



NORWOOD NEWS

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107-YEAR-OLD JULIA BIZZARRI BEATS COVID

St. Patrick's Home Resident Survives Deadly Virus



Photo courtesy of The St. Patrick's Home Rehabilitation and Health Care Center
JULIA BIZZARRI, 107, born and raised in the Bronx and a lifelong Yankees fan, survived COVID-19 after contracting the virus in May 2020.

BY SÍLE MOLONEY

A week after Woodrow Wilson was sworn in as the 28th President of the United States, Julia Bizzarri was born in the Bronx on Mar. 13, 1913. In a curious twist of fate, in the same year that the now, 107-year-old has astonishingly shown COVID-19 who's boss, Wilson's name is to be removed from Princeton University buildings, one of a number of moves by age-old institutions to address the legacy of racism in the country.

Indeed, Bizzarri has lived through not just one civil rights movement, but what many are calling a second. Like others of her generation, she has also borne witness to World War I, Women's Suffrage, the Great Depression, World War II, the moon landing, the Vietnam War, 9/11, the Great Recession of 2008, 27 World Series wins by her beloved Yankees, and now, the coronavirus pandemic.

For the last ten years, Bizzarri has been a resident at The St. Patrick's Home Rehabilitation and Health Care Center in Van Cortlandt Village, where she contracted the coronavirus in May spending two weeks in quarantine. She soon fought it off, however, not to be outdone by fellow centenarian and resident, 105-year-old Annina Walsh who also beat the virus.

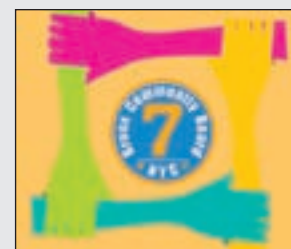
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NYS Primary Election: The Saga Continues

By Sile Moloney & José A. Giralt

On Apr. 27, 2020, citing concerns over the probable spread of the coronavirus, the New York State Board of Elections announced the cancellation of the State's presidential primary. The Sanders campaign released a statement the same day, describing the decision as an "outrage".

Bizarrely, the Board chose not to cancel the congressional, state and other special primary elections which were also planned for Jun. 23, even though these would have also required people to go out, intermingle, and vote.

Former City Council Speaker Melissa Mark Viverito told *Norwood News* in May that the confusion arising from the announced cancellation did not bode well for successful primary elections, with many voters believing *all* elections had been cancelled.

A subsequent court ruling reinstated the presidential primary and all elections duly went ahead on Jun. 23. The drama did not end there, however. After absentee or mail-in ballots were proposed as a way to avoid long voting lines, discussions ensued about whether a universal mail-in vote was actually legal under the State's constitution, since this option was usually reserved for the ill or the otherwise engaged.

This point was, apparently, resolved and Gov. Andrew Cuomo subsequently took an executive decision, and ordered the issuance of absentee voting applications to every eligible New York voter.

More problems emerged, however, when numerous residents reported to Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz that, although they had sent back their applications, their ballots had not arrived just days before the primaries were due to take place.

Dinowitz said that he contacted both UPS and the City's Board of Elections and that neither entity reported any delays or problems with the issuance of ballots. He has since called on the State legislature to pass legislation that will mandate the future use of ballot tracking technology for absentee ballots, as is already the case in some other states.



Photo by José A. Giralt

(L-R) MANUEL AND Sara Diaz take a selfie outside of PS 8 on Briggs Avenue after voting in the primary elections in the Bedford Park section of the Bronx on Tuesday, Jun. 23, 2020.

Onelection day, since in-person voting was also still allowed, indicative results became available that evening, though the final outcomes for all elections will not be known until all absentee ballots are tallied. According to the City's Board of Elections, this will not happen until, at least, one week after the primary date. As it stands right now, in the 81st assembly district race, Dinowitz himself has, so far, secured 59.81 percent of the vote.

In the 16th congressional district, it looks like there could be a shake-up. Incumbent Congressman Eliot Engel currently has secured just 35.7 per cent of total votes. Meanwhile, new challenger Jamaal Bowman stands with 61.6 percent of center tallies. During a hot mic moment at a press event on Jun. 2, Engel was overheard saying that he wouldn't care about speaking to the crowd in the wake of the June 1st riots on Fordham Road if elections had not been imminent. Some say this comment may have cost him his seat.

Meanwhile, in the hotly contested 15th congressional district race, City Councilman Ritchie Torres leads with 31.1 percent of the votes so far, followed by Assemblyman Michael Blake with 18.2 percent, City Councilman and favorite to win the race, Ruben Diaz Sr. with 15 percent, and new challenger, Samelys López, with 13.4 percent.

In the 14th congressional district race, incumbent Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez looks set to see off

a number of challengers and retain her seat, winning 72.9 percent of votes so far.

Meanwhile, State Sen. Alessandra Biaggi has won 85.22 percent of votes so far in the 34th senatorial district primary, while Luis R. Sepulveda has notched up 52.87 percent of votes in the 32nd senatorial district.

In the 78th assembly district, so far, José Rivera has won 83.38 percent of the vote, while in the 79th assembly district, Chantel Jackson is in the lead so far with 27.14 percent of votes.

Norwood News caught up with voters on election evening outside PS 280 in Norwood and PS 8 on Briggs Avenue in Bedford Park. Manuel Diaz, who voted at PS 8, made some last minute changes when it came to selecting his preferred candidate. Speaking in Spanish, he said, "It was very exciting for me to vote".

The majority of voters cited few to no problems with their voting experience. Most said that the process was quick, easy, and safe, and that mask-wearing and social distancing were in order for the most part.

Maisha Smith, who voted at PS 8, said, "There was a bit of confusion because I did the mail-in ballot, and I thought I had to drop it off".

