



NORWOOD NEWS

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FENCING AT P.S. 340 A HIT WITH STUDENTS!



Photo by Talwar

FENCING COACH, LUKA Oboladze, trains student participants of a 10-week fencing program at P.S. 340, located in the Kingsbridge Heights section of The Bronx, on Friday, March 11, 2022.

By SARAH HUFFMAN

Every Friday afternoon for the past few months, about 20 P.S. 340 students gather in the school cafeteria to learn the art and sport of fencing.

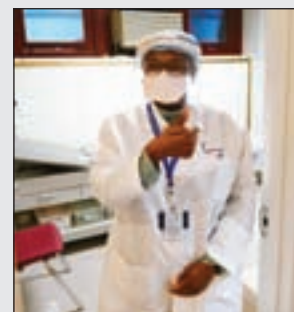
Taught by an elite coach who has competed both nationally and internationally, the Kingsbridge Heights students are learning the basic terminology and footwork associ-

ated with the combat sport, all while donning impressive, protective fencing gear and getting to handle a sword, for fun!

The school's new fencing

program was made possible by Amy Turchiaro, the school's psychologist, who pushed to find a way to bring fencing to the students. "A long time

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\$3.35M for Montefiore School Health Program | pg 2



Exterior Wall Collapse at Tracey Towers pg 9



Happy Land Social Club Victims Remembered pg 15

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\$3.35 Million for Montefiore's School Health Program

By DAVID GREENE

Congressmen Adriano Espaillat (NY-13) and Ritchie Torres (NY-15) joined Montefiore president and CEO, Dr. Philip Ozuah, at P.S. 8, Isaac Varian School in Bedford Park to announce the passage of \$3.35 million in federal funding for Montefiore's School Health Program (MSHP) on Wednesday, April 13. The program currently provides 42,000 students with access to doctors, dentists, and therapists at 32 locations and 99 schools across The Bronx.

The additional funding will assist MSHP to expand its digital infrastructure and broadband capabilities, expanding its telehealth program to the 99 impacted schools, serving children from kindergarten to high school.

During the announcement at P.S. 8, located at 3010 Briggs Avenue, school principal, Claudia Tahiraj-Sadrija, told the students and parents in attendance, "For nearly 40 years, Montefiore has been a strong partner, working with public schools across The Bronx to ensure that families get the care and attention they need."

Sadrija said the program has helped generations of Bronxites over the last two decades. "At P.S. 8, our incredible team of health professionals serves more than 210 children each week," she said. Aside from the 210 weekly visits to the nursing team, students, on average, make 60 additional visits to those offering mental health counseling and support.

During his prepared remarks, Ozuah quoted Fredrick Douglass, telling the crowd, "It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men." He added, "I'm proud to be here this afternoon with two national leaders who worked together to secure \$3.35 million [in funding]." The CEO added, "Congressmen Adriano Espaillat and Ritchie Torres fought hard and they delivered in a big way for The Bronx and for this community. They know well that the children of The Bronx are the future of The Bronx."

In reference to MSHP being the largest, school-based, health program in the nation, Espaillat, the former congressman for Norwood, prior to the 2022 redistricting process, said, "Today, thanks to decades-long commitment, Montefiore provides nearly 42,000 children with free access to state-of-the-art healthcare services. Now, we were able to secure \$3.35 million for this telehealth investment



Photo by David Greene

ELECTED OFFICIALS JOIN Montefiore president and CEO, Dr. Philip Ozuah, (center) P.S. 8 principal, Claudia Tahiraj-Sadrija (2nd right), and P.S. 8 students during a check presentation of \$3.35 million for Montefiore's School Health Program held at P.S. 8 in Bedford Park on Wednesday, April 13, 2022.

for this school and the rest of the district."

Referencing the COVID-19 testing site that City officials had opened at Lehman College parking lot at the beginning of the pandemic, as well as the high numbers of positive cases seen at the time in the Northwest Bronx, Espaillat recalled the vulnerability of the people at the time. "We need to have greater access to healthcare, and this tool that Montefiore is going to bring to this school and other schools is going to make it a lot easier for that to happen," he said, adding, "I'm really proud to be a part of this project."

Meanwhile, recalling his own struggles with asthma and depression as a young student, Torres, the new congressman for Norwood, which now falls under New York's 15th congressional district since the 2022 redistricting process took effect, said, "Every school should be a healthcare hub. Every school should be a place where you can go to see the doctor, and a dentist, and a therapist."

He continued, "Montefiore's new health program is essential to the community health of The Bronx. It's both a great equalizer and a great stabilizer. It's a great equalizer because every student it serves, every student, regardless of income or immigration status, has access to healthcare, and it's a great stabilizer because it causes students to have fewer absences from school, and it causes parents to have fewer absences from work."

According to Rosy Chhabra, Psy.D, director of MSHP, children who avail of the program are 40 percent less likely to go home sick and 50 percent less likely to visit an emergency room. "That's a very big deal for the community and the students," she said. Chhabra also highlighted the impact of upgrades to WiFi and broadband capabilities at local schools, "It's going to bring us to a whole different level of care and connection that we've been working for and looking forward to," she said.

"This marks a pivotal step in advancing the Montefiore School Health Program, extending a physical infrastructure across the Montefiore network and supporting the health of our entire community," Chhabra concluded.

Meanwhile, Dr. Naydine Johnney, psychologist and program director of the mental health clinic at P.S. 8, explained that besides providing healthcare to students, the program offers "concrete services" to the families of students, including any housing and financial assistance that may be needed.

Regarding the expanded telehealth program, Johnney said, "For example, next week is Spring break and technically, the schools are closed but we're able to provide services by telehealth. Montefiore clinics are open and we're able to provide telehealth service and this will allow us to do so on a more frequent basis."

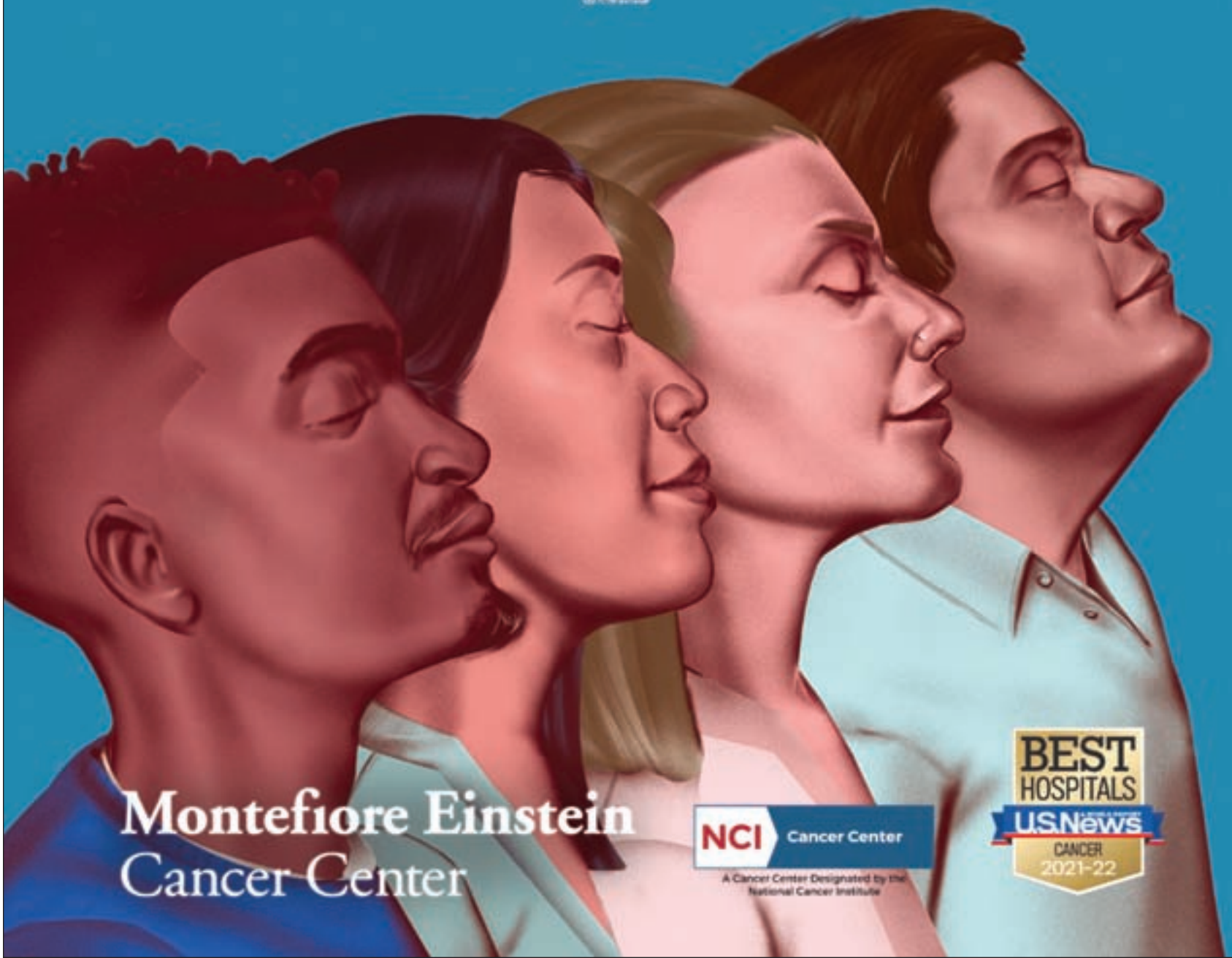
**Sile Moloney contributed to this story.*

