



# NORWOOD NEWS

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## NEW HOMELESS SHELTER FOR UNIVERSITY HEIGHTS



Photo courtesy of Google Maps

A NEW SHELTER is opening at 2287 University Avenue in the University Heights section of the Bronx.

By SARAH BELLE LIN

New York City Mayor Eric Adams announced a plan on Friday, Feb. 18, to address the

City's worsening homelessness crisis, starting with the removal of those experiencing homelessness from the City's

subway stations. But what comes after that? Where will those without housing or shelter go? The answer is pretty

clear: the streets. One Bronx-based group is attempting to address street homelessness *(continued on page 23)*



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**Deputy Bronx BP Janet A. Peguero Profiled**  
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# Madden's Bedford Pub Quietly Shuts after 50 Years

by DAVID GREENE

The once popular Madden's Bedford Pub, located at East Bedford Park Boulevard and Villa Avenue in the Bedford Park neighborhood, has sadly and quietly closed its door after at least 50 years in business.

Since the pandemic first hit, Madden's had struggled to survive. In the summer of 2021, the management team opened an outdoor shed for additional seating and brought in a giant TV so that fans could see NFL games on Sundays. The owners also installed a small window for takeout orders and began selling White Castle hamburgers, a move which had begun to draw crowds.

Sadly, the bar, as well as the adjacent Kennedy Fried Chicken food outlet, were both discovered shut on of all days, Super Bowl Sunday, Feb. 13, the busiest day of the year for most bars. A "For Rent" sign was seen hanging from the Kennedy Fried Chicken shopfront.

The telephone for Madden's appeared to be out of service with no forwarding number, when *Norwood News* recently placed a call. Meanwhile, the pub's Instagram account proclaimed, "Cheers to 50 Years of Greatness," in an undated post.

Repeated attempts to reach the building's property manager, Langsam Property Services Corporation, located on Bronxdale Avenue, were unsuccessful. In an undated online restaurant review by Lydia Pagan, she wrote, "I am 29 years old; I basically grew up in this place. It is not the same anymore."

The statewide lockdown brought on by the coronavirus outbreak in



Photo by David Greene

**MADDEN'S BEDFORD PUB** on East Bedford Park Boulevard was closed, and their outdoor dining shed had been removed on Sunday, Feb. 13, 2022.

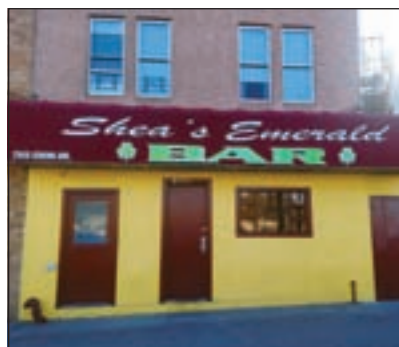


Photo by David Greene

**SHEA'S EMERALD BAR** on Jerome Avenue, photographed on Sunday, February 20, 2022, remains one of the last Irish bars in Bedford Park.

March 2020 also triggered the demise of O'Brien's Pub at 28 East Kingsbridge Road in Fordham Manor, and it remains closed to this day. The also popular Woodlawn Café, located at

Bainbridge Avenue and Jerome Avenue in Norwood, has closed too, with a "For Rent" sign also seen in the building's window back on July 12, 2020. Recently, a new business, The Last Stop, held its grand opening at the former Woodlawn Café address, at 3700 Jerome Avenue.

Meanwhile, an unidentified employee who answered the phone at Shea's Emerald Bar, located at 2960 Jerome Avenue, also in Bedford Park, discussed the recent demise of old pubs in the neighborhood. The employee mentioned how Madden's had changed owners, whereas Shea's is still a family-run business that first opened back in 1954.

With two Irish bars located just two short blocks from one another, the employee said of Madden's closing, "It's kind of a double-edged sword for us. We liked having them around the corner to give people options, and they could go back and forth throughout the night, not just go to one."

Another Bedford Park pub, The Jolly Tinker, located on the other end of East Bedford Park Boulevard at Webster Avenue, remains in business, and recently built what appears to be a thriving take-out menu. However, its future and that of Rocco's Pizza, located next door to the pub, remain uncertain as the property housing both businesses was recently sold. When *Norwood News* called The Jolly Tinker for comment, a woman who answered the phone, declined to comment on the sale of the building or on the future of the business.



Photo by David Greene

**THE MADDEN'S BEDFORD PUB** sign was removed from the building in a photograph taken on Sunday, February 20, 2022.



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# INQUIRING PHOTOGRAPHER

By **DAVID GREENE**



This week, amid the mayor's plan to remove people experiencing homelessness and have mental health issues from the subway system, we asked readers if they felt safe riding the subway.



"I take the subway. Sometimes, I feel safe, depending on the time of day. I think they're making efforts; I've been watching the news recently. I think they've made long-term efforts, but as of today, I think the police are relaxed when it comes to looking at potential perpetrators [of crime]. I think they can strengthen their efforts and can use more soft training skills in interacting with the general public."

**Ahmad "Ghost" Rode,**  
Norwood



"I have friends who've taken the subway and have had bad experiences. They've had crazy people approach them, ranting and raving, and not knowing whether they're going to be attacked; it's terrible. I feel so bad for them, and I hope they don't get stabbed, because every day there's a stabbing. They keep saying they've added more officers, but I asked my friends, and they say they don't see any new officers on the trains. I think there's a lot of people who won't take the subway; it's bad. How did it get like this? There's a lot of homeless people and a lot of people who are mentally disturbed. They now say they have teams of social workers and people who work with mentally disturbed people. It was never like this. They have to do something, we have to have confidence in the new mayor. He says he's serious about it."

**Arthur Buggeln,**  
Norwood



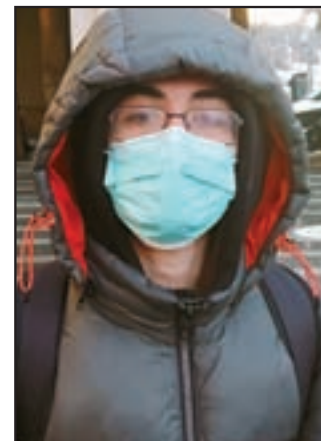
"I take the 4 train and I am concerned for my safety, because a lot of things have been happening lately. Of course, the mayor came up when we had the shooting over there. He did. I saw him; that was good. But they need to control the guns that are coming into New York. That's basically it. They need to have a police presence right there on East 198th and Valentine, because we've had plenty of incidents right there. I see police in the stations and police on the trains occasionally. They could do better. Like, years ago, they always had a cop on the train. You need more cops on the trains and more cops on the streets because we used to have cops here at night, and there wasn't that much crime. I hate to say it, but they only put cops out when something happens. It's sad for me to have to say that."

**Carlos Vazquez,**  
Bedford Park



"I ride the subway quite a bit and yes, you do become fearful when you see the news that they're robbing people and stabbing people for no reason. Of course, I'm concerned for my family's safety, because they take the train every day to go to work. My little kids take the train to go to school, so you must be concerned, of course. I think the police are doing what they can, because there's officers at every station, basically. Yes, I've seen them."

**Angel Rijo,**  
Bedford Park



"I feel safe, depending on the stop I'm at. Yes, I have seen more police lately. I think they are doing everything they can, within reason. If I could think of something else that could reduce the crime, I wouldn't know what it is. But I am hopeful that things will get better, and crime will go down."

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# Man Hammers Windows of Capital One Bank

By SÍLE MOLONEY

Police report that a man broke several windows of a Capital One Bank branch located at Bainbridge Avenue and East 206th Street in Norwood on Feb. 9 and was subsequently arrested. The NYPD said officers responded to the incident, which took place inside the vestibule of the bank, which houses a number of ATM machines, at 3159 Bainbridge Avenue at 5.20 a.m.

They said it was reported to police that a man had broken multiple ATM vestibule windows, using a hammer. He was charged with two counts of criminal mischief, as well as possession of burglary tools. A hammer was recovered at the scene. The man has since been identified as Clarence Anderson 35, of Richmond Plaza in the Morris Heights section of the borough.

A visit to the branch on Feb. 10 saw a large window area facing Bainbridge Avenue boarded up where a large window had been smashed, though the bank's other windows nearby appeared intact. The line of ATM machines inside the vestibule all appeared to be working and did not appear to have been damaged.

*Norwood News* reached out to the Capital One Bank press team for comment on Thursday. We did not receive an immediate response. Police reported no injuries, following the incident.

One resident told *Norwood News* she was informed by a source that the man in question had been experiencing homelessness, and that she, herself, had seen him in the ATM vestibule area earlier that day.

She said he had, reportedly, been informed that he could not stay in the vestibule. It is unknown if this is what may have triggered the incident. "Thank God no one got hurt," the resident said. "The quality of life has changed in this neighborhood and it saddens me greatly as a longtime resident."

According to NYC Department of Homeless Services (DHS), which falls under NYC Department of Social Services (DSS), there are more than 15,600 people from The Bronx who are currently experiencing homelessness and who live in transitional housing facilities in areas all across the City.

So-called transitional housing shelters are designed to assist those who are transitioning out of a situation where they may have previously been living in different emergency shelters but are moving into a more stable setting. An



Photo by Miriam Quinoñes

**A WINDOW AREA** of Capital One Bank on Bainbridge Avenue in Norwood is seen boarded up on Thursday, Feb. 10, 2022, following an incident on Wednesday, Feb. 9, during which a man broke some windows of the bank using a hammer.

additional 14,300 people experiencing homelessness live in emergency shelters across The Bronx itself.

As previously reported, DHS officials said the process of encouraging people who are experiencing homelessness to accept shelter accommodation or other types of transitional housing is a sensitive one and not always straightforward. It can involve substantial negotiation with clients over time in order to build trust. It is unknown if this was the case in this situation, as it was not confirmed by official sources that the man in question was experiencing homelessness.

*Norwood News* reached out to the NYPD to ask. We also reached out to DSS-DHS to inquire about the man's circumstances prior to the incident. We did not receive an immediate response.

On Feb. 11, Women in Need (WIN), the largest provider of shelter and supportive services to homeless families in New York City, called for the City's administration to reform its Prevention Assistance and Temporary Housing (PATH) intake center, located in The Bronx and managed by DSS-DHS, as well as the application process for families experiencing homelessness.

The move follows the release of a new audit by New York City Comptroller Brad Lander that identifies what WIN called "glaring problems," [with PATH]. WIN officials said the audit comes almost two years after WIN, it-

self, called on the comptroller's office to investigate what it called PATH's failures.

Christine C. Quinn, president & EO of WIN, a former speaker of New York City Council and former mayoral candidate, said for too long, the city-run, intake center (PATH) that exists to welcome and help homeless families, operated as a barrier to shelter. "That's why we called for the comptroller's office to audit PATH — because we should be helping women and children in need, not repeatedly traumatizing them," Quinn said in a statement on Friday.

"This audit is an important step toward fixing our shelter system. The results reinforce what countless homeless families have been telling WIN for years, providing concrete evidence and hard data to show just how broken the PATH intake center is," Quinn added. "With a new mayor in office, who is committed to ending homelessness, this report should serve as a clarion call for the Adams administration to fundamentally reform PATH. Our families deserve pathways to shelter, support, services, and housing, not bureaucratic roadblocks."

Among the most scathing of the comptroller's audit findings was the fact that 14 out of 21 families who were initially rejected by the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) were reportedly eventually found to be eligible for shelter. However, according to

Quinn, they had to submit, on average, 15 reapplications before being eventually being found eligible. *Norwood News* has reached out to DSS-DHS for comment on this point. We did not receive an immediate response.

In 2019, WIN released a report entitled, "*The Forgotten Face of Homelessness: Housing Instability*," which detailed what it called "the needlessly complicated intake system for homeless families." Currently, according to WIN, families seeking shelter — including children — are required to travel to the PATH center in The Bronx and undergo a full day of screening. Quinn said WIN found that 45 percent of families admitted to shelter had been rejected by PATH at least once.

