



NORWOOD NEWS

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NEW SCHOOLS CHANCELLOR OFFERS HOPE TO SECOND-CHANCE STUDENTS

MMCC recounts past struggles with DoE

By SÍLE MOLONEY

Shanti Sledge was 24 when he took the courageous step to return to education after a seven-year absence, attempting, once more, to obtain his high school diploma, having dropped out of public school in his mid-teens. "I feel like the first time around, I wasn't as motivated or felt like I really paid attention," he said. "I was just all over the place. I had dropped out of high school and I went to Job Corps to pursue my trade, my career. I kind of went through my struggles in Job Corps, so I didn't finish."

Sledge is one of 21 students who, last year, signed up to complete the High School Equivalency (HSE) program, a free program offered by the nonprofit, Mosholu Montefiore Community Center (MMCC), in Norwood. "I finally got into this program and I was just more serious with my life," he said, adding that the support structure helped him feel less alone.

Sledge's story is emblematic of a host of former Bronx public school students, for whom public school education has proven to be what one MMCC employee described as "absolute mayhem and chaos." In order for students like Sledge to return to education and schedule a HSE test date, their Individualized Education Plan or IEP records are needed by MMCC officials.

However, trying to obtain these essential records from the students' former public schools has proven to be an extremely arduous

(continued on page 19)



Photo courtesy of Shanti Sledge.

SHANTI SLEDGE, 25, has completed Mosholu Montefiore Community Center's second-chance educational program.



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CB7 Tackles Vaccine Concerns

By JOSÉ A. GIRALT

On the pandemic front, the good news is that COVID-19 infection, hospitalization, and death rates are all decreasing statewide. In addition, the COVID-19 vaccine from Johnson & Johnson has been approved by the FDA, which now provides a third immunization option beyond Pfizer and Moderna, and one which requires just one vaccination dose rather than two.

The bad news, however, is that throughout the country and especially within the boundaries of Bronx Community Board 7 (CB7), vaccination rates are alarmingly low.

At the latest meeting of CB7's Health & Human Services Committee on Feb. 22, committee members looked at the low rates, and discussed ways to improve them. Michelle Avila, committee chair, shared a slide presentation with localized data per zip code.

It revealed that zip codes like 10453, which covers Morris Heights, Mount Hope and University Heights, 10458, which covers Belmont, Fordham University and Kingsbridge, 10463, which covers parts of Kingsbridge, Marble Hill, Riverdale and Spuyten Dyvil, and 10467 which covers Norwood, Allerton, Pelham Parkway and Williamsbridge had single-digit vaccination rates.

By comparison, in the more affluent zip code 10471, which also includes parts of Riverdale, North Riverdale and Fieldston, 15 percent of adults had been fully vaccinated by Feb. 23, as reported by the *Norwood News*, (20 percent as of March 2). The FDA has not yet approved a vaccination for kids.

Some of the delays with the vaccination roll-out can be attributed to several weeks of severe winter weather which affected delivery of the medication from the Midwest states. However, *Norwood News* has also reported on other factors which may have also con-



Photo courtesy of Hakan Nural on Unsplash

CORONAVIRUS VACCINE

tributed to a slower pace of mass vaccination.

These ranged from skepticism on the part of the public regarding the safety of the vaccine, knowing how quickly it was researched and produced, to an initial inadequate supply of doses received from the federal government by New York State, to confusion over how to schedule and secure an appointment.

For Avila, however, one factor trumped all others. "The [issue] I'd like for us to talk about tonight is how to get people who are very skeptical of the vaccine thinking about why it's important to do this, and on a pathway to being more open to receiving the vaccine," she said.

As a group, the committee agreed to improve outreach efforts to help educate the public on the safety and efficacy of vaccines. Almost all health officials are in agreement that a mass vaccination program is the best path forward in order to return to a normal, pre-pandemic routine. However, deciding on which age-group holds the greatest influence when it comes to vaccination education was a point of contention for the committee.

The approach committee member, Hugo Gonzalez, preferred entailed

reaching out to school-age children to have them inform their parents on the vaccines. "I think a lot of the older folks are afraid that, 'The government's trying to get us, and they're trying to poison us,'" Gonzalez said. He was more hopeful that a younger generation would propel older people to get the shot.

"If the younger folk take it, and they can see that they're ok, then that would strongly motivate the older folks," Gonzalez added. He especially sees such a scenario playing out in immigrant households, where parents may have limited, English-speaking abilities.

Fellow committee member, Untwain Fyffe, offered a different perspective on which group to target first with outreach efforts. "I find that it's the older folks that are not so hesitant to take the vaccine," he said. "From my perspective, that is because they are only getting their source of information from healthcare providers or just the news."

By contrast, he said misinformation was more rampant on social media platforms that are more popular among young people. The committee hopes to hear more feedback from the public on the vaccine topic at the next committee meeting which will be held on March 16 at 6.30 p.m.

For trustworthy information on the vaccines and the research behind them, go to: <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/covid/covid-19-vaccine-facts.page>.

To schedule an appointment, go to: <https://vax4nyc.nyc.gov/patient/s/>.

To find a vaccination site, go to: <https://vaccinefinder.nyc.gov/locations>.

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INQUIRING PHOTOGRAPHER

By DAVID GREENE



This week, we asked readers their thoughts on the recent bombing by U.S. forces of Iran-backed militias in Syria.



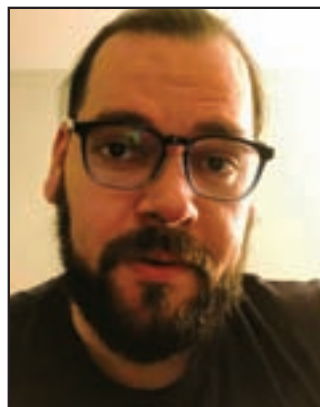
"The Biden administration's recent decision to strike at targets in Syria by all accounts seems like a measured and proportional response to an attack on U.S. forces in Iraq. What President Biden is signaling is that while he prioritizes diplomacy, he will not be a pushover. I would have liked to see the administration consult more closely with Congress before taking such action. Congress has an important oversight role in foreign policy that I think has been overlooked the last several administrations, which is why I think the new authorization for the use of force (AUMF) being debated before Congress should be passed sooner rather than later."

Andy Laub,
Ardsley, N.Y.



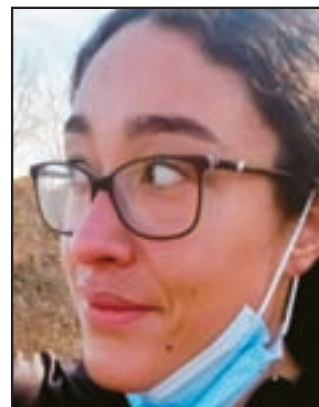
"Who gives a (expletive) about Syria or anyone else? The United States has got to stop being in wars that have no relationship to our domestic interest. All U.S. service people should come home now."

Anthony Riveccio
Bedford Park



"No matter who's in office, it's the same old story. As a historian, I am gravely concerned about America's continuation of its imperialist foreign policies, its unjust wars, and its military interventions, such as the latest one in Syria. War, imperialism and colonialism are baked into our national psyche, and both major parties work for the military industrial complex and big-monied special interests instead of working for the common good of the people. The result is death, destruction, misery, exploitation and oppression for people abroad, for the environment, and for poor working people here at home."