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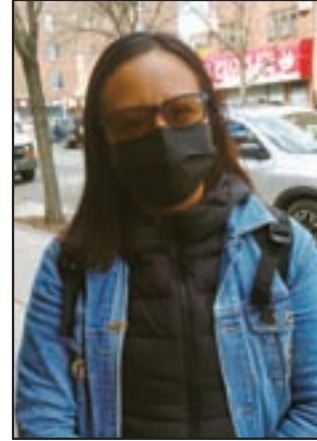


INQUIRING PHOTOGRAPHER

By DAVID GREENE



This week, following the recent mass subway shooting in Brooklyn, we asked residents if they feel safe riding the subway?



"At this point, I don't feel safe. I don't think anyone feels safe due to the system that we have. They had no cameras at the 25th Street station, still no cameras. They got him, of course. They got him, but that's not the point. The point is you could have avoided this if you had the cameras because you're supposed to have the cameras, no? With the rise in crime on the subways, you weren't supposed to have cameras? Common sense tells you you're supposed to have the cameras due to the fact that violence is increasing. Me and my wife won't go [travel by subway]. My wife was traumatized because of what happened."

Herbert Evens,
Parkchester

"No, I don't feel safe, in general, sometimes. I've never really experienced anything too drastic, but I have seen things. I have noticed an area where there was one cop, and now there's two with him. I noticed that today. I feel like sometimes when the cops are there, they just stand around talking and walking around in the train station."

Rebecca Rodriguez,
Kingsbridge Heights

"I do take the subway. I don't feel as safe as I used to. It's definitely gotten a lot more hot, or just a lot of folks, I think, who might have some mental health issues who aren't getting the support and services they need, and they go on the train. I don't know if they're homeless. Sometimes it's hard to tell... Three times I've been followed by men who I could tell just weren't okay, even right here at the D station at the Norwood stop. Even before that incident, I've seen more cops, but I saw them harassing homeless people and that's not something I agree with. I don't think that's helping with the crime."

Ilia Burgos,
Norwood

"No, I don't [feel safe] and that's the reason why I bought some safety gadgets. Yes, because you see things on social media, and you have to be a little precautions. When I'm on the train, I don't have both of my headphones on and I'm alert as to how people are moving, so I'm way more aware of my surroundings. I worry about my family. Sometimes they take the train early, so I share those tips with them so they're alert and not distracted on their phones. I have seen more police on the D train. I think they should check that every camera is working at every station. It makes you wonder where our tax dollars are going."

Karen Almonte,
Norwood

"No. It's just not safe anymore. You have to be watching your back every minute; you don't know who's ready to attack. That's another big thing. There's no police on the train and it's really scary. I stopped taking the trains. I used to love going to the City on the train, now I'd rather take the Metro North or the bus. If there was a shooting, I'd run and pray, or if I had no choice, I will find a way to get off the train. This has me thinking now to be prepared."

Nancy Marie Rose,
Allerton

Editor's Note: The NY Post reported that according to MTA spokesperson, Tim Minton, cameras at both Brooklyn's 36th Street subway station, where the mass shooting occurred, and the 25th Street station, where James may have fled, were on and recording but weren't transmitting footage back to MTA headquarters and to the NYPD. Norwood News contacted the MTA to corroborate this statement. We did not receive an immediate response.

All photos by David Greene except number 5, which is courtesy of Nancy Marie Rose.



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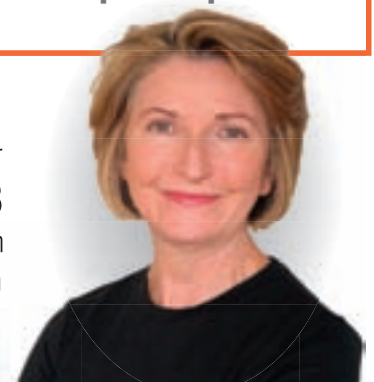
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Cuomo to Bronx Supporters: “I Am Not Going Anywhere!”

By DAVID GREENE & SÍLE MOLONEY

Former Gov. Andrew Cuomo, who resigned from office on August 24, 2021, amid a sexual harassment scandal, made his second public appearance on Thursday, March 17, since he escaped being hit with sex crime charges by State prosecutors. Cuomo addressed a group of Bronx supporters alongside former District 18 city councilman, Rev. Ruben Díaz, Sr., during a regular meeting of The New York Hispanic Clergy Organization, a group founded by Díaz.

The standing room only crowd packed the Christian Community Neighborhood Church, located at 1437 Longfellow Avenue, in a neighborhood southeast of Charlotte Gardens. Sammy Ravelo, former candidate for Bronx borough president, former District 12 city councilman, Andy King, and a host of local clergy leaders were also in attendance.

Díaz Sr. praised Cuomo for several actions he had taken as governor. They included sending 23 State Army National Guard trucks to pick up donations for Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria hit; four, soon-to-be-built Metro North train stations in The Bronx; the deconstruction of the Sheridan Expressway to give residents better access to the Bronx River and get truck traffic off neighborhood streets; and the renovation of Orchard Beach.

He also credited him with “Camp Junior,” a 40-acre camp in Harriman State Park, named after Lesandro “Junior” Guzman-Feliz, a 15-year-old NYPD Explorer who was murdered by a gang who stabbed him in a brutal assault in Belmont in 2018. The camp was created for 800 youngsters to attend each summer to give them some respite from the culture of street violence over the summer months.

Addressing the crowd, Cuomo said, “One of the things I’ve learned is that the people in The Bronx respect straight talk and unvarnished truth, and that’s what I want to offer you today.” He then continued with an unfortunate and possibly inadvertent choice of words, saying “I don’t speak to you as a politician, so I can tell you the truth. I speak to you as a concerned New Yorker.” He added, “The truth is we are in a pivotal and dangerous time in this country and in this state.”

Cuomo said he believed the current political discord in the country began with the Republican Party’s “Tea Party” movement, before alleging that “extremists” were now “driving the Democratic Party.” Later, addressing “cancel culture,” he told supporters, “I know because my family paid the price.” He continued, “This country, our social policies, we are a function of evolution... and we want to encourage, not discourage that debate and that growth.” He said when both political parties stop talking, “it is over for us as a democracy.”

Cuomo said he believed crime was the number one issue affecting voters and discussed the 2019 bail reform laws which eliminated cash bail for most misdemeanors and non-violent felony charges. Having supported bail reform at the time, Cuomo said “adjustments” to the law were needed.

“It’s not really being debated because the extremists refuse to have a reasonable conversation [about crime],” he said.



Photo by David Greene

FORMER GOV. ANDREW Cuomo, (left) is greeted by former District 18 city councilman, Rev. Ruben Díaz, Sr., during a meeting of The New York Hispanic Clergy Organization, held at the Christian Community Neighborhood Church on Longfellow Avenue in a neighborhood southwest of Charlotte Gardens, on Thursday, March 17, 2022.

Lawmakers who opposed adjusting bail reform laws argue that it was not the driver of high crime rates. Cuomo then cited the case of Díaz Sr.’s son, Samuel Díaz, who was stabbed in a 2020 attack by a man who was later released and went on to murder another victim in 2021.

The former governor said, “I believe our new mayor, Eric Adams, understands the reality of the crime problem... The bad news is he can’t do it on his own. If they don’t make the changes in the next two weeks before the State budget is done, it will not get done.”

The final State budget approved by Gov. Kathy Hochul in early April did make *some* changes to bail law, discovery law, pre-arraignment detention, involuntary commitment and more, though not to the degree anticipated by some.