According to WIN officials, two years later, the organization highlighted similarly troubling data in a policy brief that found that in just one month, over 460 families found eligible for shelter had previously been denied it by DHS. WIN officials said the comptroller's audit reinforces these findings and shows the need to reform PATH has only grown.

They added that earlier this month, WIN led a dozen shelter providers, advocates, and legal organizations in calling on the Adams administration to reform PATH, starting with making pandemic-era changes permanent. They said these changes included not forcing children to join their parents at PATH and allowing families who were initially found ineligible for shelter to re-apply from the shelter they were conditionally placed at, rather than requiring them to pack up their belongings and reappear at PATH in person.

In the meantime, Mayor Eric Adams recently announced a plan to remove homeless people from the City's subway system and into sheltered accommodation, saying, "It is cruel and inhumane to allow unhoused people to live on the subway, and unfair to paying passengers and transit workers who deserve a clean, orderly, and safe environment." He added, "The days of turning a blind eye to this growing problem are over, and I look forward to collaborating with the state, the federal government, TWU, advocates, and law enforcement to solve this challenge. It will take time, but our work starts now."

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

# NEWS BRIEFS

By **SÍLE MOLONEY**

## Bedford Park Fire Injures Two

A fire in Bedford Park which broke out in a multiple dwelling on Sunday evening was brought under control in under an hour and resulted in two injuries, FDNY officials confirmed. Department officials told the *Norwood News* that the FDNY was alerted to the incident, at 2777 Webster Avenue, at 7.09 p.m. on Sunday, Feb. 20. The incident was classified as a 2-alarm fire on the top floor of a 3-story building, with 25 units, comprising 106 firefighters responding to the call. Images from the Citizen's App showed visible signs of large flames and smoke coming out of the building. FDNY officials said the incident was brought under control at 8.16 p.m., and two firefighters suffered minor injuries and were transported to NYC Health + Hospitals/North Central Bronx. The cause of the fire is under investigation.

## BX10 Bus Stop Temporarily Closed

A flyer posted to the bus stop at East Gun Hill Road and Bainbridge Avenue in Norwood indicates that there is a temporary closure of the stop for the Bx10 bus service (westbound) from Dec. 27, 2021, to March 26, 2022. *Norwood News* reached out to the MTA, NYC Department of Transportation (DOT) and NYC Department of Design & Construction (DDC) for more information, and MTA officials said the closure may be due to construction in the local area. We await further details from DDC and will update readers upon receipt of any further information.

## Fordham Manor: Building Applications Filed for 229 West Kingsbridge Road

Building applications have been filed with NYC Department of Buildings (DOB) for a new, 7-story, mixed-use building at 229



File photo, *Norwood News*

**FORDHAM HILL COOPERATIVE** Apartments

# Fordham Hill Shareholders Continue Opposition to 5% Maintenance Increase

By **SÍLE MOLONEY & DAVID GREENE**

A number of Fordham Hill Owners Corporation (FHOC) shareholders are continuing their efforts to fight back against a 5 percent maintenance increase which took effect in February this year. A petition, initiated by "Concerned FHOC Shareholders" who own homes at the Fordham Hill Co-op housing complex, located at 1 Fordham Hill Oval, in the Fordham Manor section of the Bronx, has reached over 123 signa-

tures as of Feb. 22.

The petitioners have also held at least one rally since last year to protest the latest 5 percent maintenance fee communicated by the FHOC Co-op board last year in a letter to shareholders. According to the petition launched in 2021, posted to the website, change.org, and which is targeted to be shared with the New York Attorney General Letitia James, who has issued guidance pamphlets on Co-op ownership,

the proposed fee increase causes hardship to Co-op shareholders who have been financially impacted [negatively] by the pandemic.

The petitioners drew particular attention to the number of seniors living on fixed incomes, who live in the complex. In the context of the petition, the concerned shareholders reference a prior 6 percent maintenance fee increase that began in 2019, and a separate 6 percent fee increase in 2018.

West Kingsbridge Road in Fordham Manor, as reported by YIMBY. Located between Heath Avenue and Kingsbridge Terrace Street, the lot is closest to the Marble Hill 225th Street subway station, serviced by the 1 train. Durgaj Properties Corporation is listed as the owner behind the applications. The proposed 70-foot-tall development will yield 25,841 square feet, with 24,666 square feet designated for residential space and 1,175 square feet for community facility space. The building will have 37 residences, most likely rentals based on the average unit scope of 667 square feet. The masonry-based structure will also have a cellar, 42-foot-long

rear yard, eight open parking spaces, and five enclosed parking spaces.

## More Anti-Black Graffiti in Bronx Playground

Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz (A.D. 81), Bronx Borough President Vanessa L. Gibson, and Council Member Eric Dinowitz (C.D. 11) held a press conference in Seton Park in Spuyten Duyvil on Tuesday, Feb. 22, in response to the discovery of hateful, anti-Black graffiti found in the park over the weekend commencing Feb. 18. It was the second such incident in a Northwest Bronx playground over consecutive weekends. Anti-Black and vulgar graffiti was also displayed at Spuyten Duyvil

Playground over the weekend commencing Feb 11. A number of elected officials, city agencies and others publicly condemned the behavior, and called for an investigation, following the incident, while a group of local parents, including Assembly District 81 candidate, Jessica Altagracia Woolford, worked to remove the graffiti on Sunday, Feb. 13.

## Norwood Community Library Mailbox Vandalized

The door of Norwood Community Library's wooden mailbox was apparently vandalized and ripped from its hinges in recent weeks. The wooden and glass rectangular door

which is about 3 feet long was found on the sidewalk, close to the mailbox, located just outside the Keeper's House at 3400 Reservoir Oval East in Norwood. The exact date of the incident is unknown. Brandon Montes, who founded the community-run, free library along with Norwood locals, The Dowe Twins, in 2018, expressed his disappointment at the incident, particularly as some books were damaged from exposure to the elements. "I am still working on a replacement door, but I am hoping it will be soon," he said. Montes has been formally honored for his work with the library by Assemblywoman Nathalia Fernández (A.D. 80).



They write that the board and shareholders agreed previously to spread out that prior round of fee increases in increments of 2 percent, over three years, to lessen the financial burden on shareholders.

In that context, they wrote that the final 2 percent increase was applied to maintenance bills, beginning in March 2021. They added that the FHO board later informed shareholders, in a letter dated October 12, 2021, of the additional 5 percent increase that was to be applied to maintenance bills, effective February 2022, and they alleged that this was done without prior discussion or open forum. The shareholders said this decision was also taken by the Co-op board after it had declared a stable financial outlook during several previous shareholder meetings.

The concerned shareholders went on to write that despite confirmation of cash reserves and positive financial reports, the latest increase means FHO shareholders are paying an unprecedented 17 percent maintenance increase over a span of five years, and deemed this unreasonable and unacceptable.

“We are protesting the most recent 5% increase planned for February 2022, and the manner in which it was presented to FHO Shareholders,” they wrote last year. “These maintenance increases have outpaced [the] cost of living, and inflation in New York City, and in the United States overall. Additionally, we are requesting for the State to conduct a forensic audit of the finances of FHO.”

The petitioners wrote that before the latest rounds of fee increases were confirmed, the FHO Board should have provided a transparent and updated budget to shareholders, as well as a detailed written document that outlined the steps that were taken by the board, to avoid such increases. They added that FHO needed to allow shareholders to vote on, and have agency over, their maintenance fees.

“As shareholders and a community, we need to be inventive and find avenues forward that are sustainable, and do not unduly burden the most at-risk amongst us,” they wrote last year. *Norwood News* has spoken to a number of the impacted shareholders, includ-



Photo courtesy of Eric King  
**ERIC KING IS** one of the residents of Fordham Hill Owners Corporation who opposes the latest 5 percent maintenance fee increase which went into effect at the housing complex in February 2022.

ing some seniors, some of whom preferred not to disclose their names for fear of retaliation, and they reaffirmed the essence of the petition.

One resident told us, “It’s the management’s contention that Social Security is giving seniors an increase, so they’re thinking that that will cover the increase. 5% [fee increase] is a lot when you don’t have it.” Another argued that it was up to individual seniors how they choose to spend any Social Security increase, and objected to any assumption that it should be used to cover maintenance costs, especially amid the pandemic when the cost of groceries and other items has also increased.

The FHO complex includes 9 buildings and a garage, and has been described as “the largest, privately financed Co-operative apartment complex in the City of New York.” *Norwood News* reached out to the FHO board with a number of questions in relation to the shareholders’ concerns. We were advised through the board’s legal representatives that the board had no comment.

# Van Nest

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Van Nest Assembly of God is a body of Believers empowered by the Holy Spirit, called to worship God in Spirit and Truth, to walk in the light of the Word of God in all aspects of life, and to be witnesses of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, through word and deed, to the ends of the earth.

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# NEIGHBORHOOD NOTES

COMPILED BY SÍLE MOLONEY



## COVID-19 Updates

Effective February 10, the state-wide indoor business mask or vaccine requirement has been lifted, and is optional for businesses, local governments and counties to enforce. Masks are still required on public transport.

The omicron variant remains the dominant coronavirus strain in the U.S. since December 2021, according to the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC). As of Feb. 21, the 7-day average, citywide COVID-19 case number was 819, there were 40 hospitalizations as of the same date, and 18 deaths. All statistics were on the decline, according to NYC Department of Health & Mental Hygiene (DOHMH). Since the COVID-19 vaccination program began in January 2021, citywide, there have been 17,093 hospitalizations of the vaccinated, and 52,285 hospitalizations of the unvaccinated. Meanwhile, there have been 2,220 deaths of vaccinated people, and 8,453 deaths of unvaccinated people.

As of Feb. 18, in terms of COVID-19, full vaccination rates across the City, the Bronx continues to rank second lowest out of the five boroughs, at 72 percent, just above Brooklyn at 70 percent. Meanwhile, the citywide average is 76 percent.

New York State DOH issued a special pediatric COVID-19 report on Jan. 14, and among other findings, officials found that from Dec. 5 to Jan. 8, hospital admissions increased 16-fold for those under or 18 years of age and increased 8-fold for all age groups in NYC. Notably, among children admitted to the hospital for or with COVID-19 during the week of January 3-9, 4 percent of 5 to 11-year-olds were vaccinated, and 90 percent were unvaccinated, 31 percent of 12 to 17-year-olds were vaccinated, and 61 percent were unvaccinated.

DOHMH officials say New Yorkers who don't feel well should stay home, masks should be worn in public, indoor spaces, and hands should be washed regularly. They say everyone is at risk of infection, but unvaccinated people are significantly more likely to have *severe* illness from COVID-19, including from omicron.

Health officials said New Yorkers should call 911 immediately if they develop: trouble breathing, a persistent pain or pressure in their chest, confusion, an inability to stay awake, bluish lips or face, or any other emergency condition.

They said residents should NOT call 911 if it's NOT an emergency or if they are looking for a COVID-19 test.

NYS Department of Health (DOH) advises all New Yorkers aged 5 and older to get fully vaccinated, and all eligible New Yorkers to get a booster vaccine. New Yorkers aged 12 and older who were fully vaccinated with the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine at least five months ago, are eligible for the Pfizer-BioNTech booster dose.

New Yorkers aged 18 and older who were fully vaccinated with the Moderna vaccine at least five months ago, or fully vaccinated with the Janssen/Johnson & Johnson vaccine at least two months ago, are eligible for a booster dose. Children aged 5 to 11 with certain immunocompromising conditions who were fully vaccinated with the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine at least 28 days ago, are eligible for an additional dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine. Dosages vary for different groups.

State Health officials said a booster dose helps maximize protection, prolongs the vaccine's durability, and continues to safeguard communities against the virus. Booster and additional doses of the COVID-19 vaccine are free and widely available, statewide, irrespective of immigration status. For New Yorkers aged 18 and older, State health officials say Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna (COVID-19 mRNA vaccines) are preferred. New Yorkers may get the Johnson & Johnson/Janssen vaccine in some situations. For more information on this, go to the CDC's website: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/different-vaccines/janssen.html>.