Matthew Heidmann
Long Island



"I think it's terrible. I understand why it was carried out. I just think we have so many domestic issues that need to be handled first. In my opinion, our top priority issue is getting everyone vaccinated."

Amelia Zaino
Co-Op City



"I would like to see the U.S. foreign policy move away from 'forever wars,' rather than be involved in an endless cycle. I would like to see us again rejoin the JCPOA [commonly known as the Iran Nuclear Deal] and be an honest broker in resolving the Israeli - Palestinian crisis. We must use soft power and force should be a last resort."

Shoshana Hershkowitz
South Setauket, N.Y.



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NEWS BRIEFS

By SÍLE MOLONEY

Biaggi Calls on Cuomo to Resign

On Feb. 28, State Sen. Alessandra Biaggi, who is a sexual abuse survivor, called on Gov. Andrew Cuomo to resign following news of a second sexual harassment allegation brought against him by a former, 25-year-old aide, Charlotte Bennett. On Feb. 25, Lindsey Boylan, another former top aide to Cuomo, had accused the governor of alleged intimidation and sexual harassment, expanding on allegations she first made in December 2020.

The governor denies the allegations and on the same day, asked the state's attorney general, Laetitia James, and its chief judge to appoint an independent investigator to examine them. James rejected the governor's proposal, saying the state's executive law gave her office the authority to investigate the matter once the governor provided the necessary referral. She urged the governor to do so which would grant her subpoena power. The governor conceded the same evening, and the investigation has since been launched.

Friends of Mosholu Parkway Organize Street Clean-Up

Elizabeth Quaranta, executive director of Friends of Mosholu Parkway (FOMP), organized a solo volunteer, street clean-up on Saturday, Feb. 27, to coincide with the gradual melting of the last remaining piles of snow in Norwood and the surrounding communities. Trash pick-up by the City's Department of Sanitation had been delayed in recent weeks due to the same City workers being reassigned to work on snow clearance. Quaranta urged residents to use the arrival of the warmer weather as an occasion to clean-up the streets of remaining trash wherever they lived, and to keep the neighborhood hygienic.

District 15 Debate Hosted by NWBCC

The Northwest Bronx Community & Clergy Coalition, in conjunction with other Bronx entities which are part of the Bronx-wide Coalition, hosted a virtual City Council District 15 Candidates Forum on Feb. 24. Most of the participants are either on the ballot in the special election on March 23, or agreed to participate in the

Opinion

Child Abuse, A Public Health Crisis

By RENÉE BARRETT

Like many mothers, my heart broke as I watched the footage of a grown man pummeling two young children at the Fordham Road train station in the Bronx on January 22. The video footage is enraging and their screams continue to haunt me.

Child Abuse is a public health crisis. In addition, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) regards child abuse and maltreatment as economic burdens to society due to the extremely high hospitalization and treatment costs they generate (estimated at \$585 million in 2008). According to the CDC, at least one in seven children has experienced child abuse and/or neglect, and this is likely an underestimate. In 2018, nearly 1,770 children died of abuse and neglect in the United States. Here are some more troubling statistics:

- Approximately five children die from child abuse every day.
- 2.9 million cases of child abuse are reported every day.
- In 2012, 82.2 percent of child abusers were between the ages of 18 and 44.
- Boys and girls are victims of child abuse at almost the same rate.
- 3 out of 4 children who die from child abuse or neglect are aged 3 or younger.

Citywide, the Bronx has the highest number of abuse/neglect investigations. In 2019, ACS reported the number of Bronx child abuse investigations at 15,926, compared to Brooklyn at 13,978, Queens at 11,057, Manhattan at 7,075 and Staten Island at 4,023. It is no coincidence that the Bronx has the highest neighborhood poverty rates in the nation according to the latest 2010 Census data, at 26.2 percent. Meanwhile, the borough's median, pre-pandemic household income,

according to census data, was estimated at \$40,088.00 (2015-2019). It is likely much lower since COVID-19 hit.

Poverty, inadequate housing and education, food insecurity, access to quality healthcare, and simply trying to survive in the midst of it all can trigger abuse, whether it's spousal, or the abuse of children. While it can never be considered an excuse or justification, the effects of a person's socio-economic status are directly related to cases of child maltreatment and neglect and are worth investigating.

Mental health is a public health crisis that not only affects children, but the parents and caregivers of children. Caring for children requires supernatural patience. It's hard not to react when our children test limits and push boundaries. The fact is that children are children, behaving as children do. This is not to justify disobedience, but it's important for parents and caregivers to remember. I say this because I often forget that young children are naturally selfish creatures, who haven't yet fully developed the skills that allow them to recognize their emotions and deal with them appropriately.

Parents and caregivers suffering from emotional, physical or mental health issues, who are tasked with the overwhelming responsibility of child-care cannot provide appropriate care for their children if their own physical, social, emotional or mental health is compromised.

High poverty districts, like the 15th congressional district in the South Bronx, represent the poorest neighborhoods in the nation and have been disproportionately impacted by COVID 19. Black and Hispanic communities face barriers when it comes to adequate health insurance and accessing mental health care. They often face racism and other biases, and discrimination in treatment settings. Within their communities, people of color also face higher levels of stigma for mental health challenges which prevents them from seeking treatment.

Serendipitously, the recording of the Fordham Road incident triggered community advocacy for the defenseless children, who could not speak for themselves, and drew public attention to a private crisis. Unfortunately, in most child abuse cases, there are no recordings or reliable witnesses. The children in this case received

help, but for every case that is reported, there are thousands that go unreported.

Teachers, who are usually the first to report cases of abuse, and only when they notice bruises or signs of hunger or maltreatment at home, have not been physically present with the children, due to remote learning. According to a June 9, 2020 article in the The New York Times, reports of child abuse were down 51 percent at the time, which was concerning to authorities.

Because of the ongoing economic and social hardships, and other COVID-related stress placed on families, abuse in tense households is likely to increase. The abuse is also most likely to continue, or become more aggressive, since the usual intervention and follow-up is not happening as efficiently as it did pre-COVID-19, and, if the child or children are being abused during remote learning, such abuse can be difficult to document.

Child abuse and neglect, which can be tied to other types of violence, are public health problems that should be treated like any other physical illness or disease which can have adverse, long-term impacts on the health and well-being of our most vulnerable population living in the most vulnerable communities in this city.

Bronx families know the numbers. They have read the devastating statistics that doom our children to lives of poverty and inadequacy. Bronx families do not need more dismal statistics reporting what is already known nationwide. They need advocacy and support, which starts with knowing where to look. Listed below are some resources that can be accessed to help support abused and neglected children in The Bronx.

