



# NORWOOD NEWS

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## TREE-LIGHTING EVENT BRINGS BACK HOLIDAY CHEER



Photo by Miriam Quiñones

(L TO R) Aesha Valencia, PR representative for Friends of Mosholu Parkland (FOMP), Elizabeth Quaranta, executive director of FOMP, Ceci, a volunteer angel, Gloria Bent, member of Bronx Community Board 7 (CB7), and Grace Siemer, treasurer of the 52<sup>nd</sup> Precinct Community Council, attend the annual, tree-lighting event on Mosholu Parkway, hosted by Bronx CB7 and FOMP, on Tuesday, December 7, 2021.

### By SÍLE MOLONEY

There was plenty of holiday cheer to be had on Mosholu Parkway and Bainbridge Avenue on Tuesday, Dec. 7, as the annual, holiday, tree-

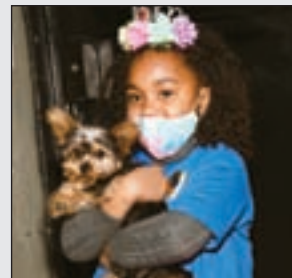
lighting event, organized by Bronx Community Board 7 (CB7) and Friends of Mosholu Parkland (FOMP), made a welcome return. Amid the ongoing pandemic, and prior

to the COVID-19 vaccination roll-out, last year's tree-lighting event was carried out discreetly, with no formal gathering.

This year's event on the

Bedford Park/Norwood border, where masks were required, saw about 200 people gather in front of a large stage. They enjoyed free, hot

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# Six-Year-Old Sees Wish Come True with New Yorkie

By JOSÉ A. GIRALT

The first thing 6-year-old Camilia Vanderhorst wants people to know about her new Yorkie puppy is its name. “I’ll call him Coco, [not Coco Melon]” she insisted softly as she addressed the media gathered in front of her home in the Kingsbridge Heights section of the Bronx on Nov. 10. Asked what was the first thing she planned to do with her new pet, the shy 6-year-old said, “We can play fetch.”

While the origin of Coco’s name was unclear, what was obvious was Camilia’s joy at seeing her wish for a new puppy come true. She received her first pet in recognition of the courage she has shown throughout her journey with leukemia. The Make-A-Wish Foundation and PuppySpot teamed up to fulfill Camilia’s wish for a furry, four-legged companion. The former is a nonprofit that helps fulfill the wishes of children with a critical illness aged between 2½ and 18.

According to Camilia’s mother, Iliana Ramos, it’s been a difficult journey in and out of hospitals since the 6-year-old was diagnosed with cancer at age two. After the formal presentation of the puppy to the little girl, Ramos spoke to *Norwood News* in her native Spanish, saying, “She fought this childhood cancer for three years, but she’s been in remission for two years.”

According to Ramos, the medical treatments Camilia received during the earlier years of her life, combined with her compromised immune system, made having a pet inside their apartment a risky situation. However, her mom said she knew Make-A-Wish would be able to deliver Coco once her daughter was cleared by doctors to safely own a pet.

Two members of Make-A-Wish Metro New York were present on Nov. 10 to make sure Coco’s delivery went smoothly. Catherine Smith, senior associate for wish relationships, was on hand to present Camilia with her new dog. She said a two-year wait from the referral stage is not uncommon for a Make-A-Wish request. “We do like to have the wish granted, from referral to being granted, within the two years, just because it’s such a special time and it’s so much for the child,” Smith said.

Gina Florescu is chief marketing director for Make-A-Wish Metro New York and Western New York. She provided *Norwood News* with a breakdown of the number of wishes granted to people living in five local ZIP codes. In ZIP code 10467, the foundation has granted wishes to 169 recipients over the past 28 years. The area covers Norwood, Allerton, Wil-



Photo by José A. Giralt

**CAMILIA VANDERHORST, 6**, holds her new pet, a Yorkie she named Coco, on Wednesday, Nov. 10, 2021, in the Kingsbridge Heights section of the Bronx. The Make-A-Wish Foundation gifted her the Yorkie in honor of the courage she has shown throughout her treatment for leukemia, having been diagnosed with the illness four years ago. It is in remission for two years.

liamsbridge and Pelham Parkway and includes recipients based at NYC Health + Hospitals/North Central Bronx and Montefiore hospitals.

Just south of this ZIP code, in 10458 which covers Belmont, Fordham University and Kingsbridge, and includes Union Community Health Center (formerly known as Union Hospital), Make-A-Wish has granted wishes to 167 recipients during the same period.

In the three remaining ZIP codes of 10468 which covers Fordham, Kingsbridge, and University Heights, 10469 which covers Allerton, Baychester, Pelham Gardens and Williamsbridge, and 10470 which covers Wakefield and Woodlawn, Make-A-Wish has granted wishes to 247 recipients during the same timeframe.

Florescu also wanted to make sure people knew that the local Make-A-Wish chapter also provides services beyond the Bronx. “We are the Metro New York Chapter,” she wrote in a later email to the *Norwood News*. “We [...] serve all five boroughs, as well as Nassau county.”

Some may think of the Make-A-Wish foundation as just fulfilling the desires of ill or dying children. However, Florescu wants to dispel that notion. She said the organization started in 1980 by granting a wish to a seven-year-old boy who wanted to become a motorcycle cop. She said the little boy died before he reached his eighth birthday.

“Since then, medicine has come a long way to help to cure childhood illnesses,”

Florescu wrote. “Even though, now, more than 70 percent of ‘wish kids’ survive and even thrive, we believe that every child battling a critical illness needs the hope and care that a wish can provide as they face a very tough time,” she added. “Wish kids who look back on their wishes see it as a turning point, and a celebration of their resilience and strength.”

Meanwhile, according to PuppySpot’s website, the USDA-licensed company is “a community of dog lovers, committed to connecting the nation’s top breeders to caring, responsible individuals and families.” Officials said the organization has introduced over 200,000 puppies into loving homes to date.

PuppySpot and Make-A-Wish officials said the organizations have been partners since 2018, and have fulfilled over 150 wishes, “bringing the true happiness that a puppy’s wet kiss provides into children’s lives.”

For Camilia, another sign of her progress is her ability to now attend school. She and her mom are glad that she was able to enroll in her neighborhood school, located just around the corner from their home. “She’s been doing super *bueno* and now only has to see the doctor once every six months,” Ramos said. “I see how happy she is, and I feel blessed.”

*\*Sile Moloney contributed to this story.*

*Editor’s Note: Animals rights organizations recommend adopting pets rather than obtaining them through for-profit breeders, for a variety of reasons. They say breeding is especially hard on the mothers.*

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# INQUIRING PHOTOGRAPHER

By DAVID GREENE



This week, we asked readers if they believe the original *West Side Story* movie accurately portrayed the racism experienced by Puerto Ricans in New York City at the time the movie was made.



"I don't know about the racism. That was, like, 50 years ago, but I saw the coming attractions [ads for] the new film, and it doesn't look anything like the original."

Phyllis Butler,  
Norwood



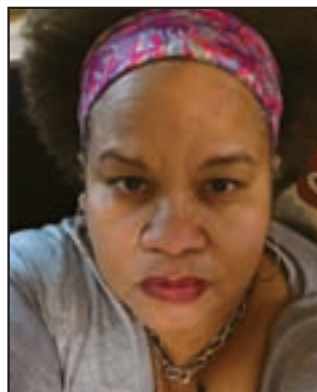
"I guess that was before most people's time. I'm 73, I grew up in the South Bronx in the 50s and 60s... I was traumatized, man. My brother had to fight and run from school every day. Because there weren't enough Puerto Ricans, we were forced to form our own gangs. We didn't come here to fight. When we got enough guys... I was too young. I was four or five years old, but the guys got their own gangs together and started fighting back. The B.S. about dancing and singing [expletive] me off when people were being abused, cursed. It's a lot of crap. It's not a romantic story. That's just sugar-coating the whole thing. They're not addressing the discrimination and the hatred."

Julio Rivera,  
Van Cortlandt Village



"It was a nice movie; the only thought I have about it is that they should've had more African American people in the movie. When we came here in 1974, we lived in Brooklyn, and that's where I realized racism existed when, on our way to night school, a group of young girls attacked us, telling us to go back on the banana boat to Jamaica. One girl picked up a stick and threatened us. I retrieved the stick from her and smacked her so we could get away. The next day, we found out that she's in the same junior high school as my sibling. So that's where I first saw racism in America. I moved to the Bronx in 1979, with my daughter, then 2 years old, and I never returned to Brooklyn to live."

Paulette Gordon,  
University Heights



"The original *West Side Story* film was the start... to bring to light racist themes during the Civil Rights era. However, movies tend to soften and romanticize racism to make it tolerable for White viewers. "Tony" would have been hated and probably ostracized by The Jets, and Maria might have been beaten by her brother. The remake of this story promises inclusion. It's refreshing to know that larger-than-life producers have acknowledged the need for a truly representative Latin cast, unlike the original White cast made up in "brown face" to appear Puerto Rican. We have a long way to go, but just maybe, we are making progress."

Karree-Lyn Gordon,  
Williamsbridge



"I am Puerto Rican and I've always been reminded of... back in the day, there was racism with the Italian and the Irish, and if they stepped out of their race with others, there was an issue, like you see in *West Side Story*. I would say the film was fairly accurate, because racism has never gone away in America, but to some extent, I can say that there were interracial relationships, but they had to be discreet due to the fact that it was not accepted. Until the laws of the land, in regards to the Constitution, are amended, racism will always be embedded in America."

Raqibah Basir,  
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# NEWS BRIEFS

By SÍLE MOLONEY

## Bronx Children's Museum Nears Fruition

Construction has ended on the long-awaited Bronx Children's Museum, which is expected to open in mid-2022. The Bronx had been the only City borough without a children's museum, even though it has been providing "a museum experience" without walls to over 115,000 children for more than ten years. The museum's new Power House is located just south of Yankee Stadium, along the Harlem River. The building originally provided refrigeration for the Bronx Terminal Market in years gone by. With four turrets, it looks like a castle, and is now classified as a historic site with LEED certification. It currently houses offices on the first floor for NYC Parks, as well as Stadium Tennis Center facilities. Children and their caregivers will also be able to visit and explore nearby Mill Pond Park, as an extension of the museum.

Collectively, the Bronx Borough President, City Council and the Mayor's Office allocated \$16.2 million in capital funds towards the construction, while the State Assembly allocated \$4 million. In addition to the capital funding, the museum also received \$500,000 from the Bronx Overall Economic Development Corporation for exhibits, and nearly \$4 million in private funds from Ford Foundation, The Louis and Anne Abrons Foundation, Rafael Collado, Con Edison and the Frederick P. & Sandra P. Rose Foundation. The museum's overall theme is "Water Connects Us All." Architect, Beth O'Neill, of O'Neill McVoy, said, "We designed the spaces uniquely [from] a child's perspective, with curving geometry of flow, drawn from nature. The materials include the first in the U.S. of curved, renewable, sustainably-harvested cross-laminated timber."

## Assistant DA Honored with Thomas E. Dewey Medal

Bronx District Attorney Darcel D. Clark announced on Tuesday, Dec. 14, that Assistant District Attorney Odalys Alonso is a recipient of the Thomas E. Dewey Medal from the New York City Bar Association. Clark said, "Odalys, the chief of staff of the Bronx District Attorney's Office, has spent her career serving the people of the Bronx. She began as an ADA dur-

# Bronx CB7 Prepares Budget for Fiscal Year 2023

By JOSÉ A. GIRALT

July 1, 2022, will mark the start of another fiscal year for New York City government, designated as FY 2023 (FY23). Although still seven months away, community boards across the city have started the process of submitting their annual Capital and Expense Budget Requests which inform the borough president, city council, and mayor about the priorities in each community district. Officially known as the *Statement of Community Needs and Community Board Budget Requests Fiscal Year 2023*, the 37-page document identifies the most pressing concerns in the local community.