NYC health officials say it has never been easier to get a COVID-19 vaccination, and they are required for many public indoor activities in the City. City residents of 65 and older can get free transportation to and from a vaccination appointment. This service is also available for those with disabilities who have no other way to get to a vaccination site. To schedule free transport by either ambulette or taxi (including wheelchair accessible vehicles), call 877-VAX-4NYC (877-829-4692). If you are younger than 18, you must have your parent or guardian call to book the trip on your behalf.

You can also sign up online for an in-home vaccination, or by calling 877-VAX-4NYC (877-829-4692). Anyone 12 or older is eligible for in-home

vaccination. Generally, find out how and where to get vaccinated here:

<https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/covid/covid-19-vaccines.page>. State Officials said all New Yorkers 6 months and older should also get a flu shot.

Health officials say New Yorkers should get tested after traveling, before seeing family, and if they have symptoms or were recently exposed to someone with COVID-19. All travelers, domestic and international should continue to follow all CDC travel requirements. NYC Health + Hospitals testing sites and mobile clinics offer free testing, including some sites that will test children 2 years old and younger. For more information, go to: <https://www.nychealthandhospitals.org/covid-19-testing-sites/>. To find a COVID-19 testing site near you, visit [nyc.gov/covidtest](https://nyc.gov/covidtest) or text "COVID TEST" to 855-48. Additional Citywide sites can be found here: <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/coronavirus/get-tested/covid-19-testing.page>.

The federal government announced in December that every home in the U.S. is eligible to order four free, at-home COVID-19 tests. Orders will usually ship in 7-12 days and residents are encouraged to order their tests now, so they have them when they need them, at <https://www.covidtests.gov/>. The federal government distributed 400 million free N95 masks to pharmacies and community health centers effective Jan. 24.

At home test kits can also be picked up locally at libraries and other cultural institutions at no cost. For a list of sites, go to <https://www.nychealthandhospitals.org/covid-19-testing-sites/>.

Effective Dec. 13, 2021, NYS Medicaid will cover COVID-19 diagnostic and screening tests with "at home" sample collection for reimbursement with no member cost sharing. Coverage will be provided for Over-the-Counter (OTC) FDA-authorized COVID-19 test kits, that are used in accordance with CDC recommendations, for antigen detection. This policy applies to both Medicaid fee for service (FFS) and Medicaid Managed Care (MMC).

If you test positive after taking a home self-test, call your provider or 212-COVID19 (212-268-4319) to be linked to care. For more information about when to get tested, the types of COVID-19 tests available and how to interpret tests results, including what to do if you test posi-

tive or negative, go to <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/covid/covid-19-testing.page>. When you go for a test, you will NOT be asked about immigration status.

The FDA recently authorized two antiviral pills, paxlovid and molunpiravir, to treat those who are severely ill with COVID-19. Due to limited supply, the antiviral pills are currently only available to people who have tested positive and are at the highest risk for severe illness from COVID-19. If you think you have symptoms, or if you have tested positive, talk to your health care provider, or call 212-COVID19 (212-268-4319). If you are a health care provider, get information about eligibility, prioritizations, and distributions of the oral antiviral pill treatments here: <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/covid/covid-19-providers-treatments.page#oral>.

Most people who have COVID-19 completely recover, but some have lasting symptoms and health problems. Post-acute COVID-19 syndrome, also called long COVID or chronic COVID, refers to a wide range of symptoms that develop during or after COVID-19 illness and continue for several weeks or months. Symptoms include fatigue, breathing problems and muscle pain. For more information on the symptoms of long COVID and available care options in NYC, visit: <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/covid/covid-19-long-covid-faq.pdf>.

For information on COVID-19 business regulations, go to:

<https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/covid/covid-19-vaccines-keytonyc.page>

## NYS Emergency Rental Assistance Program Alert

The NYS Emergency Rental Assistance Program has resumed accepting applications, effective Jan. 11. Assistance is not guaranteed. Go to: <https://otda.ny.gov/programs/emergency-rental-assistance/> for more information.

## Apply to Sit on Your Local Community Board

Bronx Borough President Vanessa Gibson is encouraging all Bronx residents to apply to sit on their local community board. Applications should be sent by Friday, March 4, 2022, to [cbapplications@bronxbp.gov.nyc](mailto:cbapplications@bronxbp.gov.nyc). More information is available about the roles at <https://bronxboropres.nyc.gov/community-boards/>.



# Memorial for CB7 Member, Jeffrey Hunter

By SÍLE MOLONEY

A virtual memorial event is being held, via Zoom, on Thursday, Feb. 24, at 6.30 p.m. to honor the memory of former Bronx Community Board 7 (CB7) member, Jeffrey Hunter. Chad Royer, Bronx CB7 Veterans Affairs committee chair, Raul Gonzalez, Amjad Mujaahid, Alan Delfish and Emmanuel Martinez, chair of Bronx CB7, collectively organized the event, the details of which are included further below in a flyer.

In the context of its announcement, Royer explained that some veteran partners organized the event as they wanted to honor Jeffrey Hunter. "He was a dedicated member of Bronx Community Board 7's Veterans Committee, and he is deeply missed by many of us," he said.

As previously reported, Bronx CB7 had extended its condolences to the families of both Carmen Miranda, former CB7 education committee chair, and Jeffrey Hunter on their recent passing. "We are heartbroken over the loss of two of our board members," the board said in a joint statement last year.

"The community has lost dedicated advocates and true community leaders," the board continued. "Carmen Miranda was a mother and activist who was invested in making sure the youth in our community had a voice; and Jeffrey Hunter was not only a Veteran but someone who continuously gave back to our community, and [was] a staunch advocate for

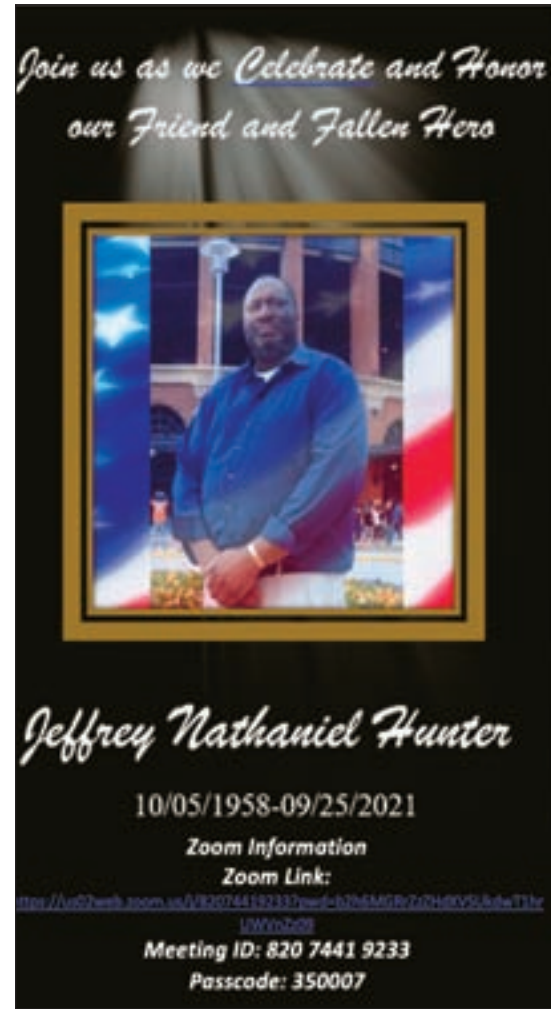


Photo courtesy of Bronx Community Board 7  
**JEFFREY HUNTER**

Veterans' rights."

In a separate Facebook post, the board described Miranda as a mother and community leader, adding, "She chaired our education committee and dedicated her time and effort to work with local schools." They described Hunter as a "Veteran, and member of the Veterans Committee," adding, "Today we honor your memory and thank you for your service and contributions to society."

Thanking his colleagues for the collective effort in organizing the memorial event, Royer later added, "Ultimately, this one's for Jeffrey. I hope I



Flyer courtesy of Raul Gonzalez

**A FLYER LISTS** details of a virtual memorial service which takes place on Thursday, Feb. 24, at 6.30 p.m. via Zoom, to honor the memory of former Bronx Community Board 7 member, Jeffrey Hunter.

# Man Found Dead at Bedford Pk Blvd Subway Station

By SÍLE MOLONEY & DAVID GREENE

Police confirm a man was found deceased at Bedford Park Boulevard-Lehman College subway station in the early hours of Tuesday, Feb. 22. Police told *Norwood News* the unidentified man was observed by a witness at around 1.40 a.m. on Tuesday morning, lying on the roadbed of the southbound 4 train at Bedford Park Boulevard-Lehman College subway station. He was pronounced deceased at the scene.

NYC Transit Subway initially tweeted at 1.46 a.m. on Tuesday morning that number 4 trains had been delayed while emergency teams responded to a person struck by a train at the station. The agency later advised that southbound 4 trains were running on the express track from Woodlawn to Kingsbridge Road, and continued providing updates throughout the morning, confirming at 3.32 a.m. that 4 trains had since resumed making local stops between Woodlawn and Kingsbridge Road, but were running with delays.

In a separate conversation with the NYPD, a police official told *Norwood News* that the man had been lying on the roadbed at the station and an incoming train was unable to stop in time. Police had no other details on the incident. A police official did say that police were continuing to investigate, but that the incident did not appear to be criminal in nature. Anyone with information regarding this incident 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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# CRIME FILE

BY SÍLE MOLONEY & DAVID GREENE

### Norwood Man Shot Dead

The NYPD has confirmed a 43-year-old man has been arrested in connection with the fatal shooting of a Norwood man on Saturday, Feb. 19. Police responded to a call regarding a man who had been shot at approximately 3.17 p.m., on the corner of East Tremont Avenue and Belmont Avenue in the Tremont section of The Bronx. Upon arrival, officers discovered a 44-year-old man with five gunshot wounds to the back. EMS responded and transported the victim to Saint Barnabas Hospital where he was pronounced deceased. The deceased was later identified as Angel Ortega, 44, of Norwood. On Monday, Feb. 21, Jose Santos, 43, of Crotona Avenue in the Crotona neighborhood was arrested in connection with the incident and has been charged with murder and criminal possession of a weapon. A person arrested and charged with a crime is presumed innocent, unless and until convicted in a court of law.



On Sunday, Feb. 12, at around 10.54 p.m. regarding a man who had been shot at East 198th Street and Webster Avenue. Upon arrival, they observed two aided men in front of 397 East 198th Street: a 24-year-old man with a gunshot wound to the torso, and a 28-year-old man with a gunshot wound to the face. EMS also responded to the incident and transported both men to Saint Barnabas Hospital, where both were pronounced

deceased.

A 28-year-old man was taken into custody with charges pending, and a firearm was recovered at the scene. On Feb. 13, police confirmed an additional suspect was being sought and provided the attached photo of the suspect. The deceased were identified as Arnold Oliver, 24, of Peekskill, NY and Jamal Smith, 28, of New Rochelle, NY. Police also confirmed that Wayne Smith, 28, of New Rochelle NY was arrested and charged with murder and criminal possession of a weapon. A person arrested and charged with a crime is innocent unless and until convicted in a court of law.

### Daylight Assault in Williamsbridge Oval

A 61-year-old man was arrested in Williamsbridge Oval park in Norwood on Thursday, Feb. 10, following an assault. The NYPD confirmed officers responded to the incident at around 2.55 p.m., and the man was later charged with assault and harassment. They said a 48-year-old male victim was struck / punched in the head and suffered bruising and pain to the forehead. The victim's injuries were treated at the scene by EMS.

When *Norwood News* spoke to

park-goers about an hour or so later to ask if anyone had witnessed the altercation, nobody had. One resident said he only saw the aftermath when police arrived. He said there were very few people in the park at the time – maybe seven. As reported, a 14-year-old student was slashed in the cheek while playing sports in the same park on Oct. 9, 2021.