<https://access.nyc.gov/programs/health-insurance-assistance/>

<https://www.vnsny.org/how-we-can-help/community-programs/community-mental-health-services/>

<https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/dc/hunts-point-resource-guide.pdf>

www.schools.nyc.gov

Renée Barrett is a freelance writer and educator living in The Bronx. She holds Master's degrees in childhood education and urban administration.

forum. According to its website, the Bronx-wide Coalition articulates systemic policy solutions at the federal level, through the Bronx People's Platform for NYC. The group is in the process of co-creating an economic development plan for the borough rooted in building shared wealth and ownership over the assets and resources in local communities, and the capacity to govern and steward them democratically for a shared purpose. The forum can be viewed on Facebook by going to <https://www.facebook.com/northwest-bronx/>.

New Affordable Housing Fordham Heights

On Saturday, Feb. 27, it was reported by YIMBY that Michael Hunt of 2074 Walton Realty LLC, the owner of an eight-story residential building at 2074 Walton Avenue in Fordham Heights, filed and application with the City to construct a new 67-unit, residential building at the same address, comprised of most-likely rentals.

The building is located between East Burnside Avenue and East 181st Street, one block from the Burnside Avenue subway station. The proposed 74-foot-tall development will yield 45,083 square feet, with

40,508 square feet designated for residential space. An average unit scope of 604 sq. ft. is anticipated, with a masonry-based structure, a cellar and a 30-foot-long rear yard.

Max Disla Architect is listed as the architect of record. Demolition permits have not been filed yet, and an estimated completion date has not been announced.

Walton H.S. Vaccination Site Moves to Bronx H.S. of Science

On Friday, Feb. 26, Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz announced that the COVID-19 vaccination site located at Walton H.S. in

Kingsbridge Heights has been relocated to Bronx High School of Science in Jerome Park. He said this was done because middle schoolers had returned to in-school learning and needed to reclaim the campus.

The school is located at 75 West 205th Street (at Goulden Avenue) and street parking may be available around the Jerome Park Reservoir. The school is also accessible by Bx10, Bx28, and Bx38 buses to Paul Avenue/West 205th Street, as well as by Bx1, Bx2, Bx22, and Bx26 buses to nearby stops. It is also near the Mosholu Parkway 4 subway.

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Illegal Gas Line Likely Cause of Explosion that Injured Nine

By DAVID GREENE

At least nine people were injured in Westchester Heights, including several children and one firefighter, after a gas explosion inside a multi-unit residential home shook the building's foundation and blew out many of the windows and doors. Two of the victims were reported to be in serious condition.

The explosion occurred inside 1522 Paulding Avenue, in Westchester Square, on Thursday, Feb. 18, at 3:20 p.m. At the scene, FDNY Deputy Chief, John Sarrocco, gave a brief statement, later released on Twitter. "We received a call for an explosion," he said. "Units arrived on scene in three minutes and found what appeared to be a gas explosion with heavy damage to the front of the buildings."

Sarrocco said several victims were inside the building at the time of the explosion. "Units entered the structure, rescued approximately eight patients, two of which were in critical condition," he said. EMS later reported transporting six children, one adult and one firefighter to area hospitals, and one adult was treated at the scene.

City Department of Buildings (DOB) officials said on Feb. 18 the adjacent 1520 and 1524 buildings also suffered some damage but both were found to be structurally stable.

On the same day, despite DOB also designating the foundation of 1522 Paulding Avenue "structurally stable," residents of all three buildings, 1520, 1522 and 1524, were issued with "vacate" orders due to the risk of possible falling debris. The landlord of the multi-building housing complex was also ordered to build a fence around all three buildings.

The following day, DOB provided an update on their investigations, saying in part, "DOB plumbing inspectors found that gas piping, fittings, valves, water lines, and waste lines for the use of laundry washing machines, gas-powered dryers, and a hot water heater for the laundry had all been illegally installed in the ground floor garage area of 1522 Paulding Avenue."

The statement continued, "This work was performed without proper permits or approvals from the department." Officials added that the precise cause of the blast had not yet been determined. However, investigators continued to focus on what may have caused or potentially contributed to the explosion i.e. the illegal gas and plumbing work.

According to records accessed by *Norwood News* through the DOB website, a DOB inspector wrote after the incident, "Due to explosion at time of inspection, 1st & 2nd floor suffered damage from explosion, damaged dry-

wall, cracks throughout and broken windows."

On Feb. 18, as residents of 1520, 1522, and 1524 were being evacuated, "Kathy," who declined to give her surname and who is a resident of adjacent 1526 Paulding Avenue, remained in her apartment which, at that point, was without heat or hot water. On Monday, Feb. 22, Kathy recalled the gas explosion incident, telling the *Norwood News*, "Yeah, it shook my house and made me jump off my sofa." She said picture frames also fell off the walls of her home.

Asked if any residents had returned home yet, Kathy replied, "No, they're not going to be able to, as everything's destroyed," and referred to discussions she had with the landlord and other officials. "They lost everything," she said. Asked about the installation of the illegal laundry room at 1522, Kathy said, "That was a laundry room when I moved in [to the housing complex], and I used to do my laundry there." She added that the landlord had installed it for use by residents of all the adjacent buildings, but that she now has her own laundry facilities.

According to NYC Department of Finance records, Trackside Homes LLC is the holder of the building's mortgage. Several calls to Trackside were not immediately returned.

Meanwhile, a gas leak was the cause of a separate explosion inside a Dekalb Avenue apartment in Norwood on Jan. 23. No injuries were reported. On Jan. 24, Stanley Jones, who lives in the apartment where the explosion occurred, was standing outside his building and told the *Norwood News*, "My kitchen exploded. They don't know what it was."

Following an investigation, and in response to a follow-up inquiry from the *Norwood News*, DOB officials said on Feb. 22, "A licensed master plumber, hired by the owner, found a leak in the cooking gas pipes in the apartment."

They added that the gas meter bar and piping in the apartment were replaced, and that the vacate order for Jones' apartment remains in effect. Officials previously confirmed that Jones' landlord had provided him with a vacant apartment temporarily while the repairs were being carried out.

Back at Westchester Heights, *Norwood News* asked Kathy if she felt safe in the building, knowing what had happened. She replied, "No, I'm worried about it. I told the landlord that he's got to let me know if I can stay here." She said a Con Edison team was expected to come out that day [Feb. 22], and added, "I know it's not going to be fixed today. It's going to take a long time."