On Nov. 30, Bronx Community Board 7 (CB7) voted on, and approved a request that prioritizes three issues in the district: land use trends, including the need for mixed-income housing, lack of funding for local schools, and insufficient municipal services, including transportation, sanitation, and parks maintenance. The general board meeting, which included updates from District 11 City Councilman, Eric Dinowitz, and representatives of other local elected officials, clocked in at two minutes shy of three hours.

The statement itself goes into detail as to why these are the three most pressing needs for the community. However, each of the nine CB7 committees, comprising the board got an opportunity to include comments and observations on the three areas of focus and many others. The committees are Budget, Personnel & Ethics; Education, Youth & Libraries; Environment & Sanitation; Health & Human Services; Housing, Land Use & Economic Development; Parks, Recreation & Cultural Affairs; Public Safety & Quality of Life; Traffic & Transportation; and Veterans Affairs.

Backing up the requests with data from the City, CB7 board members described a very concerning trend affecting residents. "The district is densely populated with approximately 73,000 residents per square mile," the board reported. "They, mainly, live in rental units in multi-family buildings that make up about 97 percent of the neighborhoods." They added, "Home ownership has been in the decline in recent years, with only 6 percent of the district owning a home, condo or cooperative. A lot of the private homes in our neighborhoods have disappeared to make way for new residential buildings with supportive and affordable housing units."

The beginning of Mayor Bill de Blasio's administration, almost eight years ago, began with a promise to preserve 200,000 affordable homes by the end of his second term, and create 300,000 affordable homes by 2026 under the "Your Home NYC" plan. In July, the mayor stood in front of a new, 420,000 square-foot development in the South Bronx, known as Bronx Commons, and declared, "There's no stopping the Bronx, and there's no stopping New York City."

A walk through the neighborhoods of Bedford Park, Kingsbridge Heights, and Norwood reveals a growing number of new developments, touting affordable housing. But according to the Community Service Society, an organization tracking inequality trends in the City, although de Blasio's administration has secured "several crucial pieces of policy and legislation [...] to protect tenants [...], [it] was not enough to reverse the growing unaffordability of housing in New York."

The trends in local land use were described by CB7 in both positive and negative terms during the meeting.

"While the district has some of the most affordable, private, market rental housing in the City, many rent-stabilized and rent-controlled apartments are disappearing, due to evictions and tenant turnover," the board reported.

As for the many residential developments that have included units for tenants in need of supportive services, some of which were not originally housed in the district, the board gave a more pessimistic view. "There is also a prevailing feeling in our district that we have received a disproportionate share of supportive housing developments, which serve a population that does not currently reside in the district."

According to the board's analysis, the overall population explosion serves not only as a warning to "ensure housing is being built responsibly to accommodate the current fabric of our neighborhoods," but to address "the growth, by increasing municipal services." Those municipal services include more garbage pick-ups, increased public transportation service, and better maintenance in the district's parks and parklands, like Devoe, Williamsbridge Oval, and Moshulu Parkway.

The board's analysis of population growth in the district also found there was an impact on local schools. "The quality and lack of funding of our local schools continues to be a major issue of concern for residents," the board reported. "The number of [school] seats available in our community is not acceptable, as most of our schools are overcrowded," they added. They identified Community Education Council 10, which includes most of CD7 as "the most overcrowded district in the Bronx."

(continued on page 20)

ing the height of the crack epidemic and has been integral to the evolution of a prosecutorial office. With her vast experience and dedication, Odalys has been a valued mentor to hundreds of ADAs. She rightfully deserves this prestigious award."

## Bedford Park: Fire in Multiple Dwelling

FDNY officials said they received a call regarding a fire at 10.20 p.m. on Monday, Dec. 13, at 18 East 198th Street and Creston Avenue in Bedford Park and were on the scene in 3 minutes and 32 seconds. They said the fire broke out in a 6-story, 50x100, occupied multiple dwelling and that 12 units, including

60 fire and EMS personnel responded. Verified videos posted to the Citizen's App showed multiple fire trucks at the scene with one ladder extended to reach one of the higher-level floors of the high-rise, building. At 10.57 p.m., the FDNY reported, via Twitter, that the fire in Apt 1C on the third floor of Building A was under control. FDNY officials later said, upon investigation, the fire was located in the walls between the first and third floors, and was placed under control at 10.56 p.m. There were no reported injuries. Norwood News has asked FDNY officials if they have yet determined the cause of the fire.

## Clemency Calls for Homeless Man Who Stole NyQuil from Duane Reade

Bronx State Sen. Gustavo Rivera (S.D. 33) joined other City elected officials and legal advocates on Sunday, Dec. 5, in calling on Gov. Kathy Hochul to grant a clemency application which is pending for Reginald Randolph, 58, who is disabled and currently serving a State prison sentence of 2 to 4 years for stealing Nyquil from Duane Reade. Legal Aid Society officials, who represent Randolph, who was homeless at the time of his arrest, said he was incarcerated at Rikers Island for over 850 days before

being transferred to State prison.

They said the theft did not involve an act of violence, brandishing a weapon, or making threats and that he is "extremely medically vulnerable, with diagnoses of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, diabetes, asthma, and a history of tuberculosis — all of which, according to medical experts, make him highly susceptible to serious illness or death." On Friday, Dec. 10, The New York Daily News reported that Rikers Island detainee, Malcolm Boatwright, 28, died, making him the 15th inmate to die in City custody this year.





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# Norwood Community Library Brings Free Books to Bronxites

By SARAH HUFFMAN

Outside the Keeper's House on Reservoir Oval East in the Norwood section of the Bronx is a light blue library mailbox which, since around July 2021, has been regularly filled with used books, all waiting for new homes. The library mailbox is a recent initiative by "Norwood Community Library," an outdoor, mutual aid, book exchange program.

30-year-old Brandon Montes is the founder of the volunteer-run library which launched in 2018, and he hopes the addition of the library mailbox will further strengthen his growing engagement with the community, through a love of reading.

"For a long time, we didn't have an independent bookstore in the Bronx, so you know, it got me thinking," said Montes who is an employee with New York City Administration for Children's Services. "What does that say about our relationship with reading, you know? I had some extra books that I thought I could share and give out."

Norwood Community Library's grab-and-go library mailbox system is another way for Montes to bring literacy to the neighborhood he now calls home. A lifelong Bronx resident, and Norwood local since 2008, Montes said he has been doing whatever he can to share books with the community for the last three years.

The original iteration of Norwood Community Library consisted of a crate of Montes' old books, chained to a fence outside a local bodega. His reason for launching the library? He says he wants to make a difference in the lives of people in the Bronx, despite being just one person on a mission, and he also wants to prevent books from being thrown away.

For a while, when he first started out, he said he just let people take or leave books at the makeshift crate library, changing up the selection on the weekends. At that time, he said he was giving away 15 to 45 books, on average, each weekend.

"During the pandemic, I felt a lot more responsibility," Montes said. "And also, I wanted to make sure that things were as safe as possible. So, I decided I should start tabling with the books." In the early days of the pandemic, before it became apparent how the coronavirus could be transmitted, he said he even used to wrap the books in plastic wrap and wipe them down with Lysol.

Since he started tabling, he said his community impact has grown substantially, and he is now giving away 70 to 100 books, on average, each weekend as well as interacting with community residents in person, rather than just leaving the books in the crate for people to pick up or drop off.



Photo via Twitter

(L TO R) Assemblywoman Nathalia Fernández presents a State citation to Brandon Montes, founder of Norwood Community Library, at his book stand on October 16, 2021, during Hispanic Heritage Month.

"I would say it's grown," he said of the free library system. "Like, it's a staple of the neighborhood. Before, it was kind of just there, but now people kind of know me as 'The Book Guy.'"

Montes said he usually sets up his table on East Gun Hill Road between Wayne Avenue and Bainbridge Avenue each weekend, but he has also gone further afield to Crotona Park and elsewhere. When interacting with his neighbors, he said, occasionally, he gets rejected by some people who are wary of people handing out free stuff, assuming, perhaps, there is some type of catch, but he said, generally, he's met with positivity.

"People are always very happy to pick up books for their children," Montes said, adding that many others are happy to see something for free. "People are, you know, open to reading some of my [book] recommendations as well, which always feels nice," he added.

Since his early days, the book-exchange program has blossomed, and Montes now works with local non-profit, Mosholu Preservation Corporation, which owns the Keeper's House. He was, therefore, able to secure the space for the outdoor library mailbox, outside the house, which is also adjacent to the local community Edible Garden at 3400 Reservoir Oval East.

Montes maintains the mailbox, checking and replenishing it every so often, and promotes it on social media, letting residents know they are welcome to take books or leave books for others to take. Indeed, he credits social media for much of the recent expansion of the book exchange program.

He said some people end up keeping the books and that that's ok too, as the



Photo by Sarah Huffman.

**NORWOOD COMMUNITY LIBRARY'S** mailbox opened on July 31, 2021. It is located outside the Keeper's House Edible Garden at 3400 Reservoir Oval East in the Norwood section of the Bronx.

objective is really to get people reading. On social media, he shares positive, inspiring messages of growth, purpose, and harmony with others, as well as recommending books to read.

Montes came up with the idea for the library mailbox, together with The Dowe Twins, a company and brand created by 12-year-old local, Bronx twins, Princeton and Brazil Dowe. The twins, who have been diagnosed as being on the autism spectrum and who also have an auditory processing disorder, do not let these setbacks stand in the way of their development, however.

Their company/brand aims to bring awareness to, and empower, kids

who learn differently from others, and they have even co-authored a range of books of their own, such as, "The Dowe Twins: The Days of the Week (More 2 Learn Series)" and "The Dowe Twins Healthy Living Series: Time to Read the Ingredients Labels."

Montes also partners with other local organizations while distributing his free books. To mark the library's third anniversary, he partnered with Jerome Gun Hill Business Improvement District (BID), an organization that provides support to businesses in the Norwood area, and together they organized a free, school supplies and book giveaway. At that event, Montes said he gave out between 100 to 150 books.

"Overall, showing up for the Bronx, that always warms my heart," Montes said. He has also partnered with other Bronx organizations to support other initiatives. With the Bronx (Re) Birth and Progress Collective, an organization that "seeks to build alternate solutions outside of the system that protect and honor birthing people in the Bronx and their families," he's spread awareness of the organization and handed out emergency Plan B with the same group.

Other group collaborations have been with "Mi Oh My Farms," which distributes free, hydroponically grown greens. Hydroponics is a form of gardening that uses no soil, but instead grows plants in a solution of water and nutrients. Montes also supports The Fridge Girls, a group who helps provide food for community fridges and food drives.

He has also provided manga and urban fiction writings to teens in juvenile justice centers. Something he said he's particularly proud of is the distribution of 100 copies of the book, "An African American and Latinx History of the United States" by Paul Ortiz. "We're getting that history that isn't taught in schools, straight to the people," said Montes.

For those wondering where Montes gets all these books, he said he receives donations from other Bronxites, partner organizations, schools, neighbors, and co-workers. He said his stockpile used to be just a few boxes of extra books but now he has a closet and storage unit dedicated to them.

While the Norwood Community Library is mostly a one-man operation, Montes said he has occasional volunteers who also help him. Delia Fernandez is one such volunteer, and a friend of Montes who said she's been helping him since the beginning. "It's been really cool to see him expand everything," she said. "It started off really with just one crate, and he's really been able to build it into something

(continued on page 20)





# Take Care of Your Mental Health



By Dr. GIFTY AMPADU

Each year, usually around the start of the year, which is just around the corner, we are encouraged to meet with our primary care physician to assess our physical wellbeing. Not often prioritized as part of this routine is an effort to

assess our psychological and emotional wellbeing, which is concerning, because poor mental health has an impact on physical wellbeing and quality of life.

Mental health problems continue to rise across the nation. The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in increased isolation, anxiety, unresolved grief, stress, and financial and housing insecurities, all of which are predictors of a mental health crisis. Also at risk are people with chronic medical conditions, such as asthma, heart disease and diabetes. They are more likely to struggle with depression and anxiety. Right now, there is an urgent need for engagement in mental health hygiene and awareness.

