



NORWOOD NEWS

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MURDER VICTIM'S MOTHER THREATENED BY GANG



Photo by David Greene

GRIEVING MOTHER, CYNTHIA Duffy, (center) pleads with the Norwood community to come forward with any information that might help with the investigation into her daughter's murder, during a vigil held on Thursday, March 23, 2021.

by **DAVID GREENE**

One day after burying her 20-year-old daughter in Woodlawn cemetery, a Norwood mother said she has been threatened by gang members, has fled her home

of ten years, along with her family, and has gone into hiding at a Bronx hotel.

Cynthia Duffy, mother of Delila Vásquez, 20, confirmed her daughter died at Jacobi Hospital just before

midnight on Wednesday, March 17. She was discovered with a gunshot wound to her head inside a third-floor apartment at 3339 Hull Avenue, near East 209th Street in Norwood at 10:09

p.m. the same night.

Police had not released Vásquez's name. She became the first recorded homicide victim of 2021 in the 52nd precinct. Speaking at
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52nd Precinct Tries New Tactic to Curb Gun Violence

by DAVID GREENE &
SÍLE MOLONEY

As part of a new, holistic approach aimed at combatting the culture of gun violence, concentrated in a few specific blocks of the Fordham Manor section of the Bronx, the NYPD's 52nd precinct has launched a multi-agency, community collaboration to tackle the issue.

Announced by Deputy Inspector Thomas J. Alps during the Bronx Community Board 7 executive meeting on March 18, part of the initiative involves giving the area a physical make-over, while also partnering with City agencies and community-based organizations to address unemployment and quality of life issues plaguing the neighborhood.

As a first step, officers from the 52nd precinct joined local community group, Guerinos Against Graffiti (GAG), Bronx Community Board 7 residents, members of the Department of Sanitation, the NYPD Auxiliary team and the 52nd Precinct Explorers for a day-long clean-up along Briggs Avenue on Thursday, March 25, focusing on the area between East Kingsbridge Road and East 194th Street.

Volunteers spent the whole day sweeping the streets, spray-removing graffiti from buildings, clearing trash, and painting walls while CBS New York arrived on site to film the efforts.

Ahead of the event, at the March 18 meeting, Alps said that while six out of the seven index crimes for the precinct were down as of that date, compared to the same period last year, the command was still struggling with gun violence. "Year to date, we have six shootings versus three last year," he said, adding that they had experienced a "horrific one" the previous night at 3339 Hull Avenue.

He said the victim was "still alive and breathing" when officers responded



Photo courtesy of **THE 52ND PRECINCT VIA TWITTER**

VOLUNTEERS AND MEMBERS of the 52nd precinct gather for a photo at the start of a daylong clean-up along Briggs Avenue in Fordham Manor on Thursday, March 25, 2021, as part of a wider initiative to curb gun violence in the area.

at around 10 o'clock. "We had her transported quickly to Jacobi Medical Center where she was pronounced deceased at 23.49 hours [11.49 p.m.]," he said, adding that the officers involved were to receive counselling due to the psychological trauma they experienced as a result of witnessing the incident.

Alps added that the investigation was going well and he anticipated the case being closed quickly. He said he wanted residents to know that the precinct was increasing their presence in the area, and had already been doing so but had been getting pulled to other areas of the command as well. "Along the 194 corridor and down by Father Zeiser Place as well, they've been experiencing gun violence," he said, adding that it was gang-related and that he was concerned there was potential for further shootings.

He then outlined the new tactic the precinct planned to adopt to address this. "It's my belief and it's the department's belief that quality-of-life issues exacerbate the issues of gun violence, and sometimes breed the issues of gun

violence, or violence in general, and crime," he said.

After analyzing crime figures for the command, he said he had selected four of the worst blocks that have experienced the most gun violence in the past three years, since he's been at the precinct. These are between Kingsbridge and 194th Street, the Valentine Avenue block between 194th and 196th Streets, Morris Avenue between Kingsbridge Road and 196th Street, and Father Zeiser Place between Webb Avenue and University Avenue.

"There's been other blocks in the command that had significant issues but those [four] are the blocks with the highest gun violence combined with community complaints, quality of life issues recorded on 311 - double parked cars, smoking marijuana, loud music, selling drugs, homelessness, trespassing, noise, noise, noise, illegal parking," he said.

Alps said he was looking for volunteers in the community to assist with the formation of a coalition with city agencies, elected officials and clergy to organize days of action to carry out mass clean-ups in each of the four target areas.

He also plans to liaise with the Department of Buildings to make sure residential buildings are in compliance, are clean, safe, and habitable and improve security measures, lighting and cameras. "We'll bring in Parks to trim trees [and] fix streetlights with DOT," he said, adding that he wanted residents to know the police were invested in helping the people in these blocks. He added that it was also preferable for City agencies to get to know the communities living there and resolve such issues di-

(continued on page 8)

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INQUIRING PHOTOGRAPHER

By DAVID GREENE



This week, we asked readers their thoughts on the recent City Council District 11 & District 15 special elections and the use of the new Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) system.



"I didn't know about the special election and now, it's too late. I wish I would have known because I would have voted in this City Council race. I just thank God that the coronavirus in New York is getting better. I heard about Ranked Choice Voting and I think it's better to have more choices today."

Delphine Sanders,
Norwood



"Ranked Choice Voting was easy and allowed me to support a few of my top candidates and ensured my voice was heard and had weight. I followed the endorsements by Voters for Animal Rights and, additionally, researched each candidate to inform how I ranked them. I rushed over to my polling place on Election Day before noon, nervous I would hit a crowd. But, upon arriving, I found barely anyone there. Apparently, the morning had been incredibly slow, and I was only among the first few dozen voters on that day. I had been a poll worker at that same location last November and wish there was the same passion and enthusiasm for the turnout for this local election."

Samantha Lawton,
Mount Hope



"I live in Queens and I worked the special election in February, and they used Ranked Choice Voting. It was fairly successful. Some made mistakes, but most voters got it. They publicized the special election as much as they usually do. We had a normal turnout, maybe a little more than a normal special election. Ranked voting is generally easy to understand, but I have mixed feelings about it. As a taxpayer, it saves money by eliminating run-off elections, but as someone who often works the elections, I have less opportunity to make money by not working those run-off elections."

William Horowitz,
Bellrose, Queens



"Several weeks before the special election, I came down with COVID-19, and was hospitalized. I was very worried that I would not be able to vote. My absentee ballot request had fallen in a black hole. A friend required four trips to the Board of Elections. I understand and support the concept behind RCV. I'm not really sure it achieved much in CD 11, but I think we might see a difference if we had greater voter turnout."

Stephanie Coggins,
Spuyten Duyvil



"I obviously know that [Eric] Dinowitz got 40-something percent, but I didn't see the results of the ranked share process. But I must tell you, I didn't know how it worked. I understand voting, and I clearly voted correctly in accordance with my choices, but I didn't understand how the votes are applied until a guy in a meeting this week presented some slides on how it works. I did not think it was complicated going in and choosing in the order that you would choose candidates."

Richard Conley,
Spuyten Duyvil



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NEWS BRIEFS

By SÍLE MOLONEY

Protesters Camp Outside Heastie's Office

More than 50 protesters gathered at the Bronx office of Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie at 1446 East Gun Hill Road in Pelham Gardens, vowing to camp outside all night on Friday, March 25. They called on Heastie to support calls for the resignation of Gov. Andrew Cuomo, following allegations by multiple women of inappropriate behavior by the governor, which he denies, and because of his handling of the COVID-19 crisis relating to nursing homes.