Moving on to the topic of family, and briefly mentioning his brother, former CNN anchor, Chris Cuomo, the former governor said, “I have gone through a very difficult year, the most difficult year of my life, not just for me, but because it hurt my family.” Chris Cuomo was fired on Dec. 4, 2021, for not disclosing that he had helped with his brother’s defense of the sexual misconduct allegations. Prior to being fired, Chris Cuomo was also hit with a sexual harassment allegation, which he has denied.

Meanwhile, the former governor sought to frame the allegations as a hit job, referring again to Democratic extremists who he said saw him as “standing in their way.” He alleged such extremists control Albany, adding, “I was limiting them, so they wanted me out. There are people who wanted to run against me. They wanted my job, and they used this opportunity to help themselves politically.”

It is unknown if Cuomo was making a veiled reference to Attorney General Letitia James. The attorney general launched a brief gubernatorial campaign in 2021 before later withdrawing her candidacy. The sexual misconduct allegations against Cuomo were investigated by her office. Investigators concluded that the former gov-

ernor did sexually harass at least 11 women — including former and current state employees — by engaging in unwanted groping, kissing, and hugging, and making inappropriate comments.

They also found that he and his senior staff took actions to retaliate against at least one former employee for coming forward with her story. In addition, they said the executive chamber fostered a “toxic” workplace that enabled “harassment to occur and created a hostile work environment.”

James referred her office’s report findings to local State prosecutors to litigate. Cuomo denied the allegations, though he apologized to the women involved if, he said, he had ever made them feel uncomfortable or caused offense, framing his behavior as either a cultural proclivity or disputing the interpretation of certain events.

Amid Cuomo’s resignation, the State Assembly later suspended an impeachment investigation which had begun to take shape. More recently, four different New York district attorneys (DA) in Nassau, Westchester, Albany, and Oswego decided not to prosecute separate criminal complaints filed with their respective offices regarding the sexual misconduct allegations against Cuomo.

The DA office officials were reported to have found the impacted women to be credible but felt their offices lacked sufficient evidence to convince a judge or jury of the allegations in court. Various media later reported that the Manhattan district attorney’s office dropped its inquiry into similar allegations though no public statement was made detailing why.

“They come up with a report that said I had 11 cases of sexual harassment,” Cuomo said at the March 17 event. “How can you have a report that says 11 cases, and then it goes to qualified law enforcement, and they find no cases? It was fraud; they wanted me out,” he said.

As reported, King was expelled from the City Council on Oct. 5, 2020, over

charges he harassed and discriminated against a female employee, took a kickback from another staffer, and failed to pay a fine for previous misconduct.”

In response, King said, in part, at the time, “It is clear to me from the narrative spun by my colleagues today, in casting their vote to remove me, that they did not consult the transcripts of the hearing that was held by the Committee on Standards and Ethics. It is also apparent that they did not review any of the evidence presented against me during the hearing.”

He added “[I] have always worked to ensure that woman’s rights are protected, supported and enriched. This case had nothing to do with sexual harassment.” He characterized his ousting as “a high-tech lynching, orchestrated by my political enemies to satisfy their agenda.”

Díaz Sr. later asked Cuomo if he was running for governor. Cuomo replied, “What are my political plans? Look, as I’ve said, I’ve been through a very difficult year. I did a lot of soul searching... I served as your governor, and I am so proud of the way I did it. The reason I have political enemies in Albany is because I fought for you, not for them.”

The former governor concluded by telling his audience, “I am not going anywhere and I’m going to continue to fight. I have a lot of options and I’m open to all of them.” Part of that fight continues in the form of a recent ad campaign, seemingly aimed at rehabilitating Cuomo’s image and reportedly and legally paid for out of his million-dollar political war chest. Cuomo later joked, “I’m hoping for an offer from the New York Jets, I still think I could play wide receiver.”

Outside the church, a crowd had gathered to catch a glimpse of the former governor. As he exited, an unidentified Department of Education employee, standing in front of I.S. 845, was asked her opinion of him. She replied, “He’s got my vote because I believe in him.” Asked if she thought Cuomo was removed unfairly from office, she responded, “Yes, definitely.”

Cuomo has also been criticized for his handling of nursing home patients amid the COVID-19 pandemic, while later promoting a book on leadership lessons from the pandemic. In December 2021, The New York Times reported that a State ethics board ordered him to turn over millions of dollars in profits from the pandemic memoir, giving him 30 days to do so.

Meanwhile, reacting to Cuomo’s Bronx appearance, Ana Maria Archila, a 2022 Democratic candidate for lieutenant governor, tweeted, “Cuomo has refused to accept an ounce of responsibility for his actions, instead opting to gaslight those he victimized, and spend millions of his corporate cronies’ donations on ads to project his grotesque message.”

In a possible reference to Díaz Sr., who was widely condemned in 2019 when he said the City Council was “controlled by the homosexual community” and that reporting sexual harassment would make him a “rat,” Archila added, “And now he’s [Cuomo] seeking validation from someone who has made a career of denying the dignity of LGBTQ people and women.”

NEWS BRIEFS

By SÍLE MOLONEY Bronx DA Prom Dress Drive a Success

Bronx District Attorney Darcel D. Clark announced on Monday, April 18, that 350 formal dresses, dozens of fancy shoes, handbags, and other accessories were collected as part of the DA Office's Prom Dress Drive, held in partnership with Bronx Fashion Week. "I just want to thank my staff, and the people in the Bronx community who donated formal wear that will help seniors at Bronx high schools to look their fashionable best on their big night," said Clark. "Graduating high school is a huge accomplishment that needs to be celebrated, and these dresses will help those who can't afford to buy one, celebrate in style. Thanks to my Community Affairs Unit for organizing the donation drive." Bronx Fashion Week will host a Prom Dress Shop later in May for girls to pick out their dresses."

Military Medical Team Departs NCB

The second U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) medical team deployed to support NYC Health + Hospitals, amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, have finished their stint at North Central Bronx (NCB) hospital and were "clapped out" during an appreciation ceremony in March. Healthcare workers at the hospital, located at 3424 Kossuth Avenue in Norwood, bid farewell to their DoD colleagues following their months-long deployment, triggered by the surge in the COVID-19 Omicron variant.

The team comprised providers, nurses, army medics, respiratory technicians, and command staff, who arrived in late January and were trained on hospital policies and procedures before they began to shadow staff. The team provided staffing support to NCB in key areas such as the emergency department, the intensive care units, and the medical-surgery units. The hospital system had previously received support from DoD during the first wave of COVID-19. The medical teams also addressed the emotional and mental health needs of frontline staffers.

Gotham City Panthers Founder Aims to Uplift Local Youth Through Basketball

By JULIAN NAZAR

51-year-old Eric King has observed that the parks near Fordham Manor aren't as busy as they used to be. "When I was young, it was a different era," King said. "The kids were outside playing freeze tag. People were playing basketball on the basketball courts."

Nowadays, he sees kids walking down the street, cell phone in hand, texting. "Everyone in this computer age is comatose," King said. "They are walking, living robots. The energy is not there to the level it was back in my time."

To address this issue, in December 2020, King launched an amateur, youth basketball team, Gotham City Panthers. "I'm giving recreation back, because whether it is in school or out of school, these kids aren't exercising," King said. "I want to create a new team for more bodies to be out here playing."

The purpose of Gotham City Panthers, King said, is to keep kids on the path to school and success. Gym closures, following the onset of the pandemic and the related City shutdown, meant King was unable to find a gym for his team to practice in for over a year. "It halted everything," he said.

On April 6, this year, King sent letters to the Office of the Bronx Borough President, to cure violence group, Bronx Rises Against Gun Violence (B.R.A.G.), and to Madison Square Boys & Girls Club, a social services organization in The Bronx that provides targeted programs to youth



Photo by Miriam Quiñones.

ERIC KING, FOUNDER of Gotham City Panthers amateur basketball team, rocks the Panthers' apparel at Devoe Park's basketball courts in Fordham Manor on Tuesday, March 29, 2022.

in under-served neighborhoods. In the letters, he outlined his need for a gym as well as his goals for the Gotham City Panthers.

His efforts initially led to a breakthrough. The Madison Square Boys & Girls Club, located on East 189th Street and Lorillard Place in Belmont, agreed to rent their gym space to King twice a week. However, on Tuesday, April 18, King said

the club rescinded its offer, citing rising COVID-19 case numbers.

Aside from this setback, King is making progress and has taken several steps to get the team up and running. He opened a bank account with Citibank in the name of Gotham City Panthers. "I do have a lot of the money saved up already to cover uniforms and certain things like that," he said. According to King, Parkview Sports Center, located on West 242nd Street and Broadway on the Kingsbridge/Fieldston border, has agreed to make the sports team's uniforms.