Engaging in activities that are beneficial for our mental health will help us to improve our overall wellbeing. Just as we are encouraged to be vigilant about our hygiene practices, such as washing our hands and wearing masks during these times, we should be equally encouraged to cultivate and engage in good practices around mental health. Here are four simple good practices for checking-in on your mental health.

## Four ACTS to Improve Mental Health Hygiene

- **Annual Assessment** - Start the conversation about your mental health at your annual, physical examination. Remember that your mental health is key to your overall wellbeing, so be proactive about starting the conversation.
- **Care** - Care for yourself intentionally. Engage in self-care and coping strategies that work for you. Examples include movement, eating well, meditation, prayer, social activity, and consistent sleep.
- **Therapy** - Seek counseling or therapy as a proactive measure to assess your mental health and to learn coping strategies that are helpful for improving/maintaining mental health hygiene. It is important to remember that checking in with a psychologist or therapist can be a way of checking-in on mental health matters, and not simply a solution to mental health difficulties.
- **Social Support** - Seek and cultivate a social support network (friends, family, colleagues, etc.) that allows you to speak openly about your mental health. Engaging in routine conversations about mental health not only provides liberated spaces for dialogue, encouragement, and accountability but it also de-stigmatizes the topic of mental health. The more we all start talking about mental health matters, the easier it becomes for us and others to address them.

As we head into the new year, remember that our mental health is equally as important as our physical health. Use these four practices to care for your mental health and overall wellbeing.

Gifty Ampadu, Ph.D. is an attending psychologist at Montefiore Health System.

# Oswald Feliz Wins District 15 General Election

By SÍLE MOLONEY

As expected, District 15 City Councilman Oswald Feliz has won the Nov. 2 District 15 City Council general election, winning 70 percent of the vote share, comprising 7,224 votes out of a total of 10,264 eligible ballots. The New York City Board of Elections certified the results on Nov. 30. The runner up was Ariel Rivera Diaz who ran on both the Republican Party and Conservative Party tickets and gained 1,340 votes. They councilman has since been selected to join Mayor-elect Eric Adams' public safety transition team. "Privileged to be selected and join @ericadamsfornyc's Public Safety Transition Team. The people that I represent strongly supported him and his public safety agenda – and I'm honored by the opportunity to help him achieve it," Feliz said.



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## CRIME FILE

BY SÍLE MOLONEY



### University Heights Armed Robbery

Police are seeking the public's help identifying the person seen in the above photo who is sought for questioning in connection with an armed robbery that occurred in University Heights. On Friday, Dec. 10, at approximately 10.55 a.m., inside the store, Antillana, located at 124 West Fordham Road, the individual began to take grocery items of an unknown value from the store without paying for them.

When a store employee approached the person to try and recover the items, the suspect displayed a firearm and fled on foot with the stolen property, southbound, towards 183rd Street. No injuries were reported as a result of the incident. The suspect is described as male, and was last seen wearing a multicolored jacket, dark colored pants, multicolored sneakers, and a black surgical mask.

### Fordham Manor: Man Stabbed in the Face

Police confirm a man was stabbed in the face during an attempted robbery which took place in Fordham Manor. Police said the incident took place in the vicinity of Decatur Avenue and East 195th Street on Monday, Dec. 6, at 5.09 p.m. They said a 23-year-old man reported to police that an unknown individual stabbed him in the face with a sharp instrument and attempted to take his phone. The victim was removed to St. Barnabas Hospital in stable condition. The investigation is ongoing.

### Norwood: Man Arrested for Assault

A man has been arrested following an assault with a pocketknife in Norwood.

Offering few details of the incident, after a preliminary investigation, an NYPD source told the Norwood News that the assault took place at the northwest corner of Jerome Avenue and East 208th Street in Norwood, at approximately 4:30 p.m. on Wednesday, Nov. 30. Police said Charles Perkins, 62, was arrested at the scene and charged with assault, menacing and possession of a weapon, a pocketknife. The unidentified victim was treated at the scene for a "minor" laceration to the lip. A person arrested for a crime is innocent unless and

until convicted in a court of law.

### Fordham Manor: Man Dies in Daylight Shooting

The NYPD has confirmed that a man has died following a shooting in the Fordham Manor section of the Bronx. Police said the shooting occurred at around 3 p.m. on Sunday, Dec. 5, at Aqueduct Avenue and West Fordham Road, in Fordham Manor. Upon arrival, police discovered a 62-year-old man shot in the head. He was transported to St. Barnabas Hospital where he was pronounced deceased. The victim has since been identified as Robert Brown, 62, of Grand Avenue in University Heights. Police said there were no immediate arrests, and the investigation is ongoing.

### Fordham Manor Fatal Hit & Run

Police said Demoy Adams, 35, a maintenance worker with the New York City Department of Education, from North Riverdale, has been charged with two counts of leaving the scene of an accident which occurred in August, in which a woman died. Adams was arrested on Nov. 27. On Aug. 28, at approximately 8.42 p.m., police responded to a 911 call regarding two pedestrians who had been struck by a vehicle at the intersection of East Fordham Road and Morris Avenue in Fordham Manor. Upon arrival, police observed a 44-year-old woman and

a 53-year-old woman, unconscious and unresponsive with trauma throughout the body. EMS transported both aided women to St. Barnabas Hospital, where the 44-year-old woman was pronounced deceased, and the 53-year-old woman was listed in stable condition.

A preliminary investigation determined that an unidentified vehicle was traveling eastbound on East Fordham Road when the driver failed to properly navigate the road and struck the 44-year-old woman. The vehicle also collided with metal items that were on the sidewalk, causing them to strike the 53-year-old woman. The driver did not remain at the scene of the incident and the NYPD's highway collision investigation squad began investigating. The deceased was later identified as Murielle Gousse, 44, of Prospect Avenue in the Belmont section of The Bronx. A person arrested and charged with a crime is innocent unless and until convicted in a court of law.

*Anyone with information regarding 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 <https://crimestoppers.nypdonline.org/> or on Twitter @NYPDTips.*

*All calls are strictly confidential.*



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# Rally Held Outside Assemblyman's Home to Protest School Vax Bill

By SÍLE MOLONEY

An estimated 50 protestors, some dressed in ultra-Orthodox Jewish attire, held a rally outside the home of Bronx, Jewish Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz (A.D. 81), in the Riverdale section of the Bronx on Sunday, Dec. 12, displaying anti-Semitic imagery and protesting the assemblyman's sponsoring of bill A8378, according to one witness who works for the assemblyman. It is the second such rally protesting the assemblyman's legislation in the last month.

The bill is still at the committee level stage of the legislative process. If passed, it would authorize an immunization program against COVID-19 for schools funded with State aid and would require immunization against COVID-19 for those attending such schools.

As reported, a protest was held outside Dinowitz's constituency office in Kingsbridge on Sunday, Nov. 14, organized by Republican gubernatorial candidate, Rob Astorino, during which swastikas and a yellow star were witnessed. The display of Nazi imagery at that protest was widely condemned by elected officials from across the State as being anti-Semitic.

*Norwood News* reached out to the Astorino campaign at the time and asked if he equated a COVID-19 vaccine mandate to the murder of millions of Jewish people during the Holocaust. Phil Oliva, spokesperson for Rob Astorino's campaign, replied, "Rob never saw the sign (which displayed a swastika), and would have removed it had he spotted it. While he strongly opposes COVID vaccine mandates and passports, it doesn't compare to the atrocities committed by Nazi Germany. Rob believes we can disagree with people without calling them Nazis."

During the latest rally held outside Dinowitz's home, it is unknown what percentage of the overall group may or may not have been Jewish. The witness counted approximately 4 to 5 Hasidic men among the crowd, and one man who was wearing a yarmulke (a skullcap worn in public by Orthodox Jewish men or during prayer by other Jewish men) who was filming the event.

One of the men held a sign that read, "Please do not discriminate our God given gift of life and health. Let us stay safe by avoiding the COVID-19 genocide vaccine." Another, also dressed in ultra-Orthodox Jewish attire, held a sign that read, "Jeffrey Dinowitz, stop bill A8378. Don't kill our kids." Yet another protestor, dressed in similar attire, held a sign that read, "Religious liberty in the USA under attack." One member of the group also wore a yellow



Photo via Twitter

**ULTRA-ORTHODOX JEWISH PEOPLE** protest, along with others, outside the home of Bronx Jewish Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz (A.D. 81) in Riverdale on Sunday, December 12, 2021.



Photo via Twitter

**PROTESTORS HOLD A** sign that reads, "No Jab - No Entry? I did Nazi that coming," during a rally held outside the home of Bronx Jewish Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz (A.D. 81) in Riverdale on Sunday, Dec. 12, 2021.

star on his clothing.

Other signs seen at the rally included swastika symbols. Two other protestors, also dressed in similar ultra-Orthodox Jewish attire, covered their faces with similarly worded signs. Yet other protestors, dressed in regular clothing, held a sign that read, "No Jab - No Entry? I did Nazi that coming." At least one other protestor carried an American flag.

Some so-called, anti-vaxxers across the world have been bizarrely equating COVID-19 vaccine mandates to the treatment of Jewish people during the Holocaust over the course of the last year.

The Twitter account for the "Voice of Jews" later tweeted images of the rally with the message, "While @Jef-

freyDinowitz sponsor bill #A8378, putting our lives in danger for his anti freedom, anti population agenda, pro-freedom, pro-life protestors showed up at his home with the truth. #COVID19-Vaccine #VaccineMandates #NoVaccineMandates #SaveOurKids"

In one video, posted to Twitter by the same group, an ultra-Orthodox Jewish man at the rally delivers a speech and appears to blame undocumented immigrants for the spread of COVID-19, saying, in part, "I feel that this liberals is a punishment, this [inaudible] liberals is a punishment from God for causing and allowing any other things." He added that Republicans should not cave in to "any minority from the liberals" and that God will bless people "to make America great again."

Another photo captured a protestor holding a sign with the words, "Hey Dinowitz, [ ] You 2," along with a drawing of a hand displaying the middle finger gesture. The assemblyman responded to the event on Sunday, via Twitter, writing, "While healthcare workers are putting their lives on the line to save NYers, a couple dozen antivaxxers showed up at my home to spread misinfo and pseudoscience about vaccines." He added, "And they brought their Holocaust imagery to co-opt. Again."

The following day, he issued a longer press release. Representatives for Dinowitz confirmed the rally outside his home did indeed take place and said it appeared to have been organized by John Gilmore of the Autism Action Network, and featured remarks from Derrick Gibson, a declared political candidate for governor of New York. Gibson is running on the Republican Party ticket.

*Norwood News* reached out to both Gilmore of the Autism Action Network, and gubernatorial candidate, Gibson, for comment on their alleged attendance at / participation in the rally, amid the public display of Anti-Semitic imagery. Gibson responded on Tuesday, Dec. 14, saying, "Alleged is correct. I was in attendance and no such symbol was displayed. I stand with my Jewish brothers and sisters 200% against any tyranny for any group of people."

*Norwood News* provided a link to Gibson of the photographic evidence of the anti-Semitic imagery on display at the rally and asked him for further comment. We did not hear from Gilmore before going to press.

*Norwood News* had also reached out for comment to a rabbi at one local Bronx Jewish Center to ask if he knew the Jewish protestors who attended the rally at Dinowitz's home, and to ask if he had any comment on the rally. We did not receive an immediate response. We had previously reached out to the same rabbi and to another local Jewish center for comment, following the November rally held outside the assemblyman's Kingsbridge office. We did not receive a response on that occasion from either center.

When contacted, police said no hate crime had been reported following the November rally. However, as reported previously, hate crimes in New York City were up 95.5 percent since 2020 according to NYPD data as of Nov. 21, with 497\* year-to-date hate crimes recorded citywide as of that date. Of those incidents, the NYPD told the *Norwood News* that 180\* were classified as anti-Semitic.

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# Eric Dinowitz Joined by Wide- Ranging Elected Officials for Inauguration Ceremony

By SÍLE MOLONEY

Elected officials from across New York State gathered inside the Lovinger Theatre at Lehman College for the formal inauguration of Democrat, Eric Dinowitz, as the city councilman of District 11 on Sunday, Dec. 5. The Bedford Park ceremony was attended by a crowd of over 300 and was streamed live on BronxNet TV.