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2 bedrooms	\$1,045	9	2 people	\$39,018 - \$45,500	1 bedroom	\$1,375	8	1 person	\$49,612 - \$71,640
			3 people	\$39,018 - \$51,200				2 people	\$49,612 - \$81,900
			4 people	\$39,018 - \$56,850				3 people	\$49,612 - \$92,160
			5 people	\$39,018 - \$61,400				2 people	\$60,103 - \$81,900
3 bedrooms	\$1,200	3	3 people	\$45,086 - \$51,200	2 bedrooms	\$1,660	19	3 people	\$60,103 - \$92,160
			4 people	\$45,086 - \$56,850				4 people	\$60,103 - \$102,330
			5 people	\$45,086 - \$61,400				5 people	\$60,103 - \$110,520
			6 people	\$45,086 - \$65,950				3 people	\$69,463 - \$92,160
1 bedroom	\$1,058	1	7 people	\$45,086 - \$70,500	3 bedrooms	\$1,911	7	4 people	\$69,463 - \$102,330
			1 person	\$38,743 - \$47,760				5 people	\$69,463 - \$110,520
			2 people	\$38,743 - \$54,600				6 people	\$69,463 - \$118,710
			3 people	\$38,743 - \$61,440				7 people	\$69,463 - \$126,900
2 bedrooms	\$1,280	24	2 people	\$47,075 - \$54,600	1 bedroom	\$1,554	5	1 person	\$55,749 - \$87,560
			3 people	\$47,075 - \$61,400				2 people	\$55,749 - \$100,100
			4 people	\$47,075 - \$68,220				3 people	\$55,749 - \$112,640
			5 people	\$47,075 - \$74,680				2 people	\$67,440 - \$100,100
3 bedrooms	\$1,472	8	3 people	\$54,412 - \$61,440	2 bedrooms	\$1,874	13	3 people	\$67,440 - \$112,640
			4 people	\$54,412 - \$68,220				4 people	\$67,440 - \$125,070
			5 people	\$54,412 - \$73,680				5 people	\$67,440 - \$135,080
			6 people	\$54,412 - \$79,140				3 people	\$77,966 - \$112,640
			7 people	\$54,412 - \$81,900	3 bedrooms	\$2,159	4	4 people	\$77,966 - \$125,070
								5 people	\$77,966 - \$135,080
								6 people	\$77,966 - \$144,090
								7 people	\$77,966 - \$155,100

¹ Rent includes gas for cooking.

² Household size includes everyone who will live with you, including parents and children. Subject to occupancy criteria.

³ Household earnings includes salary, hourly wages, tips, Social Security, child support, and other income. Income guidelines subject to change.

⁴ Minimum income listed may not apply to applicants with Section 8 or other qualifying rental subsidies. Asset limits also apply.

How Do You Apply?

Apply online or through mail. To apply online, please go to nyc.gov/housingconnect. To request an application **by mail, send a self-addressed envelope to: Bronxview LLC c/o Fordham Bedford Housing Corp 2751 Grand Concourse Bronx, NY 10468**. Only send one application per development. Do not submit duplicate applications. Do not apply online and also send in a paper application. Applicants who submit more than one application may be disqualified.

When is the Deadline?

Applications must be postmarked or submitted online no later than **April 20, 2021**. Late applications will not be considered.

What Happens After You Submit an Application?

After the deadline, applications are selected for review through a lottery process. If yours is selected and you appear to qualify, you will be invited to an appointment of eligibility to continue the process of determining your eligibility. Appointments are usually scheduled from 2 to 10 months after the application deadline. You will be asked to bring documents that verify your household size, identity of members of your household, and your household income.

Español Presente una solicitud en línea en nyc.gov/housingconnect. Para recibir una traducción de español de este anuncio y la solicitud impresa, envíe un sobre con la dirección a: **Bronxview LLC c/o Fordham Bedford Housing Corp 2751 Grand Concourse Bronx, NY 10468**. En el reverso del sobre, escriba en inglés la palabra "SPANISH." Las solicitudes se deben enviar en línea o con sello postal antes de 20 de abril 2021.

简体中文 访问 nyc.gov/housingconnect 在线申请。如要获取本广告及书面申请表的简体中文版，请将您的回邮信封寄送至：**Bronxview LLC c/o Fordham Bedford Housing Corp 2751 Grand Concourse Bronx, NY 10468**。信封背面请用英语注明"CHINESE"。必须在以下日期之前在线提交申请或邮寄书面申请2021年4月20日。

Русский Чтобы подать заявление через интернет, зайдите на сайт: nyc.gov/housingconnect. Для получения данного объявления и заявления на русском языке отправьте конверт с обратным адресом по адресу **Bronxview LLC c/o Fordham Bedford Housing Corp 2751 Grand Concourse Bronx, NY 10468**. На задней стороне конверта напишите слово "RUSSIAN" на английском языке. Заявки должны быть поданы онлайн или отправлены по почте (согласно дате на почтовом штемпеле) не позднее 20 апреля 2021.

한국어 nyc.gov/housingconnect 에서 온라인으로 신청하십시오. 이 광고문과 신청서에 대한 한국어 번역본을 받아보시려면 반송용 봉투를 **Bronxview LLC c/o Fordham Bedford Housing Corp 2751 Grand Concourse Bronx, NY 10468** 으로 보내주십시오. 봉투 뒷면에 "KOREAN" 이라고 영어로 적어주십시오. 2021년4월20일까지 온라인 신청서를 제출하거나 소인이 찍힌 신청서를 보내야 합니다.

Kreyòl Ayisyen Aplike sou entènèt sou sitwèb nyc.gov/housingconnect. Pou resevwa yon tradiksyon anons sa a nan lang Kreyòl Ayisyen ak aplikasyon an sou papye, voye anvlòp ki gen adrès pou retounen li nan: **Bronxview LLC c/o Fordham Bedford Housing Corp 2751 Grand Concourse Bronx, NY 10468**. Nan dèyè anvlòp la, ekri mo "HATIAN CREOLE" an Anglè. Ou dwe remèt aplikasyon yo sou entènèt oswa ou dwe tenbre yo anvan dat 20 avril 2021.

العربية إرسال طلب عبر الإنترنت على nyc.gov/housingconnect. لتلقي ترجمة باللغة العربية لهذا الإعلان والتطبيق المطبوع، أرسل مطروفاً بالعنوان إلى: **Bronxview LLC c/o Fordham Bedford Housing Corp 2751 Grand Concourse Bronx, NY 10468**. على ظهر المطبوع، اكتب باللغة الإنجليزية كلمة "ARABIC". يجب تقديم الطلبات عبر الإنترنت أو عن طريق ختم بريدي قبل 20 أبريل 2021.



CRIME FILE

BY SÍLE MOLONEY & DAVID GREENE


Fordham Manor: Man Ejaculates on Woman

The NYPD is seeking the public's assistance identifying the man seen in the attached photo above who is wanted for questioning in connection to a sexual abuse incident that occurred in the 52nd precinct. On Monday, Jan. 25, at around 7.30 p.m., inside 2501 Grand Con-

course (Marshall's department store) in Fordham Manor, a 33-year-old woman was standing in line to pay for items when she was approached from behind by the suspect who ejaculated on the victim's outer garment.

He then exited the location on foot to parts unknown. He is described as male, aged between 20 and 30 years old. The photo is taken from the incident location, before the incident occurred.

Man Arrested for University Heights Murder

Police have arrested a man on murder charges in connection with a shooting that occurred in University Heights on Tuesday, Dec. 29, 2020. On that date, at 8.50 p.m., police responded to a 911 call regarding an assault in progress in the vicinity of West 184th Street and Aqueduct Avenue, in the 52nd precinct.

A 26-year-old man was found lying on the ground with gunshot wounds to his chest and neck. EMS responded and transported the man to St. Barnabas Hospital, where he was pronounced deceased.

He was later identified as Kevin Mason, 26, of West 182nd Street in University Heights.

On March 2, police reported that Jamel Jackson, 33, of Davidson Avenue in Morris Heights was arrested on March 1, at 8.00 p.m. in the 52nd precinct. He has been charged with murder, manslaughter, and criminal possession of a loaded firearm. An arrest is not proof that a person is guilty of a crime.