However, she said the polling site staff told her that she had voided her mail-in ballot because she showed up in person, and therefore had to vote in person. She wanted to simply drop off her mail-in ballot in order to avoid standing in line with others [and risk infection] but in the end, she said she used one of the voting machines.

"There was a bit of a glitch," she said. "They said that I over-voted; I put in more votes than I did, and I was like, 'No I didn't'. I put exactly eight."

Smith said she had to do it over in the end, adding that usually she votes very quickly but that this time, it took a little longer than usual.

Smith said not everyone was wearing masks though most were and when it came to social distancing, she acknowledged that the venue was a small space but said she felt organizers could have made a little bit more effort to try to keep people apart.

She said the center did keep everyone "sort of distanced" for the most part. "There were still some areas between scanning-in your ballot and actually voting," she said. "There was a little bit of a cluster."

Public and Community Meetings

The next 52nd PRECINCT COMMUNITY COUNCIL ZOOM General Council Meeting will be held on Thursday, Jul. 9, 2020 at 6:00p.m. Meeting ID is 709 917 6132 followed by the # key. Password is 5n796x. Phone/Mobile Access Dial: +1 929 205 6099. Same Meeting ID. Password is 418670.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic hit in March, COMMUNITY BOARD 7 committee meetings have been held via ZOOM. There will be no meetings held in July or August due to the summer recess. The September meeting schedule will be released at the end of August.



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INQUIRING PHOTOGRAPHER

By DAVID GREENE



For this edition, after four months cooped up at home, we asked readers how they've been coping throughout the coronavirus pandemic, and how they are adapting to the "new normal" as we enter Phase III of the reopening plan.



"Actually, the new normal has been great for me. I'm the owner of a boutique in Harlem and a liquor brand owner, so for me I haven't had problems, except for having to close my doors and not have my regular clients come through. But because liquor is essential - we all love to drink - it's been a wonderful experience. I thank God that I went through it because I'm able to give a ministry after and say I went through it and this is how I came out of it."

Louis Johnson, Jr.
Harlem, N.Y.



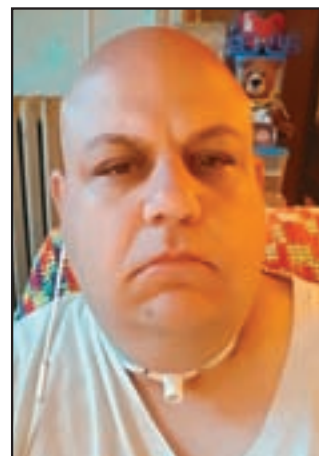
"Oh, it's been crazy, it's been a little up and a little down, but the best thing of it all is we are still here. The new normal came a little fast with stores opening up and more people out. In a way, yes, they opened too soon, but we can't stop what the system is saying. I hope the Yankees play again, because that's my team. I think slowly, eventually, they will come back. I hope they do because I love watching the games."

Delphine Sanders
Norwood



"It's been kind of crazy, I don't like it, I don't really believe this is real. I'm a (President) Trump supporter. I don't support everything he does but he's a good president - better choice than crooked Hillary [Clinton], or senile Joe [Biden]. This virus is just a means to control. I'm not saying the virus is not real, but it's not killing people like they say it is. I don't believe the mainstream media, the MSNBC. It's a lot of BS. I think they should stop censoring people on YouTube and let people provide information, and let the public decide for themselves."

Jessie Solomon
Fordham



"Life is hard, and I think it's going to get worse. Having a trachea in the age of the coronavirus - it's very hard. For me, it's been a day-to-day struggle not being able to go shopping because everything is closed, and it's hard to breathe. As for Yankee games, I see them playing games without the fans."

John Hand
Norwood



"Since I'm in a wheelchair for two years now and get few visits from family and friends, it seems like everyone is catching up to my level of isolation. The quarantine of all the nursing homes has prevented me from seeing my 89-year-old mother, and a half a dozen friends since mid-March. A book and internet reading program that I was planning to work for closed down permanently last month. I'm doing okay financially but even a short illness will knock me out financially."

Glen Leahey
Van Cortlandt Village



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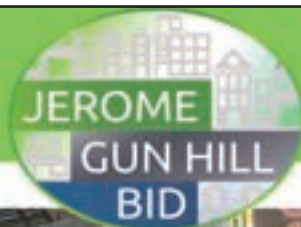


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Welcome Back Merchants!



Dawn Param, owner of Perfect Pose, is so excited to be seeing clients again! Call 718-515-1683 to book. Hair salons and barber shops along the BID have happily opened their doors this past week. Pop in for a fresh new look!

Popular family owned lunch spot, Marconi's, has started offering outdoor seating! Grab a slice and sit outside at 181 E Gun Hill Road.



Maiga Sport Gift Shop reopened to customers after almost four months of closure. Maiga is thrilled to be seeing customers again in his store! He has a huge stock of affordable masks and face coverings at 254 E Gun Hill Road.

NEWS BRIEFS

Clean-Up at 205th Street Subway

An extensive, industrial-style, subway clean-up is underway at Norwood's 205th Street subway station. A professional team of about ten cleaners, suited in protective equipment and masks, began a major clean-up of the station on Jun. 29, and will later move to other stations. The workers were seen getting into all the nooks and crannies in the ceiling and along the walls and stairs using a power spray and various chemical agents. "Just trying to keep everyone safe," one worker said.

Three-Year-Old Hit With Fireworks

CBS News reported that on Wednesday, Jun 24, at around 12.30 a.m., a three-year-old boy was hit by fireworks while watching with his siblings from the window of a sixth-floor building on Anderson Avenue in Highbridge. The child suffered burns to his arm and was brought to hospital where he received five stitches. The FDNY has warned that amateur use of fireworks can lead to serious injury and even death, and that half of all injuries from fireworks involve children of 14 years of age and younger. Possessing, using or exploding fireworks is a criminal misdemeanor in New York City.