### University Heights Robbery & Hate Crime

The NYPD is asking for the public's help identifying the two men seen in the above photo who are sought in connection with the robbery and hate crime. *(continued on page 12)*

### Two Die in Bedford Park Shooting

Police confirm two men have died following a shooting on Saturday, Feb. 12, in Bedford Park, and one man, shown above right, has been arrested. Officers responded to a 911 call on Sat-



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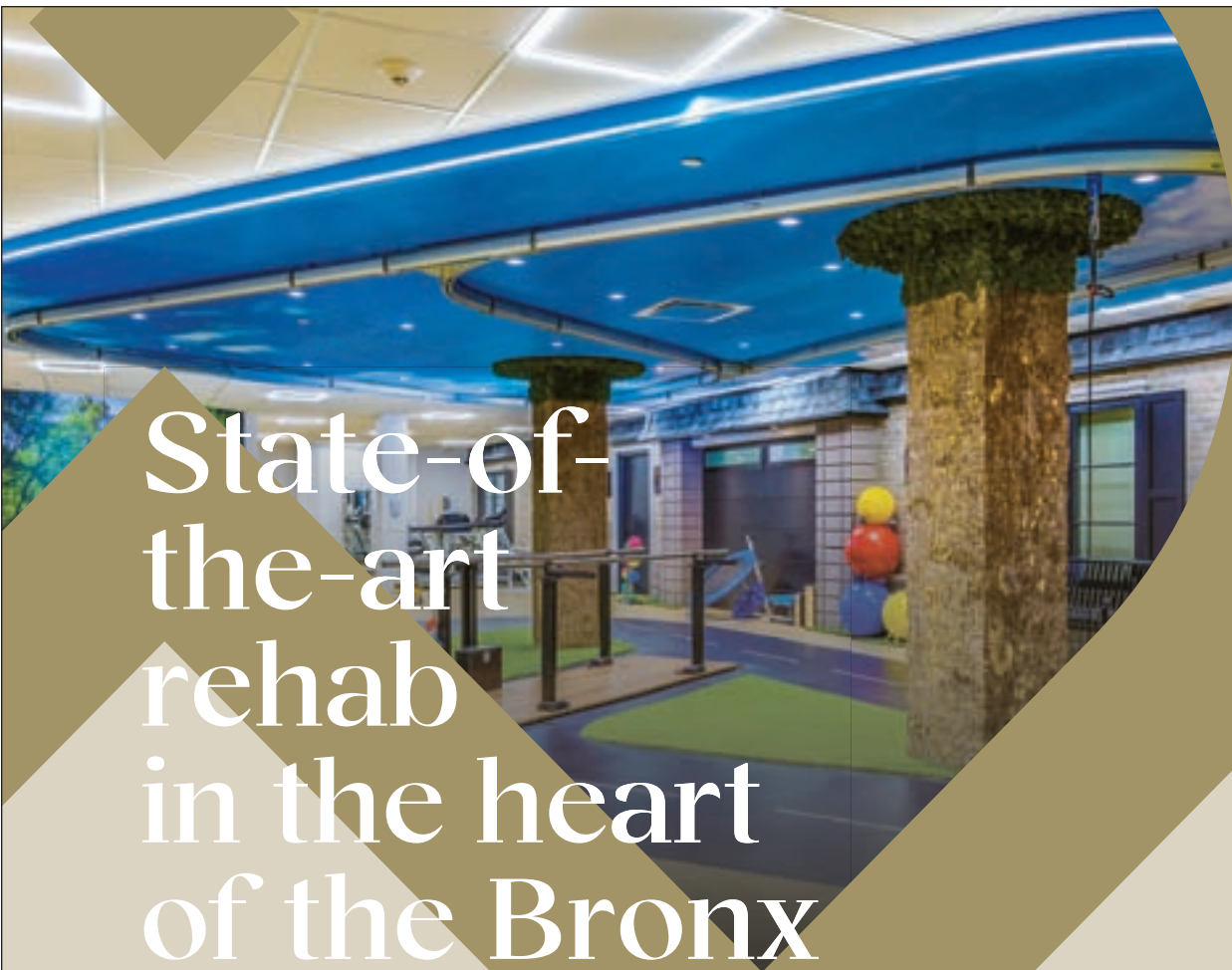
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# CRIME FILE (continued)

BY SÍLE MOLONEY



(continued from page 10)

connection with a robbery and hate crime that occurred on the border of University Heights and Morris Heights. It was reported to police that on Tuesday, Feb. 15, at 2.42 p.m., at the intersection of Davison Avenue and West Burnside Avenue, a 49-year-old male victim was walking down the street when he was approached by the two men who proceeded to punch the victim about the body and demand his property.

They forcibly removed the victim's jewelry and cell phone before fleeing the location to parts unknown. The assailants also used discriminatory (anti-LGBTQ) language during the incident. The victim suffered pain and bruising but refused medical attention at the scene. His property had an estimated value of \$1,500 dollars. The NYPD's Hate Crimes Task Force is investigating. The individuals sought are described as male, are 20 to 30 years old, and were last seen wearing masks and all dark clothing. The photo is taken from the vicinity of the incident before it occurred.



**Fordham Manor:  
15-Year-Old Boy Shot**

Police confirm a 15-year-old boy was shot in the leg in Fordham Manor on Thursday, Feb. 10, and was later treated at Jacobi hospital where he was reported as being in stable condition. Police said officers responded to a call regarding the shooting at around 4.15 p.m. at 2543 Webster Avenue, the location of the Burlington store. Police said the shooter fled the scene in an unidentified vehicle.

Norwood News spoke to a number of residents/shoppers in a few local eateries in the area in the hours following the shooting. Most people said they had not seen the incident or were too busy to respond. Police were seen placing one orange identification cone on a section of the cordoned off crime scene which stretched from the street area outside Burlington store as far as a bus stop on Fordham Road. The NYPD has since released a video of a person of interest, shown below left, who is wanted for questioning in connection with the shooting. Police officials said during the shooting, the suspect displayed a firearm from the backseat of a vehicle and shot at the teen, striking him in the leg. A screenshot of the person of interest is attached.

**Fordham Manor: 23-Year-Old  
Man Shot Twice**

The NYPD said a 23-year-old man was shot twice in Fordham Manor on Thursday, Feb. 10. Police said officers responded to the incident which occurred in front of 2556 Davidson Avenue at 8 p.m. A 23-year-old male victim told police he was walking [along the street] when he heard gunfire. He then sustained two gunshots, one to his left leg and one to his left arm. The victim said the unidentified suspect fled the area in a vehicle in an unknown direction. The victim was transported by EMS to St. Barnabas Hospital. There are no arrests, and the investigation is ongoing.



**Fordham Heights Robbery Pattern**

The NYPD is seeking the public's help locating the unidentified man seen in the above photo who is sought for questioning in connection with a burglary pattern identified in the Fordham Heights neighborhood. It was reported to police that on Monday, Jan. 10, at approximately 8.40 a.m., the

man entered a residential apartment located at Ryer Avenue and East 181st Street through the front door by breaking the lock. Once inside, he removed an electronic bike and construction tools valued at approximately \$7,605. He then fled on foot to parts unknown. There were no injuries reported following the incident.

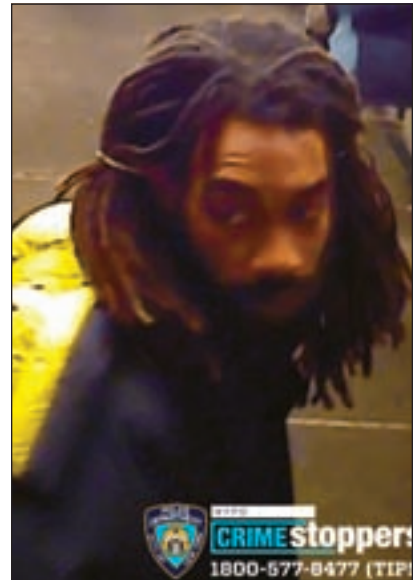
On Friday, Jan. 28, at around 11 p.m., the man entered a residential apartment, located at Ryer Avenue and East 184th Street, through a rear window. Once inside, the man removed electronics valued at approximately \$17,363. Once again, he fled on foot to parts unknown, and there were no injuries reported following the incident. The suspect is described as male, has a light complexion, is about 30 to 40 years of age, and was last seen wearing a red and black hoodie jacket, black pants, white and black sneakers, and a black winter hat. He was last seen holding a scooter bike. The attached photo was obtained from the scene of the second incident.



**Woman Robbed Aboard 4 Train**

The NYPD is seeking the public's assistance identifying the person seen in the above photo regarding a robbery that occurred aboard the #4 subway. A 26-year-old woman told police that on Jan. 24, at 4.20 p.m., as she was aboard a northbound #4 train, an unidentified man threatened her with an unknown

sharp object in the stomach area and demanded her property. The man removed the victim's wallet, which contained various credit cards as well as her ID. He fled the train at the East 183rd Street and Jerome Avenue subway station in Fordham Heights.



**Attempted Robbery at  
Knifepoint on 4 Train**

The NYPD is asking for the public's help identifying the man seen in the above right photo who is sought for questioning in connection with an attempted robbery that occurred in Fordham Heights. On Tuesday, Feb. 8, at around 6.30 p.m., inside the Jerome Avenue and West 183rd Street subway station, on the southbound platform for the number 4 line, the suspect approached a 19-year-old male victim, displayed a knife and demanded his cellphone. The victim ran away from the assailant down a flight of stairs, sustaining a minor ankle injury as he did so. He later refused medical attention at the scene. Meanwhile, the suspect fled without any property.

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 Crime Stoppers website at <https://crimestoppers.nypdonline.org/> or on Twitter @NYPDTips.

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## Letters To The Editor

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

### U.S. Respects Sovereignty?

President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris claim they respect Ukraine's sovereignty. But in February 2014, when democratically elected Ukrainian president, Victor Yanukovich, who had friendly relations with Russia, accepted a deal from Vladimir Putin for discounted natural gas prices and a \$15 billion loan, the U.S. showed no respect for Ukraine's sovereignty.

On Feb. 21 of that year, Yanukovich was pressured to accept a European-brokered deal in which he surrendered some of his powers, agreed to early elections and pulled back his police. On Feb. 22, neo-Nazis and other militants seized government buildings and Yanukovich fled for his life.

While the U.S. mainstream media still neglects to report these details, while touting the latest anti-Russia propaganda, former Newsweek reporter and Consortium News founder, Robert Parry, did in an August 4th, 2016, article. Parry wrote, "When Russian troops, already stationed in Crimea as part of the Sevastopol naval basing agreement, protected the people on the peninsula from attacks by Ukrainian ultra-nationalists, the intervention was denounced in the West as a 'Russian invasion'."

Canadian-based Global Research professor, Michel Chossudovsky, in a March 4th, 2016, article, reported that the new Ukrainian government, recognized and supported by the U.S., included two members of the neo-Nazi Svoboda party. These were Andriy Parubiy, secretary of the national security and defense committee, and Oleh Makhnitsky, prosecutor general. This was also ignored by the mainstream media that spotlighted Hillary Clinton's comparisons of Putin to Hitler.

Yet the World Jewry Digest, published by the World Jewish Congress (WJC), has repeatedly reported that Putin has friendly relations with Israel. In the December 2019 issue, WJC president, Ronald Lauder, said, "Antisemitism has all but disappeared throughout Russia."

Today, Putin is concerned about Ukraine possibly joining NATO, and the possibility of NATO bases in Ukraine bordering Russia. As reported by Gary Leupp of CounterPunch.org, but also overlooked by the mainstream media, NATO has expanded from 16 to 28

countries since 1990, including two Baltic states bordering Russia. This shows Putin's concern is legitimate. Yet Biden has declared that he will not guarantee that Ukraine will not join NATO. We certainly know that the U.S. would not tolerate Russian bases near our borders, just as it did not tolerate Soviet missiles in Cuba.