The name of the team has also been trademarked, and King owns the logo. He even has his own team of volunteer coaches. He said he hopes the team will serve as a healthy activity for Bronx kids to keep them out of trouble. "There is a lot of gang activity," King said. "If you don't give them something to do or keep them occupied, someone else who doesn't care for them gives them false love and gives them a different type of recreation."

He recognizes that youth involvement in gun violence is a big problem in The Bronx. "Every day, in the news, since even right before COVID, the youth itself has been shooting at each other tremendously," King said. According to 2021 NYPD data, there were 701 shootings in The Bronx. In around 43 percent of those shootings, either the victim or the perpetrator was between the ages of 18 and 24.

The issue of gun violence is personal

(continued on page 10)

Redistricting Update

As reported, following the 2020 census, and over several months, the New York State Independent Redistricting Commission (IRC) held a number of virtual sessions to discuss the redistricting process with the public. The IRC held the last Bronx County hearing on its proposed redrawn maps for the Assembly, State Senate, and Congressional districts on Nov. 9, 2021. The maps were submitted by the commission to the State legislature on Jan. 3, 2022.

The State legislature ultimately did not vote on these submitted maps. Instead, elected representatives voted to approve alternate

maps proposed by the Democratic Party, and these were ultimately signed off by Gov. Kathy Hochul on Feb. 3, as reported. The latest State-approved congressional map for New York Congressional District 15 is attached, represented by Rep. Ritchie Torres. Norwood, which previously fell under Congressional District 13, now falls under Congressional District 15, as does Spuyten Duyvil and Riverdale, both of which previously fell under Congressional District 16.

The New York State Republican Party immediately mounted a legal challenge, and a judge later overruled the vote taken by the State

legislature (which has a Democratic majority) as being unconstitutional, saying the latest maps were gerrymandered by Democrats, and ordered new maps to be redrawn. Lawmakers had until April 11 to submit new maps but in the meantime, on Monday, April 4, a judge issued a stay on the case, which keeps the latest district lines in place, allowing candidates time to collect the required number of voter signatures needed to get on the ballot for the June Primaries by the required deadline.

Body Found in Bronx River

Police were called to the

Bronx Zoo after a report was provided of a body floating in the Bronx River. Officers from the 52nd Precinct were called to the zoo, located at 2300 Southern Boulevard, at 12:34 p.m. on Wednesday, April 13. Upon arrival, officers discovered the victim floating in the water, unconscious and unresponsive and EMS pronounced the victim deceased at the scene. Police have not released the sex, age or name of the victim, pending notification of the victim's family. The Office of the City's Medical Examiner will determine the exact cause of death.

School Safety Agent Stabbed after Stopping DV Incident at P.S. 69

By SÍLE MOLONEY

A 57-year-old male school safety agent (SSA) was brought to Jacobi hospital after being stabbed Thursday morning, April 14, at P.S. 69 in the Soundview section of the Bronx. He had intervened to protect his colleague, a 36-year-old female guidance counselor, who was the target of a domestic violence assault on the school premises by her ex-partner.

The incident unfolded inside the school, located at 560 Thieriot Avenue, around 7.40 a.m. when the man barged into the school seemingly with the purpose of assaulting his ex-partner. Another 40-year-old male colleague, a teacher, also intervened to protect his female colleague from her attacker. His jacket was slashed but he had no apparent flesh injuries.

The female victim suffered bruising. All three were taken to a local area hospital and due to the description of the assailant provided by the victims, police were able to quickly apprehend the attacker. Claudio Villar, 23, of 228th Street in the Bronx was later arrested on various charges including attempted aggravated murder. NYC Department of Education (DOE) officials said no students had witnessed the incident as it had happened before they arrived at the school.

Mayor Eric Adams briefly addressed



Photo by Síle Moloney

BRONX BOROUGH PRESIDENT Vanessa Gibson, police officials and schools chancellor, David C. Banks, speak to the media outside P.S. 69 in the Soundview section of the Bronx after a stabbing took place inside the school on the morning of Thursday, April 14, 2022.

the incident via video conference during a pre-scheduled press conference at City Hall the same day to announce the expansion of the City's "Gifted and Talented" schools program. He commended the quick response to the incident by the SSA in question, referring to the "heroic act" on the part of the 57-year-old employee in preventing fur-

ther bloodshed from taking place. "It's unacceptable. Violence in our schools will not be accepted," said Adams, who was quarantining due to having contracted COVID-19 days about a week earlier.

The role of school safety agents has, as reported, caused some division among certain groups within the community, with some parents calling for more security in schools, and others advocating to move the oversight of school safety agents away from the NYPD and under the jurisdiction of the DOE.

This was the plan foreseen under the De Blasio administration, born out of the fall out over the 2020 City budget discussions, and amid calls to "defund the police" and direct more money to social services. During an interview on *Inside City Hall* with broadcaster and host, Errol Louis, in late October 2021, then Mayor Bill De Blasio addressed the point, saying, "Look, clearly, I thought that they were doing well under the NYPD. The City Council really wanted to make a change. I worked with them on a plan where we all had to come together and find common ground."

He added, "But we agreed to a two-year transition. That was something I was adamant about, to give us time to do it the right way, and to make sure the kids and the whole school community

were safe. In the meantime, of course, Eric Adams has been elected mayor and everything I've heard him say suggests he thinks that they should continue in the NYPD. So, that will obviously ultimately be his decision."

Another press conference was held later on Thursday morning, outside P.S. 69, and was attended by NYC Chancellor David Banks, Bronx Borough President Vanessa Gibson and Assemblyman Kenny Burgos (A.D. 85). Gibson later tweeted, "Thankful for the heroic efforts of our school leaders, educators and school safety agents responding to this morning's terrible incident at PS 69, Journey Prep School. A suspect was taken into police custody and no students were injured. We are closely monitoring the situation."

Meanwhile, Banks later released a statement on the incident, saying, "Violence has absolutely no place in our schools, and this senseless act against an essential member of our school community is unacceptable."

He added, "Our incredible educators and school safety agents work every day to keep our children safe, and I am grateful for their steadfast dedication to our schools. We are offering supports to this school community."

**David Greene contributed to this story.*

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Bronx Veterans Concerned over VA Hospital Closures

By SARAH HUFFMAN

News of the announced closures of the Manhattan and Brooklyn Veterans Affairs hospitals raised concern among veterans during the March meeting of Bronx Community Board 7's Veterans Affairs' committee.

Committee chair, Chad Royer, said announcements of the closures had arisen following an Asset and Infrastructure Review (AIR) Report by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), which included recommendations by the VA Secretary.

He said the AIR commission, which is appointed by the president, uses the report to figure out how to provide a better healthcare network in the right locations, with the right infrastructure, to all veterans. After review and public hearings, the commission then submits its own recommendations to the president for review.

Royer said that Denis McDonough, the current VA Secretary, said at a press conference, in reference to the 2022 AIR report, that the closures were part of an effort to consolidate healthcare in some areas of the country and redirect money to expanding hospital facilities in other areas. He said that McDonough cited a growth in the veteran population in the southeastern part of the United States and a decrease in the veteran population in the northeastern region.

Royer noted that the Bronx VA hospital, the James J. Peters Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center, located at 130 West Kingsbridge Road in Fordham Manor, would not be affected by the plan. However, he was worried there would be trickle down effects if the other two City VA hospitals were to close, such as an increase in patients at the Bronx center, and not enough staff to cater for them.

"One thing I did read is that they're going to put time and money into building extra services in the Bronx VA," Royer said. "While this may be good, what matters is how it is going to be accessible to the veterans who live in the Tri-state area, and even just [...] outside the Tri-state area," he said.

For his part, Amjad Mujaahid said there should be major pushback from the veteran community about the news and that people should let elected officials know it was an important issue.

"This is outrageous," he said. "They should not be doing this. There's too much of a need out here for these medical centers. In the city, specifically, we got over 8 million people here, and over 58,000 veterans and their families, you know, so I'm just, I'm just floored by it," said Mujaahid.

Jean Hill said it annoyed her that people wanted to honor veterans on holidays [like Memorial Day] but were still



Photo by Sile Moloney

THE JAMES J. Peters Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center, located at 130 West Kingsbridge Road in Fordham Manor, has not been named as one of the VA hospitals to be closed in New York City but veterans are concerned nonetheless about the impact other closures will have on the center.

willing to take away what she said were needed, medical facilities to treat veterans for injuries sustained while fighting for their country.