NYPL Virtual Summer Camp

The New York Public Library six-week, virtual summer camp program kicked off on Jun. 29 and will continue until Aug. 7. Every week, kids and students of all ages, and their families, can find fun, hands-on activities that promote learning, reading, and creativity, all of which can be done from home. Activities will be posted five days a week and will also be accessible on weekends.

The link to the website is nypl.org/summerreading.

Occupy City Hall: Protestors Change Tack

By David Greene

A growing "Occupy City Hall" movement has gathered momentum after a month of almost daily Black Lives Matter protests throughout New York City and the world following the death of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police on Mar. 25, 2020.

Despite a series of recently passed State and City legislation addressing police reform, including the banning of chokeholds and the disclosure of police misconduct records, and further federal legislation in the pipeline, several hundred protestors have been camping outside City Hall in lower Manhattan in recent weeks, while inside officials worked on re-adjusting the NYPD's \$6 billion budget.

Protesters are calling for, at least, \$1 billion of the budget to be diverted to social services like affordable housing, healthcare and education. A similar approach was taken during the "Occupy Wall Street" protests from September until November 2011, with protestors at that time refusing to leave Zuccotti Park, and calling out the reckless behavior of the Financial Services sector which led to the



Photo courtesy of Walter Pofeldt

SEVERAL HUNDRED PROTESTERS camp out in City Hall Park in lower Manhattan on Thursday, Jun. 25, 2020. They are calling for the defunding of the NYPD.

2008 recession. Police physically removed the Occupy Wall Street protestors from the park on November 11, 2011. On Jun. 29, The New York Times reported that the City Council would vote on Jun. 30, on a newly agreed budget which would cut the NYPD budget by the proposed \$1 billion. According to the report, and three council

members familiar with the revised budget, among other measures, this would involve cancelling the planned hiring of 1,163 police officers. In addition, school safety officers, who currently fall under the remit of the NYPD would fall under the Department of Education, going forward. The vote passed.

NYPD Counter-Protest in Morris Park

A counter-protest in support of the NYPD was held in Loreto Park in the Morris Park section of the Bronx on Jun. 30. A flyer on social media advertising the event read that the event was a rally in support of the women and men of law enforcement who continue to honor the badge and keep their oath to protect. About 200 pro-NYPD protestors showed up, as did about 25 anti-police protestors. One protestor was punched in the head but didn't see who did it.

Failing "Open Streets" Policy

A Norwood resident has complained that designated "safe street" areas under the City's Open Streets initiative are not being adequately cornered off, and that barriers are frequently knocked over or in a poor state of repair with weeds growing out of them. She cited Holt Place as an example. The resident contacted Council-

man Andrew Cohen's office, the 52nd precinct, and the City Parks' department to ask that the street barriers be placed every morning and throughout the day, saying she has seen police passing collapsed barriers without putting them back. She called for the wooden barriers to be replaced with metal ones, as seen in other City districts, but was told that was not NYPD policy, and that wooden barriers had to be used.

Poe Park Greenmarket Opens

Poe Park Greenmarket opened for the summer season on Tuesday, Jun. 30, with Emil Alum-moiti, the market manager, saying, "It will be a great opportunity for community members to shop for the freshest, locally grown produce in their own neighborhood". Community members can use SNAP/EBT benefits at the market, including the new P-EBT program. For every \$5 spent using an EBT card, the person will

receive an extra \$2 Health Bucks coupon to spend on more fruits and vegetables. Greenmarkets fall under the GrowNYC initiative which aims to improve the City's quality of life through environmental programs that transform communities block by block.

HUD Awards \$40.8 million For Fair Housing

On Jun. 30, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) awarded \$40.8 million to support dozens of fair housing organizations working to help end housing discrimination. These funds are provided through the Department's Fair Housing Initiatives Program (FHIP) both to help people who believe they have been victims of housing discrimination, and to educate housing providers about fair housing laws. Persons who believe they may have experienced discrimination may file a complaint by contacting HUD's Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity at (800)

669-9777 (voice) or (800) 927-9275 (TTY).

CUNY Layoffs begin, despite \$132m Federal Stimulus

CUNY is pre-emptively cutting adjunct faculty despite getting \$132 million in CARES Act money, with 422 CUNY adjuncts also set to lose their health insurance because of layoffs or lost course assignments, four times as many as in a normal year. The CARES Act requires colleges receiving a COVID-19 stimulus to make every effort to keep employees on payroll. Almost 20 percent of the adjuncts who get health insurance through CUNY are affected, which means the total number of layoffs starting on Jun. 30 could be in the thousands, leading to significantly reduced course offerings for CUNY students. The adjuncts' union has offered proposals to protect adjuncts' health insurance, but said CUNY management has not engaged seriously with the proposals.

CRIME FILE

BY SÍLE MOLONEY



17-Year-Old Shot, Dies

On Jun. 28, 2020, around midnight, police responded to a 911 call of a man shot in front of 1735 Davidson Avenue, in Morris Heights. Upon arrival, officers observed a 17-year-old male with a gunshot wound to the neck. EMS responded to the location and transported the victim to Saint Barnabas Hospital, where he was pronounced deceased. There are no arrests and the investigation remains ongoing. The deceased has been identified as Brandon Hendricks of Park Avenue, Bronx.

is currently no perpetrator description at this time. The victim was removed to Saint Barnabas Hospital by EMS. She is not likely to die and is in a stable condition. Two shell casings were recovered from the area, and the investigation is ongoing.

