



NORWOOD NEWS

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CHIEF NILDA HOFMANN, THE BEST OF BLUE



Photo courtesy of Nilda Irizarry Hofmann

CHIEF NILDA IRIZARRY Hofmann, at the start and at the end of her 30 years of service with the NYPD.

By **SÍLE MOLONEY**

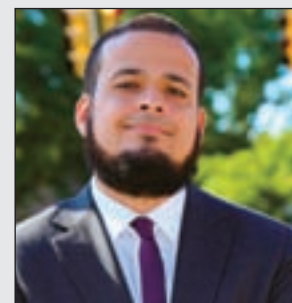
Growing up at 2746 197th Street and Decatur Avenue in Norwood, Nilda Irizarry Hofmann said she had no con-

nections with the NYPD nor any inkling that, one day, she would end up as one of the highest-ranking women in the largest police department

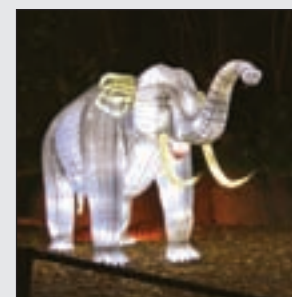
in America. Following her retirement at the end of October, marking 30 years of service, the former chief told the *Norwood News* one thing she knew

she *didn't* want to do when she grew up was bring coffee to the boss.

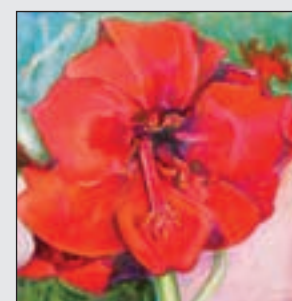
"The neighborhood I lived
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Elections 2021: Adolfo Abreu on Housing, Co-Governance & Policing

By SÍLE MOLONEY

Facebook Live has been the tool of choice for many candidates running for elected office this year. For Adolfo Abreu, in his bid to win the District 14 City Council race and replace incumbent councilman, Fernando Cabrera, who is term limited, it has also proven to be a fruitful means of cultivating community conversations on each of the six specific strands of his campaign platform.

Focusing his attention on a homes' guarantee and community control of housing, just and quality education, participatory democracy and co-governance, community health and wellness, safety and dignity in communities, and economic development, Abreu has his work cut out for him.

"There's a lot of priorities in this district, housing being one of the most important ones," he said. "I was raised by a single mother, and I've lived all my life in the district. My mom had to be a home attendant for the first 11 years of her life, making \$4.50 an hour and trying to make sure that there was food on the table, but also having to make sure she was able to afford the rent."

Abreu said it's a common story throughout the district. "Housing is really a critical piece of our platform, to fight for housing that is permanently affordable, and make sure people are living in good conditions," he said.

Though not part of District 14, we discuss the recent opposition by some homeowners to the plans to build more affordable housing next to St. James Episcopal Church in Fordham, which falls under Community Board 7. Some residents say the neighborhood is saturated and under-serviced, a situation not unique to that community.

"I hear the argument and that concern," said Abreu. "Where I kind of have some common ground with folks who have issues with new buildings is that those buildings actually are rarely affordable for even the members of our communities."

He continued, "I think the conversation will look different if people in our neighborhoods will be able to afford, and if there are stronger protections for people to live in a particular community board, being able to apply to live in those buildings."



Photo courtesy of Adolfo Abreu

ADOLFO ABREU

Abreu said everyone should be in agreement that there is a housing crisis and should make sure that any building constructed in a common space is done in conversation with and addressing the needs of the community, asking them what kinds of essential services are needed in the area that could benefit everyone, and are not being provided currently.

"I think that will, kind of, be different than what we've seen in which it's just new buildings being constructed - not affordable - and those developers are not in conversation with members of the community about what are the kind of community spaces they need, or what role they can perform?" he said.

We ask Abreu if he thinks the current ULURP process should be reimagined given it often feels like a "cart before the horse," type scenario, with developers and architects swooping in to make slick presentations to community boards, not yet having fully engaged with all stakeholders. As a longtime community organizer with the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition, he said he is all for more co-governance.

"I think the community needs to be invited in a conversation much earlier, rather than us kind of being sold into a plan and then not having real processes for us to be engaged, and asked for our opinion," he said, adding that often the ULURP process does seem very performative.

He is also a big fan of participatory budgeting (PB) even if the budgets are small, and wants to bring the process to District 14, as has been done in other city districts. "That could be a good mechanism, if not *the* perfect program, but it's a good mechanism to engage residents to have a conver-

sation about what are the things they would like to see change in the district," he said.

"It can bring capital improvement projects to our parks, to our schools, and I think they just really get people excited to be involved in the democratic process." Abreu added that they also help form relationships with people across the district, educating communities about how the budget process works.

"Each council person either has access to their own discretionary dollars, but then also advocates for larger allocations through the larger city council budget," he said. "So, I think it's important to make sure that our communities know what their council representatives can and cannot do."

In terms of raising revenue to fund his plans, he believes City & State should work together to come up with innovative ways to tax the wealthy, and redirect funds away from city departments, like the police department, to others where he believes they are most needed. He would not have voted for the June budget.

On the topic of police defunding, given the police acknowledge they are not trained mental health experts, we ask Abreu how he would suggest handling situations involving mentally unstable people who are armed and dangerous.

"I think the first step is how do we support people, so we de-escalate situations where the police might not be around the building," he said. "My approach will be not to have them involved at all, nor be the first people to respond."

How do we support people, so that we de-escalate "I want to know how many incidences we see of someone who needs [psychological] support and has a weapon, because I think that might just lead us to be fearful of a situation that can actually be remediated, if we focus on how to elevate things like community wellness," he said.

Asked what sets him apart in the race, he said making sure he involves the community in the decision-making process, plus 16 years of organizing in the Northwest Bronx. "It's important to have candidates [that] have a proven track record of work in the community, but also making sure that we have people who ultimately want to get into office, will be held accountable by the community, and be supported by the community."