The governor is cooperating with investigations into both matters. The crowd, which included members of the Northwest Bronx Community & Clergy Coalition and other community-based organizations also called for an additional tax on the rich, as well forgiveness of rent incurred by tenants during the past year, amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Police said the crowd had dispersed by the time they arrived at the location at midnight.

Frisch Field Community Input Meeting

A community input meeting was held in conjunction with the NYC Parks' department on Feb. 17 to discuss the future plans for Frisch Field in Bedford Park. Former Councilman Andrew Cohen secured funding for its renovation before he resigned. During the meeting, which drew about 27 people, the Parks' department confirmed \$5 million was available for the project, and the renovation timeline was estimated at between 30 and 45 months. Design ideas by the Parks' department include installing accessible dug-outs, a natural turf field, a scoreboard and the planting of trees in an adjacent seating area for shade.

Some community ideas included building a playground in the outfield area and installing night lights and replacement bleachers. Two local teams currently play at Frisch, and it was suggested that soccer and flag football could be played on the outfield, while baseball/softball would continue to be played on the main field.

Bronx BP Endorses Corey Johnson as Comptroller

Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr. announced his endorsement of City Council Speaker, Corey Johnson, as the City's next comptroller on Monday, March 29, during a

Opinion

Passover, An Extremely Meaningful Time of Year

By MICHAEL HOROWITZ

Passover, which started on the evening of March 27, is one of the most meaningful times of year for Jewish people throughout the world. The holiday, which will conclude on Sunday night, April 4, combines what is important for families with what is important for Jews as a distinct people.

The holiday, in a more modern context, links Jews to struggles for liberation and freedom in our country and throughout the world. On a very personal level, Passover is a time for my family and other families to get together for very special Seder meals that are very rich in symbolism and camaraderie. For me, and for other Jews, the rich symbolism and meaning of the holiday harken back to childhood memories of families enjoying the matzah, or unleavened bread that our ancestors ate when they were in the desert following their legendary escape from slavery in the land of Egypt.

We remember eating horseradish, which symbolizes the bitterness of our enslavement, and the charoses, the delectable dish of apples, nuts and sweet wine or dates with wine and nuts, which symbolize the bricks and mortar that are associated with the enslavement of the ancient Israelites.

The celebration of Passover, in a very

real sense, is a celebration of the beginning of Judaism as a distinct religion and of Jews as a distinct people. For my family and most of our Jewish friends, the holiday reminds us that tolerance for others and support for the liberation struggles of others are imperatives.

On a much more basic level, Jews throughout the world, during Passover, look forward to getting together with relatives and friends they may not have had a chance to interact with while living the helter-skelter lives of our difficult, modern times.

Last year, we celebrated Passover remotely because the pandemic made it unsafe for us to mingle on even the most basic level. In contrast, this year, my wife and I celebrated the holiday with my niece, her three children, my sister-in-law and her special male friend on the evening of March 27. Our vaccines, in a very real sense, have given us a feeling of some relief from the coronavirus.

For us, our celebration of the Seder served to symbolize our desire to return to our real-life interactions with people we care about, including non-Jews as well as Jews.

For as long as I can remember, we have invited some of our special non-Jewish friends to join us at the Seder table, and join our celebration of Jewish peoplehood and liberation struggles throughout the world. In a very real sense, we have invited non-Jews to learn why Passover is such an important holiday for Jews throughout the world.

In recent years, my wife and I have also been invited to celebrate Passover with my best friend and his family, including his wife, his two daughters, and their spouses. Again, Jews and non-Jews joined together in the telling of the Pass-

over story. My friend and his wife, as well as my wife and I, struggle to make Judaism relevant in our modern times. In this endeavor, the celebration of Passover with my best friend has featured the holiday storybook, the Haggadah, that he and his wife have painstakingly written.

Interestingly, the revised holiday storybook was not my first experience with a revised Haggadah. As Reconstructionist Jews, who view Judaism as a constantly evolving civilization, my wife and I had experience with revised Haggadahs when we attended Seders at the Society for the Advancement of Judaism, the main synagogue for a branch of Judaism that reflects our desire to bring new meaning to the ancient traditions that we cherish.

As a Jew who likes to think of himself as a forward-thinking person, I straddle two civilizations. I am proud to be an American, and I am also proud to be an American Jew. As American Jews, we share many common traditions with other American Jews, as well as many common traditions with Jews throughout the world. As American Jews, we also share common traditions with other Americans who share backgrounds and traditions that are similar to ours.

The celebration of Passover, which was limited severely during the height of the pandemic in our country, reinforces the concept of the Jewish people as a distinct force for good throughout the world. In a very real sense, our rituals and traditions remind us of the positive role we can play in the world in which we live.

Michael Horowitz is a long-time journalist, Bronxite and member of the American-Jewish community.

campaign stop on Arthur Avenue in the Little Italy section of the Bronx. The announcement marked the first by the borough president in a competitive 2021 citywide race. After the formalities, Johnson and Diaz Jr. spent some time in the Arthur Avenue hub, greeting voters and speaking to local business owners.

504 Democratic Club Announce Slew of Endorsements

The 504 Democratic Club, which is one of three citywide clubs which advocates for people with disabilities, announced a slew of endorsements on Monday, March 29, in various city races. In the

Bronx, the club endorsed Vanessa L. Gibson, for Bronx borough president. Meanwhile, in the various City Council races across the borough, the club endorsed Eric Dinowitz in District 11, Marjorie Velázquez in District 13, Pierina Sanchez in District 14, Latchmi Devi Gopal in District 15, Althea Stevens in District 16 and Amanda Fariás in District 18.

Biaggi Hosts Event for Women's History Month

On Thursday, March 25, State Sen. Alessandra Biaggi held a Women's History Month Town Hall via Facebook Live, during which she and other panelists discussed various issues affecting women, including domestic violence,

unequal pay, sex trafficking and sexual harassment in the workplace. She was joined by Bronx District Attorney Darcel D. Clark, Assemblywoman Amanda Septimo, Assemblywoman Karines Reyes and Westchester District Attorney Mimi Rocah. The event was moderated by NY Working Families Party director, Sochie Nnaemeka.

First GOP Mayoral Debate

Republican candidates for the role of mayor of New York City, Fernando Mateo and Curtis Sliwa, squared-off in the first Republican mayoral primary debate hosted by 77 WABC radio on Wednesday, March 31, at the Studio 77 event center, located at 800

Third Avenue in Manhattan. According to sources, it was the first time that the two Republican-endorsed candidates for office went head-to-head on issues of crime, police, New York City's COVID-19 recovery, and the economy. The debate can be viewed on 77 WABC's YouTube channel.

Winning Take-5 Lottery Ticket Sold in Fordham Heights

The New York Lottery announced there were multiple top-prize, winning tickets sold for the March 27 TAKE-5 drawing. One ticket was sold in The Bronx, at Reyes Wine & Liquors, located at 53 East 183rd Street in Fordham Heights, and was worth \$22,460.

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52nd Precinct Tries New Tactic to Curb Gun Violence

(continued from page 2)
rectly instead of involving the police.

Another angle is to work with violence interrupters like BRAG [Bronx Rises Against Gun Violence] who run programs where they work with young people to promote safer streets and new community norms where violence is not accepted.