The U.S. does not have a history of respecting other countries' sovereignty. It still has sanctions against Venezuela because the people there had the nerve to vote for a president the U.S. did not approve of. The U.S. has overthrown democratically elected presidents in Iran and Guatemala in the 1950s, and in Chile in 1973, to give just a few examples. The U.S. also supported the 2009 coup that overthrew the democracy in Honduras. Biden has rightly branded Donald Trump as our worst president. Certainly, someone who caused many deaths by downplaying the coronavirus, and tried to overthrow the government and make himself dictator when he lost an election is horrific. But one way Biden can trump Trump as the worst is by starting World War III. Of course, such a war might destroy the human race. Then, there will be nobody left to proclaim anyone the worst.

**Richard Warren,  
Van Cortlandt Village**

*Editor's Note: Victor Yanukovich was tried and charged with treason in 2019 for inviting Russia to invade Ukraine and reverse a pro-Western revolution that ousted him from power amid allegations of corruption and police brutality. He was sentenced to 13 years in prison. The mainstream media reported that Andriy Parubiy and Oleh Makhnitsky were members of the Svoboda Party, that Yanukovich fled Russia following his ousting, and that NATO has expanded its membership since the 1990s. Global Research professor, Michel Chossudovsky, has been regarded by some as a conspiracy theorist. Human Rights organizations have cited deaths in custody, widespread and systematic torture of persons in custody; hazing in the Russian Army; neglect and cruelty in Russian orphanages, and violations of children's and LGBTQ+ rights among the reported human rights violations in Russia. The United Nations, of which the U.S. is a member, the Organization of American States (OAS), and the European Union condemned the removal of former President Manuel Zelaya of Honduras as a military coup in 2009.*

### Funding for Transportation Projects

Democratic U.S. senators, Mark Kelly of Arizona and Maggie Hassan of New Hampshire, have introduced a bill in the U.S. Senate that would temporarily suspend the federal gas tax until the end of 2022. They remind

me of J. Wellington Wimpy, who famously said, "I'll gladly pay you Tuesday for a hamburger today." In their case, their proposal would mean a discount from the usual cost of filling the nation's gas tanks, and Tuesday may never come for motorists availing of such a windfall. What neither senator addressed as part of the proposal is its fiscal impact. The suspension would result in billions less dollars being available for the Highway Trust Fund, a critical source of funding for highway and transit projects.

A federal gas tax holiday would result in Uncle Sam forfeiting \$0.18 for every gallon of gas purchased. The Highway Trust Fund has already faced financial difficulties, and such additional lost revenue would have to be recouped at some point. The proposed suspension just kicks the can down the road for members of the 2023 legislative session to decide how to make up those lost billions and they have limited choices. They will either raise taxes, transfer revenue from another source, or reduce the scope or number of highway and transit projects. Motorists and transit riders will be the losers.

**Larry Penner  
Great Neck**

### Courage for All

I enjoy and appreciate when people seek advice from me, especially of a moral nature. I recently had two residents of Norwood come to me with issues of same sex attractions. One was a young woman in her twenties who felt attracted to other females, and the other was a parent of a man in his thirties with the same type of attraction to other males.

It had to be a sign of perfect timing because a wonderful organization called Courage was holding a meeting in the Kingsbridge Road area. I brought both parties to the meeting where they met other people in the same predicament. Support and resources were offered to everyone. I want to thank my dear friend, Chet Walker, for driving us to this life-changing meeting. The website is as follows: [couragerc.org/encourage](http://couragerc.org/encourage) for any others who may want more information about the group. In closing, I would always urge people to have courage when faced with situations of which they are unsure and to ask for help, as these two Norwoodites did with me!

**Richard Marias  
Norwood**

# Opinion

## Puerto Rico Status and Finances

By GENE ROMAN

After five years of haggling, debate, and protests, Chief Judge Laura Taylor Swain of the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York finally approved a debt restructuring agreement for Puerto Rico in January.

The Fiscal, Oversight and Management Board for Puerto Rico (FOMB) was able to reduce the government of Puerto Rico's total debt obligations from \$33 billion to \$7.4 billion, according to recent reporting by The New York Times.

FOMB was created under the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management and Economic Stability Act of 2016. It consists of seven members appointed by the President of the United States and one ex officio member designated by the Governor of Puerto Rico. The Board is tasked with working with the people and Government of Puerto Rico

to create the necessary foundation for economic growth and to restore opportunity to the people of Puerto Rico.

The latest FOMB plan also saves the island more than \$50 billion in debt service payments, the board said in a written statement. But this still leaves the root cause of many of the island's fiscal and disaster recovery issues unresolved. As an unincorporated territory, Puerto Rico's 3.2 million American citizens are subject to the plenary powers of Congress. Yet, they are unable to vote for the U.S. president, and are unrepresented in the U.S. House and Senate.

"It is obvious that Puerto Rico's subordinate, some would say colonial, political status has been an obstacle to the recovery process," said Sergio Marxuach of the nonpartisan Center for a New Economy, based in San Juan.

This disenfranchised status allowed Congress to pass legislation allowing fiscal control and oversight by Congress of Puerto Rico's finances. It also permits the U.S. federal government to discriminate against Puerto Rico when it allocates taxpayer funds for Medicare, Medicaid and nutrition assistance.

Natalie Jaresko, executive director of FOMB, said Puerto Ricans are justified in feeling resentful over the

imposition of a financial control board. "Congress could not have imposed an oversight board on a [U.S.] state," Jaresko wrote in The Wall Street Journal.

There is disagreement over what the permanent status of the island's relationship should be, but island residents have expressed some preferences during locally-sponsored status consultations in 2012, 2017 and 2020.

In 2012, when asked if they wished to continue living under the present form of territorial status, 54 percent said no. In 2020, 53 percent of island residents chose the statehood option, confirming similar votes in 2012 and 2017.

"Congress is unlikely to step in to make a determination on status until PR gets its financial house back in order," said Jaresko. "And the debt load was one of the biggest such obstacles; that obstacle has now been removed."

In recent years, some members of Congress have resisted resolving Puerto Rico's status until the debt question is settled. Now that Judge Swain has approved the restructuring agreement, this last obstacle to permanently resolving the status question has been removed.

*Gene Roman is a freelance reporter based in The Bronx.*



# ConEd Responds to Reports of Higher-than-Average Bills This Month

By **SILE MOLONEY, DAVID GREENE**  
& **JULIAN NAZAR**

Was your ConEd bill higher than average this month? Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (NY-14) has asked residents to check. The lawmaker said Con Edison said reported increases are due to high demand for natural gas in winter, plus price fluctuations in the energy market. Meanwhile, she said local officials have asked ConEd to review its billing practices and improve its purchasing practices of natural gas.

Norwood resident, Chris Perkins, said he had heard about bill increases on the news. “I’d heard about some people had bills that went up like \$200 to \$300,” he said. “Mine wasn’t that extreme. Mine went up about \$50, but that could just be my [increased] usage over the last month. But I don’t feel it was such a huge jump.”

Perkins continued, “If it goes up again next month then I will realize that something else is happening. It was \$150, I usually pay about \$100 a month and it usually fluctuates between \$90 and \$110.”

Meanwhile a University Heights resident, who uses her washer and dryer three times a week, said she’s

noticed a 60 percent increase over recent years.

*Norwood News* reached out to Con Ed for further context, amid reports that the installing of certain new meters may be the cause of the recent price hikes. Jamie McShane, director of media relations at ConEd, responded, affirming what the congresswoman reported. “The changes in customer bills are mainly due to the supply cost of the energy commodity,” he said. “Natural gas is a driver of electricity costs as it is used by generation plants to create electricity.”

McShane said Con Edison doesn’t make a profit on the commodity. “We buy the energy on the wholesale market and provide it to customers at the same price we paid [for it],” he said. “Energy prices are volatile and can be affected by factors such as weather, demand, and economic trends.”

He added that Con Edison does not generate electricity, nor can it manage the financial practices of the private power generators or suppliers of natural gas. “Con Edison is seeking the ability to generate renewable energy in New York State for our customers which would shift our dependence away from natural gas and this

volatility,” McShane said.

He said that the company is also taking action to address the increase in energy supply costs and its impact on our customers. “We are reviewing all of our practices that affect customer supply costs, including our energy-buying practices, the tools we use to reduce supply price volatility, the way we communicate changes in supply prices, and our programs to help customers who have fallen behind on their bills,” he said.

According to McShane, another factor is consumption. “December was mild, January was very cold, and usage jumped sharply,” he said. “We have found the meters we’re installing are accurate. Customers should contact us directly to address any questions about their bill.”

On Wednesday, Feb. 23, Public Advocate Jumaane D. Williams joined activists and elected leaders to call for emergency utility debt relief after the recent spike in Con Edison bills which he said many struggled to pay amid the ongoing pandemic. The group called on utility providers and the State to protect consumers against the recent increases and renewed the public advocate’s call for

public power.

Meanwhile, Ocasio-Cortez provided the following recommendations to constituents about what they could do about their increased bills. Request a reading of your electric meter: you can request an investigation if you believe that more electricity consumption is being recorded than you think you are using. Call ConEd at 1-800-752-6633.

ConEd Assistance Programs: visit [www.conEd.com/Payment-Plans](http://www.conEd.com/Payment-Plans) to view their payment program and other types of assistance.

Apply for help paying your bill: the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) helps eligible families. Contact the HEAP Information Line at 800.692.0557 with questions about the program, or 212.331.3126 for help from an operator.

The congresswoman also encouraged residents to contact NYS Department of Public Service (DPS) to inform State officials about how ConEd’s bill increases affected them. “File a complaint with DPS that your bill has skyrocketed recently, and request an investigation of the company. Call 1.800.342.3377 or file online at [dps.ny.gov/complaints](http://dps.ny.gov/complaints),” she said.

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# Out & About

COMPILED BY SÍLE MOLONEY

## EVENTS

Multimedia exhibition, "**BronX BandA: Love and Resilience**," opened on Jan. 31, and runs through May 13 at the Casita Maria Gallery, located at 928 Simpson Street in the Hunts Point section of the South Bronx. The exhibition centers on the story of the group, BronX BandA, as well as the Bronxites who inspired their music. Using oral histories, video, photography, and a recently released BronX BandA album, coloring book, and short film entitled, "The Casita Sessions," gallery visitors will experience a diverse mix of storytelling methods celebrating Bronx culture and communities and the music which was created during the COVID-19 pandemic. For more information visit [casitamaria.org/gallery#Exhibitions](https://casitamaria.org/gallery#Exhibitions).

## DANCE

**Hip-Hop Fever!** takes place at Lehman Center for the Performing Arts, located at 250 Bedford Park Blvd West, The Bronx, New York 10468, on Saturday, April 30, at 8 p.m., as part of the center's Spring 2022 season. This event is dedicated to the former Bronx Borough President, Ruben Díaz Jr. For more information, go to <https://www.lehmancenter.org/>.

Each Monday, from Jan. 3 to March 31, from 6 p.m. to 6.45 p.m., **Ballet for Kids** classes take place at Norwood's Williamsbridge Oval Recreation Center, located at 3225 Reservoir Oval East, Bronx, NY 10467. More information is available at: <https://www.nycgovparks.org/events/2022/01/31/ballet>.

## MUSIC

**Palladium in the New Millenium** takes place at Lehman Center for the Performing Arts, located at 250 Bedford Park Blvd West, The Bronx, New York 10468 on Saturday, March 5, at 8 p.m. Tickets: \$100, \$65, \$55, \$50, \$45. **Tito Puente Jr., Machito Jr., and Tito Rodriguez Jr.** come together for this iconic palladium style concert. The Lehman Center is honored to dedicate this concert to a great supporter, Mr. Robert Sancho, vice president of development and external affairs at Bronx Care Health Systems. Visit [www.LehmanCenter.org](http://www.LehmanCenter.org) for more details.