Fordham Heights: 28-Year-Old Man Murdered

On Monday, Feb. 22, at around 10.55 p.m., the NYPD responded to a 911 call regarding a man who had been shot in front of 2078 Morris Avenue in Fordham Heights, in the 46th precinct. Upon arrival, officers observed a 28-year-old man lying on the ground, unconscious and unresponsive, with a gunshot wound to the chest.

EMS also responded to the location and transported the victim to St. Barnabas Hospital, where he was pronounced deceased. The victim was later identified as Anthony Castillo,

28, of Mt. Hope Place in Mt Hope. On Feb. 24, the NYPD sought the public's assistance in identifying individuals wanted in connection with the murder investigation. A video of the suspects was released and is available at NYPD and on the *Norwood News* website.

Man Assaulted and Robbed of e-Bike on Hull Avenue

Police are looking for two men wanted in connection with an assault and robbery of a young man that took place on Hull Avenue in Norwood at 9:22 p.m. on Wednesday, Feb. 17, near the intersection of East 205th Street and Hull Avenue.

Police said a 33-year-old man was riding his e-bike on Hull Avenue when he was approached by two unidentified individuals who punched him about the body, causing him to fall to the ground. The suspects fled the scene with the victim's bike, and the victim was taken to Montefiore Hospital and was treated for bumps and bruises.

The first man is described as male, has a slim build, is in his 30s, is dark-skinned, about 5 feet, 7 inches tall, and has brown

eyes and black hair. He was last seen wearing dark-colored clothing. The second man is described as male, in his 30s, dark-skinned, 6-feet tall and was also wearing dark clothing.

Child Assaulted on Mosholu Parkway

Police are looking for an assailant who threatened a child with a sharp instrument, before punching him and stealing his cellphone and air pods at around 3 p.m. on Wednesday, Feb. 24. A 911 call was placed from the corner of Briggs Avenue and Mosholu Parkway South.

Police said an unidentified 12-year-old victim was approached by an unidentified individual who displayed a sharp object and demanded the boy's property. The suspect allegedly punched the victim in the face when he attempted to flee the location, before he, himself, fled eastbound on East 204th Street, along with the victim's cell phone and air pods. EMS was called, and evaluated and treated the child at the scene. The assailant is described as male, 5 feet, 10 inches tall, Black and was last seen wearing dark-colored clothing.

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Elections 2021: Carlton Berkley on Equality, Policing & Being the Underdog Candidate

By **MICHAEL HOROWITZ**

Carlton “Chuck” Berkley, a retired NYPD detective, who is seeking election in the 11th City Council District, is someone who doesn’t accept that the status quo has to remain as it has always been.

As a case in point, Berkley doesn’t accept that the winner of the district’s upcoming special election has to be from Riverdale, just because District 11 councilmembers have hailed from that neighborhood for decades now. Berkley, who lives in Wakefield with his wife, has a history of battling against the system, sometimes emerging victorious either for his own benefit or for the benefit of his community.

“I know I am an underdog in the March 23 special election, but that doesn’t mean that I am not determined,” said Berkley, the father of three grown children, and grandfather to two grandchildren.

Berkley and his wife, who is also retired from the NYPD, own a private investigating and security firm. “We open up our business for people in the area to come in and discuss what is on their minds,” Berkley told the *Norwood News*, adding that it was for people to discuss “hot-button issues,” and that they’ve had some very lively debates.

Over the years, Berkley said he has fought against racism in the NYPD, winning \$30,000 in a protracted lawsuit that focused on harassment and unequal treatment by white officers. We reached out to the NYPD for comment on the case, and did not receive an immediate response. Some might assume that given his history of fighting such racism within the department, he would support defunding the police, but that is not the case.

“I support redirecting funding for the police from the anti-crime units to something like neighborhood-police teams,” Berkley said. “If I am elected to the City Council, I will fight to have cops on the beat. Communities need to see police walking beats in the community the way they used to. We need to take dramatic steps to foster positive relations between the police and the communities they serve.”

Berkley said cops need to get out of cars and start foot patrolling in communities where they can be seen, and where they can interact with those people they have taken an oath to protect.

That said, he added, “It is just wrong to be against all of the police, especially since we need them to fight crime in our communities. Ninety percent of the police are terrific, and I am proud of the job I did during the 20 years I was with the NYPD. A few very bad apples sometimes create the impression that all of the police are bad. We have to go against what we call ‘the blue code of silence’ in order to weed out the bad apples in the police department.”

Turning to another matter of major concern to Berkley, he said he has been fighting against the placement of homeless shelters

in his neighborhood as part of his civic activism. “The people who run the homeless shelters have taken advantage of the relative apathy in Wakefield to place homeless shelters in our community,” Berkley said.

According to the NYPD veteran, Wakefield has more than its share of shelters, while communities like Riverdale and Woodlawn do not. Berkley attributes this to the people in the latter neighborhoods doing a better job at mobilizing. “In the case of Wakefield, the shelters have brought with them an added layer of crime in our community,” he said.

Meanwhile, when it comes to education, the tell-it-like-it-is candidate said he opposes charter schools because they take away resources that should be used to improve public schools. “The charter schools, from my point of view, are like private schools,” Berkley said. “They are very elitist. From my experience, they have separate entrances so that their students don’t have to come into contact with other students in the buildings in which they are located.”

He said the youngsters in his community, for the most part, are not getting the education they deserve. “To make matters worse, the remote learning that COVID has caused, has meant that our children are falling further behind,” he said. “The way I see it, it is premature for students to go back to their classrooms. We need to have teachers, school administrators, and students vaccinated before they go back.”

Indeed, Berkley is a strong believer in the need to vaccinate Americans to overcome the pandemic that has paralyzed so many aspects of American life and has killed more than half a million Americans. “Long after the pandemic is over, we will still have a host of problems to deal with,” Berkley stressed.

“We need to make our neighborhoods safer, and we need to bring a halt to racism in our communities. We need to tackle both of these issues at the same time.” He said to accomplish this, police cannot be viewed as the enemies in a neighborhood.

“Neighborhood people need to be the eyes and ears of law-enforcement officers if we are to successfully fight crime in our communities,” he said.

If elected, Berkley said he will fight for all the constituents who live in the district, which encompasses Norwood, Kingsbridge, Riverdale, Wakefield, and Woodlawn. “Many issues in our district are common from one neighborhood to another, but there are clearly differences as well.” As an example, the NYPD veteran said he recognizes that residents of Riverdale and Kingsbridge have to cope with poor public transportation and connectivity, while Wakefield has generally good public transportation.

Meanwhile, when it comes to food and healthy food choices, Berkley said that Wakefield has limited healthy food options.

He said, if elected, he will fight to increase the number of healthy food choices in the district’s neighborhoods. “I will seek to educate constituents on the advantages of eating more fruits and vegetables,” he said, adding that he would fight to curb obesity which he said was all too prevalent in District 11.