"We'll come back later and bring the BIDs and businesses in Fordham Road and have a resource fair and job fair," said Alps. "The target is to hire locally, connect businesses with this specific block." He said he hoped this approach would be a game changer, rather than just having police suppress crime when it occurs.

Alps assured residents that the new approach was aimed at building trust within the community but was not going to replace traditional methods of law enforcement. The aim is to complement it.

"We are police officers, and we have to enforce laws. That is our duty," he said. "I'll bring in other divisions, narcotics, undercover, gangs [units], enforcement of those individuals that are not allowing the community to evolve," he said. Of the new approach, he added, "I'm excited about it. I'm going to need some help."

After the first clean-up event, Alps tweeted that six derelict vehicles had been towed away from the area and two stolen motorcycles had been recovered during the day.

Later that night, during the monthly, virtual 52nd Precinct Community Council meeting, Alps told participants, "It was just amazing how it transformed the look of the block." He added, "That's what I want to do, transform the look and hopefully transform the attitude of the lives of the residents of the block."

Ahead of the event, the 52nd precinct had tweeted a warning to residents living on Briggs Avenue between East 194th Street and East Kingsbridge Road that there would be no parking in the area on March 25 from midday to midnight, due to the clean-up event and that vehicles would be towed away.

Despite the pre-advice, not all car owners complied on the impacted block. Alternate side parking (ASP) rules were also in effect the same morning. To make way for the clean-up, local car owners had to find other spaces to

legally double-park while ASP was in effect, and later move to new parking spaces once it was suspended.

Many drivers north of East 194th Street double-parked on the next block on Briggs Avenue between East 194th and East 196th Streets. However, not all cars on that block moved to the alternate side, creating a bottle neck.

Only one entrance to Briggs Avenue had been cordoned off. At one point, an 18-wheeler Goya Foods truck made the unfortunate mistake of turning onto the open end of Briggs Avenue, causing tempers to flare when it seemed to almost touch one of the double-parked cars. However, the forgiving car driver quickly jumped into his vehicle and moved it closer to the curb, avoiding any damage to either vehicle.

A Department of Sanitation inspector was observed a short distance away, likely giving tickets to some of the estimated ten other vehicle owners who had not moved their cars to the other side of the street. He appeared to be unaware of the close encounter between the Goya Foods truck and the double-parked car, later getting back into his vehicle and driving away.

After about ten minutes of slowly driving through the obstacle course of double-parked cars, and finally reaching East 196th Street, the Goya Foods driver told the *Norwood News*, "It's no good."

Meanwhile, Sirio Guerino of GAG who donated his services and graffiti-cleaning equipment on the day, for the first of what could become monthly clean-ups in the area, said of Alps and the clean-up event, "This is something new he's trying. The four blocks he's designated are based on multiple gunshots and reports of shootings, and those with the most 311 complaints."

In a series of tweets dated March 25, Alps wrote that the block residents were overwhelmed with emotion and thankful for the collective efforts of the volunteers, and slowly came outside to witness and take in the improvements. "Like the spring season, we hope this day of action brings, hope, transformation and change to a block suffering from neglect and violence," Alps wrote. "The 52nd Precinct is invested in this community and are proud to serve you."

The next block clean-up will take place on Morris Avenue on April 15th.

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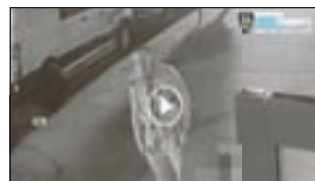
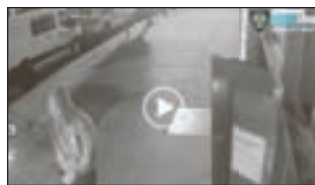
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CRIME FILE

BY SÍLE MOLONEY & DAVID GREENE

**Man Killed in Hit & Run Incident**

On Saturday, March 27, at around 9.12 p.m., police responded to a call regarding a man who was seen walking southbound on the northbound side of the Major Deegan Expressway in the vicinity of Exit 12 in the 50th precinct. Upon arrival, police determined that the man of unknown age had been struck between Exit 11 and 12, by a vehicle that fled the scene. EMS responded and pronounced the victim deceased. No arrests have been made and the investigation is ongoing by the NYPD Collision Investigation Squad. The victim has not yet been identified.



Video screenshots are attached.

NYPD Detective Arrested for Sexual Abuse of Child

On Thursday March 25, at around 11 a.m., Franco Johnson, a 42-year-old, off-duty, NYPD detective, was arrested and charged in the 52nd precinct with six counts of sexual abuse, two counts of "course of sexual conduct against a child" and two counts of acting in a manner injurious to a child.

According to the NYPD Online system which now tracks police misconduct records, there are

no complaints on file for Johnson. We found just one listing for a detective under the name Franco A. Johnson. An arrest is not proof that a person is guilty of a crime.

Man Arrested following Attempted Kidnapping

Luis Toledo, 36, of 2433 Valentine Avenue in The Bronx was arrested on Thursday, March 25, 2021 at 5.25 p.m., and charged with attempted kidnapping, acting in a manner injurious to a child, and unlawful imprisonment. Toledo was arrested for the attempted kidnapping of an 8-year-old boy at Fordham Road subway station on Tuesday, March 16, 2021 at approximately 9.17 p.m.

The incident occurred as a 35-year-old woman and her son were heading toward the southbound D Line platform. While walking down the stairs, Toledo grabbed the 8-year-old from his mother's hand. The woman started screaming for help and immediately pulled her son away from Toledo, who kept staring at them. He then left the location, as a crowd began to form. No injuries were reported. An arrest is not proof that a person is guilty of a crime.

Olinville: Shooting in Crowded Playground

The NYPD is seeking the public's assistance in identifying the individuals seen in the attached



photograph to the right in connection to a reckless endangerment incident. On Friday, March 12, at around 5.36 p.m., at Magenta Playground (Olinville Avenue and Rosewood Street) in Olinville, an individual discharged several rounds from a firearm into a crowd inside the playground.

The individual fled southbound on Olinville Road on a scooter operated by a second individual. The gunfire caused damage to three parked and unoccupied vehicles. There were no injuries reported as a result of the shooting. The first individual is described as male, and

wore a black mask, a gray hooded sweater, blue jeans and white sneakers. The second individual is described as male and wore a black mask, a yellow hooded sweater, blue jeans and white sneakers. A photo is attached.

Anyone with information with regard to these incidents is asked to call the NYPD's Crime Stoppers Hotline at 1-800-577-TIPS (8477) or for Spanish, 1-888-57-PISTA (74782). The public can also submit their tips by logging onto the CrimeStoppers website at WWW.NYPDCRIMESTOPPERS.COM, on Twitter @NYPDTips. All calls are strictly confidential.

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District 11 & District 15 Special Elections Recap

By **RACHEL DALOO, JOSÉ A GIRALT, MIRIAM QUIÑONES & SÍLE MOLONEY**

For all the hype that preceded the District 11 City Council special election on March 23, including campaigns by Eric Dinowitz and Dan Padernacht that stretched back over the course of about two years, it felt somehow devoid of urgency when it finally took place, the vote split across the board, resulting in no undisputed winner, and marked in the end by the usual low voter turnout. Though low voter turnout is the norm in special elections, with name recognition typically favoring establishment candidates, there was a feeling that the novelty of the new ranked choice voting system, coupled with the substantial choice of different candidates might have driven more people to the polls, but not so.