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INQUIRING PHOTOGRAPHER

By DAVID GREENE



This week, we asked readers for their thoughts and wishes for the coming year, and whether the events of 2020 have impacted their New Year's resolutions.



"Yeah, oh God! I just want this COVID to disappear, you know what I mean? Maybe some people should stop reading these conspiracy theories and get behind the vaccine. That should be the number one thing, because if people don't take the vaccines, this thing is not going away. For 2021, I'm wishing myself for some good health. That will be my resolution, to stop smoking and getting myself back into decent health."

Frank Soria,
Bedford Park



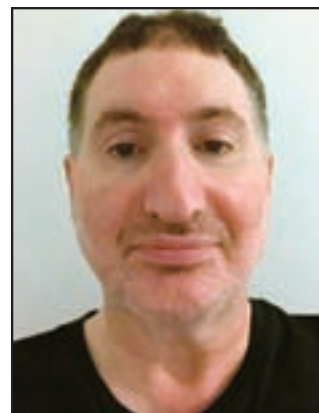
"Surviving 2020 as a transgender, Black woman taught me faith. It scared me with hope, and it led me to believe in the unbelievable - everyday living out of poverty, walking down the street out of scarcity. My fashion provokes toxic masculinity. Man, my humanity is voided and furthermore, criminalized. My 2021 wish is always to be able to wish. My 2021 hope is to be happy."

T.S. Candii,
Flatbush, Brooklyn



"This past year has been like no other in my life. Between COVID-19 and a terrible president, 2020 has been depressing. I am hoping that 2021 will be the calm after the storm. I know it will take time, but there is hope. For a New Year's resolution, I hope to spend more time with relatives and friends when we are safe from COVID."

Walter Pofeldt,
Schylerville



"I wish for permanent cure of all diseases through non-invasive procedures, not surgery. I pray for the unification of all humankind. That love overtakes hate. My resolutions are to be more patient, and to finally meet that special significant other. The year hasn't had an impact on my New Year's resolutions, but even through a pandemic, I pray for a safe effective cure and that the newly elected president and vice president run the country well, and are able to achieve world peace."

Alan Paul Katz,
Norwood



"I always like to set goals and I think it's kind of part of a tradition. This year, I think the perspective has been on what matters most in life for me - prioritizing family and good health, and community, and perseverance. I am about to be a father in January, so my New Year's resolution is to really commit myself to fatherhood and dedicate myself to the development of my child."

Ululy Rafael Martinez,
Hunts Point



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NEWS BRIEFS

By SÍLE MOLONEY

NYS Prohibited from Sale of Hate Symbols

On Dec. 15, New York State Sen. Alessandra Biaggi celebrated the signing of a new law, for which she was the lead sponsor, regarding symbols of hate. The new law prevents the State of New York from selling or displaying any symbols of hate or similar image, or tangible personal property, inscribed with such an image, unless the image appears in a book, digital medium, museum, or otherwise serves an educational or historical purpose. The term "symbols of hate" shall include, but not be limited to, symbols of white supremacy, neo-Nazi ideology or the battle flag of the confederacy.

Mosholu Pkwy Holiday Tree Lit

The Mosholu Parkway Holiday Tree and display is now up and lit at Bainbridge Avenue and Mosholu Parkway. Friends of Mosholu Parkland encourage residents to come and visit in a safe manner. They thank everyone who supported the clean-up efforts and for advocating for the Parkland in 2020, and also thank Community Board 7 for sponsoring the Holiday Lights display.

Congress Bans Anonymous Shell Companies

On Dec. 11, Reuters reported that the U.S. Senate passed a bill overhauling anti-money laundering rules and banning anonymous shell companies, often created in the form of LLCs, making payments more transparent. LLCs are frequently used by landlords who sometimes oblige tenants to use the LLC's proprietary, direct debit-type payment platforms to pay their rent, making it more difficult for tenants to see which exact entity is debiting their accounts. The bill will require most companies to report their true beneficial owners, allows greater information-sharing between law enforcement and regulators, and authorizes the use of new suspicious activity monitoring tools.

52 Precinct Crime Rates

NYPD crime statistics through Dec. 6 revealed that the 52nd precinct continues to experience increases in murder and burglaries, similar to citywide increases in

Holiday Lights at the Bronx Zoo

By DAWN CLANCY

The Bronx Zoo has officially kicked off the festive season with the return of its annual Holiday Lights celebration. From now until Jan. 10, families and friends of the zoo can meander through an outdoor, illuminated menagerie of land and sea animals from far-away corners of the world.

For many, the experience provides a much-needed boost of holiday cheer, and a brief but welcome respite from the stress of the Covid-19 pandemic. Michelle Witkowski, 31, a mother of two, recently travelled from Brooklyn to see the light show. "We've had tickets for a month. My kids have been so excited," she said. "And it's nice to be outside where you're not at risk to catch anything, and to enjoy stuff that you usually get to enjoy in normal years."

New Yorkers were forced to leave normal behind when Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced a citywide shutdown in March to curb the spread of Covid-19. The Bronx Zoo, a non-essential business, was temporarily closed to the public on Mar. 16. During that time, it made headline news when it recorded the first case of COVID-19 in a wild animal.

On Apr. 5, a four-year-old Malayan Tiger named Nadia tested positive for the virus, and some people were a little miffed that the tiger was able to get tested at a time when tests for humans were in short supply. However, a zoo representative later reported that the COVID-19 test for animals is a different one. In total, eight big cats at the zoo were infected; all were treated, and eventually recovered.

Over four months later, with COVID-sensitive, safety measures in place, including a mask mandate for all visitors, the zoo reopened on July 24, offering free or discounted tickets to front line workers as a ges-

both categories. There have been two more murders in 2020 compared to the same period last year. Of the ten homicides, nine are considered closed cases. The murder rate remains at less than one per month at the 52. Burglaries rose by 35.9 percent from 167 to 227 over the same period, while rapes have decreased. The city reported a drop of 20.3 percent, while the 52 precinct rates dropped by 28.1 percent from 32 in 2019, to 23 to date this year, despite the dramatic increase in domestic vio-

lence incidents. Meanwhile, the precinct has made more gun arrests than any other precinct in the Bronx, and is fifth in the city for gun arrests.