On the subject of endorsements, not being part of the political establishment, Berkley said he never expected to get the official backing of the District’s political leaders or the unions who he said represented a large portion of District 11’s constituents. “In fact, I recently told someone with influence that his organization would not endorse me, even though the organization’s leader liked what I stood for and what I represent,” Berkley said.

“The groups that make up the establishment invariably endorse candidates who represent the establishment’s interests. What I am about is leading the way toward constructive changes in the way we do things, rather than supporting the interests of the political establishment.”

When it comes to the New York City mayoral race, Berkley said he supports Brooklyn borough president, Eric Adams, a founder of the organization, “100 Blacks in Law Enforcement Who Care,” of which Berkley said he is still a member.

“We continue to interact with one another,” he said of Adams. “Both of us have waged often-lonely battles against racism in the NYPD.”

In addition to fighting against racism within the agency, Berkley said “100 Blacks in Law Enforcement Who Care” also counsels Black youth on how to act when they are confronted by police officers, in order to avoid harassment.

Berkley is also a member of both the “Black Law Enforcement Alliance” and the “Latino Officers Association.” “I joined these organizations because I felt that the Guardians, the traditional group that represents Black police officers, wasn’t adequately representing us,” he said. “They (the Guardians) had become part of the establishment in much the same way that politicians become part of the political establishment.”

Berkley said that he paid a significant price for butting heads against the NYPD’s hierarchy, giving one example where the NYPD allegedly placed roadblocks in his path when he sought to retire, making it difficult for him to get retirement money that was owed to him. He also said that superior officers harassed him. Berkley retired from the NYPD in 2004. *Norwood News* reached out to the NYPD for comment. We did not receive an immediate response.

The candidate said he anticipates he will also “pay a price” for challenging the political establishment in District 11. “I know that I am facing an uphill in



Photo courtesy of Carlton Berkley

CARLTON BERKLEY

the race for a City Council seat in the special election,” said Berkley. “A special election makes it even harder for underdog candidates, who are outspent and are not part of the political establishment, to win.”

Berkley is running for the seat that has been vacated by former City Councilman Andrew Cohen, who Bronx Democrats nominated for a Bronx Supreme Court judgeship last August. Cohen subsequently won the seat in the November general election.

Fellow candidate, male district leader and public schoolteacher, Eric Dinowitz, is the son of the assemblyman for the 81st Assembly District, Jeffrey Dinowitz, the latter representing the majority of City Council District 11 at state level. The younger Dinowitz is widely viewed as the favorite in the race to succeed Cohen, but shifting political winds in the Bronx and in the City may prove otherwise.

Recent elections have seen outliers like U.S. Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and State Sen. Alessandra Biaggi beat their respective opponents who were seen as the favorites, and this has given underdog candidates in a number of other political races more confidence than they might otherwise have had. Indeed, a record number of candidates are running in various Bronx races this election season.

For Berkley, who is 58 years old, running for City Council is all about “giving something back” to the community that has given his family a stable life for decades. “Our family is very close - very close-knit,” he said. “We promote respect and healthy living among ourselves. We are proud of ourselves, and we celebrate our accomplishments. I like to think that we can be viewed as a role model of what family life should be.”

Berkley first ran for City Council in 2009. “I had not intended to run this year until the people in Wakefield insisted that I run,” he said. “I am not seeking the Council seat for personal glory. My ego and my sense of who I am don’t require that I be on the City Council. I am running out of a sense of obligation to the people in my neighborhood. They have convinced me that I can make a difference in the life of my community, and other communities in the 11th Councilmanic District.”

The special election will be held on March 23.



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Out & About

Compiled by RACHEL DALLOO & SÍLE MOLONEY

Events

From December 2020 to June 2021, the **Norwood Farmstand** will be open to the community on Thursdays from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at E. Gun Hill Road and Dekalb Avenue, with fresh, affordable fruits and vegetables grown by regional farmers, year-round. Be a part of GrowNYC's Wholesale program, designed to bring the freshest, highest quality, regionally grown farm products to the New York City community. To learn more about this program, visit <https://www.grownyc.org/farmstand/norwood>.

On Friday, March 5, from 11 a.m. to 12 p.m., the **New York Botanical Garden** will be hosting "Botany, Race, and Power: The History of Expeditions to Cuba."

This talk will examine the history of botanical expeditions to Cuba, beginning with the Spanish Imperial expeditions of the 1790s, and ending with the first New York Botanical Garden expeditions to the island in the first decades of the 20th century. The paintings, photographs, and texts produced as part of these scientific explorations reveal how these expeditions drove, and were driven by, geopolitical and racial struggles of their time. Register at <https://www.nybg.org/event/>, and search using the word "Cuba".

Boost your knowledge, meet other adults, and get to know them with the fun, virtual "Trivia Game: All Things Green," hosted by **Van Cortlandt Library** staff on Tuesday, March 16 at 3 p.m. Each month, the group plays a

game with a different category/theme and provides book recommendations based on the categories. The theme for March will be "All Things Green." Advance registration is required at: <https://www.nypl.org/events/programs/2021/03/16/trivia-game-program>.

Art

Want to learn about Designing Migration? Join the **Lehman College Art Gallery**, for The Sara Little Turnbull: Visiting Designer Speaker Series, on March 4, from 3 p.m. to 4 p.m. The program will cover serving Human Mobility and Justice. Learn more at: <http://events.lehman.edu/Calendar>.

Want to be a part of a free film screening? Then join the **Mott Haven Film Festival** on March 20, from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. for their screening of "Stakes the Short Film," a story about a young adult from the hood who gets involved with the wrong people and makes some bad decisions. The event will take place at the Bronx Art Space. To purchase tickets or for more information visit: <https://>

www.eventbrite.com and search for "Stakes Short Film by Mott Haven Film Festival."

Movement

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/>.

Join NYC Parks on March 6 from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at 242nd Street and Van Cortlandt Park East for their **Hiking program**. Join the Urban Park Rangers on a journey along the only trail that crosses west-east in the park. NYCParks asks participants to stay home if sick, maintain six feet of physical distance between households, wear a face covering, keep hands washed and carry hand sanitizer. To register, visit <https://www.nycgovparks.org/events/2021/03/06/van-cortlandt-super-hike> or call (718) 548-0912.

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Veterans' Health Prioritized at CB7 Meeting

By DAWN CLANCY

Bronx County is home to 25,000 civilian veterans, according to the annual American Community Survey (ACS) conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau.

Though the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (V.A.) provides integrated life-long healthcare services to eligible military veterans at 1700 V.A. medical centers and outpatient clinics located across the country, in reality, only some are covered.

During the Bronx Community Board 7 (CB7) Veterans' Affairs Committee meeting on Feb. 17, a Union Community Health Center (UNION) representative provided an overview of the variety of health services available to Bronx veterans and their families, including help with health insurance.

While UNION, a hospital, provides primary and urgent care services, across its six locations, to all Bronx residents, the center's veteran health care liaison, Raul Gonzalez, who presented at the CB7 meeting, provides tailored health care support to veterans and their families.

"The hospital has some limits," said Gonzalez. "They have emergency rooms that tend to be madhouses because of the waiting times. So, if you go in with something simple like a sprained ankle or a rash, you end up waiting six or seven hours. But with something simple that doesn't need the emergency room, veterans with Veterans Affairs benefits can go to one of our V.A.-approved, urgent care centers."