The councilman has been serving in the role since April 2021, having won the District 11 seat in a special election in March. As reported, he went on to win the primary race in June, surpassing his nearest Democratic rival, Mino Lora, for a second time, and on Nov. 30, the New York City Board of Elections certified he won the Nov. 2. general election with 73 percent of the vote share, securing 15,416 votes out of a total of 20,892 eligible ballots.

In the general election, 17,014 of the

total eligible votes were up for grabs in Assembly District 81, where the councilman's father, Jeffrey Dinowitz, has been the elected assembly member since 1994. The councilman secured 12,581 votes in this district, with runner-up, Kevin Pazmino, winning a total of 3,013 votes, having run on both the Republican Party and Conservative Party tickets.

Among the heavyweights who spoke at the councilman's inauguration were U.S. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, Attorney General Letitia James, who recently announced that she has suspended her gubernatorial campaign, State Comptroller Tom DiNapoli, Congressman Adriano Espaillat (NY-13), who represents parts of the Bronx and Northern Manhattan, and State Sen. Jamaal Bailey (S.D. 33), chair of the Bronx Democratic Party.

James later tweeted, "As an educator and a labor and District Leader, @EricDinowitzNYC has been a public servant for communities across the Northwest Bronx for over a decade, and I know he will continue this work in the years to come. Congratulations on your inauguration to the New York City Council!"

Schumer also shared photos of the event on Twitter, adding, "An incredible day for NYC's 11th City Council District in the Bronx, swearing in @EricDinowitzNYC!" Meanwhile, Bailey tweeted, "When I met him when we were HS classmates, I knew him as



Photo via Twitter

**ERIC DINOWITZ DELIVERS** his inaugural address as city councilman of District 11 during his inauguration ceremony at Lehman College in Bedford Park on Sunday, December 5, 2021.

'Kara's brother,' but he's established one hell of an identity on his own, as a father, husband, son, and now-councilman. Huge congratulations to @EricDinowitz on his inauguration today! The 11th is lucky to have you!"

Other speakers at the event included Bronx Congressman Ritchie Torres (NY-15) and former Congressman Eliot Engel, whose District 16 congressional seat was won last year by Congressman Jamaal Bowman, State Assembly Speaker and Bronx Assemblyman Carl Heastie (A.D. 83), City Council Speaker Corey Johnson,

Bronx Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz, Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr., Bronx Borough President-elect and outgoing Bronx District 16 City Council Member, Vanessa Gibson, Bronx District Attorney Darcel D. Clark, and former Bronx District 11 City Council Member, June Eiland.

A representative from Gov. Kathy Hochul's office also attended the event and delivered remarks on the governor's behalf. Other attendees included Westchester County executive, George Latimer, several members of the State Senate and Assembly, City Comptroller-elect, Brad Lander, who campaigned in Norwood for Lora in the primaries, and current and incoming colleagues at New York City Council.

The ceremonial oath of office was administered by State Supreme Court Justice, Andrew Cohen, who held the District 11 city council seat until he resigned on Dec. 31, 2020, to take up his role as a judge in the Bronx. As reported, the situation was deemed controversial by some, given District 11, like District 15, was left without representation, amid the ongoing pandemic, for the first three months of the year.

Some people felt the nomination of Cohen to the bench was purposefully orchestrated from within the rank and file of the Bronx Democratic Party to trigger a special election which typically has a lower voter turn-out and favors candidates with stronger name

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## Rally Held Outside Assemblyman's Home to Protest School Vax Bill

*(continued from page 12)*

In the Bronx, year-to-date hate crimes were up 126.3 percent from 2020, with 43 such crimes reported as of Nov. 21, while in the 28 days ending on Nov. 21, hate crimes were up 300 percent in the borough. In the 50th precinct, which covers Riverdale, Fieldston, Kingsbridge, Marble Hill, and Spuyten Duyvil, a broad area that is home to a substantial Jewish population, year-to-date hate crimes were up 800 percent as of Nov. 21, compared to last year.

As also reported by *Norwood News*, a Spuyten Duyvil man was arrested and charged with hate crimes in October 2021 for vandalizing various synagogues in the Northwest Bronx in April of this year.

On Sunday, Gov. Kathy Hochul announced that masks will be required in all indoor, public places unless businesses or venues implement a vaccine requirement. Officials said this was a major action to address the winter surge as COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations rise statewide, and to align with the CDC's recommendations for communities with substantial and high transmission.

The new business and venue requirements extend to both patrons and staff. The measure is effective Dec. 13, 2021, until Jan. 15, 2022, after which the State will re-evaluate based on current conditions.

Hochul said, as governor, her two, top priorities were to protect the health of New Yorkers and protect the health of the economy. "The temporary measures I am taking today will help accomplish this through the holiday season," she said. "We shouldn't have reached the point where we are confronted with a winter surge, especially with the vaccine at our disposal, and I share many New Yorkers' frustration that we are not past this pandemic yet."

The governor thanked the more than 80 percent of adult New Yorkers who she said had done the right thing by getting fully vaccinated. "If others will follow suit, these measures will no longer be necessary," she said. "I have warned for weeks that additional steps could be necessary, and now we are at that point based upon three metrics: increasing cases, reduced hospital capacity, and insufficient vaccination

rates in certain areas." In New York City, as of Dec. 10, cases, hospitalizations, and deaths from COVID-19 were all increasing.

On Monday, Dec. 13, the Van Cortlandt Jewish Center announced that it will be holding a "Celebration of Appreciation, Honoring Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz," on Sunday, Dec. 19, at 10.30 a.m. Representatives of the center said, via a press release, "Jeffrey Dinowitz was elected to the New York State Assembly to represent the 81st Assembly District in the Bronx on February 15, 1994, and he's been our Assemblyman since. The district includes the Van Cortlandt Jewish Center (VCJC) in Van Cortlandt Village."

They added, "When the NYC Department of Education abruptly stopped renting space from VCJC, Assemblyman Dinowitz stepped in and helped broker a deal with Mosholu-Montefiore Community Center (MMCC). That was key to VCJC's ability to continue to serve both the Jewish and general communities of Van Cortlandt Village, as it has for over 90 years. VCJC now houses the JASA Senior Center and the Mosholu-Montefiore Early Learning

Center."

The group concluded, saying that they would be pleased to show their appreciation for all the work the assemblyman has done for VCJC and for the community. Stu Harris, president of VCJC, said, "I am happy that we're finally able to honor Assemblyman Dinowitz after the year we've had due to COVID. He is a man that deserves to be honored, and I'm sorry we had to put it off last year."

*Editor's Note: Get the facts regarding the COVID-19 vaccine here:*

<https://covid19vaccine.health.ny.gov/frequently-asked-questions-0>

*To report a hate crime in progress or any emergency, call 911. Non-emergencies should be reported to the local precinct.*

*\*According to the NYPD, the hate crime task force statistics referenced above are subject to change as active possible bias cases can be reclassified to non-bias cases, and removed from counted statistics, upon investigation. As a result of a possible bias to non-bias classification, statistical percentages may fluctuate beyond assumed percentage calculations from week-to-week reporting periods.*



# Friends of Devoe Park Host Tree-Lighting Gathering

By SARAH HUFFMAN

Friends of Devoe Park (FODP) hosted the group's second, annual tree-lighting event on Saturday, Dec. 11, in Devoe Park, located in the Fordham Manor section of the Bronx. While the group hosted a similar event in 2019, they cancelled last year's event amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Attendees at the event were treated to hot chocolate, munchkins, and sugared cookies provided by FODP. The group also handed out Christmas-themed masks, candy canes, and jingle bells to community members. Assemblyman José Rivera (A.D. 78) was also in attendance.

Rachel Miller-Bradshaw, founding member of FODP, said the group wanted to host the event because there wasn't really any such event marking the holiday season in their local neighborhood.

"That's just it, just [to] wish the community Happy Holidays, Merry Christmas, Happy New Year, Happy Kwanzaa and Happy Hanukkah," said Miller-Bradshaw.

Meanwhile, FODP member, Myrna Calderon, explained that the group had wanted a tree planted in the middle of the park which they could then decorate, but said the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation planted it in an out-of-the-way spot, which didn't align with their plans.

The tree which was eventually used for the lighting was a different one which had been planted a few years ago in the middle of the park, according to Miller-Bradshaw.

"[We're] just continuing to give the park love and attention and continue to hold events the best way we can because I think this will probably be our last event until spring," she said. "We'll probably pick up and have something in the spring, but it's all about jolliness," she added.

Aside from the problem encountered with the selection of the holiday tree, the event faced other challenges from the get-go, with the weather forecasting rain in the hours leading up to the tree-lighting ceremony. Luckily for FODP, the rain finally held off until later in the evening, allowing the group to proceed with the gathering.

FODP also encountered an issue with the string lights used on the tree. While it was initially lit, the lights slowly started to go out as the evening unfolded. "When I came, the lights were lit on the top, the middle lights I



**FRIENDS OF DEVOE** Park (FODP) serve hot chocolate to attendees at their second, annual tree-lighting ceremony in Devoe Park in the Fordham Manor section of the Bronx on Saturday, December 11, 2021. Photo by Sarah Huffman.

could see, were missing," said Calderon. "I don't know what happened."

John Howard, another FODP member, explained that the lights used were solar-powered because the Parks' department preferred the use of such solar-powered lights. He said the lights worked perfectly when tested the night before, after charging them in the sunlight for three days. He said he believed the lights stopped working on Saturday night because there wasn't a lot of sunlight that day.



"When I got here at about 4:30, they were not illuminated," he said. "The sun went down, the lights came on, and then, about half an hour later, they started to go out because there was no sun today. So, there you go - so much for solar," Howard said.

The group tried to resolve the issue by driving a car up behind the tree and using its headlights to illuminate it. Howard credited Calderon for thinking of getting a speaker for music, and for asking for a generator to power the speaker.

"I took it upon myself to coordinate with the Parks people about getting their generator," said Howard. "Now, I see this generator and next year, I'm going to ask if we could just borrow it for the lighting event."

Despite the technical difficulties, FODP and the community attendees appeared to enjoy downing the hot chocolate and singing carols. Howard said the most important thing was for people to have a good time. "We are a very loose group and that has its advantages," he said. "It enables us to put this together kind of like in the last moment."

**(LEFT) COMMUNITY MEMBERS** joined the Friends of Devoe Park for caroling and hot chocolate at the group's annual, holiday tree-lighting event in Devoe Park in the Fordham Manor section of the Bronx on Saturday, December 11, 2021. Photo by Sarah Huffman.

## Eric Dinowitz Joined by Wide-Ranging Elected Officials for Inauguration Ceremony

*(continued from page 14)*

recognition, which was the case for the councilman, due to his father's seasoned political career in the district.

The ceremony included a performance by the Celia Cruz School of Music, led by conductor David West. The group also performed on Tuesday, Dec. 7, at a separate, tree-lighting event on the Norwood/Bedford Park border. Dinowitz, a former special education teacher, previously taught at the music school.

After the swearing in, the ceremony ended with an inaugural speech by the councilman. Reflecting on the local support garnered through his various elections to date, Dinowitz said his campaign team included some high school volunteers who were not yet old enough to vote.

"We had older adults who had voted for decades but never participated in a campaign before, community members who found that they had a voice in the future of our community," he

said. "We brought together a broad and diverse coalition of community members and small businesses, tenants and co-op shareholders and homeowners, elected leaders and union members, from across all ethnic, age, income, religious, and political backgrounds."

Dinowitz said that as a candidate, he vowed to ensure the Bronx would never be left behind. "In the brief time I have served as your council member, I've kept that vow," he said. "Since taking office in April of this year, I have delivered for District 11. We brought composting back to the neighborhood, continue to address food insecurity, saved a school and community garden, secured millions of capital dollars, invested heavily in clean-up services, and provided superior constituent services, while being physically present in every corner of the district."