In District 11, just 6,994 voters showed up at the polls, including 1,600 who voted early. According to the New York City Board of Elections (BOE), 4,423 absentee ballot applications were distributed to voters choosing to vote by mail. As of March 22, 1,791 of those absentee ballot applications had been returned. They are currently being reviewed for validity, along with any additional, remaining, valid absentee ballots which may have been received in the meantime.

If all are received that would make the total voter turnout to be 11,417. Cur-

rently, we know, it is at least, 8,785. By comparison, in the last District 11 general election, held in November 2017, a total of 21,573 votes were cast.

As was announced by the BOE on election night, after the polls had closed, Dinowitz won 42.03 percent of the first-choice votes (including early votes). Mino Lora, who was one of the last few candidates to join the race in the latter half of 2020, broke through with 25.31 percent. She was followed by Jessica Haller with 15.02 percent, Padernacht with 12.91 percent, Kevin Pazmino with 2.47 percent and Carlton Berkley with 1.94 percent.

Matthew Pitt from the New York City Campaign Finance Board attended the Bronx Community Board 7 general meeting the day after the election on March 24, and said the final results should be expected in another two to three weeks, as the tally of absentee ballots continues.

Dinowitz, a teacher and Democratic male district leader for the 81st Assembly District, and son of Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz, released a statement following the release of the unofficial election night results.

"We feel good about where we are as the early results come in, and I remind everyone that every vote must be counted," he said. "I encourage everyone to be patient while our democracy is at work."

Meanwhile, Lora, founder and execu-

tive director of the People's Theater Project, also reacted to the unofficial results on election night, saying, "The Bronx County machine and Assemblyman Jeff Dinowitz forced a low, turnout special election to try and guarantee Dinowitz's son would win, with the added help of real estate money."

Lora vowed to run again in the June primary, as have Padernacht and Pazmino. Meanwhile, Haller, a tech entrepreneur and environmentalist, said, "We have days or even weeks before we know the final outcome, and every vote is counted. This certainly isn't the end of the road for our fight for new leadership for our community - we're only just getting started."

For his part, freelance film director, Pazmino said, "While it is unfortunate, I lost tonight's race, it was an expected result considering the amount of outside money being poured into the race." He said he believed Dinowitz to be a weak candidate but wished him luck. He added, "I look forward to a rematch in November's general election. I will be on both the Conservative & Republican lines."

Earlier this week, Padernacht also released a statement, saying, "While the initial results from the Special Election this past Tuesday are not promising, the lessons learned are invaluable. While I felt disappointment with the results, I strive to be self-aware and use the experience from the

election in a positive way." He continued, "That being said, we are moving towards the Democratic Primary on June 22nd with light hearts and a new approach."

Meanwhile, in the District 15 race, it was a similar story, with just 3,339 voters casting their vote by election night (excluding absentee ballots but including early votes). By comparison, in the November 2017 general election, a total of 10,507 votes were cast.

Hostos Community College adjunct professor and tenant lawyer, Oswald Feliz, leads in District 15, to date (excluding absentee ballots), with 28.42 percent of the votes, followed by Ischia Bravo with 21.54 percent, John Sanchez with 20.21 percent, Elisa Crespo with 15.08 percent, Latchmi Gopal with 4.04 percent, Altagracia Soldevilla with 2.77 percent, Kenny Agosto with 2.57 percent, Bernadette Ferrera with 2.18 percent, José Padilla with 1.68 percent, and Ariel Rivera Diaz with 1.21 percent.

Reacting to the news, Feliz said, "Tonight, it's clear that families across our district are calling for fresh leadership that will get results for our community. I am thrilled and humbled by the support our campaign has received from so many Bronxites, and I urge everyone to be patient as the ranked choice tallying takes place."

Rally for Repairs and Respect at 2770-2780 Kingsbridge Terrace

By **JOSÉ A. GIRALT**

Caring for a child with special needs requires a lot of attention. Add a second child and the work multiplies. Add living on the third floor of a building with a broken elevator inside an apartment with a roach and rodent infestation, and it is enough to drive tenants to protest their living conditions.

These are the conditions Daisy Reyes faces on a daily basis. Reyes, mother of a two-year-old and a 12-year-old child who uses a wheelchair, was one of about a half dozen tenants who took to the street on March 20 in front of the entrance of 2770-2780 Kingsbridge Terrace, a multi-building housing complex, to bring attention to the tenants' complaints.

The rally, entitled "Tenants Rally for Repairs and Respect," was organized by Tenant Association President for the building, Juan Nunez, and candidate for the District 14 City Council seat, Adolfo Abreu, who sought to give voice to the affected residents who say they feel neglected by their landlord, the manage-

ment office, and the super. They also called on New York State officials to cancel rent amid the ongoing pandemic.

Abreu, who is president of the tenants' association for the overall building complex, knows and has worked with Nunez as both are members of the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition (NWBCCC).

Meanwhile, speaking in Spanish to the *Norwood News*, Reyes said at the rally, "My rent is up to date and now, through some neighbors, we've heard that we'll be without an elevator for three months." She added, "I've been told by the [management] office that I can break the lease and move whenever I want." She said the office won't help her find another apartment, however, because "she calls 311 too much."

Abreu, described the management office's response to Reyes' concerns as "a form of harassment." The long-time activist and community organizer has led the tenants' association at the location for about ten years, having taken over the role

from his mother. They originally moved into the building in 2005.

Since then, he has seen ownership of the building change from Florida-based, LNR Property, to its current owner, Steve Finkelstein. In 2011, *Crain's New York Business* reported that the 2770-2780 building complex was part of "a nearly \$28 million deal to buy 10 rundown Bronx buildings."

According to the State's Division of Housing and Community Renewal (DHCR), in addition to the annual increases approved by the New York City Rent Guidelines Board (NYCRGB) on rent-stabilized apartments, landlords are also allowed to raise rents when they make "building-wide improvements to systems such as boilers, windows, electrical rewiring, plumbing and roofs."

These are classified as Major Capital Improvements (MCIs). In 2019, MCI-related rent increases were capped at 2 percent per year. However, if the cost of an improvement exceeds 2 percent, the landlord is allowed to phase in the required rent increases over a period of years until the

entire cost of the improvement is recouped.

In an interview with *Norwood News*, Abreu explained the cause of contention with the current landlord. "In 2018, MCIs were approved [for the landlord] and that's when we started fighting back," he said. "The repairs [and] improvements were terrible. We ended up with worse conditions."

Finkelstein, the landlord and president of Finkelstein Timberger East Real Estate, disputes the claims made by Abreu and other residents. In a phone interview with the *Norwood News*, he describes a different situation pertaining to the approved MCIs at the 2770-2780 housing complex. "I just feel like we want to run the best buildings we can run," Finkelstein said. "I've gotten a lot of criticism about it [MCIs], but to me, I just want my buildings [to be] nicer than most people's, and our rents are all 100 percent affordable."

As for offering Reyes the option of breaking her lease without penalty, he does not see any

issue with it. "What we did say to the tenant [is] that if they want to break the lease, we won't hold them to it," he said. As for her two special needs children he said, "They're disabled; we got to help her. So, we're trying to find an apartment on the first floor that'll work for them in one of our other buildings."

Abreu has little patience for the current owner and wants to help his fellow tenants get their complaints resolved. "This current landlord, Steven Finkelstein, is one of the worst evictors in the Bronx," Abreu said. "[I'm] lending my voice to support Juan [Nunez] and their organizing struggle to remove the MCI, [and] improve the living conditions in their building."