"It's only flag waving when it's a holiday or when it sounds good," Hill said. "But then, they don't follow through on some of the technical stuff." Mujaahid suggested flooding elected officials' emails and phones, letting them know they needed to stand up against the closures.

Hill also suggested talking to the city council chair for the veterans' committee and raising the issue to local, State, and federal politicians. Isha Taylor talked about her experience of going to different VA hospitals and expressed her frustration at the level of reduction of veteran resources.

"Even if they don't close the Bronx VA, the Bronx VA is not as equipped as the Brooklyn VA is," she said, adding that she had attended both, and that the Brooklyn VA was the best one. "That's actually where I started my radiation therapy and different things like that, and I share that because even though it's not impacting all hospitals, this is a major issue that we can't be silent on," she said.

Joe Bello, chair of the VA's Acuity Veterans Engagement Board, said he had heard it might take 10 years for the proposed closures to take effect and suggested that if it were found that veterans couldn't access their usual inpatient care, one of the two hospitals might stay open. He agreed with Royer, however, that hospital closures would ultimately hurt the Bronx VA hospital because staff and resources would be stretched.

Bello said veteran population numbers have been dropping in New York City over the past few years, but that

there hadn't been a super accurate count in a while. He added that many Staten Island and New Jersey veterans come to the Manhattan VA hospital for treatment.

"The Bronx is the only VA hospital between here and Albany," Bello said. "So, you know, again, there is a general fear out there that a lot of vets will start to move to the Bronx VA. They want to go to a VA hospital, and so you're going to wind up seeing them move to registering into the Bronx VA. And again, you're forcing that VA system, that hospital, to take on additional numbers.. additional patients," he said.

Meanwhile, Taylor was outraged by the VA's reasoning for the closures, saying they would affect Black and brown families, lower income people, and senior citizens the most. She said she was frustrated it would mean people would have to travel more to get access to the treatment they needed.

"That just all of a sudden you're going to say, 'Oh, we're going to close,' because veterans are moving now. What the hell does that even mean?" she said. "It [AIR report] doesn't address any of our needs or concerns. It only speaks to *their* need and *their* desire to privatize," she said.

Bello agreed that the report included lots of selling points from the VA that could largely be countered. "We still have veterans here and we have a large veteran population, and the thing is.... let's be honest....the City and the VA have done a very poor job in terms of senior veterans," he said.

The March meeting also featured a presentation about the VA's aid and attendance program, also known as the VA pension. It was given by Martha Longo PhD, a certified senior care manager at Life Force Services.

Longo said the program is a non-taxable, monthly benefit paid to veterans who need homecare services and who don't have the means to pay for it. Longo's company focuses on providing caregiving services to seniors and veterans and also helps veterans get approved for the VA aid and attendance program.

To qualify for the program, veterans must be 65 years of age or older or have a permanent disability. They must also have an honorable discharge, meet monthly minimum income requirements, and have no more than \$130,000 in retirement savings, including stocks, bonds, or any 401k plans. They cannot receive any VA compensation. If they are receiving Medicaid, they need approval from a social worker.

The benefit also extends to a living spouse, if the spouse was married to a veteran at the time of the veteran's death, if the spouse has not remarried and if he / she requires homecare services. It also extends to veteran couples but not to the children of veterans.

The veteran must also be a wartime veteran who served in the Vietnam War, the Korean War, World War II, or the Gulf War. Taylor questioned why it only covered these four wars when there were so many other veterans who had served in other wars, including herself. Longo agreed the rule was discriminatory toward some veterans and said she believed it should cover all veterans.

She added that Life Force Services doesn't charge for helping people to get approved for such benefits and it also works with the Care Planning Institute, a third-party vendor that works closely with veterans to gather all documents necessary to get approved for the benefit.

Raul Gonzalez asked what the maximum benefit available was. Longa said couples can receive up to \$2,431, single veterans \$2,050, and living spouses \$1,371.

She said veterans also had to remain in compliance with the program requirements and that the benefit had to be solely spent on homecare services. Longa said, sometimes, the VA conducts random audits, and the Care Planning Institute has to ensure veterans remain in compliance at all times.

In wrapping up the meeting, Royer confirmed he had asked Woodlawn Cemetery if it would be possible to arrange some type of ceremony to mark Memorial Day this year. He said there had been some interest in doing a similar-type event last year, but the cemetery had not been allowing outsiders to enter for an indefinite duration due to the pandemic. He said he didn't have an update yet but hoped to have some clarity on the matter for the April meeting in order to start planning, and if people were interested in pursuing the idea.

Playground Shut, Scaffold Returns after Wall Collapse at Tracey Towers

By DAVID GREENE

A partial exterior wall collapse that occurred in early March at Tracey Towers has prompted management to erect a sidewalk shed to protect residents and pedestrians, and NYC Department of Buildings (DOB) has issued a partial stop work order, shutting the Tracey Towers playground on the complex grounds that had re-opened in 2015 after an infusion of \$200,000 in City Council funds.

On March 10, a resident contacted *Norwood News* saying management had told residents strong winds had brought down the wall. A visit the following day to the massive dual-tower complex, located opposite Mosholu Parkway subway station in Jerome Park, found construction workers still clearing the fallen bricks and securing the wall with a giant tarp.

A follow-up visit on April 19 found metal barricades blocking off the damaged wall to exiting vehicles from the Tracey Towers parking area, and sandbags holding down a pair of giant tarps.

Back on April 1, Andrew Rudansky, press secretary at DOB said his office had no record of a wall collapse and that the owners of the building had obtained a permit to install a sidewalk shed in front of the building. Rudansky added, "The sidewalk shed may be related to facade maintenance, but we have not received any filings for the work as of today. The most recent Facade Inspection and Safety Report (FISP) the owners filed with DOB was back in 2019, and it indicated the facade was in safe condition."

On April 4, Don Miller, president of the public relations firm, West End Strategies, Ltd., issued a statement on behalf of the building manager that read, "A small section of a freestanding wall near the parking ramp at Tracey Towers experienced a partial failure. The wall separates the vehicular exit ramp from the residential parking deck. It is not known if the wall was possibly struck by a vehicle which may have contributed to its failure."

Miller continued, "The structural engineer recommended removing an additional section of the freestanding wall and replacing it with fencing that conforms to the design of the complex. The safety of residents and the public remains the number one priority of Tracey Towers Associates. As a precautionary measure, a sidewalk shed has been installed during the construction of the wall and fencing."

On April 5, Jean Hill, president of the Tracey Towers Tenants' Organization, discounted Miller's contention that a vehicle had possibly struck the wall, telling *Norwood News*, "We had a bad rainstorm that night and the wind was really, really hard and it just knocked it over." She added, "No, no, no, nothing hit it. That wall is raised up where you come down the [elevated] driveway; a car could not have hit that."

Hill then recalled the last time Tracey Towers had to erect a temporary sidewalk shed, noting that it had stayed there for 15 years. "They were supposed to do painting and do other work on the building, and they were slow-dragging their feet."

Norwood News asked Hill about the small holes that occasionally opened on the driveway exit ramp, through which residents could often see the MTA's Jerome Avenue Maintenance Shop below. Hill shot back, "You sure can. What happens is....I don't know if it's wear and tear... it could probably be because of the cars going back and forth and it could be vibrations under there from the trains, I



Photo by David Greene

AFTER A 300-SQUARE-FOOT section of masonry veneer collapsed at Tracey Towers, in Jerome Park, following stormy weather, workers began clearing the debris and securing the wall on Thursday, March 10.

have no clue." She added that workers simply patch the holes.

Asked if there was a drop-ceiling below the ramp or any protection barrier below the asphalt, Hill replied, "Nope, that's what it is. Well, nobody has fallen through or anything like that and then, when we b*tch and complain about it, then they'll come in and they fill the holes."

Tracey Towers was created through the Mitchell-Lama, middle-income housing program, and opened in 1974. It is overseen by NYC Department of Housing, Preservation & Development (HPD), and comprises 871 one, two, and three-bedroom affordable apartments.

After dispatching inspectors to the site on April 4, DOB deputy press secretary, Ana Alcantara, said on April 15, "During the inspection, they observed evidence that an approximately 300 square foot section of masonry veneer had collapsed from a parapet wall adjacent to the parking access ramp at the property." Alcantara added, "DOB issued a violation to the owners for failure to maintain the property and ordered them to obtain the appropriate per-

mits for the work."

Regarding the claims of holes in the asphalt along the driveway exit ramp near the children's playground, Alcantara said, "There is a Partial Vacate Order in effect for the entire playground located at 40 West Mosholu Parkway South, due to the condition of a nearby retaining wall that is in a state of disrepair. This Partial Vacate Order remains in effect today."