According to the councilman's website, earlier this year, following the City budget approval, he con-

firmed having secured nearly \$15 million in local capital project funding. "This includes giving schools in our district over \$4 million for technology and facility improvements," he said. "Our parks will receive nearly \$7 million for enhancement and safety upgrades. Hundreds of thousands of dollars will also be spent locally on our senior centers, community centers and organizations to be used for local programming."

Meanwhile, during his inaugural address at Lehman College, the councilman said he has also sponsored 48 pieces of legislation to date, beneficial to the people of both the city and the Bronx, 23 of which he said have already been signed into law. He concluded, saying, "For me, it all started in a classroom, and now, I proudly bring those lessons learned to City Hall, and the lessons I have learned at City Hall so far, I proudly take into my upcoming full term at the Council. The future is bright here in the Bronx."





## Letters To The Editor

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

### Student Debt

There are many bills President Joe Biden has had difficulty passing, due not only to blind opposition from Republicans, but disunity among Democrats as well. But there's one thing he can accomplish with the authority he already has. With the power granted in the Higher Education Act of 1965, Biden can cancel student debt. A coalition of 105 groups, organized by Public Citizen, is urging him to do that. Student loan payments were already paused by Biden's predecessor (one of the few good things he did) and they have been continued by the current president. But eventually the pause will be lifted, and all those on shaky financial ground, including a disproportionate number of non-White students will, again, be burdened. As it is, college tuition nowadays is outrageously high. More financial aid is needed for those capable of achieving a college education, but not able to pay the exorbitant cost.

**Richard Warren,  
Van Cortlandt Village**

### Power Washing Needed Opposite 52nd Pct

On Webster Avenue, under the Mosholu Parkway overpass and opposite the 52nd precinct, a very unhealthy and unsanitary situation has been festering for too long. Bird droppings, and general dust and grime are gathering from vouchered and towed vehicles. This situation has now been magnified since a homeless man set up a campsite in the area. I am calling on the Bronx Community Board 7 Manager and the Commanding Officer of the 52nd precinct, with our elected, local officials, both Dinowitzes, to accept this letter as an official complaint, and to sit down and come up with a comprehensive plan to have community volunteers come in twice a year and power-wash the area to be clean and sanitize it, especially the walls leading down from the overpass. All the vouchered cars should also be removed twice a year to allow Sanitation sweepers to come in and clean the curb areas. I eagerly await your collec-

tive reply.

**Richard Marias,  
Norwood**

### Rally Outside Assemblyman Dinowitz's Office

Your coverage of the Astorino organized protest in front of Assemblyman Dinowitz's office, [Norwood News, Dec. 2-15] as well as all the collateral issues, should win a Pulitzer Prize. It is one of the finest examples of neutral, unbiased, thorough, just-the-facts journalism I have ever seen in a newspaper. However, several key points are missed.

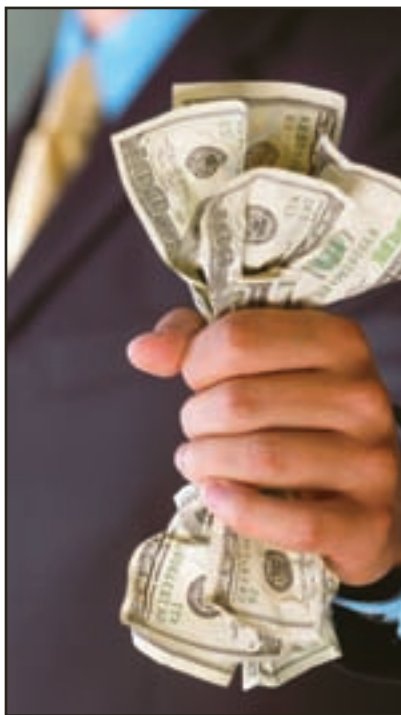
The woman carrying the sign with the swastika is entitled to one of our most important constitutional protections - freedom of speech, assembly, right to redress government. So long as she does not engage in incitement to riot or perform violence against Mr. Dinowitz (or anyone else) or his property, she is absolutely entitled to say what she wishes. The minute we engage in repression of expression, no matter how repulsive or repulsive, is the minute we begin the descent down a very, very slippery slope.

Also, while I feel the antivaxxers are wasting their time with demonstrations, and they are certainly not changing Dinowitz's mind, I do see their point of view. I, personally, have received two Pfizer injections because I am far more afraid of poverty from loss of income, and my mother's incessant nagging, than I am of a vaccine. I tested positive for COVID in April 2020 and was totally asymptomatic and was exposed in 2021 and tested negative. I wear my mask in public at all times, but I could have just as easily done without being vaccinated.

Former Congressmen [Charles] Rangel, several years ago, took a position on the draft the New York Post harpooned, but it didn't lay a glove on Mr. Rangel himself, acknowledging his fine record in the military. The antivaxxers would do well to read that editorial. They do not have the right to harass, bully, or intimidate Dinowitz or personally attack him, verbally.

**Nat Weiner  
Parkchester**

Editor's Note: Get the COVID-19 facts at: <https://covid19vaccine.health.ny.gov/frequently-asked-questions-0>



METRO FILE PHOTO

### Waste of Tax Dollars

Drip, drip, drip....watch your tax dollars go down the drain. Have you also seen all the "Don't Let Tax or Repair Charges Come Between You and Your Property" full page ads in many daily and weekly neighborhood newspapers? They deal with New Yorkers who owe real estate tax, emergency repair or other property-related charges, as seen in "The City of New York may sell a lien on your property" advertisements. Is this the best way the NYC Departments of Finance, and Housing, Preservation and Development can spend taxpayer dollars?

Why can't these agencies compare their respective lists of people who owe money, with those filing City and State tax returns? Surely the technology exists to place liens on tax refunds. You could also extend citizens the courtesy of a telephone call, letter, or e-mail, informing them of their overdue obligations. What's next? Will City Hall send out City marshals, going door to door serving subpoenas? Will Mayor-elect Eric Adams, City Comptroller-elect Brad Lander, Public Advocate Jumaane Williams, the next NYC Council Speaker and NYC Council Class of 2022 put an end to this waste, fraud, and abuse of taxpayer dollars?

**Larry Penner  
Great Neck**

## Fordham Manor: Search for 14-Year- Old Missing Girl

By SÍLE MOLONEY

The NYPD is seeking the public's assistance in locating a 14-year-old girl who was reported missing from Fordham Manor, in the 52nd precinct. Evelyn Hernandez, 14, of 2700 Grand Concourse, was last seen on Thursday Dec. 9, at her home at approximately 7.30 a.m. She is described as female, 5 feet, 4 inches tall, Hispanic, weighs 150 pounds, has brown eyes and brown hair.

Anyone with information regarding this missing person 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 <https://crimestoppers.nypdonline.org/> or on Twitter @NYPDTips. All calls are strictly confidential.



Photo courtesy of the NYPD.  
**EVELYN HERNANDEZ, 14**, of 2700 Grand Concourse, has been reported missing. She was last seen on Thursday Dec. 9, at her home at approximately 7.30 a.m.

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## Public and Community Meetings

The 52<sup>nd</sup> **PRECINCT COMMUNITY COUNCIL** meetings are usually held on the third Thursday of each month at 6 p.m., sometimes virtually and sometimes in person. Call the 52nd Precinct Community Affairs office at 718-220-5824 to be added to the email list.

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 in January 2022 (date TBC). Contact [KCabreraCarrera@cb.nyc.gov](mailto:KCabreraCarrera@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 usually held on the **first Wednesday of each month at 8 p.m.** The last meeting was held on Dec. 1. For further details, contact [bedfordmosholu@verizon.net](mailto:bedfordmosholu@verizon.net).

## CORRECTION

In the November 18-December 1 edition of the Norwood News, in the page 6 story, "Community Groups Step Up Clean-Up Efforts," Sirio Guerino was incorrectly referenced as a Bedford Park resident. He is a Norwood resident.

In the December 2-December 15 edition of the Norwood News, in the page 22 story, "Bronx DA's Office Hosts Reentry Resource Fair," Antonio Hendrickson's name was correctly referenced in the story, but incorrectly referenced as Antonio Hendricks in the photo caption. We apologize for these errors.

[www.norwoodnews.org](http://www.norwoodnews.org)



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# Out & About

COMPILED BY SÍLE MOLONEY

## EVENTS

Starting Nov. 24, 2021, discover NYBG GLOW at **The New York Botanical Garden**. Take in the beauty of the landmark landscapes after dark all breathtakingly illuminated with thousands of lights and whimsical installations. Tickets can be bought for Dec. 16, 17, 18, 23, 26, 27, 28, 29 and 30, and Jan. 1, 6, 7, 8, 14, 15, 21 and 22, each day between 5 p.m. and 10 p.m. See NYBG's iconic sights and buildings come to life as dramatic, glittering canvases with the Haupt Conservatory and Mertz Library Building as the centerpieces. Washes of brilliant color, thousands of dazzling LEDs, illuminated plant stories, and whimsical, picture-perfect installations reflect the surrounding gardens and collections—creating a spectacle not to be missed! Go to: <https://www.nybg.org/event/holiday-train-show-2021/nybg-glow/> for more information.

**Moshulu Preservation Corporation** will be hosting two holiday events in conjunction with **Bronx Bound Books** mobile bookstore on Thursday, Dec. 15, from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. at 3498 Jerome Avenue in Norwood, and on Friday, Dec. 16, from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. on Williamsbridge Square, at 3500 White Plains Road, in Williamsbridge.

Every child in attendance will get a chance to choose from over 1,000 free books. Masks will be required, and free masks will be available at the event.

## THEATER

On Friday, Dec. 17, from 7 p.m. to 8.30 p.m. 2021 New York grant awardee, Juan Ramirez, Jr., in partnership with Art Defined, presents his virtual play, entitled, **A Love Letter to The Bronx**, via Zoom. The anthology play is structured in many scenes, each set and based in The Bronx, featuring specific characters and themes focused on our dope borough. After the performance, the play will be released licensed-free, for any educational and for-profit organizations to produce the play for support. RSVP at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/a-love-letter-to-the-bronx-a-virtual-play-tickets-219480460967> For access to the script, go to [www.JuanRamirezJr.com](http://www.JuanRamirezJr.com)

## ART & KIDS

Residents have until Dec. 31 to sign up for free membership to the City's various recreation centers. **Williamsbridge Oval Recreation Center**, located at 3225 Reservoir Oval E, Bronx, NY 10467, is

holding a Night Art class of painting wine bottles on Friday, Dec. 17, from 6 p.m. to 7.30 p.m. and a Winter Wonderland event on Saturday, Dec. 18, from noon to 2 p.m., where there will be arts & crafts, as well as a visit by Santa! All programs require proof of vaccination for people aged 12 and over. Masks must be worn inside.

## MOVEMENT

**Williamsbridge Oval Recreation Center**, located at 3225 Reservoir Oval E, Bronx, NY 10467, is holding an open dance floor event on Friday, Dec. 17, from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. Residents have until Dec. 31 to sign up for free membership. All programs require proof of vaccination for people aged 12 and over. Masks must be worn inside.

NYC Parks and the Madison Square Garden Company have teamed up to host citywide basketball clinics and leagues free for boys and girls, ages 7 through 17, with the **NYC Parks Junior Knicks Basketball Clinics and League**, which aims to provide a positive, structured environment for

self-improvement, personal growth, and community development. This year, more than 180 teams will participate in 8U Co-ed, 10U Co-ed, 12U Boys, 12 Girls, and 17 U Boys, 17 U Girls age divisions across the five boroughs. Instructional clinics are featured in each borough that will provide an opportunity regardless of skill level an opportunity to have a positive basketball experience followed by a league in each borough.

Teams will play intra-borough weekly round robin schedule and then compete in intra-borough tournaments culminating the program with a Citywide Championship. To be considered for the league, please select a program and submit your information using the online registration system. For more information in your borough please contact the Sports Coordinators for the **Bronx**: Dylan Santos on (718) 430-1824 or [dylan.santos@parks.nyc.gov](mailto:dylan.santos@parks.nyc.gov). Register today! Clinics run through January 10, 2022, leagues from January 10 to April 2, 2022, and the Citywide Championship will be held on Saturday, April 9, 2022.