As New York's largest federally qualified health center (FQHC), also a VA medical center, UNION operates a borough-wide medical mobile health

unit and plans to launch a dental mobile health unit this summer. In addition, there are plans to introduce on-site pharmacy services at select UNION centers, but details have yet to be released.

In addition to non-emergency services at UNION centers, veterans also have access to physical and occupational therapy, dental, urgent care, and an audiology department. "We tend to forget how noisy war is," Gonzalez said, explaining that rifle and improvised explosive device (IED) blasts can cause hearing loss which, in turn, can lead to both depression and heart disease.

"Many veterans suffer from hearing loss, and they take it for granted. They think it's normal," he said. "But we can treat hearing loss and even provide veterans with hearing aids."

The COVID-19 vaccine is also available at some UNION centers and distributed in accordance with City guidelines. *Norwood News* also recently reported that the Bronx V.A. Hospital, also known as the James J. Peters Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center, has begun vaccinating veterans of all ages.

On the topic of insurance, CB7 committee member, Helene Redd, asked Gonzalez, "What if a veteran comes to you with their family and they're not insured?" Indeed, while the V.A. offers health care coverage, veterans have to meet specific eligibility requirements to qualify.

However, Gonzalez said he will work with every veteran that walks through his door. "If a veteran or a member of their family comes in to get

(continued on page 19)

NEIGHBORHOOD NOTES

COVID-19 Vaccinations

Appointments are required to receive a vaccination. To determine your eligibility, access a list of nearby providers, and schedule your vaccination appointment, use New York State's new 'Am I Eligible' app. Prior to receiving your scheduled vaccination, you must complete the New York State COVID-19 Vaccine Form. Please be patient and continue to monitor these links frequently for available vaccine appointments:

New York City: <https://vaccinefinder.nyc.gov/> or 877-VAX-4NYC (877-829-4692)

New York State: <https://am-i-eligible.covid19vaccine.health.ny.gov/> or 1-833-NYS-4VAX (1-833-697-4829)

VaccineTogetherNY: <https://vaccine-togetherny.org/Pages/default.aspx> or 646-697-VACC

Your physician or local pharmacy may also have information on scheduling vaccine appointments. If you need transportation to get your vaccine, click this link for a list of options: <https://forms.ny.gov/s3/vaccine>.

COVID-19 Testing Sites

For a full list of COVID-19 testing sites, text "COVID TEST" to 855-48 or go to:

<https://www1.nyc.gov/site/coronavirus/get-tested/covid-19-testing.page>.

Hotel Workers Now Eligible for Vaccine

Given the overall increase to the State's vaccine supply and the essential health care service that hotel workers provide, officials are granting localities the flexibility to add hotel workers to the 1B vaccine prioritization group. Appointments can be scheduled by calling the Vaccination Hotline at 1-833-697-4829 or through the State's eligibility tool at: <https://am-i-eligible.covid19vaccine.health.ny.gov/Public/prescreener>.

Resources for Families of Students with Disabilities

Advocates for Children of New York (AFC) has multiple back-to-school resources for NYC students with disabilities. You can call AFC's Jill Chaifetz Education Helpline with questions about the NYC education system. The number is (866)-427-6033, and is open from Monday-Thursday, 10:00AM to 4:00PM. AFC offers guides and resources to help you navigate NYC's education system.

Go to: https://www.advocatesforchildren.org/get_help/guides_and_resources_for_materials. An updated Start of School Year Q&A for Students with Disabilities is available, in English and in Spanish at the following links:

https://www.advocatesforchildren.org/sites/default/files/library/start_of_school_qa.pdf?pt=1

https://www.advocatesforchildren.org/sites/default/files/library/start_of_school_qa_spanish.pdf?pt=1.

Find the Education During COVID-19 webinar series online at this link:

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL3a_EooC0xyd7YH8upy5jB-JYqeNyHF6aI

COVID-19 Emergency Eviction and Foreclosure Relief

The State has halted all eviction and foreclosure cases through February 28. To halt evictions/foreclosures until at least Saturday, May 1, all tenants, and owners of buildings that contain fewer than 10 units, can submit a hardship declaration form, attesting they have lost income, have had increased costs during the pandemic, or would be at an increased risk for severe illness from COVID due to an underlying

medical condition if forced to move. http://www.courts.state.ny.us/eefpa/PDF/Eviction_Hardship_Declaration-English.pdf

Housing courts will send the form to defendants in pending cases, and the form can be returned to NewYorkHardshipDeclaration@nycourts.gov. All tenants, and owners of buildings that contain fewer than 10 units, who are behind in rent or mortgage payments and are seeking to preemptively head off evictions/foreclosures in March and April can submit the hardship declaration form to their landlord/mortgage lender. Make a copy or take a photo of the completed form for your records.

New York State Small Business Relief

New York State is offering grant and loan programs and other assistance for small businesses affected by COVID-19 at: <https://esd.ny.gov/covid-19-business-resources>.

Access-A-Ride Updates

The MTA has resumed fare collection. Eligible Access-A-Ride customers are able to apply for the Fair Fares discount through ACCESS HRA. The MTA has reopened three of the six Access-A-Ride assessment centers that have been closed since the start of the pandemic. The Bronx open MTA Paratransit Assessment Center is Excellence Physical Therapy at 1811 Hone Avenue.

Indoor Dining Resumes

Indoor dining in New York City has resumed at 35 percent capacity, with strict health guidelines in place. All restaurants and bars licensed by the SLA must cease all indoor and outdoor dining activities by 11 pm daily.

Bars Inside Establishments: All physical patron bars must be converted to service bars only. That means no seats at bars, and patrons cannot directly order a drink at the bar or be served a drink at the bar. All service is at seated tables.

Outdoor Dining Structures: If more than two sides of an outdoor dining structure are enclosed, it is considered "indoor dining" and the 35% occupancy and related requirements apply.

Table Spacing: Tables are to be spaced 6 feet apart. However, when that is not feasible, they can be closer if approved barriers are placed between the tables.

No Face Mask, No Entry: Businesses cannot allow patrons to enter the establishment, go to or from the bathroom, or stand inside for takeout, if they are not wearing a face covering.

HVAC: Businesses must closely review air circulation and filtration requirements.

Join New York City's Mental Health Workforce

The careers page of the ThriveNYC website now features opportunities from community partners alongside active searches for the NYC Mayor's Office of ThriveNYC. If you are an agency or community-based organization partner and are recruiting for mental health positions that you would like to feature on the site, please email ThriveNYC@cityhall.nyc.gov.

eCycleNYC Application

The NYC Dept. of Sanitation is seeking locations with indoor storage space that can host eCycleNYC bins for electronics recycling. Interested building owners and managers can fill out this form, and DSNY will get in touch: <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dsny/site/services/electronics/ecycle-nyc>

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Friday, March 5, 2021 12:00pm - 1:00pm | Thursday, March 18, 2021 5:00pm - 6:00pm
Friday, March 19, 2021 12:00pm - 1:00pm | Thursday, March 25, 2021 5:00pm - 6:00pm

*Note: The lottery will be held on April 15, 2021 For applications, please visit our website at www.ilchs.org

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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 usually held **on the 3rd 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** meetings have been held via ZOOM. The next full Board meeting will be held **on Wednesday, March 24, 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 meetings are held **on the first Wednesday of the month at 8 p.m.** For further details, contact bedfordmosholu@verizon.net.