An April 16 visit to the housing complex found no children playing on the basketball courts nor in the playground that had opened on August 27, 2017, following a \$200,000 renovation financed by discretionary funding obtained by then-District 11 city councilman, Andrew Cohen. However, the playground area was not roped off nor was there any visible signage indicating that the playground was closed. When *Norwood News* informed a security guard of the situation, she vowed to inform management.

According to DOB records, 20 West Mosholu Parkway, the location of one of the towers, currently has a reported 108 complaints and 16 outstanding violations, including nine for problems with the building's elevators. Some open violations date back to 2017. One elevator violation stemmed from a fire on October 18, 2021, as reported by *Norwood News*, which left the 40-story building with just one working elevator.

Meanwhile, DOB records reveal 192 complaints and 20 open violations for 40 West Mosholu Parkway, the address for the other tower, with one violation alleging that an elevator at that building had been out for six straight months.

Follow-up questions were sent by *Norwood News* to Miller via email on Tuesday, April 19, regarding the Partial Vacate Order for the playground, the playground not being closed off to the public, and the holes where tenants can see into the MTA's maintenance yard. We did receive a response as of press date.

**Sile Moloney contributed to this story.*



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Gotham City Panthers Founder Aims to Uplift Local Youth Through Basketball

(continued from page 6)

for King. “I had several co-workers who lost their kids to gun violence,” he said. “I have several friends I grew up with who lost their lives to gun violence. A long time ago, I was shot at.”

For this reason, King contacted David Caba, an experienced cure violence leader and vice president with B.R.A.G., to ask for his help with promoting the Gotham City Panthers. B.R.A.G. works with young people, community residents and organizations, and the public to promote safer streets and new community norms where violence is not accepted.

Program staff help reduce gun violence by identifying youth at risk for retaliatory violence, working with victims and their families and friends to help prevent future violence, and providing links to resources and follow-up services.

Before the basketball tryouts, he’s asked Caba to address the team recruits on the topic of gun violence. For his part, Caba is interested, and knows firsthand how sport can be used to engage youth. B.R.A.G. already launched a successful boxing program at St. Barnabas Hospital’s Healthplex in Little Italy, as reported by *Norwood News*.

In reference to B.R.A.G.’s ongoing community outreach and intervention efforts, Caba told *Norwood News* in a phone interview on March 2, “We spoke to different organizations prior to the pandemic.” One of those was Gotham City Panthers. “We are trying to reconvene those conversations,” he said.

In terms of its success rate, Caba said B.R.A.G. reduced gun violence by 50 percent within its first year of operation in The Bronx in 2014. Drawing on five years of shooting data at the time, B.R.A.G.’s violence interrupters identified the most dangerous areas for shootings and homicides in the 46th precinct, which covers Fordham, University Heights, Morris Heights, and Mt. Hope. These were East 183rd Street up to Fordham Road, and East 188th Street between Jerome Avenue and the Grand Concourse.

In 2013, there were eight shootings in these areas. “When we implemented our program in 2014, there were four shootings in that hot zone,” Caba said. They have since expanded their work into the 47th and 52nd precincts. Caba attributes the effectiveness of B.R.A.G. to the identity of its messengers, some of whom have firsthand experience of street violence. “The key to it is credible messaging,” he



Photo by Miriam Quiñones.
ERIC KING, FOUNDER of Gotham City Panthers amateur basketball team, attempts a hook shot at Devoe Park’s basketball courts in Fordham Manor on Tuesday, March 29, 2022.

said. “The very individuals that were affecting others were the cure. That is why it is so successful.”

Caba has a pretty good idea of what he might say in a speech at the tryouts for Gotham City Panthers, saying he would start out with simple questions centering on people’s personal experience with gun violence and whether they know anyone who has made it rich off of street activity.

Meanwhile, besides inviting B.R.A.G. to his basketball tryouts, King also plans

to invite some rappers he knows. He has had conversations with Azie Faison, founder of the Hip-Hop group, Mobstyle. Faison has appeared on VladTV multiple times. “He has street credibility,” King said.

Once he has assembled his team, King would like to place them in tournaments with some of the City’s prominent teams like the Riverside Hawks and the New York Gauchos. “I want my team to play against teams that have established names, so we can get recognition,” he said.

Another future goal is to provide unique opportunities to his players. “I want to sponsor them so they can do basketball camps during the offseason,” King said. “I want to buy them pairs of sneakers and have family nights where I take the family out to a Knicks game.”

To cover these expenses, he plans to seek funding from several sources, including the Office of the Bronx Borough President. “I would ask for a certain amount and divide it among all those things I need,” King said. For now, the priority is to secure use of a gym to schedule practice sessions for his players four days a week. “I want to get them tournament ready,” King said.

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CRIME FILE

BY SÍLE MOLONEY



76-Year-old Woman Attacked & Robbed

The NYPD is looking for the person seen in the accompanying photo who is sought for questioning in connection to a robbery that occurred in Fordham Manor. On Saturday, April 2, at approximately 1.40 p.m., shortly after a 76-year-old woman withdrew money from an ATM located inside a bank, located at 1 East Fordham Road, the person grabbed the victim's purse and threw her to the ground. The assailant then fled, northbound, on Jerome Avenue with the victim's purse. The victim was transported by EMS to Saint Barnabas Medical Center in stable condition with a laceration to her head.



at approximately 2 p.m., the victim, a 16-year-old male, was followed into 124 West Fordham Road (Antillana Supermarket) by four male individuals.

The group proceeded to steal, at knifepoint, approximately \$80 from the teen's wallet. They later gave the wallet back to the victim and demanded that he leave the store. The group then fled on foot to parts unknown. There were no injuries reported as a result of the incident. The suspects are each described as male, about 18 to 20 years of age.



Fordham Manor: Two Men Hit in Drive-By Shooting

The NYPD is asking for the public's help identifying the individuals seen in the accompanying screenshot who are sought in connection to an assault that occurred in Fordham Manor. On Thursday morning, April 14, at around 1.40 a.m., police received a report concerning two males who had reportedly been shot. A 37-year-old man was standing in front of 2654 Valentine Avenue when two males traveling in a dark vehicle shot at the victim multiple times, striking him in the right ankle.

A 25-year-old man was also struck by a bullet which grazed his chin on the right-hand side as he was standing in front of 2650 Briggs Avenue. Both victims were transported to St. Barnabas Hospital in stable condition. There were no other injuries reported as a result of the incident. The two perpetrators were last seen in the dark-colored vehicle. One was wearing all black and the other, a light-colored hoodie.

20 Alleged G-Side/Drilly Gang Members Charged with Murder, Other Charges

Bronx District Attorney Darcel D. Clark and Police Commissioner Keechant L. Sewell announced on Thursday, April 7, that 20 people, including four adolescent offenders, were charged with various offenses related to murder, non-fatal shootings, and stabbings which took place mainly on East Gun Hill Road, Hull Avenue and Decatur Avenue in Norwood and the surrounding areas.

According to the investigation, the defendants, alleged members of the G-Side/Drilly gang, a subset of the Bloods Sex

Money Murder gang, allegedly carried out a total of 32 acts of violence that spanned a three-year period, between Sept. 20, 2018, and March 15, 2022. Clark said the 82-count indictment included charges of conspiracy, murder, manslaughter, attempted murder, criminal possession of a weapon, reckless endangerment, assault, attempted assault, and grand larceny.

The defendants allegedly carried out fatal shootings, as well as non-fatal shootings and stabbings, killing two people and leaving six people wounded. They are prominent in the Drill rap scene, and in music videos that were posted to YouTube, they allegedly boasted about the acts of violence that they or their associates carried out. A total of 18 guns were seized during the investigation and three defendants were also charged for allegedly committing an act of violence while held in Rikers Island.

According to Urban Dictionary, drill is a branch of rap music that can be compared to trap music. Both are about life in the streets, but while trap music is about the trap (hence the name) and drug dealing, drill music is about the violent side of the streets. "Drill is aggressive, dark, violent, and about guns and shootings," according to Urban Dictionary.

On Jan. 9, 2019, at approximately 1 p.m., four defendants, including one teen and other individuals, surrounded an 18-year-old CUNY Prep student as he left his school and attempted to rob him, allegedly attacking the victim with multiple weapons, including a knife. The teen was seriously injured and required emergency resuscitation and life-saving blood transfusions. Video surveillance captured the incident.

The goal of CUNY Prep is to offer out-of-school youngsters an opportunity to pursue an alternative pathway to earn their High School Equivalency Diploma within a college-going culture.