## Norwood Community Library Brings Free Books to Bronxites

(continued from page 8)

much larger. So, it's been really cool to see also how the other people in the community kind of gravitate towards it," she added.

Meanwhile, Laura Moya said she knows Montes from the neighborhood, but got involved with the library a year ago after seeing his work on social media. "I thought it was fantastic that he's bringing literature into our neighborhood, and people are actually responding to it," she said.

"I think that's a direct response of having someone from the community doing work for the community, instead of an outsider," she added. "He really understands what our people want, and he makes it accessible," she said. A lifelong, self-described bookworm, Montes said he's always loved reading and the role it plays in his life.

"I grew up really liking Lemony Snicket, and George Orwell when I got into my teens." Other favorites are Kurt Vonnegut and Zadie Smith. "I really like Clarice Lispector, Trevor Noah," he said. "These guys are so talented. I find a lot of peace with reading, and it expands the mind. There's a lot of distractions, and I'm only human. Of course, I have my own battles with distractions as well, but reading helps battle that there. Also, you know, it's nourishing," he said.

In addition to the book exchange program, Montes also hosts the

Norwood Community Library book club, where members meet every two months on Google to discuss a selected book.

Montes' work in the community has been recognized, and to coincide with Hispanic Heritage Month, on Oct. 16, he received a citation from local Assemblywoman Nathalia Fernández (A.D. 80), who said she was proud to honor Montes as founder of the library. "This Bronx book exchange program is an essential asset for the Norwood community, bringing the community together to share its resources to all," Fernández wrote on Twitter, along with a photo of herself presenting the citation to Montes at his book stand. "Keep up the great work!" she added.

Looking to the future, Montes said he'd like to collaborate in another food drive. Long term, he said he'd love to start a learning center, something to offer support to his fellow Bronxites. "I'm thankful to be from the Bronx, and I'm thankful for the Bronx to be so happy with what I'm doing," he said.

Follow [@norwoodcommunitylibrary](https://www.instagram.com/norwoodcommunitylibrary) on Instagram and [@norwoodxbbooks](https://twitter.com/norwoodxbbooks) on Twitter for more information, and to see where Montes sets up next. For more information about The Dowe Twins, go to <https://thedowetwins.com/>.

## Bronx CB7 Prepares Budget for Fiscal Year 2023

(continued from page 6)

Not all requests from CB7 include a call to action or enforcement from a City agency, however. The board said some quality-of-life issues can be addressed through more public awareness and education. While there was a request to enforce sanitation laws, as they relate to dog waste, especially on sidewalks, there was also a call for "a culturally sensitive, public education campaign targeted to residential and commercial property owners [that] can result in a reduction of these violations."

The board explained that, before the pandemic, the 59 community boards across the five boroughs were receiving a baseline budget of \$288,000 for employee salaries, rent, and day-to-day operations. For FY23 the board requested a budget increase

to \$350,000.

At the October CB7 general board meeting, a motion to hire Karla Cabrera Carrera to the position of community coordinator, at a yearly salary of \$68,000 was passed with 29 "yes" votes, zero "no" votes, and two abstentions. Cabrera Carrera picks up on the work carried out by a former, departed employee. A motion to increase the yearly salary of Bronx CB7 district manager, Ischia Bravo, by the maximum allowable increase of 10 percent per annum, from \$96,611 to \$106,272, was also passed in October, with 22 "yes" votes, zero "no" votes, and nine abstentions.

The statement of needs will next be reviewed by the relevant City agencies responsible for the requested follow-up and a preliminary budget will be established in January.





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# Build Back Better: A Local Perspective on a National Issue

By JOSÉ A. GIRALT

The countdown has begun, and it remains to be seen if the U.S. Senate will pass President Joe Biden's \$1.7 trillion economic safety net and climate bill by the Christmas deadline, marking the end of the current legislative session, according to NBC.

Biden is hoping that this week will see his second "Build Back Better" domestic spending bill brought before the U.S. Senate for a vote, after months of negotiations both within the Democratic Party and in the House of Representatives have pared the latest bill back from its original \$3.5 trillion target.

The dollar amount and bill programs described by the White House as a "framework" which allows for more negotiations, even after its passage in the House of Representatives. Some of the programs still in the bill include free and universal pre-K throughout the country, \$555 billion to combat climate change, and a reduction of insurance premiums for 9 million Americans, through a temporary expansion of the American Care Act Subsidies.

Some of these benefits were already enacted in New York City during Mayor Bill de Blasio's administration. In 2017, the city's Department of Education (DOE) launched 3-K for All. The mayor also announced NYC Care in August 2019 in the South Bronx and expanded it to all five boroughs by the end of 2020. The program makes health care affordable to low-income New Yorkers and includes provisions to cover the poorest with no-cost plans.

If passed, the economic safety net and climate bill will build upon the \$1.2 trillion bipartisan infrastructure bill signed into law on Nov. 15. Both bills form part of the president's Build Back Better agenda but were split into two and eventually negotiated separately.

What impact, then, will the Build Back Better agenda have in the North-west Bronx? As far as public structures are concerned, the national plan could have its biggest effect on one of City Council District 14's most prominent buildings, the Kingsbridge Armory.

As the Build Back Better agenda includes billions allotted for physical infrastructure investment, City and State agencies will be eyeing most of that to help with transportation issues. However, District 14 City Councilmember-elect, Pierina Sanchez, is hoping to see some of those funds delivered specifically to help with the armory, which falls within the district's boundary.

Sanchez previously worked in the District 14 office, and also served in the White House during the Obama administration. As such, she has a unique perspective on how national policies can

impact local communities. "I know how disconnected Washington D.C. can be from local communities," she told **Norwood News** in a phone interview. "But this type of spending [Build Back Better] offers a glimmer of hope. It can transform the Bronx."

Indeed, Sanchez acknowledges that the amount of funding in the plan has the potential to improve the lives of Bronxites in NYCHA housing, help keep small businesses operating after severe losses due to the pandemic and provide better mental health outcomes for those in need of help. However, it is the Kingsbridge Armory that, for Sanchez, "stands out for investment." Her official campaign portrait even includes the top half of the landmark structure in the background.

The armory, which is owned by the City, has been repurposed many times since it was built in the 1910s to house military troops. In the 1980s, it was used as a homeless shelter and has also been flagged at various points for project proposals ranging from a school to a shopping mall. As reported, the latest proposal, negotiated in 2013, involves a lease to KNIC Management to facilitate the construction of an indoor ice rink complex, to be known as the Kingsbridge National Ice Center (KNIC).

Though negotiations on the legal and financial arrangements between KNIC Management and the City and State have been hampered by the pandemic, Kevin Parker of KNIC Management, told the **Norwood News** on June 22 that the project was oversubscribed, at over \$400 million, in terms of the private capital commitments.

On the other hand, Parker said he was still trying to finalize negotiations with the City and State to obtain the necessary lease and permits needed to get "shovels in ground by Q4 2021, and a \$350 million investment into The Bronx." Asked in whose court the ball was in terms of next steps, Parker said, "It's the City and State that need to take the next steps."

Asked if those next steps involved rezoning commitments, Parker said they did not, and referred instead to a State loan commitment to the project of \$138 million which has been written into the State budget, but which needs to be re-confirmed every two years if it's not drawn down. It is this State loan commitment conundrum that could receive the kiss of life through Build Back Better federal dollars.

However, some Bronxites continue to voice their concerns about whether an ice center is really the best fit for the armory. Bronx Community Board 7 chair, Emmanuel Martinez, told the **Norwood News**, "For the last thirteen years, our community has been ravished by eco-

nomie disparities, drug epidemic, loss of businesses, [a] housing crisis, the COVID pandemic, and now a quality-of-life crisis. At the same time, the one landmark that has gone unchanged, the Kingsbridge Armory, sits idle while pieces of the structure continue to deteriorate."

Martinez wants to see an armory development project that will help stimulate **actual** job growth, lead to greater injection of funding in the district and assist with the issues outlined above. "Although an ice rink is a fun pastime for families to use once in a while, I can't see where the demand would come from to sustain any sort of financing needed to keep the doors open," Martinez said, before citing the district's demographics as 16 percent African American, 3 percent Asian, 9 percent other, and 70 percent Latino.

He said residents are puzzled by the choice of an ice rink for the venue. "The first question they ask is why," he said, adding that they tell him they don't need ice skating rinks, and that their children play baseball or basketball. Martinez said he has asked himself the question, "Who are they [KNIC Management] targeting? The residents of the district or those from the outside?"

He said his next question is how will the project generate jobs? He acknowledged that as a result of the initial negotiations local officials had with the developers in 2013, the project **was**, at least, able to secure a Community Benefits Agreement (CBA), the first of its kind in any developer/community project. He said the CBA **does** state that 51 post-construction jobs will go to the community, including in security, concession roles, and maintenance positions.

However, Martinez asked how CB7 could ever address the problem of unemployment in the district if all that was on offer were minimum-wage jobs. In addition, he asked, "How can we help our community when we're only getting 51 jobs? Where are the construction jobs, or most importantly, union jobs? How can we ensure a Minority and Women-owned Business Enterprise (MWBE) plan is in place? Up to this point, no MWBE has been introduced!"

Martinez said The Bronx needed its own multi-sports complex a la Chelsea Piers sports complex, where hundreds of jobs could be generated in addition to retail roles. "Imagine the economic injection a multi-sports complex would bring to the community, [...] the young boys and girls who [could] play basketball or visit a batting cage, or simply enjoy themselves by sitting down having a bite to eat in a safe and secure environment?" he asked.

"On one hand, we have a project that will only serve a select few [the ice center], and on the other, we have a project

that will serve the community [multi-sports center]," Martinez said. He asked that elected officials reconsider the KNIC project, and move on to a project that he said is better prepared and ready to get the job done. He called on Gov. Kathy Hochul, Sanchez and Assembly Member José Rivera (A.D. 78) in whose district the armory also falls, to listen to the community and open the project up to ideas that he said would truly revitalize the community. "We need it now more than ever," he added.

*Norwood News* reached out to Sanchez for her views on Martinez's comments and on the project's viability as an ice center. She responded saying as the city council member-elect for District 14, she would not rest until a transformational project would be realized for the armory. "Our community must continue to be active partners in making decisions," she said. "The Kingsbridge Armory represents so much promise for our community. When I see the building, I see our power but also broken promises."

She went on to say that as the current proposal continues to stall, the 2013 CBA should be regarded as the floor and not the ceiling in terms of commitments for any future project. "There have been numerous proposals over the years and ultimately, any plan for redevelopment must include good union jobs with thriving wages, and community facilities and cultural spaces that allow for gathering and recreation," she said. "We need guaranteed local hiring, and a percentage of revenue reinvested into community development," she added.

Ahead of the November general election, *Norwood News* reached out to Sanchez's Republican opponent, Shemeen Chappell, as well as to the Bronx GOP, to ascertain their perspectives on the Build Back Better plan and its potential effects on the armory and on District 14, which includes the Morris Heights, University Heights, Fordham, and Kingsbridge sections of the borough. We did not receive an immediate response.

Sanchez, a Democrat, went on to win the general election, with almost 76 percent of the vote share, securing 8,387 votes out of a total of 11,036 eligible ballots, when the final election results were certified by the New York City Board of Elections on Nov. 30.

Before the Nov. 2 election, Sanchez held a campaign rally on the sidewalk along the Kingsbridge Armory. During the event, she expressed a heartfelt desire to see it used for something more. "This project must be something that serves the community and strengthens us, and not just a vehicle for gentrification," she said. "I commit to champion this."