Meanwhile, Reyes did not mince her words when asked what she most wanted the public to know about her plight. "In this building ... there is no respect for the tenant. It doesn't matter if you owe [rent] or don't owe," she said. "We are alone and without help. We are filled with a plague. We are accompanied with a plague and filth."



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Bronx CB7

Continue Efforts to Increase COVID-19 Vaccination Rates

By DAWN CLANCY

In March 2020, New York City was designated the epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic, accounting for nearly 5 percent of the world's COVID-19 cases. Meanwhile, the Bronx was ranked by the University of Wisconsin's Population Health Institute, as New York State's unhealthiest county, and has consistently remained one of the region's hardest hit counties by the coronavirus.

At Bronx Community Board 7 (CB7)'s Health and Human Services Committee meeting, held on March 16, Michelle Avila, committee chair, shared recent COVID-19 infection rate data from the City's health department to remind the community that COVID-19 continues to plague some of CB7's largest neighborhoods, including University Heights, Fordham University, Kingsbridge, and Norwood.



Photo courtesy of Hakan Nural on Unsplash

CORONAVIRUS VACCINE

"The Bronx and CB7 neighborhoods have not been faring well in terms of caseload," she said. According to the data, the 7-day COVID test positivity rate as of March 21 in the Bronx was 6.5 percent, compared to 2.9 percent in Manhattan. "I think that it's pretty obvious that we've suffered some major

losses because of COVID," Avila said. "Our hope is to try to think about the factors that are contributing to these higher rates. It's really concerning."

Despite the long-standing environmental challenges, and systemic disparities in employment and health services that have made the Bronx

uniquely vulnerable to the virus, some CB7 community members believe Bronxites need to be more pro-active and vigilant about following the Center for Disease Control's (CDC) social distancing and mask-wearing guidelines.

"I'm in the neighborhood every
(continued on page 16)

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Bronx CB7 Continue Efforts to Increase COVID-19 Vaccination Rates

(continued from page 14)

day, and I noticed that the more buildings that go up, the busier and more crowded the sidewalks get," community member, Chad Royer, said at the meeting. "That's actually worsening our chances for safety." But fellow community member, Sirio Guerinos, disagreed, summing up what he believes is the reason behind the borough's high positivity rate in six words, "Too many people aren't wearing masks."

According to the CDC, the virus that causes COVID-19 spreads via respiratory droplets that get expelled from the body when an infected person coughs, sneezes, talks, or breathes. Social distancing - maintaining six feet of distance between people - in addition to wearing masks that completely cover the nose and mouth, and fit snugly against the sides of the face, can help slow the spread.

To gain more insight into the reasons for the Bronx's sustained, high COVID-19 positivity rates, *Norwood News* reached out to the borough's Neighborhood Health Center for Health Equity and Community Wellness, which is affiliated with the City's health department. In response, the health department provided a link to a recent press conference where New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio spoke about the crisis but did not directly address the underlying reasons for the high COVID rates in the Bronx. *Norwood News* followed up with the department for clarification. We did not receive an immediate response.

In addition to social distancing and mask-wearing, the CDC also urges all eligible New Yorkers to get vaccinated. However, as *Norwood News* recently reported, vaccination rates in Bronx CB7 are low compared to other Bronx communities. A few months ago, the reason for this could have been attributed to factors like vaccine scarcity, weather-related delays preventing vaccine supplies from arriving in the city, and vaccine scams, which are ongoing, but which have largely been debunked.

Now, one of the biggest challenges to increasing vaccination rates appears to be public confusion over *how* to actually schedule an appointment, particularly among those for whom English is not their first language, as well as those who are not adept at using the internet. Then, there is the challenge of trying to *secure* an appointment while millions

of others are trying at the same time, sometimes causing the various online sites to time out, or crash.

However, despite the ongoing COVID-related challenges plaguing the Bronx, CB7 community members are finding ways to help their neighbors. Working in health care, Carrie Shumway, a CB7 resident, has an insider's understanding of how challenging it has been for seniors and immigrants to navigate the system. As vaccine eligibility requirements expand to include more New Yorkers, she is determined to assist her Bedford Park neighbors with scheduling their appointments. "I made my first community appointment for my building's superintendent," said Shumway, in an email to the *Norwood News*. "He reached out to me directly and asked for help."

Eventually, Shumway discovered the Vaccine Scheduler, NYC Project, a collective of New York City health professionals who assist vulnerable and at-risk populations with scheduling their COVID vaccine appointments for free. These include seniors over 65, people with underlying health conditions, physically and mentally disabled individuals, people with limited or no access to a computer or the internet, non-English speakers, and undocumented people.

"I've scheduled between 50-60 appointments myself," Shumway said. She started volunteering with the project in February. "I also do a lot of call-backs to folks who speak Spanish to confirm their appointment details and give instructions about what documents to bring to their vaccine appointment. Vaccine Scheduler NYC volunteers work as a team, so we have some volunteers booking the appointments, while others do the call-backs in the patients' preferred languages," she added. "We currently have volunteers who speak English, Chinese, Spanish, Portuguese, Russian, Mandarin, French, and Hebrew."

To request vaccine scheduling assistance, eligible candidates must fill out and submit the project's service request form. For those unsure of their vaccine eligibility status or who require additional help, they can speak with a volunteer by calling or texting 646-494-7029. Further information is also available on Instagram @VaccineSchedulerNYC, or on Twitter @VaccineschedNYC.



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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](tel: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 Tuesday, April 27, 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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NEIGHBORHOOD NOTES

Compiled by SÍLE MOLONEY

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 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 call 1-833-NYS-4-VAX (1-833-697-4829)

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

To schedule an appointment, go to: <https://vax4.nyc.nyc.gov/patient/s/>.

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

Your physician or local pharmacy may also have information on scheduling vaccine appointments.

If you need transportation to get your vaccine appointment, click this link for a list of options: <https://forms.ny.gov/s3/vaccine>.

To schedule an appointment at Yankee Stadium, you can also call 1-833-SomosNY. Another new mass vaccination site opened at Co-Op City on Thursday, March 4, which is open to all eligible applicants.

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>.

The MTA announced that it has launched a new vaccination site locator on its live subway map. See the map here:

<https://map.mta.info/#/@40.70949,-73.97853,14z>

More Help with Scheduling Vaccine Appointments
Epicenter-NYC is a vet-

ted, volunteer group, assisting New Yorkers to find and schedule vaccine appointments, particularly the elderly, and anyone not adept at using the internet. More details can be found here: <https://epicenter-nyc.com/epicenters-vaccine-resources/> or my emailing hello@epicenter-nyc.com.

Separately, and additionally, the turbovox site, <https://www.turbovox.info/>, scans the websites of all providers offering the vaccine throughout the city and lists their available appointments.

Another volunteer group who go by the Twitter handle @VaccineSchedNYC and Instagram handle @VaccineSchedulerNYC are also helping vulnerable populations like seniors and non-native English speakers to book vaccine appointments. For questions, contact VaccineSchedulerNYC@gmail.com or phone/text: 646-494-7029.

