting the following free workshops on managing diabetes: Montefiore Medical Group, 2532 Grand Concourse, 3rd floor conference room, on May 16 from 4 to 6 p.m.; and Co-op City Community Center, 177 Dreiser Loop, 2nd floor (room 8), on May 20 from 3 to 5 p.m. For more information, call (866) 996-6683.

Become a Home Health Aide

Home Health Aide certification can be earned in one month (no high school diploma or equivalent is required) at the SUNY Bronx Educational Opportunity Center, 1666 Bathgate Ave. Applicants must be able to pass a background check and a drug screening. Register Monday or Wednesday from 8:30 a.m. to 11 a.m. at <http://bronxeoc.org/register> for tuition free training. Class starts May 13. For more information, call (718) 530-7000.

Job Fair

The Bronx Educational Opportunity Center, 1666 Bathgate Ave., hosts a job fair on May 17 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Representatives in the fields of health care, administrative, and customer service will be on hand. Professional dress is recommended. Bring resumes. For more information, call (718) 530-7000.

Summer Youth Police Academy

Young people between the ages of 10 and 15 can sign up to train with

police officers at the Summer Youth Police Academy. The program is free, runs five days a week for six weeks, from 8:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. Classes include lectures, role playing, and demonstrations in the areas of law, behavioral science, drug prevention and gang resistance. Applications are due May 31. For more information, call (718) 312-5079 or email communityaffairs@nypd.org.

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.

Free Legal Services for Immigrants

Low-income immigrants can receive free legal advice from volunteer attorneys through the New York State Liberty Defense Project and Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York. For more information, visit CatholicCharitiesNYProBono.org or call (800) 566-7636. If you are interested in volunteering, visit catholiccharitiesny.org.

Free Bird Walks

Free bird walks are offered every Saturday beginning at 9 a.m. through July 20 at the Van Cortlandt Nature Center. Bird watchers can look for various species of residents and migrants and discuss a wide range of avian topics. For more information, email Joseph McManus at mcmnaus638@aol.com. No registration necessary. No limit. Free, thanks to grant by Councilman Andrew Cohen.



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Out & About

Compiled by JUDY NOY

EDITOR'S PICK

Bronx Week Parade

The public is invited to join the free Bronx Week Parade on Sunday, May 19 which closes out a week of borough activities and events. Marchers stroll along Mosholu Parkway from Hull Avenue starting at 11:30 a.m. to Van Cortlandt Avenue. Invited are celebrities, marching bands, community organizations, schools, sports teams and civic groups. The parade is followed by a Food & Arts Festival offering food for purchase, hand-crafted and specialty items, free health screenings and health insurance information. For more information on the week's events, visit www.ilovethebronx.com

Onstage

Bronx Library Center, 310 E. Kingsbridge Rd., presents free, **Rumpelstiltskin**, musical presented by the Department of Music, Multimedia, Theatre and Dance, May 11 at 11 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. For more information and to

reserve, call (718) 960-7796.

Lehman College's Center for the Performing Arts, 250 Bedford Pk. Blvd., W., presents **Andy Montanez and Victoria Sanabria**, May 11 (tickets: \$65 to \$85; \$100/VIP; VIP tickets include best seats and preconcert wine and hors

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File photo

EXPECT COMMUNITY BOARD 7 members to march up Mosholu Parkway North for the annual Bronx Week Parade happening May 19, beginning at 11:30 a.m. The viewing section can be found at Mosholu Parkway North and Van Cortlandt Avenue East.

d'oeuvres at 6:30 p.m. in the Havana Café; and **Hip Hop Fever**, May 18 (tickets: \$45 to \$60; both at 8 p.m. For more information, call (718) 960-8833.

Events

Join the **Bronx River Flotilla** on May 18 (rain date June 1). For more information regarding time and to paddle at this fundraising event, call (718) 430-4602.

Assemblywoman Nathalia Fernandez holds **open house** for her new office at 2018 Williamsbridge Rd., May 11 from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Refreshments will be served. For more information and for required RSVP, call (718) 409-0109.