21-Year-Old Stabbed, Died

On Jun. 26, 2020 at around 8:00 p.m., police responded to a 911 call of an assault-in-progress, coupled with a motor vehicle collision at the intersection of Fairmount Place and Crotona Avenue, in the Crotona section of the Bronx. Upon arrival, officers observed a 21-year-old man with a stab wound to the chest. EMS responded to the location and transported the victim to Saint Barnabas Hospital where he was pronounced deceased. There are no arrests and the investigation remains ongoing. The deceased has been identified as Jeremiah Russel-Hamilton of Lafontaine

Avenue, Bronx.

17 Officers Charged, following Layleen Polanco Death Investigation

On Jun. 26, 2020, Mayor Bill de Blasio announced that 17 uniformed Department of Correction staff will be charged for their conduct surrounding the death of 27-year-old, Layleen Polanco, at Rikers Island in June 2019. This comes as Bronx District Attorney Darcel Clark filed no charges following a six-month investigation by her office into the circumstances surrounding Polanco's death. Polanco was arrested for allegedly assaulting a cab driver and for possession of a controlled substance, and was being held at Rikers Island on a \$500 bail. She died on Jun. 7, 2019 following an epileptic seizure, according to a medical examiner. She had been placed in solitary confinement at the time of her death. Her family and other advocates are calling for an end to

solitary confinement.

Suspect in Morning Attempted Rape Arrested

Police confirm that pursuant to an ongoing investigation, Michael Rosa, 25, of Melrose, the Bronx was arrested and charged with attempted rape, strangulation, and other charges following an incident on Jun. 26, at around 8:00 a.m. at 3345 Reservoir Oval West, in Norwood. A 27-year-old female victim was entering the residential building when Rosa allegedly grabbed her and pulled her into the lobby. He then, allegedly, threw her to the floor, punched her repeatedly in the face, and tried to remove her clothing. The victim screamed and fought off the attack, sustaining multiple bruises to the face and arms. She was removed to an area hospital in a stable condition.

26 Alleged Trinitarios Indicted for Multiple Stabbings

On Jun. 25, 2020, 26 alleged Trinitario gang members, who are current or former Rikers Island inmates, were indicted for multiple stabbings, and other acts of violence in jail. The defendants allegedly carried out a total of 14 violent acts in the jail between Sep. 2015 and Jul. 2019. Half of those incidents were against rival gang members, and half against fellow Trinitarios who allegedly broke gang rules and were not in good standing with other gang members. Out of the 14 incidents, 12 were slashings and stabbings. Some victims suffered deep lacerations, and one lost a vast amount of blood. The defendants allegedly conspired through various forms of communication, including phone calls and letters, and by using coded language.



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Bronx Toastmasters Club of Riverdale: The Art of Communication

By Auréole Ribes

The word of the day announced over Zoom chat at the most recent Bronx Toastmasters Club of Riverdale, was “polyvalent” which means “having different functions, forms or facets”. There is hardly a better word to describe the club.

Toastmasters International is a non-profit, educational organization that teaches public speaking and leadership skills through a worldwide network of clubs. Bronx Toastmasters Club of Riverdale is one of them.

While each toastmasters club differs in style, the meeting format remains broadly the same. A few of the members present speeches that have been prepared in advance, while others are assigned the role of evaluating their colleagues’ speeches by providing constructive feedback.

Then, there are other members who participate in what’s

called the “Table Topics” section of the meeting. The aim of this section of the meeting is to help members think on their feet by developing impromptu speaking skills. This is done by assigning particular topics to random club members on which they must speak for about two minutes, without having any prior knowledge of what the topic will be.

At each meeting, one member acts as grammarian, tracking any grammatical errors which are highlighted at the end of each meeting, and another member times the various speakers and evaluators.

During the last meeting, one member gave a speech about her brother who, when he listens to James Brown’s music, dances too hard and ends up splitting his pants in half. Another member spoke about the complicated dichotomy of protocol and diplomacy.

As the meeting was vir-

tual, after each person spoke, members shook their hands in front of their cameras in applause. Indeed, throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the club has persevered, uplifting and informing its members in the process.

In fact, Adam Cole, the club’s new president, is pleasantly surprised by the positive effect Zoom has had on regular meetings. “We’ve been able to attend meetings in other parts of the country and other parts of the world,” he said.

Dunstanette Macauley affirms this, saying she’s attended meetings hosted by clubs in New Zealand, Scotland, Jacksonville, Los Angeles, Haiti and Jamaica. Similarly, toastmasters from other clubs around the world have joined the Riverdale club meetings via Zoom also.

Though the members love Toastmasters, they say it is nerve wracking to learn how to give speeches because it requires being vulnerable in

front of a group of strangers. Cole said after first hearing about Toastmasters, he waited for a while before trying it. “It took me a couple of years to build up the courage to actually contact the club, then go to a meeting,” he said.

Another club member, Alicia Wyatt, said she struggled with speaking up during meetings at her workplace. “I’m Jamaican,” she said. “You’re often taught as a child not to speak until spoken to. Because no one directly spoke to me [at work], I didn’t speak up.” Wyatt said she joined Toastmasters after her first meeting when she attended as a guest and has been a member for three years now.

Everyone’s first speech at Toastmasters is called an icebreaker, a speech in which members share something unique about themselves, as opposed to showcasing their knowledge. Wyatt laughed as she recalled her icebreaker, which she described as an anx-

iety-inducing experience.

While advanced speakers learn to speak in public without too many notes, Wyatt said, for her icebreaker, she simply read an essay aloud verbatim. “I not only held it in my hand, but you could see the paper moving as I was reading it because I was nervous,” she said. “I was trembling.” Since then, Wyatt said that the meetings have helped her both at work, and in her interpersonal relationships with her two daughters. “I have these really good, thoughtful conversations with them and it’s because of Toastmasters,” she said.