Latest Updates on Vaccine Eligibility

Who is now eligible? New York residents aged 30 and older, incarcerated people

over 16s with the following conditions:

- cancer
- chronic kidney disease
- pulmonary disease e.g. cystic fibrosis
- intellectual or developmental disabilities including Down syndrome
- heart conditions, including hypertension
- immunocompromised state e.g. organ recipient
- severe obesity
- pregnancy
- sickle cell disease
- type 1 or type 2 diabetes
- cerebrovascular disease
- neurological conditions such as Alzheimer's or dementia
- liver disease

The following industry groups are now also eligible:

- Group Living Facility Residents & Staff
- Essential in-person public-facing building service workers (does not include workers at construction sites)
- Correctional Facilities Workers

- First Responders
- Emergency Communication and Public Safety Answering Point Personnel, including dispatchers and technicians
- Other Sworn and Civilian Personnel
- Grocery Store Workers
- Regional Food Bank paid or unpaid workers
- Permitted home-delivered meal program paid or unpaid workers
- Restaurant Workers
- Government & Nonprofit Workers
- Health Care Workers
- Hotel workers who have direct contact with guests
- Public Transit & TLC Drivers
- Schools (PreK-12), College, Childcare & Early Intervention Workers
- State Office of Children and Family Services Workers

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>.

Rev. Dr. Christopher Ponnuraj Retires

At 72, Rev. Dr. Christopher Ponnuraj is retiring, on April 11, from his role as pastor of the Bedford Park Congregational Church, located at East 201st Street and Bainbridge Avenue in Bedford Park. A replacement pastor has not yet been announced. Ponnuraj has served as pastor since December 1996. He is married with one son. He will continue some chaplaincy work at Calvary Hospital and will also deliver some sermons occasionally at local churches.

Help with SSI Benefits

People can apply for SSI benefits, and other benefit programs, through a telephone appointment with the agency, even while local offices are not able to accept walk-in visitors. People can call toll-free 1-800-772-1213, or their local Social Security office, to make a phone appointment to apply for SSI. People who are deaf or hard of hearing may call Social Security's TTY number, 1-800-325-0778.

A new webpage at www.socialsecurity.gov/third-party, is available for anyone who can assist another person with accessing Social Security's programs and services. Information on how to help support children with disabilities can be found at www.socialsecurity.gov/benefits/disability/apply-child.html.

party, is available for anyone who can assist another person with accessing Social Security's programs and services. Information on how to help support children with disabilities can be found at www.socialsecurity.gov/benefits/disability/apply-child.html.

Business Start-Up / Recovery Workshops

The Bronx Small Business Development Center is organizing two half-day Business Start-Up / Recovery Workshops on April 6 and April 13. Sign up at www.bronxsdbc.org for more information.

Stop & Shop Announces New Bronx Location

Stop & Shop announced a new pick-up location at its Crotona store (961 East 174th Street). Crotona joins the group's Castle City store (1720 Eastchester Rd.) in allowing shoppers to place an order at www.stopandshop.com, or on the Stop & Shop mobile app, head to the store, and have a Stop & Shop associate load their groceries right into their car

Brooklyn Man Charged with Slashing Teen on D-Train

By DAVID GREENE

The NYPD has arrested Nelson Rivera, 40, of Marine Park in Brooklyn, charging him with assault, criminal possession of a weapon, menacing and trespassing, following the slashing of a teen on a northbound D subway line at Fordham Road station, in Fordham Manor, on Friday, March

19, at 4 p.m.

Rivera dropped a bicycle on the foot of a 16-year-old male victim who was onboard the subway. When the train came to a stop and the doors opened, the victim was approached from behind and stabbed in the abdomen. Rivera subsequently fell onto the tracks and fled into the sub-

way tunnel but was apprehended by responding police officers. A switchblade knife was recovered at the scene. The victim was transported to St. Barnabas Hospital and was expected to recover.

A person arrested and accused of a crime remains innocent unless and until convicted in a court of law.



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Letters To The Editor

Editor's Note: We reserve the right to edit letters for space, clarity, civility and accuracy.

Bronx Elected Officials & Crime

Last week we had a 20-year-old female shot and killed on Gun Hill Road and Hull Avenue. A day before, we had a teen shot in the leg outside of a church on Perry Avenue, three blocks away, but do you think Bronx Borough President Ruben Díaz Jr. responded to the dead girl's family, and helped to make funeral arrangements? Do you think the Bronx Borough President responded to St. Barnabas Hospital to comfort the teen, and help to get the crime victim assistance? The answer is a resoundingly **NO!**

Where was the Bronx Borough President? At a street renaming ceremony for a deceased rapper named Big Pun. That is the nonsense Bronxites are complacent enough to put up with from our elected officials. Tonight, I am watching the news and they show two males on an electric scooter firing a pistol at children

playing in a playground right next door to us in Wakefield, during daylight hours!

The useless Democratic political hacks are more concerned with rappers and the needs of the LGBTQ community than with hard-working decent residents. Giuliani was far from perfect, but he turned this city around under the Republican banner, and we have lost all of his progress.

Don't vote for any of these Democratic candidates running for City Council. Just look at the sad resignation of Mark Gjonaj who said his fellow Council members are to the extreme left of public safety and democracy. He cannot in good faith work with them. Please hold your nose, and vote for any Republican and/or Conservative candidates running for any elected office.

**Richard Marias,
Norwood**

Response to Various Stories, March 18th Edition

Reading David Greene's "Home Care Workers Demand Fair Pay," [Norwood News, March 18th edition],

you get an idea of how grossly underpaid many of our most essential workers are. State Sen. Rachel May's Fair Pay for Home Care Act (S. 5374) would significantly boost the pay for those workers who come to the homes of those who need medical help, but this bill would raise their pay to only \$35,000 a year.

That would help, because it's a lot more than they get now, but it's still a poverty wage. Greene also deals with another group of the grossly underpaid, "Protestors Rally Over CUNY Layoffs and Cuts," [Norwood News, March 18th edition]. CUNY adjunct professors are not tenured, so they are lacking job security. Their current contract will get their annual salary up to \$47,000 a year.

To give you an idea how poorly they've been paid, that's a 71 percent increase. That's for a job that requires at least a master's degree. Yet, CUNY is laying them off because they claim they can't afford them, even with the miserly wages they are paid.

Getting back to health care workers, another financially undervalued group is the EMTs, who are basically your street doctors. They keep you alive until their ambulance gets you to the hospital. Our hypocrite mayor, Bill de Blasio, preaches against income inequality but has done nothing

to raise their pay anywhere near a quality salary. They currently start at \$33,280 a year and their salary peaks at \$51,000 after 5 and a half years.

On another subject from the same Norwood News issue [March 18th], is the apples-oranges comparison made by George J. Silos' letter to the editor. The issue is child abuse, not the merits of two parent households compared to one-parent households. Yes, having two good parents (whatever their sex) is better than one good parent, but the woman who allowed a thug-criminal man to live with her did not benefit her ten-year old son. Over two days, that child was beaten to death. [NYC dad outraged after son, 10, beaten to death by ex's new boyfriend in Harlem, NY Daily News, March 9th].

In addition, there have been plenty of single parents who, out of necessity, have done a great job successfully raising their children.

**Richard Warren,
Van Cortlandt Park South**

Support the Restaurant Industry

What a great way to celebrate Spring, now that NYC restaurants are open for indoor dining at fifty percent capacity. As more and more of us receive our COVID-19 vaccines, it is now easier and safer to patronize our neighborhood restaurants.

My wife and I don't mind paying a little more to help our favorite restaurants survive. Don't forget your cook and server. We try to tip 20 to 25 percent against the total bill, including taxes. If it is an odd amount, we round up to the next dollar.