Many local residents complained about people loitering in buildings, playing loud music, parked cars that obstruct driveways, and drug addicts at the D train subway. Residents were encouraged to contact Community Affairs Officers, Stephen Echevarria and Crystal Reveron about this. Their contacts are available on the precinct

website or by calling 718-220-5824. The 52nd Precinct Community Council meetings will resume in Jan. 2021. A food drive for needy families was held at the precinct on Thursday, Dec. 10, with proceeds going to St. Brendan's / St Ann's Food Pantry.

Black Friday

The usual 'Black Friday' crowds and overnight campers seen outside large stores and shopping malls were noticeably absent this year. Instead, many of the lines were seen at soup kitchens,

food giveaways, at COVID-19 testing sites and outside one Bronx mosque. Additionally, millions of shoppers switched to online bargain hunting, a move that could change the face of Black Friday forever. According to Adobe Analytics, Black Friday national online sales on Nov. 24 rose 21.6 percent to hit an all-time, online sales record of \$9.3 billion this year, beating out sales from last year's Black Friday, which hit \$7.4 billion.



Photo by Dawn Clancy

HOLIDAY LIGHTS AT Bronx Zoo.

ture of gratitude.

However, over the last several weeks, New York City has, once again, experienced an alarming uptick in coronavirus cases, reaching a 5.5 percent test positivity rate over a seven-day rolling average by Dec. 12. The increase already prompted Mayor Bill de Blasio to switch New York City's entire public school system, the largest in the United States, back to the virtual world on Nov. 19.

"The schools were just closed again today, so, we figured, let's get out," Witkowski said on Nov. 19. "With everything that's happening, who knows if the zoo will be open next week." According to Bronx Zoo social media platforms, no official announcements have been made regarding a second closure.

Alice Brandow, 63, a grandmother from Long Island, also had COVID on her mind as her two grandsons twirled around on the zoo's Bug Carousel but overall, she was blown away by the holiday lights experience.

"It's all so realistic: the fish,

monkeys, tigers, lions, everything," Brandow said. "It's like, wow! You turn a corner, and you look up, and the animals are so huge. You almost think - they're beautiful."

The Holiday Lights exhibit has five lantern displays featuring gorillas and lemurs from Africa, elephants and rhinos from Asia, jaguars and vibrant pink flamingos from Latin America, sea lions and caribou from North America, and a dazzling underwater display where sea turtles, dolphins, and sharks appear to bob and float in mid-air.

Additionally, against the backdrop of festive holiday music, the zoo is crawling with costumed animals, stilt walkers, a wildlife theater, and unique sculptures. Steamy cups of hot cocoa are also available, along with a station dedicated to assembling and roasting smores over a fire pit.

Despite the cold, Lessya Bindrum, 38, a mother of three from Queens, was glad she brought her family out for a fun, festive night at the zoo. "It's something we can do outside that's Christ-

(continued on page 10)

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Bronx Art Association Fosters Greater Inclusivity

By JOSÉ A. GIRALT

When 2020 started, Doris Cordero was thrilled to assume the position of president of the 45-member Riverdale Art Association. She is the first Puerto Rican to hold the position, but then COVID-19 came along, disrupting the monthly, in-person meetings. Later, on a more personal level, a cancer diagnosis in early summer left her facing what she described as an ordeal.

"I was in recovery during August, September, and October. I'm now 100 percent," Cordero told the *Norwood News* in a phone interview. She is philosophical, and even somewhat upbeat about having slowed down to assist her recovery. "Because of the pandemic, everyone is home. So, it isn't like I missed anything during the summer," she said.

Now, Cordero is focused on continuing the work she started almost a year ago as president, namely, to grow the membership of the art association by bringing in a more diverse group of new artists. She is thankful to work with a board of directors, helping the

organization through these difficult times, especially as much of the art world faces decreasing financial support.

"The challenges of any organization in [regards to] leadership is that you need to have a good group of people that work with you, that are willing to do the work,' she said. "Because one person alone can't run an organization."

Cordero is joined on the board by six other women, and one man who serves as the treasurer. Her mission also includes expanding the association's reach beyond Riverdale, through the use of technology. Because of social distancing restrictions on in-person group meetings, arising from the pandemic, digital tools like Zoom allow interested artists beyond the local neighborhood to get in touch with the association.

"One of the board members is a real strong 'techie,' and very talented, said Cordero. "So, we immediately created a website, and we have Instagram now. For people outside our community,



Photo courtesy of Doris Cordero

DORIS CORDERO, PRESIDENT of Riverdale Art Association

we're trying to reach them with Instagram and our website."

Art has been a life-long passion for Cordero. Born in the Hunts Point section of the Bronx, she spent her early

school years in Puerto Rico, before returning to the city at 13, as a fully bilingual student.

"I was always that child that loved

(continued on page 14)



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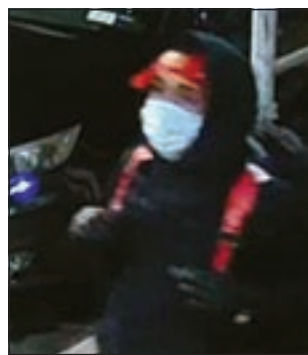
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CRIME FILE

By SÍLE MOLONEY & DAVID GREENE

**Body Found in Mosholu Golf Course Woodland**

On Tuesday, Nov. 24, at around 10.40 a.m., police responded to a 911 call from a Parks' department employee regarding an unconscious, aided person in a wooded area between Mosholu golf course and the water filtration plant, in the vicinity of East 233rd Street and Jerome Avenue, in the 50th precinct. Upon arrival, police found the badly decomposed remains of an unidentified man, lying on the ground at the location. EMS responded and pronounced the man deceased at the scene. His identity remains unknown. *Norwood News* has reached out to the Chief Medical Examiner for the cause of death. The investigation is ongoing.