## ART

The Poe Park Visitor Center proudly presents selected works of five artists for its 2022 virtual **Black History Month** exhibition. Each artist communicates their view of the Black experience as seen and lived by them. There is not just one side to the story. Through their works, these artists present stories that are powerful, thought-provoking, and as varied and complex as the artists. The show is free and available to view through Feb. 28.

Visit [https://www.nycgovparks.org/events/black\\_history\\_month](https://www.nycgovparks.org/events/black_history_month).

On Friday, Feb. 25, between 6 and 7.30 p.m., a **Silhouette Painting Workshop** will be held at Norwood's Williamsbridge Oval Recreation Center, located at 3225 Reservoir Oval East, Bronx, NY 10467. For more information, visit [nyc.gov/parks](https://nyc.gov/parks) or call (718) 543-8672 or email [Ana.Torres@parks.nyc.gov](mailto:Ana.Torres@parks.nyc.gov).

## MOVEMENT

Learn basic ball handling, defense, dribbling, passing, shooting, and other skills and techniques at an **Adult Basketball Workout** on Friday, February 25, from 10 a.m. noon with instructor, Jabor Forde, at the gymnasium in St. Mary's Recreation Center at 450 Saint Ann's Avenue, The Bronx. This event is free and ADA inclusive. Registration begins on 1/3/2022 and ends on 3/25/2022. This program requires an NYC Parks Recreation Center membership. For more information, call (718) 402-5155 or email [Jabor.Forde@parks.nyc.gov](mailto:Jabor.Forde@parks.nyc.gov) and to register, go to: <https://www.nycgovparks.org/events/2022/02/25/adult-basketball-workout>.

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# Freedom Youth NYC Opens New Office in The Bronx

by **SÍLE MOLONEY**

Freedom Youth Family Justice Center Inc., a nonprofit organization founded in 2019, which provides support to people, particularly youth, affected by human trafficking and domestic violence, recently opened a new office in The Bronx, located at 555 West 235th Street, in Riverdale.

The organization runs a number of programs, one of which is the Young Adult Discovery (YAD) program. This serves victims and survivors of human trafficking and prostitution aged 12-17, who are seeking a holistic approach to making positive changes in their lives by providing tools and support for those re-entering society.

*Norwood News* has reported previously on the crucial work being carried out by the organization. “As you know, space has been a chronic issue for Freedom Youth Family Justice Center Inc.,” Monique Riley, CEO and founder of Freedom Youth NYC, told *Norwood News*. “We no longer have to meet with our clients, virtually.”

Though numbers are notoriously difficult to pin down, according to most organizations that work in the area of human trafficking, cases reportedly spiked amid the pandemic, as they did for domestic violence. Riley said the group moved to Manhattan amid the



Photo courtesy of Freedom Youth NYC  
**MONIQUE RILEY, CEO** and founder of Freedom Youth NYC, (center, back row) is joined by colleagues to celebrate Black History Month.

pandemic because they couldn't afford to not meet and assist clients and needed a space to do so, virtually.

They had previously been working in person among the community. “So, we made the decision to move into 433 Broadway, New York, NY 10013, a space called Cubio,” Riley said. “The rent was very affordable. We went through Linda Tool office, which gives small nonprofits space at an affordable fee. We were at Cubico for six to eight months.”

She said as soon as it started to get warmer and more information was known about COVID-19, the owner approached her and said the rent would have to go back up to its previous rate,

which she said was a huge jump. Despite bargaining with the owner, the group eventually had to move out of the Manhattan location. “During this time, COVID-19 started to peek and increase again, so myself and our staff decided to work remotely, yet again.”

She said, initially, this meant renting small spaces out for meetings with clients as and when needed, or for meeting clients, in private, via Zoom. “This wasn't a bad move for us because most of our clients enjoyed the comfort of getting service from their home, without the hassle of getting on mass transportation, just to come to an office, and the same for our support groups,” Riley said. “There were cases that needed attention right away e.g. being able to connect with a family that needed mediation where tension had flared up and a simple Zoom could not fix. This year, we received a very generous amount of donations, and we were able to obtain an office space where we will be able to meet with our clients for support groups, peer advocacy, and provide services.”

Riley said it had been a struggle doing the work year after year and not getting much support, so they have now elected to assist other organizations that have also been on the ground, doing work but which didn't have space to

operate and meet their clientele either. “So, I have elected and offered dedicated desk space to the organizations, “Palms Upon My Hands,” and “Peer Network of New York,” free of cost,” Riley said.

When we spoke to Okera Ritchie, 17, in 2020, she had just started working for Freedom Youth, a position she obtained through a job placement via BronxWorks. “I love it,” she said at the time. Asked what advice she would offer to people who might not know a lot about human trafficking, Ritchie said, “I just feel like people need to be extra cautious nowadays, especially with social media because it's very easy, you know, through the social media platforms to get caught up in the wrong things.” She added, “So, just always be careful, and always keep an open mind as everyone does not always have the best interests for you and stay safe.”

If you are being trafficked or suspect trafficking activity in your area, please call the National Human Trafficking Resource Center Hotline at 1-888-373-7888 or Text “Be Free” to 233733.

Visit Freedom Youth Family Justice Center Inc. at <https://freedomyouthnyc.com/>. You can also call (929) 367-4754 or email at [info@freedomyouthnyc.com](mailto:info@freedomyouthnyc.com).

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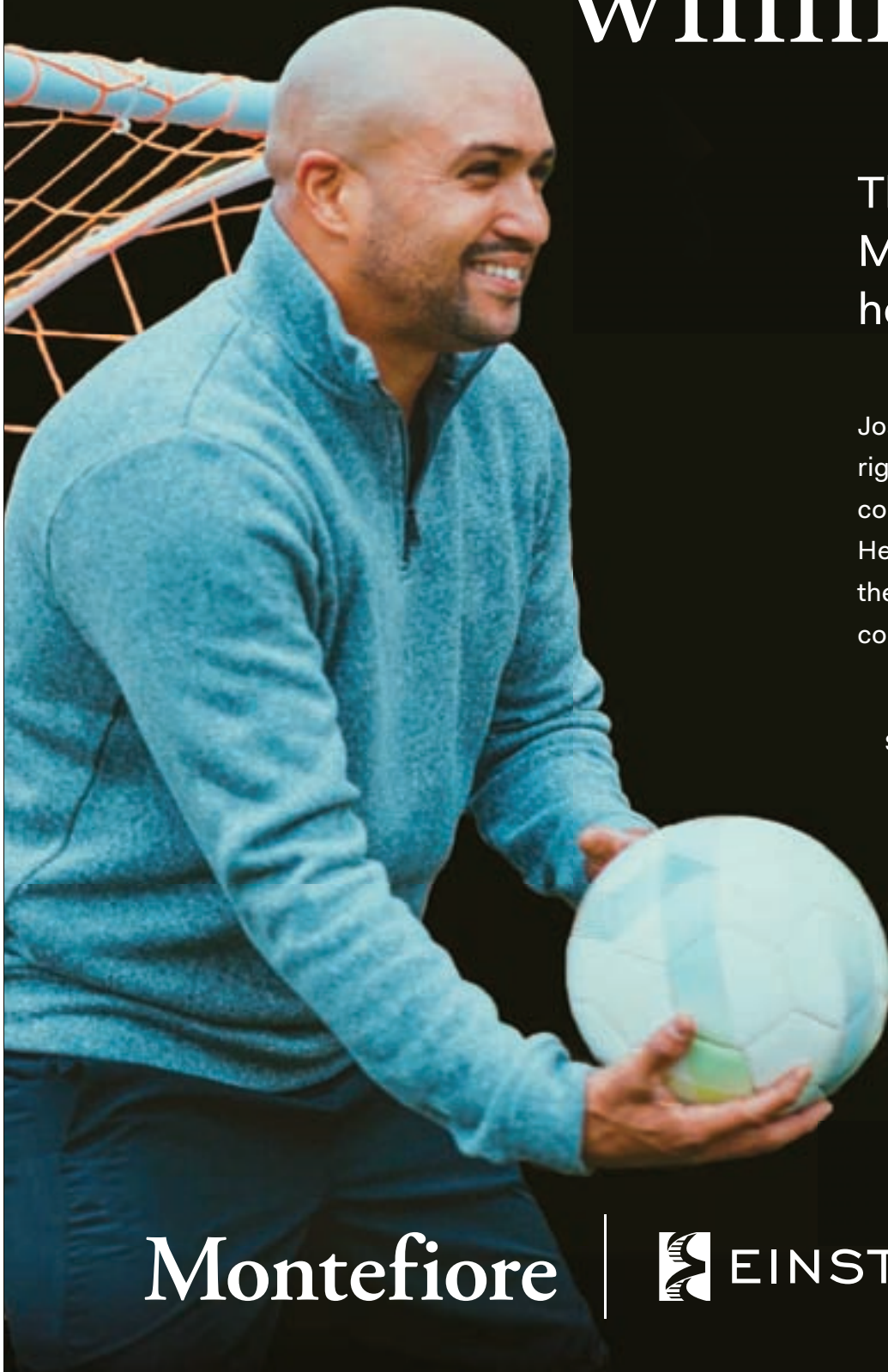
The next 52<sup>nd</sup> PRECINCT COMMUNITY COUNCIL meeting will be held on **Thursday, Feb. 24, at 7 p.m.**, via ZOOM. The meeting ID is 896 5087 0731 and the code is 598988. Call the 52nd Precinct Community Affairs office at (718) 220-5824 to be added to the email list.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic hit in March, **BRONX COMMUNITY BOARD 7** meetings have been held via ZOOM. The date for the next full board meeting in March is to be confirmed. The last board meeting was on Feb. 22. 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 Feb. 2. For further details, contact [bedfordmosholu@verizon.net](mailto:bedfordmosholu@verizon.net).



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# HEALTH CHECK

## When Muscle Pain in Your Legs Could Mean a Heart Problem

By DR. JOSE M. WILEY

February is American Heart Month, when we raise awareness about heart disease and how to prevent it. Heart disease is one of the leading causes of death in adults living in New York City, and it is important to know if you are at risk for heart disease. New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene has tools and resources to help you identify and manage your risk for heart disease. You can access these resources and use their Heart Age Calculator tool by going to <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/health/health-topics/heart-age-calculator.page>.

One condition related to heart disease is peripheral artery disease (PAD). This is caused by a build-up of fat in the arteries outside the heart, which blocks the flow of oxygen and blood to the arms, legs, and feet. If you have pain or cramping in your calves, it might be PAD. It's not uncommon. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), almost 6.5 million people aged 40 and above in the U.S. have signs or symptoms of this condition. Both men and women are affected by PAD, and African Americans are at an increased risk.

The earliest and most frequent symptom in patients with PAD is pain in the calf or thigh muscles when walking. This pain is called intermittent claudication (IC) and it happens when a person is active and stops when the person is at rest. This pain is a sign that not enough blood is flowing to that part of the body.

As the disease progresses, patients may experience pain in the feet even when resting, especially when the legs are elevated, such as in bed. This pain can be relieved by hanging the legs over the side of the bed, standing, or sitting in a chair.

The signs of PAD can be mistaken for other conditions and can sometimes go undiagnosed. PAD can be dangerous and even life-threatening. People with PAD are at a higher risk for developing coronary artery disease, and this can lead to a heart attack or stroke. If left untreated, PAD can progress, causing ulcers (painful sores on the skin) and gangrene (death of the tissues). In about a third of these patients, PAD can lead to surgical removal of the leg or foot.

The CDC reports that the following factors can increase our risk for PAD, especially as we age:

- smoking
- high blood pressure
- atherosclerosis
- diabetes
- high cholesterol
- being 60 years or more.

The good news is that peripheral artery disease can be prevented or managed by following a heart healthy lifestyle. You can help prevent PAD by quitting smoking and exercising to help manage blood pressure and diabetes. Eating a heart healthy diet with vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and healthy fats can help keep cholesterol under control. Speak with your doctor or a nutritionist about ways to incorporate healthy food and exercise into your life.