Let's hope many of the over one hundred thousand NYC residents whose livelihood depends on restaurants will be rehired. This includes bartenders, waiters, bus boys, cooks and cashiers. Wholesale food sellers, distributors and linen suppliers are also affected, along with construction contractors and their employees, who renovate or build new restaurants. Our entrepreneurs who have been lucky enough to remain open continue to work long hours, pay taxes and provide local employment opportunities. If we don't resume patronizing these establishments, they don't eat either.

**Larry Penner
Great Neck**

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New Clinical Study To Help People Who Are Living With Chronic Pain

**Allen Burton, M.D.,
Medical Director,
Abbott Neuromodulation**

Abbott's DISTINCT Clinical Study is Here to Help People in Your Neighborhood Who are Living with Chronic Low Back Pain

Low back pain is the world's leading cause of years lost to disability, according to a study in The Lancet. And for 20 percent of patients, low back pain can become "chronic," which the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke defines as pain that persists for six months or more.

Now, a clinical study, which recently got underway at Montefiore Medical Center - Waters Place, Bronx, N.Y., is investigating a distinct new way to help treat people who suffer with chronic low back pain. The DISTINCT (Dorsal spinal cord STimulation vs mediCal management for the Treatment of low back pain) study, sponsored by Abbott, will compare the use of spinal cord stimulation (SCS) to standard medical care, which can include taking medicine. The goal of the study will be to determine how much a patient's level of pain, physical function and emotional well-being improves under each type of care.

SCS treats people living with chronic pain by using mild electrical pulses delivered by a small implant to change pain signals as they travel from the spi-

nal cord to the brain. The study will use Abbott's BurstDR SCS device, which has been used over the past five years to help those affected by back pain.

Currently, doctors do not have consistent treatment guidelines for chronic low back pain. Many patients start on a regimen of over-the-counter anti-inflammatory medications and exercise or physical therapy. Some will eventually be prescribed opioids for the pain, while others might qualify for surgery. For those who are not able to have surgery, treatment options can be limited.

Findings from the study could answer questions healthcare providers have about how to treat low back pain in patients who are not able to have surgery and for whom there are limited treatment options. This could also help inform future standards of care, and provide insurance companies with the evidence necessary to demonstrate the benefit of SCS for patients who are not able to have surgery.

The DISTINCT study is now enrolling at up to 30 sites across the United States. Patients will be randomized to either SCS treatment or be treated with medication. Participants will be followed in-clinic and via telephone over a two-year period.

To see if you may be eligible for Abbott's DISTINCT study and to obtain more information on how to enroll, visit Neurostudies.abbott.


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Out & About

Compiled by RACHEL DALLOO & SÍLE MOLONEY

Events

Join the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's Center for Health Equity & Community Wellness for a discussion on: steps for getting vaccinated in NYC, COVID-19 demographic data in communities, CDC and DOHMH safety guidance and resources, and questions about the vaccines. The department will be focusing on The Bronx on April 8. To register, visit <https://www.eventbrite.com/>, search "How to Sign Up for the COVID-19 Vaccine," and select April 8.

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>.

Want to participate in a **Watercolor Painting** workshop? Join the Williamsbridge Oval Recreation Center on April 7, from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. with artist Amy DiGi, and learn how to draw

and paint using nature as your inspiration. Learn about light, color and design while making art *en plein air* (outside). All levels from beginners to advanced are welcome. To register, contact sarah.bishow@parks.nyc.gov.

Arts

Are you interested in learning about working artists? Join **Lehman Stages** for an event with Lucrecia Briceno on April 7, from 3:30 p.m. to 5 p.m. Lucrecia Briceno is a Peruvian artist currently based in Brooklyn. Much of her work has been in association with artists developing innovative and original pieces. Her work includes theatre, opera, puppetry & dance, as well as collaborations in several non-performance projects. To register for the event, visit <http://www.lehmanstages.org/>.

Radical Elegance features photographers who subvert the traditional aesthetics of fashion

photography, and challenge its elitist practices in the field, as well as the historical, technical, and stylistic approaches that characterize the genre. At the Longwood Art Gallery, photographers do this by taking charge of their narratives, documenting their communities, and shedding light on Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) cultures. To learn more, go to: <https://www.bronxarts.org/programs/>, and click on "Radical Elegance," on the homepage,

Movements

Join NYC Parks on April 4, from 11 a.m. to 12 p.m. at the Van Cortlandt Nature Center in Van Cortlandt Park for the **Nature's Workshop: Build-A-Journal** and make your own artistic nature journals using specimens and other natural inspirations. NYC Parks asks participants to follow prevailing COVID-19 safety guidelines. For more information, call (718) 548-0912.

Bronx Students with Disabilities Display Scientific Discoveries over Zoom amid Pandemic

By SÍLE MOLONEY

More than 100 students with visual impairments, emotional challenges and developmental delays showcased their science experiments at the New York Institute for Special Education (NYISE)'s annual science fair which ran from Monday, March 21 to Thursday, March 25. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this year's science fair at the Bronx-based school was held over Zoom.

The theme of this year's science fair was 'Science All Around Us.' Over the course of the week, students of all ages from kindergarten to high school virtually showcased their scientific experiments and discoveries to their fellow classmates and teachers.

NYISE, a private, 501(c)(3) nonprofit, nonsectarian, educational facility, was founded in 1831 as The New York Institution for the Blind. It is one of the oldest and most respected schools in the nation to provide specialized services for children with disabilities. Located in the Bronx since 1924, NYISE provides quality programs for more than 250 students from New York City's five boroughs, Westchester County and up-

state New York, including more than 100 children from the Bronx, ages 3 to 5, who attend its preschool.

The pandemic has obviously been particularly hard for the disabled community, who are already limited in terms of social movement due to poor transportation accessibility and inadequate housing options, which are often insufficiently tailored to meet the needs of people with disabilities. In addition, because of certain underlying health conditions, in many cases, those with disabilities are more prone to catching the virus, rendering them even more isolated due to the need to socially distance.

The City recently announced that New Yorkers who are 16 years and over, who have underlying health conditions, like intellectual and developmental disabilities, including Down syndrome, are now eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine.

Last year, on October 28, NYISE arranged a special Halloween event for the children. Halloween-costumed preschoolers who are part of the school's readiness program participated in a socially distanced trunk or treating event from decorated cars at 985 Astor



Photo courtesy of the New York Institute for Special Education

MORE THAN 100 students with visual impairments, emotional challenges and developmental delays showcased their science experiments at the New York Institute for Special Education's annual science fair from Monday, March 21 to Thursday, March 25.

Avenue, in Allerton.

Norwood News spoke at the time with Barbara Phillips, who ran the event, about its importance for the children in terms of using their learned skills. "Many of them have developmental delays, many of them have language impairments, and many of them have social difficulties," she said. "It was a good opportunity for the children to have a chance to trick or treat. It was outside, social distancing was maintained, and for them, it was probably Disneyland."

In one way, like with other inequities which have been brought to light amid the pandemic, the crisis may have served as a stark reminder of just how

crucial accessibility is, both for the physical and the mental health of the community.

In announcing a slew of recent political endorsements, members of the 504 Democratic club, a citywide organization which advocates for people with disabilities, said they have noticed more and more political candidates are spending more and more time on their disability policies, as part of their respective campaigns in hopes of gaining the backing of both those with disabilities and their allies, an increasingly significant voting bloc, estimated to make up 61 million American voters.