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New Schools Chancellor Offers Hope to Second-Chance Students

(continued from page 1)

ous, if not impossible, task for MMCC staff. Often times, they are dealing with “alternative schools.”

According to newyorkschools.com, these schools were created because poorer school districts didn't have enough special education funding. The NYC Alternative High School District is designed, in theory, to help students who, without having these services available, would more than likely not earn a diploma.

However, MMCC officials describe an ongoing battle with the City's Department of Education (DOE) when attempts to obtain the required paperwork from such schools fail, and MMCC's escalation to the DOE appears to fall on deaf ears.

Effective March 15, Meisha Porter, will be the first Black woman to serve in the role of City Schools Chancellor, replacing Richard A. Carranza, alongside whom Porter has worked. MMCC officials hope that this change at the helm may help bring an end to the bureaucratic nightmare that has required them to redirect their time and energy away from students.

Sophia Antonelli is an academic supervisor at MMCC and described her experience with DOE. “We have gone up the ladder of school officials in one case, and we have reached the chancellor at four attempts and have not gotten a response in order to get proper IEP records for one of our participants,” she said. “In many cases, these are the things that are holding back their test dates. It's this record-keeping that schools are giving us runarounds about, not giving answers, blatantly ignoring correspondence, pass-offs.”

Antonelli continued, “This is really a shame because these are supposed to be our supporters. We kind of work simultaneously because we're taking students that have been through this [public school/alternative] system, and we're relying on them [DOE] to give the students what they need.”

She added, “It's not even about us. It's about the student. As a City system that serves students, DYCD (Department of Youth & Community Development) and the DOE, you would think that we would have a stronger partnership. Unfortunately, the DOE has not serviced our students while they were in their schools, I guess. That's why a lot of them are here.”

Norwood News asked Antonelli if she believed it was simply a question

of DOE being under-resourced due to the pandemic or if it's a case of internal DOE mismanagement. She said former “participants” of the alternative schools have spoken about them not being run properly. “Another common theme I'm getting with [student] transcripts - if I do get them - Regents' scores are not recorded, and that's an issue,” she said.

Regents' exams measure student achievement in high school-level courses in five areas. “If I call the school, I've been told, ‘Well, they didn't sit for the Regents,’” Antonelli said, adding that she then asks if there is not coding to designate when a student has not sat the Regents. She said she's been told that there is, but it is not always provided on the transcripts she receives.

“So, coding on report cards is amiss,” she said. “IEPs are being withheld for, I think, probably legal reasons at this point, or a personal vendetta against students, and their schools are being run like mayhem. There is no order. There's no curriculum. There's no teaching.”

Norwood News reached out to the DOE for comment on what MMCC told us and while our request was acknowledged, we did not receive further feedback.

Quanasia Sullins is the coordinator of workforce development at MMCC. “Our program is an alternative, adult literacy workforce program, geared towards assisting Bronx residents with getting their high school diploma, and/or some type of certification to successfully enter the workforce,” she said.

“The Bronx has the lowest literacy reading scores out of all five boroughs and that reading score, I kid you not, between the ages of 18 and 21, for Bronx residents, is reported at second grade reading level.” Sullins said some students just don't do well in a typical educational structure.

She said aside from the pandemic and the issues relating to remote learning, a lot of the students weren't able to finish their high school diploma, “due to teachers, family issues, community issues, sometimes substance abuse, a lot of times behavioral issues that the typical educational structure is not meant to deal with.”

For Sullins, the system has already failed these students, but MMCC's 20-week expedited program gives them a second shot to obtain their high school diploma.

Another free program offered is the Commercial Driver's License (CDL). “We found with the current workforce trends, transportation, especially during the time of COVID, has increased consistently,” she said.

Sullins said to get a CDL, 20 to 30 driving lessons are required, in addition to the necessary permit and license paperwork, all of which comes to a total of \$8,600, a hefty amount in the borough with the lowest median household income and the lowest employment rate.

MMCC aims to improve overall family employment, family wealth and family education in the Bronx. Its programs also offer another advantage. “These students are paid,” Sullins said. “For high school equivalency, those students are able to make anywhere between \$150/week or \$317/week.”

For the CDL, it's between \$200 and \$350 per week. Sullins continued, “We understand that our youth need money, but we also understand they need their

education. We are willing to pay these young people to invest in themselves.”

She added, “We get it. You're living life during a pandemic which this generation and my generation, no other generation knows about.”

Meanwhile, Sledge awaits the necessary paperwork in order for his test date to be scheduled so that he too can move forward into his preferred field of engineering. He said the daily contact with tutors was one of the things that stood out in the program.

“They helped me build my courage back up and made me realize that everything isn't basically handed out to you, and sometimes you got to take some time to figure out what you want to do with yourself in life,” he said. “What I would say is - don't give up on yourself even if you feel like you're too old. Just get back up and do it.”

For more information on the HSE or CDL programs, call Marlon Seymour on (973) 556-7843 or email advanceandearnintake@gmail.com.

Veterans' Health Prioritized at CB7 Meeting

(continued from page 16)

services, and they don't have insurance, I will help them find whatever New York State coverage they're eligible for,” he said.

“And if they don't qualify for anything, or if money is limited, we have a sliding scale that's based on an individual's ability to pay, but they will not be turned away. I will help them get the insurance that they need,” he added.

Gonzalez also confirmed that veterans do not need to provide a DD Form 214 or discharge and separation documentation to receive help. “If a person served anywhere in the armed services, and is a veteran by definition, we are open to help them,” Gonzalez said. “As long as you served, you're one of us.”

Before ending his presentation, Gonzalez called on the community to assist with veteran outreach. “They usually congregate at the American Legion or a VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars) post, but COVID has made it impossible for anyone just to be together,” he said. “So, it's really hard to know where veterans are right now.”

He was anxious for them to be aware of what services were available and also welcomed suggestions from

the committee and the public. During the next Veterans Affairs committee meeting on March 17, the committee plans to provide updates on a planned veterans' round-table discussion to be held in either April or May.

Committee and community members suggested focusing the upcoming event on veterans' mental health, and on COVID vaccine concerns. “A lot of people, because of COVID, are suffering mental health issues because we're all locked up in place and can't get out to communicate with other people,” said committee member, Jean Hill. “And veterans in particular, if they had any active service duties, they may have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) which only makes it worse.”

For more information on UNION center locations, hours of operations, and services, visit www.uchcbronx.org. To reach UCHC Veteran Health Care Liaison, Raul Gonzalez, call 718.618.8152 or email rgonzalez2@uchcbronx.org.

To assist with Bronx's veteran community outreach or to learn more about Community Board 7's Veterans' Affairs events and meetings, email committee chair, Chad Royer, at chadyroyer@ymail.com.

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