Bedford Park: Uber Driver Robbed Under Threat of Being Shot

The NYPD is asking for the public's help identifying a person sought in connection with a gunpoint robbery in the 52nd precinct, seen in the attached photo taken at the incident location. On Friday, Nov. 27, at around 3.40 a.m., a 63-year-old male Uber driver was waiting for a passenger at 364 East 197th Street in Bedford Park, when the suspect approached the driver's side window and simulated a firearm, covered

in a dark bag. The suspect pressed it against the victim's chest, forcibly removed him from the vehicle, and later fled the scene in the victim's gray 2011 Honda CRV with registered plate #T623343C, in a northbound direction on Decatur Avenue. The victim's cellphones and wallet were inside the vehicle. No injuries were reported as a result of the incident. The suspect is described as a light-skinned man in his mid 20s, was last seen wearing a black hoodie, black pants, black sneakers, black gloves, a red hat, light-colored mask and was carrying a red and black, large travel bag. Anyone with information is asked to call the NYPD's Crime Stoppers Hotline at 1-800-577-TIPS (8477) or for Spanish, 1-888-57-PISTA (74782).

Missing 10-Year-Old, Norwood Girl Reunited with Family

Police reported that Leila Aracena, 10, was found "safe and in good condition," on Dec. 3, at around 12.20 p.m. Leila was reported missing from her home at 3525 Perry Avenue in Norwood, in the 52nd precinct, at around 11.22 p.m. on Dec. 2, having last been seen there at 8 p.m. Police initially said she was not believed to have been the victim of a crime, and it was understood she had walked out of her home voluntarily. A helicopter was requested to help search the area.

Police have not provided any information on arrests. A witness told the *Norwood News* that NYPD broke into an abandoned home at 3099 Webster on Thursday, Dec. 3, and watched as cops talked a man out of jumping out a window.

One witness, who learned

Leila was missing on the Citizens' App, said he understood they were searching for her in the area, having tracked her there via her phone. A witness said police later entered a nearby building at 3091 Webster Avenue, and a man in his early 20s, living on the 4th floor, had his clothes removed for evidence by police and was put in a white jumpsuit and taken to the 52nd precinct.

Norwood News witnessed what we understand were two family members picking up Leila at the 52nd precinct on Dec. 3 at 5:15 p.m., and later being driven to an unknown destination in a police vehicle. They family declined to talk to the media on three occasions.

On Sunday, Dec. 13, *Norwood News* spoke to the man from the 4th floor of 3091 Webster Ave through the door of his home. He acknowledged that "something happened," in relation to the case but neither confirmed nor denied that he had been taken in for questioning.

Man Shot on Briggs Avenue

Police are looking for a gunman who opened fire, striking a 22-year-old man in the hip as he was walking past 274 East 194th Street and Briggs Avenue in Fordham Manor on Tuesday, Dec. 8, at 4:30 p.m. The victim was transported to St. Barnabas Hospital in a stable condition, where police said he was uncooperative about who shot him. No arrests have been made, and the investigation is ongoing.

Man Slashed on East 205th St

According to police, a 40-year-old man got into a dispute with a known suspect who slashed the victim with an unknown object in front of 178 East 205th Street in Norwood on Tuesday, Dec. 1, at 7:30 p.m. As of Dec. 13, the NYPD said no arrests have been made, and the investigation remains ongoing.

Holiday Lights at the Bronx Zoo



Photo by Dawn Clancy

HOLIDAY LIGHTS AT Bronx Zoo.

(continued from page 6)

massy," Bindrum said. "This makes things feel normal again." Her daughter Skyla, 7, excitedly agreed, "My favorite animals are the cats and the seals, and I love how everything glows, and I love the fancy people," she said, referring to the costumed stilt walkers.

Skylar's cousin, Andrei Anastasian, 10, was equally impressed. "I like how everything is in 3D, and it's not just a

picture hung up on a wall like a poster," he said. His sister Alyssa, 8, highly recommended the underwater world. "My favorite animal is the dolphin, so that's probably my favorite exhibit." She added, "I love seeing all the lights and the animals. It's a weird experience."

As she gathered up her family for the drive back to Queens, Bindrum added with a smile, "This has been wonderful. 'It's been worth its weight in gold.'"

Due to the coronavirus pandemic,

tickets for the Holiday Lights display are available online only. Visitors, including Bronx Zoo members, must purchase a date-specific ticket before arrival; on-site ticket purchases are not available. Visitors are required to wear masks and practice social distancing on zoo grounds, when possible. Easily accessible, hand sanitizing stations are available for use throughout the exhibit. Check the zoo's website for the exhibit schedule.



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Chief Nilda Hofmann, The Best Of Blue

(continued from page 1)

in was tough - a lot of drugs," she said. "I remember when the police would drive by, people would say, 'The police is coming,' and everybody ran as a kid not really understanding that it was because they were selling drugs. I didn't know that's why people ran. That was really my impression of the police," she said.

Her parents came to the U.S. from Puerto Rico in their 20s and she said they didn't speak the language. Along with her two younger brothers, the family moved around a lot during her teenage years. She worked locally at the associate supermarket on Kingsbridge Road and at Alexander, a department store on Grand Concourse and Fordham Road, while attending Walton High School.

"This used to be an all-girls school. Mainly, what they taught you there, besides your regular academic stuff, was pre-teaching, like a teacher's aide," she said. "They had a nursing course. They had definitely a whole typing/secretary kind of course," she said, adding that she remembered one white person being at the school, and 99.9 percent being Black or Hispanic.

"And that was how they prepared you because, I guess, they didn't expect us to do anything," she said. "I never remember a conversation about college in high school, like I do now with my kids. That wasn't the expectation."

Nonetheless, Irizarry-Hofmann said she believes in fate, and when a new teacher arrived at the school to teach computer programming, it piqued her interest. She was told she would first have to take typing before she could join the class. "I didn't want to take typing because I didn't want to be a secretary," she said. "What I thought about secretaries is them bringing coffee to the boss."