**\*Sile Moloney contributed to this story.**



# Holiday Wishes And Happy New Year 2022

*Happy Holidays! This entire year of 2021 we have found ourselves thinking about our quality of life and purpose now, more than ever. As the nation and world recovers from COVID, it has provided us the opportunity to think about what's really important to us as individuals, as a family and as a community. Though COVID is still in our daily lives, and with precautions still in place, it has been a year of "coming back" to being that community that we want to care about.*

*Throughout 2021, Friends of Mosholu Parkland not only volunteered, taking care of the many areas on the parkway, but we also collaborated with organizations like Mosholu Preservation Corporation, Jerome Gun Hill BID and the North-west Merchants Association. We took on projects within walking distance of Mosholu and on the city sidewalks of our shopping districts and residential streets.*

*Our urbanite neighborhood is just as important as our parkland. These sidewalks hold our street trees that provide crucial benefits to our residents, shoppers, and small business owners. It's these urban, green spaces that enhance public safety and health, daily, as we live our lives walking to and from home, school, errands, work and more.*

*This past year, we gained new knowledge with the help of Central Park Conservancy and their partnership lab. Some of our group members went back to school for environmental studies. This knowledge is a benefit to all of us as new information and resources can be accessed to continue the group's environmental goals for the parkland and its surrounding playground and green areas.*

*Being a member of this community means we roll up our sleeves and get to work. For the long-term residents, we know what that means, volunteering in our public areas, recycling food scraps to make compost, and building on opportunities to grow food. We educate ourselves to come up with solutions that create more jobs and open new small businesses. We are learning every day to incorporate sustainability into our lives.*

*For the new individuals and families moving into Norwood and Bedford Park / Mosholu area, we welcome you with open arms. This community is your new home. Together, we are all roommates under this great, big house of a community that, together, we keep in operating condition.*

*There is so much to look forward to in 2022.*

*We wish you a Merry and a Happy New Year!*

*Friends of Mosholu Parkland - Elizabeth, Lorita, Aesha, Zoe and David.*

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# Dinowitz, Biaggi Ensure Co-op Shareholders Can Access Reverse Mortgages

By SÍLE MOLONEY

If at first you don't succeed, try, try again. So goes the maxim for perseverance, a trait which describes the now successful, multi-year efforts of legislators to grant cooperative housing shareholders the same access to reverse mortgages as other homeowners. On, Wednesday, Dec 1, Gov. Kathy Hochul signed legislation (S760/A1508), sponsored by Bronx Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz (A.D. 81) and Bronx State Sen. Alessandra Biaggi (S.D. 34), into law. The bill was strongly supported by advocates for cooperative housing in New York and now allows cooperative housing shareholders to obtain reverse mortgages on cooperative apartment loans.

Reverse mortgages are financial tools, frequently used by older homeowners whose assets are often tied up in their homes. They allow the homeowners to access certain loans which can be used to pay for daily living expenses. This is done by allowing the homeowners to borrow money against the value of their homes without requiring ongoing and immediate loan repayments. Instead, the reverse mortgage is repaid when the bor-

rower dies or sells their home. Prior to the signing of this new law, cooperative apartment owners, who may have needed cash to pay for certain living expenses, were forced to sell their homes and relocate, because they were ineligible to apply for such reverse mortgages.

Reacting to the bill's passage, Dinowitz said, "Many residential buildings in New York are cooperative apartments. These apartments offer affordable home ownership opportunities to New Yorkers that may not be able or desire to purchase private homes or condos, and it is critical that we do not maintain a bifurcated system where different types of homeowners have different access to the equity contained within their homes."

The assemblyman said he was proud that the legislation has finally been signed into law, and is grateful to the many organizations who helped support and shape the policy on behalf of older cooperators. "Thank you to Gov. Hochul for looking at this legislation with a fresh pair of eyes, and I look forward to a future New York where people are not compelled to leave their homes simply because they need some extra cash flow," he said.

Meanwhile, Biaggi said, "As elected officials, we must do everything we can to protect our elderly homeowners — especially in the midst of a pandemic. This legislation will grant elderly and low to middle-income co-op residents the same resources and protections as traditional homeowners, ensuring that they are not ever forced to sell their homes and leave their communities if in need of additional loans."

The senator added, "These protections will safeguard elderly communities, and allow New York's seniors, who so desperately wish to stay in their homes, the ability to do so. I am grateful to Assembly Member Dinowitz for his continued advocacy on this issue, and to Gov. Hochul for signing this legislation into law and protecting our senior homeowners."

This new legislation was originally introduced by Dinowitz in 2018, and was nearly enacted in 2019, after a significant number of consumer protections were added to strengthen and prevent against scams that often plague homeowners seeking reverse mortgages. These protections include the establishment of certain rules and regulations by the State Department of Financial Services to which lenders must adhere. They prohibit unfair or deceptive practices by lenders when marketing or offering reverse mortgage loans to cooperators.

They mandate the inclusion of supplemental consumer protection materials, as deemed appropriate by the Department of Financial Services. They also mandate lenders to provide borrowers with monthly account statements on prevailing lines of credit. Other rules cover the requirement of new procedural steps that must be taken when a lender determines that a loan is in default and requires the lender to proactively contact the borrower and others.

The 2018 bill was ultimately vetoed by former Gov. Andrew Cuomo who, it has been reported, in recent days, must now return some of the proceeds he made from the book he wrote on his

management of the pandemic, following a 12-1 vote by the Joint Commission on Public Ethics.

Cuomo's veto of the reverse mortgage bill was despite support for it by the AARP, an interest group which focuses on issues affecting those over the age of fifty, and co-op-oriented organizations. It also had widespread support among legislators (134-10 in the Assembly and 62-0 in the State Senate). The veto memo cited federal regulations precluding cooperative apartment shareholders from participation because reverse mortgages would not be secured by "real property." Co-ops are not considered to be real property, whereas private homes are. Another reason cited was the foreclosure risk to which borrowers may be exposed from unscrupulous lenders.

Not to be discouraged, legislators and advocates regrouped and recently passed the legislation once more, this time by a margin of 148-1 in the Assembly, and by a margin of 62-1 in the State Senate. This time, with the new gubernatorial administration in place, in the form of Hochul, and renewed efforts to ensure focus on the lengthy consumer protections included in the bill, it was ultimately signed into law. It will go into effect 180 days after it was signed by the governor, meaning it will become effective on May 30, 2022. The bill will be subject to some small changes that will clarify and strengthen the bill's language, and which were agreed to by the governor and both houses.

The news was welcomed by Beth Finkel, director at AARP in New York State, who said, "The home you own is your home no matter what form it takes, and AARP New York is thrilled that co-op owners will now be able to access properly-regulated reverse mortgages so they don't lose their homes to meet their financial obligations." She added, "AARP New York applauds Gov. Hochul for signing this bill into law, and Assemblyman Dinowitz and Sen. Biaggi for ensuring it contained strong consumer protections - and their perseverance and determination in

seeing it through to enactment."

Meanwhile, Stephen Budahas, president of the Association of Riverdale Cooperatives & Condominiums said, "We, at the Association of Riverdale Cooperatives & Condominiums (ARC), representing more than 140 buildings that offer nearly 19,000 units of housing throughout the north Bronx, [are] thrilled to hear that Assemblyman Dinowitz and his colleagues have worked successfully to bring the revised and improved Reverse Mortgage bill to the Governor's desk."

He said he looked forward to the day when duly qualified co-op shareholders could take advantage of what he said was a means of providing needed financial support they may determine and require, just as their neighbors in private housing have long been able to do. "I am confident that coop boards will embrace the new provision and expeditiously review applications with the same diligence as they have long applied to original and second mortgages," he said. "Many thanks are due to our elected officials in Albany for recognizing and embracing this initiative for which ARC has so long advocated."

Fordham Hill Owners Cooperation, based at One Fordham Hill Oval in Fordham Manor, for example, is advertised as the largest privately financed cooperative apartment complex in the City of New York. A rally was recently organized at the complex and a petition is currently circulating because over 100 shareholders oppose another proposed maintenance fee hike that is due to go into effect in early 2022. Norwood News reached out to the Co-op board for comment. Their legal representatives said they had none.

Mary Ann Rothman, executive director of the Council of New York Cooperatives & Condominiums, said of the new bill. "When Governor Hochul signed the reverse mortgage legislation, it provided hundreds of seniors the hope of living out their lives in the housing cooperatives that have long been their homes."

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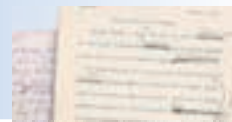


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# NEIGHBORHOOD NOTES

COMPILED BY SÍLE MOLONEY



## COVID-19 Updates

800,000 Americans have died of COVID-19 as of Dec. 14.

On Sept. 9, President Joe Biden mandated that all private employers with 100 or more workers require their workers to be vaccinated or tested weekly. He also mandated that all healthcare workers in hospitals, clinics and other facilities that accept Medicare and Medicaid payments, and all federal contractors must get vaccinated, with no opt out option.

On Nov. 2, the CDC authorized COVID-19 vaccinations for children aged 5 through 11. Vaccinations are available at City-run sites, schools and elsewhere. If you get your first vaccine dose at a New York City-run vaccine location or through the City's in-home vaccination program, you will be eligible to receive a \$100 pre-paid debit card or alternative. Find out more at: <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/coronavirus/vaccines/vaccine-incentives-pickup.page>. Book an appointment at any eligible site with "\$100 incentive available" listed on the [nyc.gov/vaccinefinder](https://nyc.gov/vaccinefinder) or call 877-VAX4NYC (877-829-4692) to find a participating site.

On Nov. 9, Gov. Kathy Hochul launched the 'Vaccinate, Educate, Graduate' vaccine incentive program for 5 through 11-year-olds for a chance to win a SUNY or CUNY full scholarship. More information is available here: <https://forms.ny.gov/s3/Vaccinate-Educate-Graduate-Vaccine-Incentive>. The deadline to sign up is Dec. 19.

On Nov. 26, Gov. Kathy Hochul signed an executive order allowing the DOH to limit non-essential, non-urgent procedures for in-hospitals or systems with limited capacity to protect access to critical health care services. City data as of Dec. 10 showed that COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths were all on the rise, though deaths have declined in the meantime.

At least one person has died in the UK from the new Omicron variant of the virus, dispelling the myth that it is less severe than other variants. The BBC reported that health experts say it is more transmissible than previous variants, with cases doubling every two to three days.

Gothamist reported on Dec. 14 that New York City officials said there were about a dozen confirmed cases of the Omicron variant in the City. The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) officials say they are still studying the severity of illness caused by the omicron variant, as well as how well the available COVID-19 vaccines and medications work against it. They said

despite the increased attention on Omicron, the Delta variant continues to be the main variant of concern in the U.S.

CDC and NYS Department of Health (DOH) officials strongly recommend that everyone, including people who are vaccinated or who were previously infected, wear masks in all public, indoor settings, and added that vaccinations, masking, and testing remain the most important tools in fighting the current pandemic wave.

NYS DOH officials say all New Yorkers, 5 and older, should get fully vaccinated.

Boosters are recommended for any adults who are fully vaccinated, especially those over the age of 50, and others with underlying conditions. Learn more and find a COVID-19 vaccine near you here: [nyc.gov/covidvaccine](https://nyc.gov/covidvaccine).

DOH officials say all New Yorkers 16 and older who are two months past the Johnson & Johnson vaccine or 6 months past the Pfizer BioNTech or Moderna initial vaccine series, should get their booster dose. Officials say New Yorkers 6 months and older should also get their flu shot. They also recommend that New Yorkers get tested after traveling, and before seeing family. They say all travelers, domestic and international should continue to follow all CDC travel requirements. New Yorkers who don't feel well should stay home.

NYC's COVID-19 vaccination requirements have expanded to younger children and private sector workers, effective December. For more information, visit: <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/covid/covid-19-vaccines.page> and <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/covid/covid-19-vaccines-keytonyc.page>. Also, as of December 13, New Yorkers must wear a mask to enter any public indoor location in New York State that does not require proof of COVID-19 vaccination.

New York State requires proof of full vaccination or a mask requirement for businesses and venues. Get more information here: <https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/frequently-asked-questions-proof-full-vaccination-or-mask-requirement-businesses-and-venues>.

Gov. Hochul previously signed into law a moratorium on COVID-19-related residential and commercial evictions, which is in effect until Jan. 15, 2022. To apply, go to: <https://otda.ny.gov/programs/emergency-rental-assistance/>.