If you or a family member is diagnosed with PAD, the first treatment is gentle, supervised exercise and medical management. Historically, surgery has been the primary treatment for patients with very advanced PAD. However, minimally invasive medical techniques have rapidly evolved over the past decade, and can be helpful for people whose symptoms don't resolve with exercise and/or medical management.

PAD can be diagnosed using a painless, simple process. If you or a family member notice ongoing pain and swelling in your calves and legs, see your doctor to rule out PAD, and keep up the healthy habits for Heart Month.

*José M. Wiley MD, MPH, is director of the cardiac catheterization laboratory and director of endovascular interventions at Montefiore Health System, and professor of medicine at Albert Einstein College of Medicine.*

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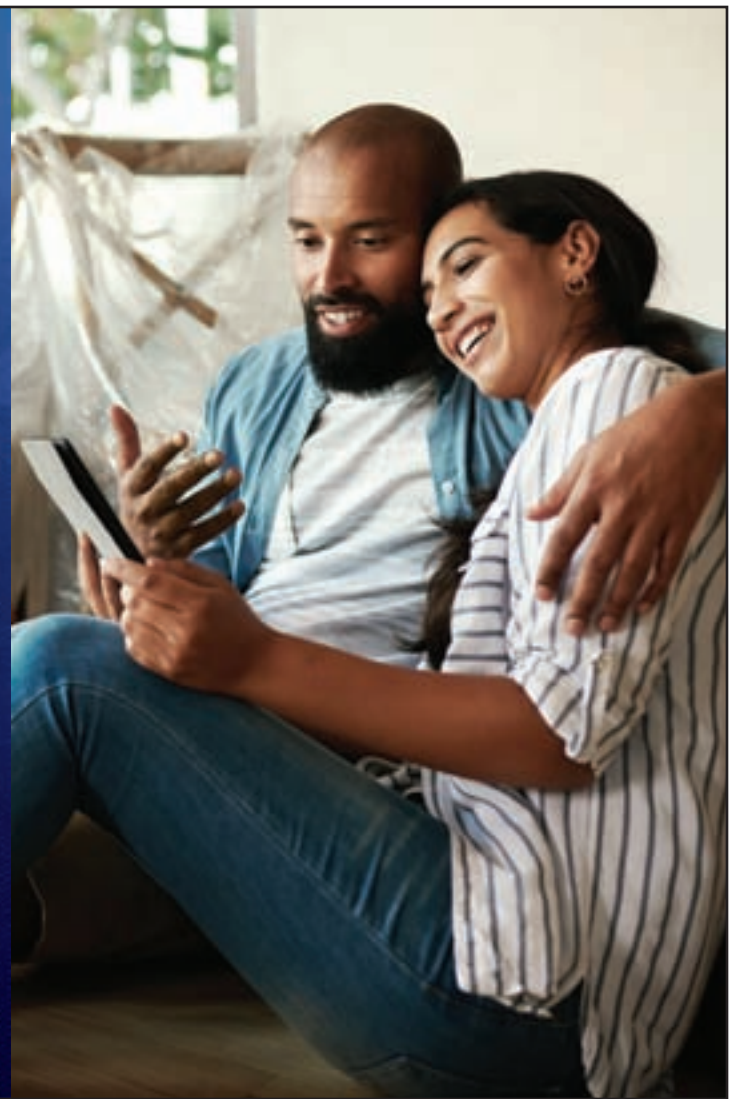
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# Fordham Introduces 33rd University President, Tania Tetlow

By SARAH HUFFMAN

Fordham University announced on Feb. 10, via a Zoom conference, that Tania Tetlow will become the 33rd president of the University. Tetlow will become both the first woman and the first lay-person to lead the university in its 181-year history, when she assumes the role in summer, ahead of the new academic year.

"I am thrilled beyond measure that the search committee, with all of its engagement from faculty and students, and the board itself has chosen me to do this," Tetlow said. "I will give absolutely everything I have to doing it well," she added.

Robert D. Daleo, chair of Fordham's board of trustees, said the board unanimously voted Tetlow into the position, citing her prior leadership skills and successes at Loyola University as some of the reasons why she was chosen for the role.

"This is a historic and exciting moment for Fordham," said Daleo. "As a university that seeks to transform its students' lives, we are preparing to be transformed by bold, new leadership."

Tetlow will replace current University president, Fr. Joseph M. McShane S.J., on July 1. McShane announced he would be leaving his position in the fall of 2021, after 19 years as president.

"So, we wanted to make sure that the university was in the best of all possible hands," said McShane during the call. "Those hands are Tania's. Tania is an extraordinary leader," he added. "She is visionary and practical at the same time; that's a rare combination. She's also deeply committed to Jesuit education."

Tetlow's family history is deeply entwined in Fordham, and in The Society of Jesus. Her father was a Jesuit priest for 17 years before meeting her mother at Fordham, and leaving the order.

"Fordham is where my parents met," said Tetlow. "It's the reason that I exist. It [has] always loomed large in my family as a beacon of excellence, a place of such relevance in the most exciting city in the world." She said the role was now a chance for her to follow in what she said were "the very big shoes of Fr. McShane," and to be part of "helping Fordham grow ever more relevant and ever more excellent."

Tetlow was born in New York City but moved down south as a child. She attended Tulane University on a dean's honor scholarship and later earned a Truman scholarship at Harvard Law



Photo courtesy of Patrick Ryan/Fordham University.

**TANIA TETLOW WAS** announced as the 33rd president of Fordham University on Feb. 10, 2022, via a Zoom press conference. She will be the first woman and first lay-person to hold the position in Fordham's 181-year history.

School.

She went on to have a prosperous law career and eventually became a law professor. Tetlow was also the first woman and first lay-person to assume the role of president of Loyola University New Orleans in 2018. She will leave that post this summer to lead Fordham.

Tetlow said she felt the call of Jesuit education before taking her job at Loyola, especially while the college was going through a difficult time. She said it was a privilege to help transform the school and see it flourish, even throughout the pandemic.

"Today is a homecoming for Tanya," said McShane. "And you know, we on the campus are delighted to welcome her home. We want to make sure that she feels welcome, and I cannot think of a better choice for the 33rd presidency," he added.

Ahead of officially joining Fordham

in July, Tetlow said she looks forward to getting to know the college and listening to the people there. She will then work on a strategic plan for the college, saying it was important to take into account the opportunities New York City holds for Fordham, and the potential for outreach to people and organizations within the City.

In 2012, a group of Fordham University students known as the Collective of Concerned Students of Color and Anti-Racist Allies led a rally to raise awareness following a spate of hate crimes on the Jesuit school's campuses. At the time, they called for tolerance and implementation of new anti-racism policies, and a petition, posted on change.org, quickly garnered 1,500 signatures.

The college took further steps to address the issue of racism when it was highlighted again in 2020 in the wake of the killing of George Floyd. McShane

addressed the issue at the time, saying in part, "Although we don't all like to admit it, People of Color and let's be frank, especially Black people, live lives of relentlessly hostile scrutiny, and they have been telling us so since the ink on the Thirteenth Amendment was barely dry."

He added, "I want to speak directly to the Black people and other People of Color in the Fordham community. I know this has been a difficult year for you in many ways. The killing of Black people by police, the disproportionate harm that communities of color have suffered during the pandemic, and the upswelling of racism across the country have burdened you uniquely."

A representative for the college added that Fordham had been working to address students' concerns, categorizing racism and anti-Blackness, specifically, as a second pandemic under which the world was living and saying the college was engaged in anti-racism work at every level.

Meanwhile, last year, the University launched an initiative whereby it provided financial assistance to "neighbors" of the college's Rose Hill campus, located in Fordham Manor. The Fordham School of Professional and Continuing Studies (PCS) launched what it described as a unique "Good Neighbor Initiative" for the Fall 2021 term. It was dedicated to adult learners and provided an automatic 30 percent discount on tuition fees for undergraduate-seeking PCS students at the Bronx campus who lived in certain neighboring zip codes.

Dr. Anthony Davidson, dean at Fordham PCS, said that the turbulence of the previous year had placed universities under tremendous financial pressure to keep tuition the same, or even increase it to help the bottom line. "However, Fordham PCS is committed to supporting the communities we serve, and that serve us in return," he said at the time. He added that the college was thrilled to be able to give back to the community and provide the opportunity for a "best-in-class education" right in their own backyard.

Summing up her objectives as the new Fordham University president, Tetlow said, "At a moment when the problems of the world seem evermore complex and pressing, [it's] urgent that we step up to the plate.... [solve] those problems, and [educate] the kind of students who will go out and solve them for generations to come."



# Deputy Bronx BP, Janet A. Peguero, Embodies Spirit of Dominican Heritage Month

By JULIAN NAZAR

Janet A. Peguero's favorite spot in The Bronx is Hunts Point Flower Market. "When things get a little bit stressful, I feel like flowers help me center myself, by just admiring the beauty and the color," the deputy Bronx borough president said. "And then, it's just a plus that it's a Dominican-owned business, and I get to support a local, family-owned and family-operated business," she added.

This week marks the last week of Dominican Heritage Month, which celebrates the legacy and contributions of New York's thriving Dominican American community who, according to the latest census figures, comprise 323,240 Bronxites. In fact, The Bronx is home to the largest Dominican population in the country according to the website, Little Dominican Republic.

On Thursday, Jan. 6, Janet Peguero, 32, made history by becoming the first Dominican immigrant to be appointed Bronx deputy borough president. "Janet is someone I consider to be a friend, a sister, and now my partner at Borough Hall," said Bronx Borough President Vanessa L. Gibson. "She has worked tirelessly throughout her career to amplify the voices of historically underserved communities, and as the first Dominican-American deputy Bronx borough president, she is bringing a new voice and perspective to this role."

Every year, the Dominican Heritage Month festivities start on Jan. 21 and end on Feb. 27. On Feb. 10, Gibson and Peguero hosted a community celebration at the Grand Slam Banquet Hall in Tremont, where Peguero said they enjoyed "good Dominican food and great Dominican music."

Peguero intends to continue honoring her heritage throughout the month. "The way I celebrate is by supporting Dominican-owned businesses, the Hunts Point Flower Market being one of them," she said, as we toured the local area. Stopping by The Lit. Bar, the only remaining bookstore in The Bronx, she purchased "*If Dominican Were A Color*," by Sili Recio, described as a striking, evocative, debut picture book that celebrates the joy of being Dominican.

Peguero later explained that Beatstro, the restaurant next door to the bookstore, is both a Hip-Hop bar and a speakeasy and recommended coming back with friends. Later, at Chocobar

Cortés, the 4<sup>th</sup> generation, family-owned, Caribbean, bean-to-bar, chocolate manufacturing company, established in the Dominican Republic in 1929, she thanked Carlos Cortés, executive director, for bringing the business to the South Bronx.

Peguero describes herself as "*Dominicana hasta la tambura*," which loosely translates to "Dominican until the last drumbeat," a loose reference to a merengue song by Johnny Ventura. "That's just kind of the culture and the vibrancy of the Dominican Republic. I feel like I exude that each and every day. I am as real as it gets when it comes to being, "*una dominicana del Bronx*" (a Dominican from The Bronx).

Peguero was born in Santo Domingo, the capital of the Dominican Republic. "I grew up in a house with a huge backyard, with the liberty to roam and run the streets with my neighbors and my cousins, in a community where everyone looks out for one another," she said.

At the age of six, she left the Dominican Republic. "Moving to the City of New York, it's the immigrant story," Peguero said. "It was a hard transition; leaving your homeland, but also leaving your entire family and coming to a brand-new place where you are secluded."

She settled in Harlem across from Macombs Dam Bridge. At the time of her arrival, the school year was just about to start up again but her local school was at capacity. She ended up enrolling at an elementary school in The Bronx for first grade. "Little did I know that bus ride was going to serve as a catalyst for where I am today," Peguero said.