She took the typing class in the end and joined the programming class, in which she excelled. "I really want to do this. Where can I go to do this?" she recalled asking her teacher at the time, who told her he had gone to Iona College, the only place offering the program at that time. Then came a crushing rejection. He didn't think she would make it. "And that's all you needed to



Photo courtesy of Nilda Irizarry Hofmann

CHIEF NILDA IRIZARRY Hofmann with her family on the day of her retirement from the NYPD on Oct. 29, 2020.

tell me," Irizarry-Hofmann said. "And I think that throughout my career. You tell me, 'No,' I'm going to work double and triple harder."

The same teacher did help her in the end, writing a letter on her behalf. "I was very grateful to the teacher because he spoke to me about college, and then he did help me with the application," she said. "You needed to have someone to guide you. That was the first time in my whole life I ever heard anyone talk about college, either in school, or at home," she said. "I had nobody. My mom had a sixth-grade education, and my dad had a GED, and nobody in my family that I knew ever went to college."

She studied computer programming for two years, while working part-time locally. It was around this time that her mom asked her to go with a neighbor to a job agency to help interpret during a job interview. "After I finished interpreting, I could remember his face like it was yesterday," Irizarry-Hofmann said, referring to the recruiter. "He turns to me, and he says, 'Well, what about you, young lady? Would you like a job?'"

Still working at Alexander's, and going to school full time, she said she was a workaholic back then. She asked where the job would be, and he told her the police department. "My eyes opened up," she said, and she asked what she would be doing. He said administrative tasks, if she knew how to type. "Yes, I

know how to type!" she said.

Finally, her typing speed and proficiency would serve her well. "I remember going to the appointment," she said referring to the police department entrant's exam. "It must have been, like, 50 of us in the room. They said, 'Type this,' and then they took the papers. They came back, and they called five names and I was one of the five names and to everybody else they said, 'Thank you very much.'"

She said they did a background check on her, and she became a police administrator in 1987 at 19 years of age, assigned to the 40th precinct at the Detective Bureau. Around the same time, her parents decided to move back to Puerto Rico, and she decided to stay in the U.S., but realized she needed enough money to pay her rent.

"So now, I'm working full time in the police department. I'm surrounded by cops, detectives, and they were extremely supportive, telling me, 'You're a young girl. Take the police test,' and I did take the test, and that's how I came into the police department back in 1990," she said.

There were about 2,100 in her graduating class, the largest class at the time which also included 40 women. They made the front page of the NY Daily News. "This was during the height of high crime," she said. "They wanted to change a little bit, hiring more cops, and yes, [there were] very little women at the time."

This brought its own struggles at the beginning, with male officers not wanting to work with female officers. "We had to deal with that," she said. Officially, there was no policy that discriminated against women, and she appreciated the gender-neutral term of police officers, when firefighters were previously always referred to as firemen.

Unofficially, like other women and because she had previously worked as a police administrative aide, and her colleagues knew she could type, she was sometimes asked during staffing shortages to cover inside work, typing up reports rather than being out in the field. She was determined not to get stuck in that cycle, however, and since then, Irizarry Hoffman has not looked back.

Starting in the 43rd precinct, she went on to serve in the 23rd, 25th, 42nd, 44th and 52nd precincts, Patrol Borough Bronx, and the Bronx Task Force. She was promoted to sergeant in April 1998, lieutenant in December 2003, captain in April 2008, deputy inspector in September 2011, inspector in October 2013, deputy chief in June 2018, and chief of community affairs in January 2018.

On June 24, she was made chief of transportation, "to continue the stewardship over a series of ongoing innovations for the safe and secure movement of all New Yorkers around our

(continued on page 19)

Northwest Bronx Youth Award DOE Grinch of the Year

By MIRIAM QUINOÑES &
SILE MOLONEY

A crowd of around 20 students, parents, teachers, community members and clergy leaders hosted a culminating Police Free Schools Rally on Saturday, Dec. 12, at 1 Fordham Plaza, where they awarded the Grinch of the Year Award to the Department of Education.

The event marked the end-of-year rally on their “Police Free School Liberation Tour” organized by Sistās & Brothas United (SBU), the youth organizing arm of the Northwest Bronx Community & Clergy Coalition. Over the last five months, SBU have been to over 30 schools in the North Bronx delivering banners and calling for Police Free Schools from school administrations.

They group said after decades of invasive security measures, harsh disciplinary practices, and the criminalization of youth of color in schools, it is time that schools become free, safe and supportive environments. The group has been calling for a full divestment of policing policies and practices, while calling for investment in counselors, social workers, restorative practices, mental health support and more.

Speaking at the event, Wesley Guzman said it had been organized to bring attention to how youth of color are criminalized in schools, instead of living a life with what they need to feel supported in holistic learning spaces. Though the rally was the last of the year, Guzman added that it was not the end of the fight.

“2020 has been a difficult year for all of us, and we hoped that the Department of Education would have stepped up and provided a safe and supportive learning environment for our students, our families, our teachers and our community,” he said. “Yet, our youth were left with

the same old racist and criminalizing practices and budget priorities.”

Anisah Sabur also spoke, saying it was necessary to fight for police free schools, because Black, Latinx, LG-BTQ+ and students with disabilities continue to be negatively impacted by harsh disciplinary practices in schools, like arrests, summonses and suspension.

As part of the event, the group sang their own version of the Christmas carol, “The Twelve Days of Christmas” switching up the lyrics to highlight the lack of necessary resources and support in their schools, and criticizing Department of Education policies.

Meanwhile, Josh, one of the students who also spoke at the event, said COVID-19 continued to negatively impact him in many ways, saying school should feel like a safe haven but instead, it leaves students fighting for change. “After a disappointing budget process in June, I feel like my well-being is not a priority for the mayor, or chancellor, or any elected officials,” he said.

“The DOE continues to reopen schools with many unanswered questions, and with a priority to continue to fund policing in our schools over nurses, counselors, social workers, and other holistic supporting systems.”