The open enrollment period for uninsured New Yorkers has been extended through Dec. 31. New Yorkers can apply for coverage through NY State of Health, at <https://nystateofhealth.ny.gov/> or directly through insurers.

Health care workers can text NY-FRONTLINE to 741-741 to access 24/7 emotional support services. Any New Yorker can call the NY Project Hope COVID-19 Emotional Support Helpline at 1-844-863-9314 for free, confidential emotional support and resource linkages.

NYC offers free, at-home PCR COVID-19 testing for all New Yorkers who are 65+ or immunocompromised. The service is available 7 days a week from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m., and appointments can be scheduled by calling 929-298-9400.

The City has expanded its in-home vaccination program to all New Yorkers aged 12+. You can select whichever of the vaccines you prefer at no cost. To request your in-home vaccination visit <https://forms.cityofnewyork.us/f/home>.

NYC Mobile Vaccine Buses continue to provide vaccines to residents across the City. The full schedule of mobile vaccine locations can be found at <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/coronavirus/vaccines/covid-19-vaccines.page>. Walk-ups are welcome and you can also book in advance through the <https://vax4nyc.nyc.gov/patient/s/>.

The City of New York operates a COVID-19 hotline. Through this hotline, you can call and get all your COVID-19 updates, including testing sites, advice from medical staff, quarantine information and mental health support. Call 212-COVID19 / (212) 268-4319.

The NYC Department of Health & Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) mandated COVID-19 vaccination for City employees and certain city contractors, effective Nov. 1. More information is available here: <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dcas/downloads/pdf/guidelines/faq-vaccine-mandate.pdf>

Anyone who has received a COVID-19 vaccine at any time can enjoy giveaways from Krispy Kreme, Shake Shake, and Crunch Gym. You can also get 20% off at the CityStore to show your NYC spirit!

The NYC Vaccine Referral Bonus program incentivizes community and faith-based organizations to encourage members of their neighborhoods to get vaccinated by awarding \$100 for each person they refer who gets their first vaccine at a City-run site. When a person makes an appointment ahead of time or walks up, they can select the organization that referred them to get vaccinated. Once the person receives their first dose, the referral organization will be credited \$100, up to a total of \$20,000. Interested organizations can

sign-up through [nyc.gov/vaccinereferalbonus](https://nyc.gov/vaccinereferalbonus).

U.S. Surgeon General, Dr. Vivek Murthy said that, to date, research has indicated that those who have acquired antibodies following an infection of COVID-19 may not have sufficient antibodies to fight a future infection, and that this is the reason why it is recommended to get vaccinated.

ABC News reports that according to the CDC, COVID-19 vaccination providers *cannot* charge for the COVID-19 vaccine, *cannot* charge directly for any administration fees, copays, or coinsurance, and *cannot* charge an office visit or some other fee to the recipient if the only service provided is a vaccination. The federal government has created a hotline, urging people to report if, and when, they've received fees. For more information, go to: <https://www.hhs.gov/coronavirus/covid-19-care-uninsured-individuals/index.html#patients-no-health-ins>.

## Get the facts about the COVID-19 vaccines at these sites:

<https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/covid/covid-19-vaccine-facts.page>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/facts.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/about-covid-19/caring-for-children/families.html>

## COVID-19 Business Guidelines

For the latest industry guidance, go to: <https://forward.ny.gov/active-industry-guidance>.

## NYC Utility Moratorium

New York's statewide, utility shut-off moratorium, which had expired on March 31, has been extended. The law extends the statewide moratorium on utility shut-offs, including water, heat, electric, telephone, cable, and broadband services until the conclusion of the COVID-19 state of emergency, or until December 31, 2021, whichever comes first. For New Yorkers suffering financially due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the law enshrines a further moratorium extension of 180 days.

## NYC Parks After School Program

NYC Parks' After School program provides children with academic support and physical activity in a safe, structured environment. The program runs from Sept. 20, 2021, to June 10, 2022, from Monday to Friday between 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. For more information, go to [nyc.gov/parks](https://nyc.gov/parks).



# Tree-Lighting Event Brings Back Holiday Cheer

(continued from page 1)

apple cider, hot chocolate, and various other goodies served at a handful of decorated holiday booths, while walking snowflakes and holiday trees mingled among the crowd. There were also fun activities for kids, in addition to a festive, choral performance by the Celia Cruz Bronx School of Music.

Bronx CB7 district manager, Ischia Bravo, welcomed everyone back for the first in-person, tree-lighting event in two years. "We're definitely excited to be back [...] to make it bigger and better for the community," Bravo said, amid applause from an excited crowd. "So, we're happy! Thank you for that. We hope everybody's enjoying just being able to connect with one another for the holiday season."

Bravo gave a big shout-out to Bronx CB7 Parks committee chair, Barbara Stronczer, who she said started the tradition of the tree-lighting event on the parkway several years earlier, describing it as her baby event.

"Yes, I did start it with the group, many moons ago," said Stronczer. "Our first tree-lighting consisted of tying a very small tree to a lamppost on Decatur and Mosholu Parkway South and using City electricity. It's grown quite a bit since then, so, I'm very happy to be here tonight and to welcome everybody," she added, before introducing a number of guests which included elected officials, their representatives and sponsors.

District 11 councilman, Eric Dinowitz, jokingly encouraged people to use as much City electricity as they wanted. "I feel like I just broke a law by saying that!" he said, before adding that he loved coming to events like the tree-lighting one, saying he so appreciated everyone on CB7. "It's events like these, where we come together as a community, we remember how much we love each other, we remember why we're here," he said.

"We're here for each other, especially during the holiday season," the former teacher said, and added how happy he was to see his former stu-



Photo by Miriam Quiñones

(L TO R) Bronx Community Board 7 (CB7) Parks committee chair, Barbara Stronczer, District 15 City Councilman Oswald Feliz, District 14 City Councilwoman-elect, Pierina Sanchez, Bronx CB7 district manager, Ischia Bravo, Assemblywoman Nathalia Fernández (A.D. 80) and a colleague attend the annual, tree-lighting event on Mosholu Parkway, hosted by Bronx CB7 and FOMP, on Tuesday, December 7, 2021.

dents from the Celia Cruz Bronx School of Music, where he taught for five years. "It's going to be the most fantastic thing you're going to hear," he said of the performance.

District 15 city councilman, Oswald Feliz, said he was honored and privileged to join the event. "I've seen so many wonderful community members, and I just want to thank you for all of the good work that you're doing in the Bronx," he said. "This has been an extremely difficult year, and we're so lucky, and we're so privileged to have so many wonderful members working around the clock to make sure that our people, our most vulnerable people have the access to housing that they deserve, access to food, and everything else that you do."

Frederic Klein from the Office of Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz (A.D. 81) thanked Stronczer and the CB7 board, and said the assemblyman sent his regards to all for the holiday season. "He's going to be back, fighting for all of us in Albany, starting in January," Klein said.

"We did a lot of good this year, thanks to your help. We kept tenants in their homes, we got an eviction morato-

rium, and we're going to go right back and get to work in January. So, if you're having issues, you want to fight with your landlord, you want to get a street sign put in, call us. No job is too small," he added.

FOMP executive director, Elizabeth Quaranta, said it was great to get outside.

"We weren't here last year. It's so good to see you," she said. "I want to thank you. This is what we do in the parklands. Because of you, the parkland is greener, and this is what happens at the end of the year. We like to bring you out so thank you, and Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays and Happy New Year!"

Jeremy Scheublin, the new commanding officer of the 52nd precinct, who has replaced Deputy Inspector Thomas J Alps, re-introduced himself to the community in person, having already joined some virtual meetings. He said he was very appreciative of the warm welcome he had received to date from the community, Bravo, and the board.

"Special thanks to them for putting this great event together," Scheublin said, adding that the precinct was also having a toy distribu-

tion event outside the stationhouse on Dec. 20. "Engaging the children in this community is our priority," he said. "Please spread the word. If you can, stop by. We got, so far, more than 1,000 toys, I'm told." The deputy inspector was later seen interacting with some parents and a small child who was about to take off with the commanding officer's walkie talkie before it was gently recovered.

The precinct has been called out a number of times by the Twitter account, "Placard Corruption," and other residents for allegedly parking police vehicles illegally in the vicinity of the precinct. Since its expansion over the years, parking for the additional police vehicles has become even more scarce, and the problem has also been compounded by the number of other impounded or abandoned vehicles which await towing by DMV/DOT. During a recent precinct meeting, one officer mentioned that though the precinct has been asking for the vehicles to be picked up, there have been long delays in doing so.

Jason Carabello, community affairs manager with Montefiore Health System also addressed the crowd, wishing everyone happy holidays. Meanwhile, Assemblywoman Nathalia Fernández was greeted with an "I love you" from one member of the crowd when she took her turn to speak to those gathered. She said she loved coming to the Mosholu tree-lighting event because it was such a beautiful green space. "I love that CB7 utilizes it with the community, with the tree-lighting, fun little events here. Not every community can come out and do what we do," she said.

She thanked the organizers and sponsors and added, "This is our time to come together to enjoy the year, think about it, reflect on the year that just passed, and to look forward to another great year where we continue to empower each other, educate each other, and take care of our community."

Bravo thanked all the

volunteers for serving at the booths and added, "Friends of Mosholu Parkland, I know they already spoke, but if you look at all these decorations, they spent a lot of time doing this, and let's give them a huge round of applause."

She then introduced each of the other CB7 board members by name, Ruth Caraballo, Tasha Andrews, Monjour Choudhury, Helene Redd, Andrew Laoisa, Betty Arce, and Edgar Ramos, before also acknowledging the president of the 52nd Precinct Community Council, Brenda Caldwell.

"Thank you for joining us and a special shout out to Irene Estrada and Sandra Pabon for joining us today," Bravo said. Estrada is female district leader for Assembly District 80, and Pabon is the State committeewoman for the same district. Stronczer also took the occasion to thank the 52nd precinct community affairs officers.

Recently inaugurated, District 14 city councilwoman-elect, Pierina Sanchez, was also in attendance and wished everybody happy holidays. "I want to thank CB7's leadership and the board members for everything that you do," she said. "This is beautiful. This is wonderful. This is who we are. I'm here to serve."

The event was sponsored by Bedford Mosholu Community Association, Ridgewood Savings Bank, Montefiore Einstein, Assembly Member Nathalia Fernández, Part of the Solution food pantry, and the 52nd Precinct.

At one stage during the proceedings, a dance teacher walked a group of kids through some salsa moves on the stage, before the main event, the tree-lighting countdown. The first attempt was met with a temporary delay, amid excited laughs from the crowd. "Don't go anywhere!" joked Bravo, adding that the first count was just a practice run. "We're going to do this again. Are you guys still with me?" she said, before the holiday tree finally lit up to the delight of the happy crowd.



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**Kramer & Pollack, LLP is a team of tough, dedicated lawyers committed to obtaining the best settlements for our clients. We serve as trial counsel to the profession by whom we are highly esteemed. We PERSONALLY handle each and every case unlike others you may see advertising on TV.**

### Verdicts/Settlements

**\$28,500,000.00** **\$16,687,615.91** **\$16,000,000.00** **\$15,000,000.00** **\$4,000,000.00** **\$3,700,000.00**

*Placental Abruption*

*Brain-Damage Baby*

*Pedestrian Hit By Bus*

*Construction Accident*

*Construction Accident*

*Construction Accident*

PAST RESULTS ARE NOT A GUARANTEE OF FUTURE RESULTS

### Kramer & Pollack, LLP Practice Areas:

- Accidents
- Animal & Dog Bites
- Automobile Accidents
- Aviation Accidents
- Bicycle Accidents
- Birth Injuries
- Boating Accidents
- Brain Injuries
- Burn Injuries
- Bus Accidents
- Construction Accidents
- Injuries to Minors & Children
- Medical Malpractice
- Motorcycle Accidents
- Nursing Home & Assisted Living Abuse
- Pedestrian Accidents
- Premises Liability
- Product Liability
- Slip, Trip & Fall Accidents
- Spinal Cord Injuries
- Truck Accidents
- Wrongful Death