The next meeting of Bronx Toastmasters Club of Riverdale will be held via Zoom Video Conferencing on Wednesday Jul. 8 at 7:30 p.m. Eastern Time. Guests are encouraged to join, but are asked to RSVP to BronxToastmastersClub@gmail.com beforehand. For more information about the club, visit their [site](#).

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Bronx CB7 Prepares for Budget Cuts

By José A. Giralt & Síle Moloney

Over the past few months, most New Yorkers have focused their attention on the public health aspects of the coronavirus. Now that all indicators show a downward trend, and the spread of the virus is relatively controlled, elected officials and community leaders are facing hard decisions on budgets for public services.

From Albany to City Hall to all 59 City community boards, officials are being asked to slash previously agreed budgets due to reduced revenue sources like sales taxes. Locally, Bronx Community Board 7 (CB7) is assessing what adjustments may need to be made to its budget.

In May, at the Board's Budget, Personnel and

Ethics Committee meeting, officials from the City planning department (DCP) forewarned members to prepare for significant budget changes, since the City was and still is experiencing a major drop in revenue.

At that point, DCP was still inviting input from community boards to determine where cuts could be made with the least amount of disruption. Jorge Hernandez, a program manager at DCP said, "Community boards help influence and drive the City's budget and a community's input is a key component".

For the 2020 Fiscal Year, community boards across the City received a \$42,500 increase to their annual budgets, thanks to efforts led by Councilman Fernando Cabrera.

This increase was added to the baseline budget of \$288,000 that all community boards receive. Out of the larger amount, boards are expected to pay employee salaries, rent, and daily operational expenses. The increase was to be used for non-salary expenses such as events and equipment.

Indeed, Bronx CB7 had been looking into upgrading some of the technology it uses to connect with the community, like new laptops and iPads. District Manager Ischia Bravo acknowledged that this may no longer be possible. "The iPads, that's wishful thinking," she said. "I don't know if that's going to happen because we're still waiting for the government rep to respond to us."

This appeared to suggest that there might be

a potential reversal of the recent \$42,500 budget increase. *Norwood News* reached out to Bronx CB7 since the May committee meeting to ask if the board had yet decided where cuts might be likely. Bravo replied, "It is safe to say we will have further discussions in September". The board held its last board meeting at the end of June and is now on summer recess until September.

Meanwhile, at the City level, Mayor Bill de Blasio projected that the City would lose \$9 billion in tax revenue over the next two years as a result of the shutdown. He had already scaled back the City's February budget projection of \$95 billion to \$89 billion in April. It was subsequently reduced to \$87 billion, and the mayor had been looking at more ways to pare it down by another \$1 billion,

with talks of 22,000 possible employee furloughs and layoffs.

Finally, on Jun. 29, the mayor announced the final budget would amount to \$88.1 billion, including projected labor savings of \$1 billion. He said he would work with the City's labor unions on ways to arrive at those savings.

Finally, on Jun. 30, the mayor announced the City had already asked for a federal stimulus in order to meet the budget deficit, as well as a loan from Albany but that neither were forthcoming. He said the City would continue to push for both but that if, by October, they were still not forthcoming, layoffs would be inevitable.

In terms of budget priorities, it was announced that the NYC Care program, covering healthcare would be expanded along with the

food security program. Youth summer programming will receive an investment of \$115 million, and another \$116 million will go to education. Social and family services will receive \$134 million in the communities hit hardest by the coronavirus.

Following calls from Black Lives Matter protestors and supporters to defund the police, \$1 billion will be shifted from the NYPD budget by canceling recruitment programs (an estimated 1,163 police officers), reassigning staff from administrative to patrolling duties, ceding certain functions to other agencies, and reducing overtime. This fell short of what protestors had been calling for but the budget was approved nonetheless when voted on by the City Council on the evening

(continued on page 19)

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East 149th Street Bus Project

By Sile Moloney

Phase III of the City's reopening plan is set to commence on Monday, Jul. 6, incorporating indoor dining, and personal care services like manicuring and tattooing. In June, Mayor Bill de Blasio announced nine major bus lane projects in preparation for reopening, including one major bus project along the 149th Street corridor in the Bronx.

The projects aim to increase bus speeds, safety and reliability, and address concerns over the growth in vehicular traffic, potentially caused by people choosing to drive rather than use public transport due to COVID-19 concerns.

After successful pilot bus programs were implemented in other parts of the City, a new bus lane serving critical transit connections along 149th Street in the Bronx is now planned.

"As New Yorkers head back to work, they'll be relying on the bus more than ever, and I'm proud to offer them faster and more reliable options," said de Blasio earlier this month at the launch of the project.

The 149th Street corridor incorporates four bus routes, the Bx2, Bx4, Bx17 and Bx19, catering to 55,000 daily riders. These bus routes serve vital connections to ten subway lines 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, A, B, C and D, as well as to The Hub, Lincoln Medical Center and Hostos Community College.

As part of the East 149th Street project, which began in early June, DOT will implement offset bus lanes for most of the 2.7-mile corridor from Southern Boulevard to River Avenue.

An offset bus lane is a travel lane for buses one lane away from the curb. This makes parking or standing at the curb still possible. Double parking, or stopping of any kind, is not permitted in an offset bus lane. Meanwhile, a curbside bus lane is a travel lane for buses at the curb. Parking and standing at the curb are not permitted during the hours the bus lane is in effect.

The key issues which emerged following analysis of the bus routes were slow bus speeds, high traffic volumes between Exterior Street and Grand Concourse, double parking, weaving and merging of traffic.