Josh continued, “This, to me, means my social welfare is not a priority. I have yet to hear how the city plans to invest in more counselors and social workers in our schools. We know there has been a hiring freeze for other essential staff like teachers but why is there no hiring freeze on cops, and why is the department budget continuing to spend more than \$450 million on police in schools?”

Norwood News reached out to the Department of Education for comment. We did not receive an immediate response.



Photo by Miriam Quiñones

SISTAS & BROTHAS United, the youth organizing arm of the Northwest Bronx Community & Clergy Coalition Students, (above and below left) hosted a culminating Police Free Schools Rally on Saturday, Dec. 12, at 1 Fordham Plaza, where they awarded the Grinch of the Year Award to the Department of Education.



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Out & About

Compiled by AURÉOLE RIBES

Events

A **Holiday Display** is open at the Keeper's Inn in Norwood with a tree, polar bear, penguin, snow bear, lights, garland, and snowflake decorations. This first, annual holiday event continues until Jan. 3.

The **Bronx Holiday Market**, hosted by Bronx Night Market takes place on Dec. 19 and 20 at Fordham Plaza from noon to 7 p.m. All proceeds will be donated to support market and street vendors critically affected by the pandemic. It includes a variety of food, eclectic art, crafts, performances, and more. For more information, search for Bronx Holiday Market on www.eventbrite.com.

The Bronx Museum of the Arts is expanding outside with **#SeeMeBronx**, an interactive project about visibility, intersectionality, and identity. The project kicks off the Museum's 50th anniversary, which is focused on visibility as a tenet of social justice.

To participate:

1. Form your own question about identity, visibility, and/or intersectionality.
2. Write your question on a sign (cardboard, paper, canvas or whatever you have).

3. Take a selfie holding your sign or have a friend/sibling/family member take one from a safe social distance. You can take your selfie at home, in the park, or even at the Bronx Museum when you come to visit. Reminder: The museum is free and accessible to everyone. Plan your visit, reserving your free timed ticket on www.bronxmuseum.org.
4. Share your selfie on social media, tagging [@bronxmuseum](https://twitter.com/bronxmuseum), with the hashtag [#seeembronx](https://twitter.com/seeembronx).

NYC Parks presents **Winter Work Days at the Foodway** on Friday, Dec. 18 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Concrete Plant Park. Shake the wintertime blues and lend a hand at the Bronx River Foodway by laying mulch, pruning plants and more, preparing the Foodway for its 2021 spring revival! Prevailing COVID-19 social distancing guidelines will apply, and extra masks will be available on site. For more information, go to www.nycgovparks.org and search for "Winter Work Days at the Foodway."

New York Botanical Garden presents the **Holiday Train Show**, where model trains zoom through a gorgeous display of New York landmarks made with natural materials

like bark, acorns, and cinnamon sticks. Capacity for the show is limited to patrons, members, and Bronx community partners only.

The **Bronx Zoo Holiday Lights** event offers five, lantern-lit safaris to explore: Africa, Asia, Latin America, North America and the Ocean until Jan. 10. Stilt walkers, a holiday tree, an ice carving, hot cocoa, wildlife theatre, and costumed characters also form part of the experience. Tickets for adults are \$34.95 and \$22.95 for kids. Learn more here: <https://bronxzoo.com/holidaylights>

If you miss live music, but can't leave your home, join **Bronx Music @Home Concerts** on Fridays at 8 p.m. To learn more, go to www.facebook.com, and search for "Bronx Music @ Home Concerts (BM@HC)."

Movement

Shape Up NYC presents seven, weekly walks at Allerton Skatepark, Franz Sigel

Park, Van Cortlandt Park, Macombs Dam Park, St Mary's Park, Williamsbridge Oval Park, and Patterson Playground. This free fitness program includes a warm-up and a walking workout in these beautiful Bronx parks. More info on the days and times can be found at: <https://www.nycgovparks.org/programs/recreation/shape-up-nyc>.

Every Monday night, the **Bronx Nomads** host an hour long run / walk for anyone interested in joining the group. The event starts at Williamsbridge Oval Recreation Center at 6 p.m. More information can be found on the group's Instagram here: <https://www.instagram.com/bronxnomads/>.

Every Wednesday at 9 a.m. at **Bronx Works**, there is a free Vinyasa Yoga class at 1130 Grand Concourse, and yoga mats are provided. For more information, go to www.eventbrite.com, and search for free vinyasa yoga

CORRECTION

In our edition, Vol 33, No 17, dated December 3-16, 2020, in the article entitled, "Elections 2021: Elisa Crespo on the Economy, Housing & Criminal Justice," Oswald Feliz was incorrectly referred to as male Democratic state committee member for the 78th Assembly District. In fact, Feliz previously held this position before Emmanuel Martinez.

In the same story, we reported that Julian Sepúlveda was one of the other candidates in the 15th District City Council race when, as of the time of publication, he had already dropped out. We omitted Kenny Agosto as another candidate. We apologize for these oversights.

Bx. Art Association Fosters Greater Inclusivity

(continued from page 10)

to fill the notebooks with drawings very early on. It was a passion," she said. "Everything that was art, I always gravitated to."

An art teacher saw Cordero's artistic potential and encouraged her to attend the Art & Design High School. She went on to earn a degree in studio art and elementary education, as well as a master's degree, both from Fordham University.

After a multi-decade long career in arts education and administration, Cordero retired 13 years ago from teaching kids and mentoring art teachers. It is that vast experience in the arts that has prepared her to take the reins of the Riverdale Art Association.

Nydia Novoa Sancho has known Cordero throughout her career and also worked extensively, as a principal, to bring art education into public schools. She sees Cordero as uniquely qualified to lead an arts organization. "We had to deal with a lot of different arts organizations, everything from Lincoln Center, Harlem School of the Arts, we had the Museo del Barrio,"

said Novoa Sancho. "We were in with all those people, and Doris and I were in that together."