In December, Assembly Members, Robert Carroll and Jo Anne Simon, sent a letter to New York City Mayor de Blasio and then Schools Chancellor Richard Carranza to urge them to address the needs of children with autism and related disabilities currently enrolled in ASD Nest, ASD Horizon, ACES and bilingual special education Middle and High School programs.

"These students have unique needs and require in-person instruction," said Carroll. "They have struggled for months in front of computer screens that do not provide the type of kinesthetic social instruction that they need. It is past time for Mayor de Blasio and Chancellor Carranza to fulfill their duty to these children and to give them the education they are legally entitled to."

Murder Victim's Mother Threatened by Gang

(continued from page 1)

the Bronx Community Board 7 (CB7) executive committee meeting on March 18, Deputy Inspector Thomas J. Alps, the commanding officer of the precinct, described the shooting as an “absolute tragic incident.”

He said the victim had been “still alive and breathing” when officers responded at the scene at around 10 o’clock. “We had her transported quickly to Jacobi Medical Center where she was pronounced deceased at 23.49 hours,” he said.

“It was difficult to experience for my officers, as well,” he said, adding that he would be having some counsellors come in to speak to the officers who he guessed had experienced some psychological trauma from witnessing the event.

WABC-TV had reported that an unidentified male who was inside the apartment on the night of the shooting was arrested at the scene and was taken into custody on an unrelated charge the same evening. In an email dated March 25, in response to a request for further information about that arrest, Sergeant Ishmael of the NYPD confirmed that the male in question had been arrested for an “open warrant,” unrelated to Vázquez’s death. He declined to provide the male’s name or other information.

On March 26, the NYPD announced that Precious Williams, 20, of Dekalb Avenue in Norwood, was arrested on March 19 and charged with criminal possession of a weapon and criminal possession of a controlled substance. Police also confirmed on the same date that an unidentified 16-year-old male from the Bronx was also charged with weapon and drug possession. They confirmed that both arrests were made in connection with the inquiry into Vázquez’s death. The name of the 16-year-old was not made public due to his age.

During a telephone interview with Duffy on Sunday, March 29, the grieving mother confirmed to the *Norwood News* that she had been harassed by gang members, saying, “Yes, I sent everything to the police, and today, they [the gang members] were writing to me, ‘We’re so glad that Delila’s dead.’” She added that they also, allegedly, told her they had urinated on the young woman’s

grave.

Duffy said the police had traced several of the harassing Instagram messages she received to the South Bronx but that, so far, they had been unable to locate those responsible for them. When questioned by the *Norwood News* about the gang-related links, one NYPD source said he was unaware of a gang connection to the case.

On Wednesday, March 24, a local pastor, whose name the *Norwood News* has withheld, told us in a phone call that after participating in a vigil and anti-violence rally in honor of Vázquez on Hull Avenue, the previous day, members of the clergy had been verbally threatened. At the March 23 rally, some family members and friends of Vázquez wore T-shirts and sweatshirts displaying her photo, while others held photos of her.

The clergy member also said, “The family told me yesterday that they are being threatened by the Bloods.” According to the NYPD, the Bloods are a gang who surfaced in New York City in section C-73 at the Department of Correction facility of Riker’s Island in 1993. He added, “Yesterday, when I went there [at the peace rally] they told me we couldn’t have the prayer vigil there.”

When asked about the separate alleged threat to the clergy, Duffy said, “Yes, they [the gang members] said all over ‘gram [Instagram] that if they see anyone with Delila shirts, they’re going to shoot anyone wearing Delila shirts.”

We also asked Duffy about another allegation made by the same clergy member, who told the *Norwood News* that a handgun had been found on the roof of a Hull Avenue building around the time of the vigil. She responded, “Yes... no. I can’t really talk about that, but they did.”

The NYPD did not respond to a request for comment regarding the alleged threats made against Duffy, against those attending the vigil or the claims that a weapon was recovered from a Hull Avenue rooftop at the time of the vigil.

The vigil was organized by the Bronx Community Council and the Muslim and Immigrant Coalition for Justice. It was attended by members of Stand Up to Violence (SUV),

an anti-violence organization based at Jacobi Hospital, Imam Ibrahim Issa of Montefiore Hospital, the 49th Precinct Clergy Coalition, over a dozen local senior clergy leaders, as well as by family members and friends of Vázquez.

During the vigil, which was also attended by about eight to ten police officers, Duffy told the crowd of mourners and residents of the block, “It’s unfair that your own (expletive) friends kill you.” Appealing to those present for help with the investigation, the mother pleaded, “I need everybody to communicate, for everybody to say what they know. Please, I’m begging you.”

Aldo Rafael Perez, a member of both the Bronx Community Council and the Muslim and Immigrant Coalition for Justice, later told residents, “Gun violence has risen 75 percent since last year, and our city is freakin’ tired of what’s going on.” He added, “Today, we are here with Mrs. Duffy and we’re standing with her, calling for justice.”

Assemblyman José Rivera, who was also present at the vigil, said he had left the budget negotiations at the State capital in order to attend. When Rivera began to console Duffy, in Spanish, he was informed she was Irish American, creating a very brief, light-hearted moment which drew some smiles from the crowd. Referring to the recent wave of gun violence engulfing the Bronx, Rivera then said, “This is a sad moment. I can’t take it anymore. Every time you turn on the TV, someone is taken away from us.”

Pastor Jay Gooding, the president of the 49th Precinct Clergy Council and director of community outreach at SUV, then addressed the mourners and residents, saying, “Our prayer is that God will send his angels of protection in this community. Too much senseless gun violence is happening in our country, in our community.”

Gooding added, “We see what happened last week in Atlanta, yesterday in Colorado, what’s happening right here in the Bronx; it’s time to put the guns down.”

At the Bronx CB7, March 18 meeting, Alps had confirmed that while six out of the seven index crimes for the 52nd precinct were down, compared to the same period last

year, the command was struggling with gun violence. “Year to date, we have six shootings versus three last year,” he said.

After consoling the grieving mother at the March 23 vigil, Alps told the crowd of about fifty, “As far as the investigation goes, I don’t want to get into too many details about it. There’s been some arrests in relation to it. The Bronx DA is working closely with us, obviously, in the investigation.”

Alps added, “I anticipate further arrests as information comes in.” He then reminded residents that anyone with information on the case could call the Crime Stoppers Hotline or the 52nd precinct directly.

The next day, in a March 24 telephone interview with a source with knowledge of 3339 Hull Avenue, the source told the *Norwood News* that the tenant of record for the apartment where the shooting occurred was a woman in her 50s who had been arrested about two or three months earlier. “Whoever was in that apartment was not supposed to be there,” he said. “There were a lot of young guys going in and out of that apartment. What they were doing inside the apartment, I don’t know.”

Norwood News spoke with a second, unidentified Hull Avenue neighborhood source, and asked if he knew the female tenant of record for the apartment at 3339 Hull Avenue. He said, “The lady got arrested about three months ago, and the apartment was left in the care of somebody else... the Bloods took over the apartment and they used it as a stash house (for drugs) and to keep guns in the house.” He also corroborated what the first source said about the apartment being a hangout for local gang members.

Meanwhile, describing her late daughter, Duffy said Vázquez loved to help her friends, and had enjoyed helping take care of her younger brother. She concluded, “Right before this happened, she was texting me saying she wanted to go to church every Sunday and to follow God more, because I used to take her to church when she was younger.”

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