In terms of current bus speeds within the Bronx Community Board

4 district, buses on East 149th Street move at walking speed or slower with eastbound traffic moving at an average speed of 3.3 miles per hour from Exterior Street to Grand Concourse between 6:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m., and westbound traffic traveling at an average speed of 2.9 miles per hour from Grand Concourse to Gerard Avenue between 6:00 a.m. and 6 p.m. It is this bottleneck that causes back-ups across the entire route.

Other factors identified were that each traffic direction has two travel lanes and one parking lane so buses tend to get stuck in heavy traffic at all times of the day, causing delays and resulting in two to three buses arriving at the same time. This was also hampering the flow of emergency response vehicles.

Among the measures undertaken as part of the overall bus project, in addition to the new bus lane, will be the widening of certain streets along the route.

DOT Commissioner Polly Trottenberg said, "As New York City emerges from the difficult days of COVID-19, our commitment to faster and more reliable bus service has never been more important, as buses serve a critical role, both in communities hit hard from the pandemic, and by essential front-line workers".

She added, "We are proud to undertake transformational work on some of the busiest bus corridors in the city, including 149th Street in the Bronx. We look forward to working with our partners at the MTA to get these transformational changes finished this year."

With most of the bus projects slated for other City boroughs, *Norwood News* asked the mayor's office for a comment, given that the Bronx is one of the least-connected boroughs especially when it comes to east-west subway connectivity.

A representative from the Mayor's office said the 149th Street bus project is a major step in making the Bronx better connected.

He added that the mayor hopes to expand the program even further soon, and that even though it's just one project, the 2.7-mile stretch that is being added in the Bronx represents more mileage than what's being added in Brooklyn or Manhattan.



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Norwood Neighbors Against Racism Call to Defund the Police

By Sile Moloney

Following a historic week of legislative reform aimed at addressing racial injustice and inequality at both City and State level, a group of about 50 local residents gathered peacefully at Williamsbridge Oval Park in Norwood on Friday Jun. 19 for a kid-friendly Juneteenth celebration in support of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Norwood Neighbors for Racial Justice and allies is an unofficial, local group recently formed and spearheaded by four local, multiracial women, Miriam Neptune, Jatnna Ramirez, Carissa Smith and Pam Sporn.

In addition to organizing the Juneteenth event, the first of its kind in Norwood, the group also penned an open letter dated Jun. 26 to New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio, City Council Speaker Corey Johnson, and local Councilman Andrew Cohen to make three



Photo by Sile Moloney

JATNNA RAMIREZ SPEAKS during a Black Lives Matter event at Williamsburg Oval Park in the Norwood section of the Bronx, to coincide with the celebration of Juneteenth on Jun. 19, 2020. Ramirez is one of four local women who organized the event.

demands with regard to the NYPD budget.

The letter calls for the defunding of the NYPD by at least \$1 billion, more transparency,

in general, when it comes to annual NYPD budget planning, and the blocking of any new police-related initiatives in relation to the 2021 budget.

During the Juneteenth event, each of the four women took turns to address the crowd, while about twenty kids, together with adults of all

ages, colored in large lettering along the pavement at the west entrance of the park to spell out the words, “Black Lives Matter”. A sign-up sheet was also available for anyone who wanted to take a more active role in the group by writing to legislators and calling for further reform.

Ramirez, whose family is from the Dominican Republic, attended the event with her daughter and said the group wanted to come together to celebrate Juneteenth but also to demand that justice be served in the community, and to hear from community members.

Overall, she considered the event a success. “I’m really happy that people came out,” she said. “It’s important for organizing to happen at the local community level, really grassroots where people can see a presence, when people can see that it’s not only happening

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downtown, but it's happening here in the Bronx, in this community that is mostly Black and brown people, mostly working class people. I think it's a beautiful day."

Ramirez said it was also nice to create a community space for kids to raise their voices and for them to understand and conceptualize what's happening around them, and participate in this moment in history. "Some of it may get lost with all the chalk and the painting," she said when asked if she thought they were fully taking it all in.

"Some of them I saw were writing actual names, so not just coloring in the letters but also writing names of people who have been killed by the police. I think that's also another reason why it's important." Because of the police response to protests, Ramirez said a lot of events had become unsafe. She said that in her opinion this was mostly because of the way the police reacted, and was not necessarily the fault of protestors.

Earlier that week, statewide virtual hearings commenced to investigate interactions between police and protestors at recent Black Lives Matter rallies.

For its part, the NYPD said the agency took swift action in acknowledging where there had been inappropriate conduct by officers in the handling of some protests, but they also said that in some cases, they had been attacked and provoked, and that some videos circulating on social media only told half the story.

They also said there was evidence that some protests had been infiltrated by rioters from out of state who had sought and planned to wreak havoc and cause trouble, and it was this intelligence that, in some cases, determined their approach to policing the protests, including the wearing of riot gear.

At various points during the June-teenth celebration, Ramirez led the "Black Lives Matter" chant and encouraged those present to also take the mic and share with the crowd why they were in attendance.

"So many times, we are crying because Black lives are dying," Ramirez said, addressing the crowd. "We wanted to celebrate Black life, celebrate Black resilience, plus Black Power, Black beauty, Black unity, Black community, Black culture - to say that Black is beautiful, and that we appreciate every single Black life that we have in our lives, and in our world."

Norwood News has reached out to the mayor, the city council speaker and the councilman for comment regarding the demands outlined in the Jun. 26 letter.

Cohen is supportive of a review of the NYPD budget. "As we weigh difficult cuts to nearly every city agency, the NYPD must be expected to take on an equitable share of cuts," he said in a June 16th statement. "This means working aggressively to substantially cut spending by shifting responsibilities away from the NYPD, reining in excessive overtime pay, and identifying savings wherever possible. It requires moving away from the current concept of policing and shrinking the role of the NYPD by redistributing responsibilities that they are neither the appropriate agency nor the best equipped to handle."