Now retired, Novoa Sancho has high praise for the extensive knowledge and skills that Cordero brings to the role of president. "She comes with a wealth of resources and information about the arts, in particular the visual arts," said Novoa Sancho. "She is a part of the network in the arts."

As a fourth grader in rural Puerto Rico, Cordero remembers being taught art appreciation in a school with no electricity and no running water. When her teacher showed her a print of Jean-François Millet's "The Reaper," she knew art would somehow always be a part of her life. "It wasn't about the Metropolitan [Museum of Art]. It wasn't about taking a child to a museum," she said. "It's about how art influences children and changes their lives."

Far away from rural Puerto Rico, and building on a career dedicated to art and education, Cordero works to instill and inspire both young and old through her leadership at



Photo courtesy of Doris Cordero

A PAINTING BY Doris Cordero, president of Riverdale Art Association

the Riverdale Art Association.

"We're a group of artists that love art, of all ages that wants to really be involved together in our art-making and show our work," said

Cordero. "We have this passion for the arts."

More information can be found at <https://riverdaleartassociation.org/>.



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Letters To The Editor

Electoral College

The debate has started again as to whether the US Constitution should be amended in order to change the presidential election process. Some promote eliminating the Electoral College in favor of a direct popular vote for president while others believe the Electoral College should remain unchanged. Just as compromise solved the initial problems of the framers, so it is that compromise can solve this problem. The solution is to change the electoral votes to electoral points and reward each candidate a percentage of points based on the percentage of popular votes received in each state. This would eliminate the "winner take all" system thus allowing for all the votes to count. A voter is more apt to believe their vote counted when a percentage of popular votes are taken into account rather than the "all or nothing" system currently in existence. Further, this new system would integrate the desire for a popular vote for president with the need for the individual states to determine who actually gets elected.

For 2020 multiplying the percentage of votes each candidate received (in each state) times the number of electoral votes (in each state) results in the following: Biden 267.23 and Trump 252.33.

Multiplying the percentage of popular votes each candidate received (nationwide) times the total number of electoral votes (538) results in the following: Biden 274.92 and Trump 253.40.

Joe Bialek
Cleveland, Ohio

MTA & Congestion Pricing

News from the MTA that the implementation of congestion pricing may be delayed until January 2023 told only part of the story. MTA chairman, Pat Foye, is outspoken in blaming Washington while continuing to stay silent on the critical role played by Gov. Andrew Cuomo and Mayor Bill de Blasio in the delays. For one year, Cuomo and de Blasio have refused to announce their appointments to the MTA Traffic Mobility Review Board. Details of who will pay what can never be resolved and made public until this board is established and completes its mission.

Toll price recommendations were originally promised to be made public by November 2020. This process is politically sensitive. The final details of who will pay what remain unknown. Congestion pricing might not take effect until Jan. 1, 2023, the fourth year of the \$51 billion, 2020-2024 Five-Year Capital Program. You can't collect five years' worth of revenue in two years. Congestion pricing may only result in \$6 billion in revenue, versus the \$15 billion anticipated.

The MTA will have to reduce this \$51 billion program to \$42 billion. It will have no choice but to cancel Phase 2 of the \$6.9 billion Second Avenue subway and the \$1.5 billion Metro North Bronx, East Penn Station Access projects. Any \$42 billion program should preserve the core MTA system, including safety and state of good repair, and it would still be \$10 billion more than the previous \$32 billion, 2015-2019 Five-Year Capital Plan.

Larry Penner
Great Neck

We reserve the right to edit letters for space, clarity, civility, and accuracy.

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Photo by José A. Giralto

AFTER PLACING STICKERS inside C Town Supermarket, and a red Stop sign on the window warning of the dangers of underage drinking, volunteers leave to visit more stores selling alcohol, during a Day of Action campaign organized by WEPA on Wednesday, Dec. 9, 2020.

Coalition Drives Underage Drinking Awareness Campaign

By JOSÉ A. GIRALT

A coalition of local community groups made up of many young volunteers joined forces on Dec. 9 during a "Sticker Shock Campaign," to alert local alcohol retailers of the dangers underage drinking presents to young people. The groups made in-person visits to various stores in Community Boards 5, 7, and 8 with oral presentations, stickers, and posters reminding both store owners and customers that it is illegal and dangerous to provide alcohol to anyone under the age of 21.

The campaign was spearheaded by "We Engage in Prevention Awareness," (WEPA), a community coalition seeking to eliminate substance abuse, especially among families in the Bronx facing multi-generational addiction issues. WEPA works under the auspices of the Groundswell Group, a nonprofit grassroots organization formed in the Bronx in the late 1990s which provides addiction workshops and training programs, especially with faith-based groups. Outreach efforts like the Sticker Shock Campaign focus on issues affecting the lives of young people between the ages of 10 and 21.

According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAA), underage drinkers experience higher rates of unsafe sexual encounters, and can also become victims or perpetrators of interpersonal violence. In addition, they experience difficulties in school or with law enforcement. Underage drinking can also affect brain development, sometimes resulting in premature death, including death by suicide.

The Rev. Addie Banks, executive director at WEPA, was pleased with the energy and activism displayed by the volunteers, mostly high school and college age students, who participated in the campaign. "Overall, I'd say the campaign was a success," Banks said, adding that they were excited to be engaged in the project and were happy to be out on the streets and actually taking proactive measures to address the problem.

"They want to be civically engaged and active in their community," she said. Banks also noticed a receptive attitude from store owners, saying merchants were really happy to have their assistance.

The volunteers assigned to the CB7 area numbered around 17, including two NYPD Youth Coordination Officers tasked with supervising members of the 52nd Precinct Law Enforcement Explorers, commonly referred to as the Explorers, a program that provides young men and women from the city's diverse communities with an introduction to a career in law enforcement or a related field in the criminal justice system. The program is geared toward youth aged 14 to 20.

The group's first stop was at C Town Supermarket located on Sedgwick Avenue. Dilenia Torres is the owner and welcomed the group which easily crowded the narrow aisles. She did not mind their brief visit, during which they placed four awareness stickers by beer display area and a campaign poster next to the sliding door at the front entrance.