On July 20, 2020, as reported, in front of 3343 Decatur Avenue, six defendants, including two who were teens at the time, began to chase victim, James Rivera, 24. Four defendants allegedly shot at Rivera multiple times, and one defendant also allegedly attempted to stab him when he fell on the ground. The victim died of a gunshot wound to the back.

On Sept. 29, 2020, at around

2 p.m. on East Fordham Road, as reported, two juvenile defendants allegedly fired shots at their target in a busy commercial area near a subway station, endangering the lives of multiple people, including children. No one was injured.

On April 25, 2021, inside the Robert N. Davoren Center in Rikers Island, three defendants allegedly assaulted a rival gang member. On March 17, 2021, four defendants went to an apartment on Hull Avenue and allegedly shot Delilah Vasquez, 20, at close range in the forehead, killing her. Video surveillance shows the defendants allegedly entering and fleeing the building. As reported by Norwood News at the time, the victim's mother was threatened by a gang in the aftermath of the killing.

On June 28, 2021, at around 10 p.m., two defendants fired multiple shots at their target in front of 3573 Dekalb Avenue. The shooting left three innocent bystanders, a 66-year-old woman, a 39-year-old man, and a 31-year-old man, wounded.

On the evening of Oct. 22, 2021, as reported, two defendants waited outside a barbershop on East Gun Hill Road for approximately 15 minutes, then entered and allegedly fired multiple shots at their target. The individual who was getting a haircut at the time, tried to hide behind a chair and was shot in the stomach and leg. He was taken to the hospital and survived. Surveillance video of the incident shows patrons in the barber shop running for cover.

In the context of the charges, Clark said in part, "These defendants terrorized residents of the Fordham/Bedford Park neighborhoods who were forced to run for their lives as bullets flew. We thank the NYPD for their intense work on this investigation. We are doing all we can to battle the gun scourge, but more must be done to deviate young people from a life of gangs and senseless violence."

For her part, Sewell said, "Today's sweeping indictment highlights the focused efforts that continue to identify the relatively small percentage of people responsible for much of our city's crime and disorder."

Seven defendants were arraigned Tuesday, April 5, by Bronx Supreme Court Justices George Villegas and Naita Semaj, and are due back in court later this month. The remaining defendants, who are in custody already, are awaiting arraignment. If convicted of the top count of

first-degree conspiracy, four of the defendants face a minimum of 15-25 years to a maximum of life in prison.

The arraigned defendants are Brayan Hernandez, AKA Breezo, 17, Bronx; Jaheim Buchanan, AKA Jah, 17, Bronx; Anthony Brea, AKA Chubbs, 17, Bronx; Michael Brito, AKA Yogi, 20, Bronx; Ali Doby, AKA Lee Drilly, 19, Bronx; Claurvin Rosario, AKA Pegotes, AKA Kelvin Rodriguez, 21, Bronx; and Omar Gibbs, AKA Leeky, 20, Bronx.

The remaining defendants, who are in custody already and awaiting arraignment, are Richard Santiago, AKA Swift, 21, Bronx; John Martinez, AKA Suave Drilly, 23, Bronx; Tabu Harris, AKA Spazz Drilly, 21, Bronx; Careem Williams, AKA Houdini, 20, Bronx; Mario Jimenez, AKA MB, 19, Bronx; True Bell, 18, Bronx; Nasir Carter, AKA Nas Forty, 19, Bronx; Donjuan Patterson, AKA Bobby Drilly, 17, Bronx; Precious Williams, AKA PW Jet, 21, Bronx; Daniel Abreu, AKA D-Dot, 18, Bronx; Brandon Beltres, AKA Nonstop, 19, Bronx; Angel Rodriguez, AKA Milly2Drilly, 20, Bronx; and Briant Gonzalez, AKA Faze Drilly, 23, Bronx.

If convicted of the top count of first-degree conspiracy, four of the defendants face a minimum of 15-25 years to a maximum of life in prison.

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

Kingsbridge Cell Phone Robbery

The NYPD said a cell phone store in Kingsbridge was robbed at gunpoint on Thursday, April 7. Police said the store, located at 5609 Broadway, was robbed at around 6.45 p.m., with the perpetrator making off with some merchandise and cash of an undisclosed value. Boost Mobile store is located at the address. No firm description is currently available for the perpetrator. There was one employee and no customers in the store at the time of the incident. No shots were fired, no injuries were reported, and there have been no arrests. The investigation remains ongoing.

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 Crime Stoppers website at WWW.NYPDCRIMESTOPPERS.COM, or on Twitter @NYPDTips. All calls are strictly confidential.

University Heights: 16-Year-Old Robbed at Knifepoint

The NYPD is asking for the public's assistance identifying the individuals seen in the accompanying photos who are sought in connection to a robbery that occurred in University Heights. It was reported to police that on Sunday, April 3,



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Letters To The Editor

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

Say What You Mean, Mean What You Say

You should know that Gov. Kathy Hochul recently announced that New York will not allow Republicans to come and change its reproductive laws. What she really meant to say but did not have the audacity to say it, is New York will not allow the Republicans to come and change the Democrats' radical, abortion laws.

She made this declaration, apparently too ashamed to use the word "abortion." The leftist Democrats have, for too long, controlled the verbiage and they have successfully done so for the purpose of confusing voters. They hide behind words that are less harsh, and as a result, easier to swallow. They change the language (actual words) to conceal their true intentions (agenda).

The Left knows they will face the voter's repudiation which can result in their loss on election day. So, the truth is hidden behind carefully selected language, crafted to purposely confuse the voter. This change in words is a clever, sophisticated, but deceiving strategy that too often results in uniting a large block of voters who do not fully understand this play on words and their true hidden meanings. Therefore, words used in place of the actual words appear to be something they are not.

This is intended to, deceitfully, hide Democrats' leftist agenda, an agenda that most people, especially people of faith, do not support. The voter will unknowingly vote for pro-abortion candidates, and for the very policies they abhor. Abortion and late-term abortions become laws disguised as "pro-choice rights" or "reproductive rights" etc.

Most Democrats and elected officials, either willingly play into this game of semantics or are too ashamed to publicly say what they really mean. They will not campaign as a pro-abortion candidate, and instead they campaign as "pro-choice" candidates. You see how easier that is to swallow? I guess this makes them feel better about themselves. They convince themselves that they are doing something "noble," something great that would benefit women and their unborn children.

During campaign season, we often hear candidates and elected officials proudly say that they support a "woman's right to choose" or they will promise to protect "reproductive rights," but don't be fooled. Please know that these nice phrases are synonymous to saying they support "abortion," that, my dear reader, leads to the end of an innocent life. As the saying goes, "A spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down."

It is important for you to know, that we, as Christians, followers of Jesus Christ, and believers in the Holy Scriptures, believe in "reproduction," not "abortion." Reproduction produces life while abortions always lead to death. Supporters of abortion recognize this fact, so they will go all out to transform the harsh word of "abortion" and turn it into something it is not. Abortion is not "reproductive health." Abortion is not about being "pro-choice," when the only choice is the death of the unborn. Abortion

is not about a "woman's health" when women too often have suffered with emotional, mental, and physical ailments following their abortion procedures.

It is unfortunate that far too many Christian voters and people of faith have been purposely deceived, and do not know that when they support and vote for a person who publicly says that they are "pro-choice" or "pro-reproductive rights," they are voting for a person who supports the death of an innocent life who is still in their mother's womb.

These changes in our language, this game of semantics, and the transformation of the true meaning of the word has negatively impacted our society. It has caused much confusion, division, misunderstandings, and the condemnation of Christians and other groups of faith. This has proven to be detrimental to the people of our City and State.

This is not based on racism, discrimination, or homophobia, let alone hate speech. This has everything to do with the truth, transparency, liberty, freedom of religion, and the free exercise thereof.

**Rev. Ruben Diaz Sr.
The Bronx**

Federal Discretionary Funds Not Secured by DOT

On April 6, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) published a "Federal Notice of Available Funding for Federal Fiscal Year 2021." The available funding for various projects makes for interesting reading. Gov. Hochul, U.S. Sens. Chuck Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand, members of the NY congressional delegation, Mayor Eric Adams, NYC DOT Commissioner Ydanis Rodriguez, and other elected officials constantly complain that Washington D.C. shortchanges NYC and the MTA.

Yet none of them has ever said there is still discretionary FTA funding allocated to two New York City projects totaling \$19 million that NYC DOT has yet to secure as grants. The allocations fall under the category, "Prior Year Unobligated Allocations for Buses and Bus Facilities."