She said school was challenging for her because at the time, she didn't speak any English. "It's funny because my mom created a name tag for me because I didn't know how to speak the language," she said. "A basic question like: 'What is your name?'...I didn't have an answer for that. The immersion was rapid with no real preparation."

However, little by little, Peguero started to pick up the language, saying one of her earliest memories of learning English was through Hip-Hop. Although she lived in Harlem, she recalls spending most of her time in The Bronx and both her parents worked in the borough also. "It was the Hip-Hop culture that I immersed myself into, learning the lyrics to the songs," she said. Growing up, Peguero said she



Photo courtesy of Michael Ivory (Page 1 photo courtesy of Finalis Valdez)

**DEPUTY BRONX BOROUGH** President Janet A. Peguero at The Lit. Bar in the South Bronx on Friday, Feb. 18, 2022.

didn't have any role models. "I couldn't identify with the leaders in my community," she said. "There was no one I looked towards and was just like, 'I want to be exactly like that person.'" Her biggest influence was her father.

He started out as a cab driver in The Bronx and in Upper Manhattan. After driving cabs for 20 years, he transitioned to NYC Department of Education, serving as a school aide for 13 years at Frederick Douglass Academy 1, the same high school his daughter was attending.

Peguero recalls that her father would stand in front of the school and greet every single student each day. "What I realized is that made a difference in every single student that walked through that door, because they felt seen," Peguero said. "I felt seen every day by my dad."

She also remembers the time her father helped the predominantly Black chess team at her high school. "During that time, there were budget cuts. The chess team was limited in being able to attend tournaments," Peguero said. "My father volunteered to join the chess team to serve as the guardian of the team. That really made a difference, because it allowed this chess team that didn't have resources to attend tournaments."

Peguero said she still gets messages from alumni of Frederick Douglass Academy 1 who tell her what a difference her dad made in their lives. She credits her father for sparking her interest in public service. "To this

day, I carry those lessons with me along the way," Peguero said. "While you are serving, you are here to make the community you are serving better. Every single day that he woke up, he made someone's life a little bit better through his service. That is what I am committed to."

While at the school, Peguero met Radhy Miranda, now VP for government & community relations at NYC Economic Development Corporation, during her freshman year. Miranda recalls how they had a global studies class together and ended up commuting to school together. Miranda considers Peguero one of the best human beings he has ever met. "She is a very caring, passionate, and extremely intelligent young lady, a very relatable person that wants to ultimately help, and is for others," he said.

Peguero started her career in government in 2016, working for NYC Department of Small Business Services (SBS), later working with others to ensure under-served Bronx and Upper Manhattan neighborhoods undergoing land use change had direct access to business, workforce, and neighborhood development services. There, she crossed paths with City Councilwoman Pierina Sanchez (C.D. 14) who observed and commended Peguero's impact on the community.

Miranda has also seen this firsthand. "If you look at her professional trajectory, she was doing work with the small business services for the City, supporting small businesses through commercial lease assistance, and making sure people in our communities of The Bronx and immigrants had access to resources," he said. "It's not like she couldn't do other jobs. She deliberately put herself in a situation where she is supporting those types of programs and initiatives."

Before becoming deputy borough president of The Bronx, in 2020, Peguero worked as an associate at Constantinople & Valone, a government relations, public affairs, and business development firm. Miranda noticed how this role fit into the larger pattern of her career trajectory. "Going to do some work with consulting and lobbying, but on behalf of nonprofits, that is impressive and remarkable," he said. "She is shaping her career in a way that is giving back, inherently."

In her current role, Peguero is in a perfect position to do just that. "It's a full circle moment because my entire life, I have been dedicated to public service without knowing that was the category of it," Peguero said. "It wasn't until later on that I identified as a public servant. I realize that this is exactly where I wanted to be." She believes she is an ideal representative of the borough, saying, "I have the lived and professional experience to be able to represent Bronxites."

Peguero said she is grateful too for the opportunity to work alongside Gibson. "She is kind, but also she is a strong, powerful advocate," she said. "She does not take 'no' as an answer for anything. It's like when there is a will, there's a way. Learning under her leadership has been a blessing."

As deputy Bronx borough president, Peguero plans to continue to support small businesses. "We can't speak about moving The Bronx forward if we don't focus on local economic development," she said. "During COVID, small businesses took a hit. How can we develop more local job opportunities for Bronxites? How can we develop more training opportunities for local residents?"

Peguero also intends to advocate for more affordable housing units, not one-bedroom units or studios but on larger developments that she said meet the needs of Bronx families. To accomplish this, she hopes to capitalize on public-private partnerships. "We know that through private partnerships, we are able to cut through the red tape and really bring actionable and tangible outcomes to the borough, developing those relationships and bringing them to The Bronx," she said.

Indeed, having lived 11 years in Kingsbridge, Peguero wants to set the record straight on The Bronx. "We are a beautiful, diverse borough," she said. "We are the borough with [the] biggest parks. We are the birthplace of Hip-Hop. No one has that over us. Personally, I have taken it upon myself to show all of my friends in my network the gems of The Bronx."

She added, "If there is a change that you want to see, work towards that change. Focus on that change, and then build out a plan that will really work towards bettering the lives in the community you live in."

# New Homeless Shelter for University Heights

(continued from page 1)

by opening a new shelter in the borough.

Planned for a mid-March opening, the shelter will accommodate 59 individuals, most likely men. The five-floor building is located on 2287 University Avenue in the University Heights neighborhood, roughly 100 feet away from Lehman College and about five blocks from the 183rd Street subway station. Tolentine Zeiser Community Life Center, now listed as closed, previously ran a housing shelter at 2345 University Avenue.

At Bronx Community Board 7 (CB7)'s housing committee meeting on Feb. 8, Erin Drinkwater, deputy commissioner at NYC Department of Social Services (DSS), provided an overview of the shelter which will be run by Bronx-based nonprofit, Acacia Network Housing, a subsidiary of the larger umbrella organization, Acacia Network.

Amarilis Soler, assistant vice president at Acacia Network Housing, will oversee the new project, along with James Baggett, the nonprofit's project coordinator and Soler's "number two person." Baggett will supervise the shelter.

Other staff may include Fernando Brinn, a consultant for Acacia Network and president and CEO of The Brinn Group, a business consulting, real estate development and community relations company, and Ravi Rampersaud, a program director at one of Acacia's permanent housing sites.

In reference to work carried out to date across the borough by Acacia Network Housing, Soler said, "We have been providing services in the neighborhoods when nobody wanted to go into those neighborhoods." She said Acacia manages affordable, supportive housing, and added, "We are experts in all the types of housing vouchers that are out there."

According to Acacia Network's website, the organi-

zation currently manages 33 shelter locations in four of the City's boroughs, serving around 750 families with children, adult families, and about 2,500 single people. It is the largest provider of shelter services for older adults in the City. "We have a lot of experience operating shelters, permanent housing for homeless individuals," Soler said. "We have dealt with literally every population."

The new University Heights shelter will provide a type of transitional housing known as "stabilization beds" to its clients. According to DSS, these are low-threshold, private rented rooms for clients experiencing long-term, unsheltered homelessness, where clients may stay until they are placed in permanent housing or in a long-term, transitional setting.

According to homeless outreach group, BRC, stabilization beds tend to be allocated to individuals who require transitional housing, but who have stable health and strong independent living skills. Experts who work with those who experience homelessness recognize that the structure and size of most shelters is unappealing to many New Yorkers experiencing chronic homelessness. Indeed, this is one of the reasons why it is sometimes difficult to convince them to accept shelter.

Another type of transitional housing are safe havens. These usually have fewer people / beds, according to BRC, and operate under a modified harm reduction philosophy. Though encouraged, sobriety is not required, rules are minimal, and structure is limited.

Collectively, there are around 1,800 stabilization bed and safe haven shelters in New York City, 1,200 of which were created under the de Blasio administration. Meanwhile, according to the most recent NYC Department of Homeless Services (DHS) shelter report, out of the roughly 45,000 individuals who live in shelters across New York City, around 1,300 individuals live in safe

haven shelters.

In terms of which clients will live at the new shelter, Acacia officials said referrals will come from DHS directly or from BronxWorks, another nonprofit which helps individuals and families improve their economic and social well-being by providing food, shelter, education, and support.

During the meeting, Myrna Calderon, a CB7 housing committee member, said she still has concerns about the new shelter, adding that she had expressed concerns about the impact of affordable housing developments and shelters on the community at previous meetings.

"I'm very concerned that, once again, the community is not included in these decisions," Calderon said. "I don't care what [you] want to call it. It's another [men's] shelter and the dangerous thing that you're doing here...it is on the same block [as] two charter schools, a head start program...a preschool program," she added.

Soler said there would be weekly recreational activities available for shelter clients, as well as an arts and culture program to help them feel comfortable inside the building. She added that Acacia also runs its own food pantry for its clients. "We want to keep our residents, as much as possible, in the building, engaged and entertained," Soler said.

According to Acacia officials, the shelter will have a full team onsite, including a full-time program director, a social service team with a licensed clinical social worker, trained in mental health and emotional counseling, and a couple of substance use counselors. A full-time director of program operations will supervise the maintenance of the building, and security will be onsite supporting the team.

"We will have staff at the site around the clock," Soler said. She added that there will also be three full-time senior case managers, assisting clients with housing and onsite

recreational activities.

Acacia Network also operates seven health centers across the City which provide various health services to clients ranging from annual physical exams to behavioral health and substance use prevention programs. Soler said a driver will be available to transport clients to their appointments or to housing viewings so that they won't have to take the train or bus or walk.

Another Acacia initiative is its "Health Home" program, which it operates in conjunction with Montefiore Hospital. The program provides comprehensive care coordination and care management services for Medicaid patients with complex combinations of chronic conditions and behavioral health disorders. Patients are assigned a dedicated care manager to provide intensive care management to help them navigate medical, mental health, substance use and social services systems.

Meanwhile, during the meeting, Bronx CB7 district manager, Ischia Bravo, also expressed concerns about the new shelter. Hers were about its proximity to local parks and schools, especially since there will, apparently, be no curfew for shelter clients, and they will be free to come and go for up to three days at a time.

Meanwhile, CB7 housing committee member, Sandra Erickson (who is vice president of the Bronx Chamber of Commerce) also worried about shelter residents needing medication and potential 911 emergencies. Soler addressed this point, saying shelter staff know to dial 911 when somebody needs medical attention.

Shane Cox, deputy commissioner with DHS, described who the intended shelter clients would be, saying, like others, it was built for individuals who live on the street who have historically been reluctant to enter traditional shelters. As a result, he said sites such as the one being discussed tended to be smaller, accommodating at

most three people in a single room. "The clients who will really be prioritized for these sites tend to be a bit more independent, higher functioning," Cox said.

He also explained that stabilization bed shelters don't have restrictions on which boroughs the shelter clients come from, saying, "If this is a really appropriate place for somebody who's in Queens, and they were willing to come up, then we would make the placement."

Calderon said this was what worried her: people coming from as far away as Brooklyn or Staten Island to be housed in the local shelter. "Wherever they don't want them, they wind up being housed here in The Bronx," she said. "So, it's not our people that are being put there."

Soler sought to reassure residents, saying the shelter building, itself, is equipped with around a couple dozen security cameras and said security rounds would not only be carried out inside the building, but also outside to make sure that, with a small caveat, there would be no congregating or panhandling outside. "We cannot promise that we're going to be going three blocks down, three blocks up, but definitely within the proximity of the building, every hour," she said.

Acacia is also planning the forthcoming opening of two more shelters in Manhattan. Meanwhile, officials said there will be an opportunity for the local community to voice their feedback, publicly, on the new Bronx shelter at around the six-month mark, following the facility's opening. Amid concerns by residents about safety and security, Cox summed up the presentation, by driving home one singular point which links back to the issue of dealing with homelessness on the City's subways. "The goal is to get them inside," Cox said. "The ultimate goal is permanent housing."

*\*Sile Moloney contributed to this story.*



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