The 52nd Precinct holds **brunch** on May 24 from 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at Monroe College, 2501 Jerome Ave. Tickets are \$15. For more information, call Community Affairs at (718) 220-5824.

Community Board 7 holds **brunch for veterans** at Lehman College, 250 Bedford Pk. Blvd., W., May 17 from 10 a.m. to noon. For more information, call (718) 933-5650.

Wave Hill, a Bronx oasis at 675 W. 252nd St. in Riverdale, offers **Family Art Projects**: Restore and Re-story the Land, to tell your plant story, learn about land restoration, and create a story mobile of your favorite nature spot using natural materials and paper cut-outs, May 11 and 12; and BioBlitz Myths & Imaginary Species for Biodiversity Day, to find make-believe animals and plants that may just exist and create your own species using upcycled electronic parts and other recycled materials, May 18 and 19; 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 including tours and walks, call (718) 549-3200.

Exhibits

The Museum of Bronx History, 3266 Bainbridge Ave., presents exhibition, **The Bronx Goes to the Movies**, through Oct. 6. For more information, call (718) 881-8900.

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

The Museum of Bronx History, 3266 Bainbridge Ave. (208th Street), presents **A History of the Bronx Latino**, ongoing. Hours: Saturdays 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Sundays 1 to 5 p.m. For more information, call (718) 881-8900.

Library Events

Bronx Library Center, 310 E. Kingsbridge Rd., presents for children: **Art Thursdays at 4 p.m.**: (ages 5 to 12), arts & crafts, May 9, 16 and 23; **film**: (ages to 12 years), May 14 at 4 p.m.; **BLC Green Team**; (ages 5 to 12), to work on indoor greenhouse garden growing vegetables and flowers, May 15 at 4 p.m.; and **STEM Explorers**: (ages 5 to 12 years), for hands-on science experiment, May 17 at 4 p.m. Adults can attend: **Computer Basics**: May 14 at 2 p.m.; and **film**: "Marty," May 18 at 2:30 p.m. For more information, call (718) 579-4244/46/57 or visit www.nypl.org.

Mosholu Library, 285 E. 205th St., offers for children: **Crafty Fridays**: (ages 5 to 12), crafts, May 17 at 3 p.m.; **Toddler Storytime**: (ages 18 months to 3 years), interactive stories, action songs, fingerplays, and crafts, May 16, 20 and 23 at 11 a.m.; and **STEM: Kids Science**: (ages 5 to 12), Air/Gravity, May 14 and 21 at 3 p.m. Adults can enjoy: **film**: "Aquaman," May 18 at 1:30 p.m.; and **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: **film**: (ages 5 to 12), May 18 at 2 p.m. Adults can attend: **Computer Basics at noon**: May 16 and 23. For more information, call (718) 549-5200.

HAPPY MOTER'S DAY TO ALL OUR MOM READERS!

NOTE: Items for consideration may be mailed to our office or sent to norwoodnews@norwoodnews.org, and should be received by May 13 for the next publication date of May 23.

\$1M in PB Results Are...

(continued from page 1)

of time they have to wait for an MTA bus to arrive.

The announcement marks the resolution of the 11th Council District's Participatory Budgeting process, commonly called PB, which kicked off in July 2014. The practice, developed in Sao Paulo, Brazil in a bid to involve disenfranchised communities in the city budget and infrastructure development, first came to New York City in 2011.

The process goes back to the summer of 2018. Residents of the district attended public meetings and workshops over the course of several months, developing proposals for capital projects—meaning building or repairing physical infrastructure, such as roads, bridges, schools or parks—funded by their Council member's discretionary funds.

Council members are given a total of \$5 million in capital funds each year, offering residents to decide how 20 percent of those funds, or \$1 million, can be spent. Funding of these projects—which were ultimately reviewed by city agencies to determine their feasibility—will automatically be adopted in the Fiscal Year 2020 Budget.