(continued on page 19)



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Public and Community Meetings

Since the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the **52nd PRECINCT COMMUNITY COUNCIL** meetings have been held via **ZOOM**. Meetings are typically held on the fourth Thursday of each month at 6 p.m. Call the 52nd Precinct Community Affairs office at 718-220-5824 for further details.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic hit in March, **BRONX COMMUNITY BOARD 7** committee meetings have been held via **ZOOM**. The next full Board meeting will be held on **Tuesday, Dec. 22 at 6.30 p.m.** Zoom details will be circulated ahead of the meeting. Contact mirosario@cb.nyc.gov to be added to the distribution list.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic hit in March, **Bedford Mosholu Community Association** meetings have been held via **ZOOM**. The next meeting will be held virtually on **Wednesday, Jan. 6, 2021 at 8 p.m.** For further details, contact bedfordmosholu@verizon.net.



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Chief Nilda Hofmann, The Best Of Blue

(continued from page 1)

city,” a position which is increasingly under the microscope of late due to the growing number of alarming, unprovoked attacks on subway riders.

During her career, at different times, Irizarry Hofmann commanded the 25th and the 52nd precincts, and served as executive officer of the Risk Management Bureau and the 42nd precinct. She would also return to formal studies, earning a Bachelor of Arts degree in forensic psychology from John Jay College. She is also a 2013 graduate of the Police Management Institute at Columbia University.

She credits Gertrude Laforge, once the highest-ranking woman in the NYPD during Irizarry-Hofmann's earlier years, with inspiring her to push forward with her career. “I think she must have been the first woman running a precinct back then. This was back in 1991,” she said. “At the time, I didn't know what a big deal it was. Most police officers didn't really interact with the commanding officer of the precinct. I just remember meeting with her once,” she added, saying Laforge offered her a role overseeing schools.

“I think, looking back, and knowing a little bit about being a commanding officer and going into it myself, I think that being a woman probably, was something that she thought was important, that it was important to work with the young kids.”

Irizarry-Hofmann said that in

working with schools, and in an effort to try to give something back to her local community, she visited her old high school and was saddened to discover that kids had to go through metal detectors to enter the buildings.

She conducted a survey which found that while some students found them annoying, and caused them to be late for class, the majority said they felt safer with them in place. She did not disregard the impact they have on students' time and, coming from the Hispanic community, she was also careful to ensure they were in schools where there had been reported security incidents, rather than solely targeting minority schools.

Looking back on her career, Irizarry-Hofmann said the lows have been the many police officers who have been lost, who she knew, knowing the work they carried out throughout the country was tough work. “They put their lives [at risk] every day,” she said, adding that their intentions when they go out each day are to do the best they can.

“The highs have been the many friendships and relationships that I've had with the communities that I've served, and I'm very proud to also serve many of the Hispanic communities that definitely, you know, relate to me,” she said, adding that they were sometimes fearful of the police, and she was able to help break those barriers.

In terms of promotion within the



Photo courtesy of Nilda Irizarry Hofmann

THE FRONT-PAGE STORY of The NY Daily News in April 1991 was about the then-largest class of graduates to join the NYPD, as the city battled a surge in crime. Among them was Nilda Irizarry Hofmann.

NYPD, and diversity in the senior ranks, Irizarry-Hoffman said it is, of course, important, to promote diversity, adding that she also understands that it takes time to build a wider pool of minority candidates from which to select for senior positions.

Reflecting on her earlier days in Norwood, she said anything is possible. “I was very happy to have reached

a three star within the police department. If you would have asked me when I was living there at Decatur Avenue, would I have ever dreamt [this]? This was not even a dream I could have ever dreamt, what I have accomplished,” she said. “There was no way for me to ever have dreamt this, and if it just inspires even one young person, I would be happy.”

Coalition Drives Underage Drinking Awareness Campaign

(continued from page 16)

Speaking to the *Norwood News* in Spanish, Torres expressed gratitude for the signage warning about underage drinking. “It's a good idea because young people may not be aware that alcohol is dangerous to their health,” she said. “If they see a campaign that warns them [about those dangers] then it's a good initiative.”

Torres was also impressed by the number of young people who were part of the campaign. “I saw plenty of young people which means they must be supportive [of the campaign],” she said.

The group included volunteers from the local church, Our Lady of Angels, the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition (NWBCCC), while

members of the National Guard helped organizers in the CB5 community.

The City's health department (DHMH) has conducted studies to determine the correlation between levels of alcoholism in a given community, and the availability of alcohol through either liquor stores or other retailers authorized to sell alcoholic drinks.

The rate at which businesses sell alcohol in a given community is described as the “alcohol outlet density.” DHMH admitted to a difficult task in confirming that connection citywide based on a research report dated October 2019, entitled “Measuring Alcohol Outlet Density and its Associations with Alcohol-related Morbidity in New York City.”

The report read, in part, “Developing a citywide alcohol outlet density measure is difficult because of the variability of many factors in NYC, including resident populations, alcohol consumption, drinking norms, and other factors in NYC neighborhoods.”

On a citywide level, the report found no strong correlation between the number of outlets selling alcohol, and visits to the emergency room at neighborhood hospitals, for alcohol-related issues.

However, in the Bronx the report did find a correlation between the overall alcohol density measure and emergency room visits. It should also be noted that often only the very worst cases are seen by hospital staff.

For Banks, studies like these con-

firm what she sees at the ground level — a need for more awareness. The day's campaign resulted in the distribution of over 400 stickers and 20 posters to supermarkets, bodegas, and liquor stores. She said the merchants also signed a petition whereby they agreed to comply with the campaign.

The Sticker Shock Campaign is the first in a series of Day of Action initiatives for the coalition. Next on the organizers' agenda is a campaign in February to raise awareness on opioid abuse.

Anyone in need of help with substance abuse prevention or treatment services can contact the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, via a 24-hour help hotline on 1-800-662-HELP (4357).

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