The City Council voted in favor of the new budget on Jun. 30, and will cut the NYPD budget by \$1 billion, but protestors say this is not a true cut but merely creative accounting. According to sources familiar with the new plan, for which no documents are yet available, this will involve canceling the planned hiring of 1,163 police officers. In addition, school safety officers, who currently fall under the remit of the NYPD will be transferred to the Education department's budget, going forward.

Ramirez said the community doesn't need more police. "We don't need more cops in our schools. We don't need the cops over policing our communities," she said, adding that way before the killing of George Floyd, Black and brown communities were in crisis and that what was needed was quality health care, among other things. "We want more schools. We want more counselors. We want more parks. We want clean air."

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Black, Brown, and Blue in the Bronx: Stories of Pain, Profiling, and Measured Promise

By JOSÉ A. GIRALT

familiar in the Bronx.

The following article is a two-part feature story on the Black Lives Matter protests.

Part I

The following stories are all too

On a summer afternoon in July 2016, a man saw a tense situation unfolding between NYPD officers and three people at Morris Houses in Claremont Village. One woman was cuffed, and the arguing escalated. The

man thought he could help diffuse the situation, but in an instant, he was thrown against a gate by an officer who later defended his action by saying he felt the sergeant at the scene needed to be protected.

The peacemaker that day

was Black, and a State lawmaker, Assemblyman Michael Blake. When a police captain recognized Blake as an elected official, the officer backed off and apologized.

Not all interactions between law enforcement and people of color end in death, or in broken bones. The success of the Black Lives Matter movement has been in spotlighting the scars left on society from excessive police force that sometimes characterizes such interactions.

Since the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis on May 25, protesters have flooded the streets of large cities and small towns in this country and in others to bring attention to brutal police tactics that have long traumatized communities of color. Residents of the Bronx have known the pain caused by these tactics for decades.

In a borough where 56.4 percent of the population is Latinx and 28.9 percent is African American, interactions between the NYPD and the lo-

cal communities can be fraught with suspicion and fear. While a racial breakdown of the NYPD per borough is unavailable, according to a 2019 report, the majority of the department, 52.6 percent, is made up of Black, Hispanic and Asian uniformed officers.

Last October in Norwood, Allan Feliz, 31, a resident of Yonkers, was pulled over by Police Officer Edward Barrett, Sgt. Jonathan Rivera and Officer Michelle Almanzar because they believed he was not wearing a seatbelt. NYPD bodycam footage reveals initial, friendly banter between Feliz and the officers from the 52nd precinct. It transpires Feliz was wearing a seatbelt.

The situation quickly escalates when Feliz gets back into his car, and he is tased repeatedly by Sgt. Jonathan Rivera from the passenger side of the vehicle. Rivera is heard saying, "Yo bro! I'm gonna [expletive] shoot you!"

According to NYPD Chief of
(continued on next page)



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Police, Terence Monahan, the officers involved felt their lives were in danger. "This violent struggle between [Feliz] and the officers lasted approximately one and a half minutes before the shot was fired. At this time, the sergeant fired one round from his service weapon striking the male in the chest," Monahan said, at a press briefing following the fatal shooting. Feliz later died at St. Barnabas Hospital.

New York State allows law enforcement officers to use their service weapon if they believe a vehicle poses "an imminent threat of deadly physical force". A check of Feliz's license showed he had, at least, three outstanding arrest warrants.

The officers involved in the Feliz shooting said they felt an imminent threat to their lives, with Feliz back inside his car. On the other hand, Bronx residents wonder how an unarmed person dies in police custody from a traffic violation.

Feliz's brother, Sammy, still asks why his brother had to die



Photo by José A. Giralt

(L-R) STATE SENATOR Jamaal T. Bailey, Assemblywoman Nathalia Fernandez, and Assemblyman Michael Blake, at a joint press conference announcing the passage of criminal justice and police reform bills at Joyce Kilmer Park in the Bronx on June 17, 2020. "It took too long for us to get here but people turn pain into promise because of that." Assemblyman Michael Blake

following a traffic stop. "My brother and me were aware that racial profiling existed but we had respect for the police, not fear," Sammy replied in an interview with *Norwood News*.

Feliz had served time in federal prison for a burglary con-

viction, but his brother said that should not have any bearing on how police interact with community members. "My brother paid his debt to society. We're asking them [the police] to protect us, not beat us and brutalize and kill us."

On Jun. 10, the family filed a lawsuit against the City of New York and the police officers involved for \$100 million in compensatory damages and \$250 million in punitive damages. They are claiming false arrest, illegal search and seizure, use

of excessive force during the arrest process, and assault. The family further accuses the police officers involved in the shooting of engaging "in the practice of racial profiling" since "at least, 2010." Their case is part of a class action suit against the NYPD by various Bronx residents.

Feliz's family hired Robert Vilensky to represent them. "[I remember] there was a camaraderie between the public and police in my day," Vilensky said. "I'm 64-years-old and grew up in the City of New York, [but now] all the interactions between police and Black and Latino communities seem to be bad."

Rather than only seeing the downside of successive lawsuits against the police, Vilensky said he believes there is an opportunity for law enforcement to listen to what communities of color are expressing with these various legal actions. "If they [law enforcement] had a better relationship with the community it would benefit them. It would make their work safer," he said.

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PS/MS 95: The Many Faces Behind Remote Learning

By the Staff of PS/MS 95

Like all schools in New York City, PS/MS 95, in Van Cortlandt Village, was required to enter the world of “remote learning” when the state-wide PAUSE order went into effect in March. Having lived and worked through the experience, as the school year ends, the teachers, administrators and staff reflect on what has been a hectic but inspiring time.