In a way, the initiative also lifts the burden of crafting ideas from Council members, offering that chance to the public, who can offer a different kind of perspective. There was a total of 2,500 votes collected online and through regular, in-person voting that Cohen's office received. "It's not really so much the voting as the idea generation. If it's a good idea, I'm gonna find a way to do it," Cohen said.

Following a weeklong voting period, in which any resident of the district aged 11 and over can vote on their top five projects, 10 projects were proposed.

The proposed projects in the 11th Council District included school library upgrades in Kingsbridge and Spuyten Duyvil, improvements to the dog run at Seton Park, security cameras for PS 37 in Spuyten Duyvil, traffic calming and road safety measures in Woodlawn Heights, and street repaving and countdown clocks for buses throughout the district. The proposed project sites were concentrated largely in Riverdale, Spuyten Duyvil and Woodlawn.

But how did Woodlawn, a quiet

suburban-esque enclave in Cohen's district, manage to drum up the most support for such a project? The answer lay in old fashioned community organizing, according to Anne Barbano, a Woodlawn resident, who rounded up support for safety upgrades.

"I don't have young kids anymore, but there are lots of young moms in here," said Barbano. "The park is very busy and anything they could do to enhance it would be a great help."

The topic was discussed at the local civic group Woodlawn Taxpayers Association meeting, with signs posted across the neighborhood encouraging residents to vote at PS 19.

"[W]e really pushed it," said Barbano, adding that the neighborhood mobilized, competing with nearby Riverdale, also falling in the 11th Council District. The fear, according to Barbano, was that "Riverdale's going to get everything."

Time constraints often keep residents from taking part in the initiative. But it doesn't mean they don't have an opinion on community improvements. The *Norwood News* spoke to Norwood residents about what capital improvements they would have wanted to see had they been able to weigh in.

In Norwood, residents had their own ideas of what Participatory Budgeting funds can do for their neighborhood. One resident named Victor welcomed pothole repairs for the district, adding the area of Bainbridge Avenue and East Gun Hill Road, which underwent a massive sewer upgrade project that left the roadway in bad shape, is in need of repairs. "It messes with your car," Victor said.

Tarik Hamilton, 31, did not vote but wants to see funds earmarked for a youth center so "we could go play ball and exercise."

A youth center is on the mind of Danny Perez, 46, a Norwood resident, who hopes funds can go towards improving lighting conditions at Bronx Park, also known as French Charley's Park. "During the summertime, you don't want to be there with your kids. It's crazy down there. They need to fix that," said Perez, a Norwood resident since 1991.

Sha-Nia Alston contributed to this report



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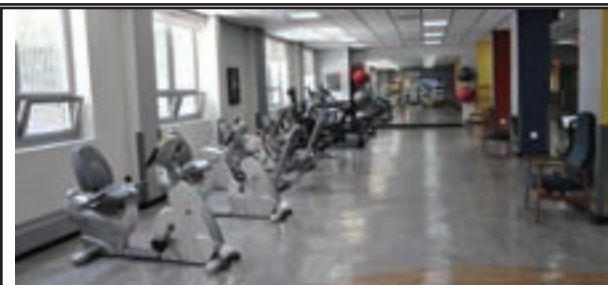
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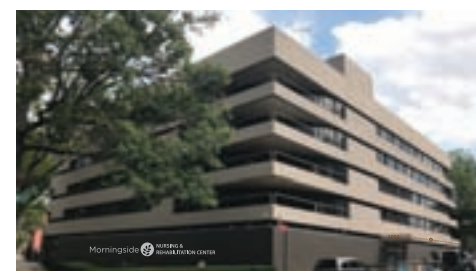
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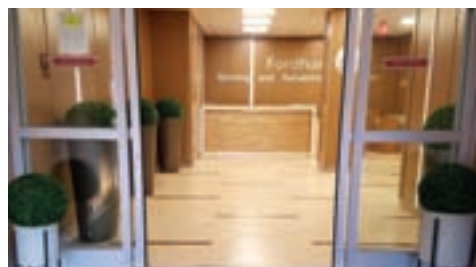
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