In retrospect, they can now say that they were well set up to work remotely thanks to the vision of Principal Serge Marshall Davis. Educators had already been trained on various computer platforms and software, and many were, and still are, highly skilled in this regard.

The students, from kindergarten through eighth grade, also had experience in computer literacy with technology like i-Ready, coding and Google Classroom integrated into the curriculum.

Social worker, Josie Parashis worked with students and families to provide support in developing self-confidence in the students’ abilities to succeed by learning coping skills, managing transitions and adapting to changing situations and responsibilities.

Middle school teacher, Kevin McMahon, said that in addressing the remote learning challenge, the school chose the technology that worked best

for the students and they then followed the regular curriculum with teachers going live every day, and McMahon sometimes taking the students on virtual field trips.

Elementary school computer teacher, Amanda Barelli, chose live instruction as the best way to organically interact with the kids, and found this worked best especially for struggling students.

Parent coordinator, Katherine Luis, used extensive computer and phone contact with parents for academic, emotional and wellness assistance, as well as for community building; hosting meetings, forums, and virtual events for parents, students and other team support groups in conjunction with administrators.

Parent, Donaji Sarabia, said that for children, the stressful component of remote learning was the requirement to sit at a computer for hours at a time. However, she said families had patience and adapted accordingly.

As for the students, on the whole, they missed school! Fifth grade student, Sidratul Choudhury, said although she preferred being physically at school, she managed to understand and follow her work very well through remote learning. “My school and I are doing amazing” she said, adding that every morning the teachers motivated the students by cheering them on through lively videos. “We’ve got you!” they told the students.

107-Year-Old Julia Bizzarri beats COVID-19

(continued from page 1)

zzarri in 2018, as a then-sprightly 105-year-old, she said, "I can't believe I am this old. I give thanks to God for living this long".

One of eight children, she grew up so close to the old Yankees stadium, she was able to watch the team's home games from her window. In fact, the New York Highlanders were renamed the New York Yankees the year she was born. Her parents, both Italian immigrants, lived in the Bronx until they died, with Bizzarri acting as primary caregiver to her late mother, and later caring for some of her siblings as well.

In former years, Bizzarri worked in the newspaper printing business before later becoming an office worker. She is a devout Catholic and had been attending daily mass in the hospital chapel until March of this year when social distancing restrictions took over. She now watches prayer service on her television each day.

Since 2002, every third Tuesday in June, St. Patrick's has hosted its annual, joint Centennial Celebration to honor residents who have reached or surpassed the centennial milestone. Usually, there are streamers, balloons, family visits, dancing, and lively renditions of 'How Great Thou Art' and 'God Bless America'.

Last year, one resident was even seen pushing her wheelchair along with her feet, both hands already occupied with two cups of wine. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, this year the festivities were a little bit more low-key, and were held virtually with residents tuning in to watch various staff presentations from their rooms through a live connection to the hospital chapel.

Though visitors were not allowed, there was cake, sparkling cider, streamers, decorations, and virtual games. Residents have been unable to go outside since March but are connecting with family through Skype, FaceTime, Zoom, and Messenger.

The irony of surviving, at 107, a disease that has decimated nursing homes, in particular, throughout the world is not lost on anyone, and is most certainly something to sing and dance about.

A recent report by The New York Times shows that almost half (43 percent) of all coronavirus deaths in the U.S. were linked to nursing homes, with at least 54,000 residents and workers dying from the deadly virus.

In New York State alone, across 509 facilities, there were 7,177 cases, 6,432 deaths, accounting for 21% of all deaths in the state. As the virus continues to spread and has now claimed almost half a million lives globally, State officials are this week on-site at St. Patrick's to audit their operations.

But not only has Bizzarri survived the deadly virus, at 107, she is St. Patrick's oldest, beloved resident, and is one of 12 centenarians for a number of years now. Two of the twelve who were celebrated during last year's festivities have sadly died in the meantime, though not from the coronavirus. Meanwhile, two other residents have since reached the 100-year milestone.

Bizzarri remains something of a celebrity at St. Patrick's. Janet Kibassa is Director of Recreation and Volunteer Services there and said of her, "Julia always has a smile for everyone who greets her," adding that she always takes great pride in her appearance, and is still very stylish to this day.

In addition to the Yankees, Bizzarri's other love is the homemade wine she and her siblings regularly enjoyed throughout their lives together. "It was the best," she said in 2018. "Nothing tasted like it." When asked this year what has contributed to her longevity, Bizzarri replied, "a glass of wine, and Blackberry Brandy, and I never got married".

St. Patrick's home is open to accepting donations which are used to purchase prizes for residents during game days.

Bronx CB7 Prepares for Budget Cuts

(continued from page 12)

of Jun. 30. According to sources familiar with the new budget plan, for which no official documents are yet available, school safety officers will no longer fall under the remit of the NYPD and will be transferred to the Education department's budget. Protestors say this amounts to mere creative accounting. Two protestors were arrested on Jul. 1 following the vote announcement.

Back in the Bronx, different CB7 members appeared to have different views and expectations on the severity of the anticipated budget cuts. DCP warned that the board would have to reassess what the most pressing issues were in the local neighborhoods and present a compelling argument for future funding.

In view of these warnings, CB7 member Betty Arce, wondered how the budget approval process might affect board decisions. "We're going to be facing real severe cuts," she said. "There's no doubt that we're not going to get a lot of the things we want, so we have to be very strategic about what we must advocate for, and we need to do that as a board."

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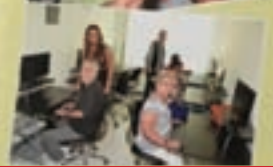
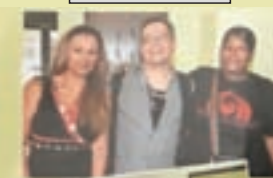


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