Funding of \$9,000,000 is allocated for the Safe Routes to Transit project, to make infrastructure, pedestrian safety, and accessibility improvements for transit riders along 86th Street in Brooklyn, and \$10,000,000 is allocated for the South Bronx BX6 Select Bus Service.

DOT should have previously submitted grant applications to avail of this funding. Has DOT entered formal grant applications in FTA's Transit Award Management System, used to award and manage federal grants? If so, has DOT failed to answer all of FTA's concerns and issues as part of any ongoing grant review?

The availability of these funds will lapse in September 2023 and will be lost. DOT is in intense competition with other transit agencies from other cities and states around the nation. It hurts NYC, the MTA, and the Metro NY area when DOT leaves these discretionary dollars on the table, year after year. Our congressional delegation also loses credibility when lobbying for more transit dollars.

There is no incentive for Washington to approve additional discretionary transit dol-

lars. As each year goes by, project costs also tend to increase. The dollar value of the earmarked funding does not. In the end, taxpayers and commuters are the losers. When will Mayor Adams and DOT Commissioner Rodriguez make this a priority and secure these funds?

**Larry Penner,
Great Neck**

Free Workers from Slave Wages

The Norwood News "Faith for Fair Play Rally" article spotlights how even our country's most essential workers are paid horribly low poverty wages. The article cites an October 2021 report, "The High Cost of Low Wages," that stated that 74 percent of New York seniors and people with disabilities were unable to retain their home care workers in 2021. Many such workers have left this profession due to wages as low as \$12.50 an hour.

This is a violation of the current minimum wage laws that require \$15 an hour in New York City, Long Island and Westchester as well as \$13.20 an hour in the rest of the State. But even if wages were raised to those levels, they would still be poverty wages. The federal minimum wage is \$7.25 an hour, which is ridiculous. Such salaries should be considered a violation of the Thirteenth Amendment.

What's worse is how important this work is, and how hard it is, but the majority of workers are underpaid, while the concentration of wealth among the richest gets greater. Forbes magazine's October 8, 2020, headline said it perfectly, "Top 1% of U.S. Households Hold 15 Times More Wealth Than Bottom 50% Combined." The U.S. is the eighth wealthiest country in the world according to World Population Review but, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, as of 2020, 11.4 percent of our population was poor.

But it's much worse when you consider that the official U.S. poverty rate is \$12,880 a year for a single person, and \$28,500 a year for a family of four. Try affording rent, food, clothing, transportation, and health care on \$28,501 a year as a single person.

Obviously, the richest people can afford to pay much higher salaries and more taxes so that all our citizens can receive the complete health care coverage that all other developed nations provide their people, but the problem is greed. Even though their wealth has continued to increase during the pandemic, like the gangster played by Edward G. Robinson in "Key Largo," they still want "MORE! MORE! MORE!"

Income distribution in this country is like the food distribution in the Kramden residence [from the 1950s show, "The Honeymooners"]. When her mother asks Alice, "You look frail, are you getting enough to eat?" she answers, "You wouldn't say that if you saw the food bills." Her mother replies, "I don't doubt the bills are high, but how much of the food are you getting?" A report from Princeton and Northwestern Universities concludes that the U.S. is not a democracy, but an oligarchy. This is based not only on the unequal distribution of wealth but also on the greater influence the richest people have on our elected officials. This is ironic considering how often the media refers to Russia as an oligarchy.

**Richard Warren,
Van Cortlandt Village**

Bronxites Remember Happy Land Fire 32 Years Later

by DAVID GREENE

Unable to gather for the annual memorial event for two consecutive years due to COVID-19 restrictions, family members of the 87 people killed in the 1990 Happy Land Social Club fire gathered in late March with members of Bronx Community Board 6 and elected officials, to remember, once again, the victims of the tragic event.

A smaller crowd than in past years, the group gathered on Friday, March 25, in the small park located at Southern Boulevard and East Tremont Avenue, where a monument is erected across the street from where the fire occurred at 1959 Southern Boulevard in the West Farms section of the borough.

Lt. Roy David, a member of EMS for the last 48 years, was present on the day to pay his respects. Mingling among those in attendance and speaking informally to them, he recalled being part of the first EMS team that arrived at the scene of the tragedy. "The call came across of rubbish burning in front," he said. "I pulled up over here, and I was told by the firemen that there were up to 100 people inside and I said, 'Where?' Because there was no sign or anything."

David continued, "It was upstairs, and the two windows were blocked by these two huge air-conditioners." He recalled treating one of the lone survivors, the club's disc-jockey, who apparently ran through the flames. Only six people escaped the blaze according to a 2016 article by The New York

Times. The outlet reported that Happy Land was found to have lacked fire exits, alarms and sprinklers, prompting City officials to belatedly form a task force to toughen and enforce regulations governing social clubs.

On his reason for attending the annual vigil, David later told *Norwood News*, "It's something that still resonates in my heart. It's a very sad situation and it was a very tragic event from then until now. It's just good, and very supportive to have all of these people around, you know...the families and people from the community all joining together just to commemorate this event."

Bronx Borough President Vanessa Gibson was also in attendance and spent some time speaking informally with family members of the victims. The vigil took place just two-months after the Bronx's most recent mass fire tragedy, the Twin Parks Northwest fire at **333, East 181st Street** in Fordham Heights. As reported, that fire killed 17 people, including 9 children on Sunday, Jan. 9, and was caused by a faulty space heater. The situation was worsened by non-functioning, self-closing doors, a factor which impeded residents from escaping due to heavy smoke. A class action legal case has been launched by residents of the public housing complex against both the property managers and the City.

Referencing the ongoing relief efforts in the wake of the tragedy, Gibson said, "We've set a really high standard, and now, everyone wants to be accommodated to that level, which is a lot." She then spoke of three or four families who did not live at Twin Parks but who had lost family members in the blaze, including a 2-year-old child who died while staying with a babysitter in the building.

Meanwhile, due to prevailing COVID-19 social distancing restrictions which were in effect on the last two anniversaries of the Happy Land Social Club tragedy, including on the 30th anniversary in 2020, Carmen Crisanto of Belmont had been unable to visit the park where the Happy Land Memorial Monument is located in memory of the victims.

Instead, she said she stood outside the locked iron fence to pay her respects to her sister, Justa Gladys Batiz, who was just 25 when she died in the fire. "From day one, every year I would come here and provide flowers, and we used to gather at the church down the block," she said. "We used to go there for the mass and then from



Photo by David Greene

MOURNERS OF THE Happy Land Social Club fire of March 25, 1990, read the names of the 87 victims who lost their lives in the fire during an event marking the 32nd anniversary of the tragedy on March 25, 2022, in the West Farms section of The Bronx.

there, we would come here."

Crisanto continued, "My sister would be 57 years old [this year]. Yesterday, I couldn't sleep because I knew I was going to come down here, and every time I think about it, I don't want to think about it, but I have to, because I was the one that identified my sister when the tragedy happened, because they took pictures of all the dead bodies, and I remember the school right there."

She concluded, "That's where they took all the pictures, and the relatives had to come and identify the pictures." Crisanto said she was able to identify her sister at the P.S. 67 location from her yellow dress and curly hair.

State Sen. Luis Sepúlveda (S.D. 32) also spoke to the crowd and said he had been approached by Ivine Galarza, the former chairwoman of Bronx Community Board 6, and by family members of the victims who suggested some type of sign be hung on the fence outside the park, in addition to the monument plaque, that would tell the story of the fire tragedy. He said Galarza also suggested the park be kept open "every single day" so family members could visit on birthdays and anniversaries.

Family, community board members, and David later took turns reading the 87 names of those who perished in the fateful blaze.

After the ceremony, *Norwood News* asked Gibson about the suggestion of keeping the park open. "As of right now, it's closed all the time and so, we would really like to work with the Parks Department to find a responsible way of opening this memorial [site] and providing access to family members and friends," she said.

The borough president added, "I don't know that we necessarily want to open this up as a full-fledged park, with the normal park regulations and rules because obviously, I want to be very concerned about maintaining

the sanctity of this place, with a sense of dignity, and I don't want it to be the victim of any vandalism or anything."

The park housing the Happy Land memorial monument was later found to be open on Saturday, April 16, but this may have been the result of "normal" access to the park having resumed around Easter time. Calls placed with Bronx Community Board 6 on the matter were not immediately returned.

In the aftermath of the Happy Land blaze in 1990, detectives tracked down the perpetrator, Julio Gonzalez, who they said had flown into a rage with his on-again, off-again girlfriend, Lydia Feliciano, who had been at the club on the night of the tragedy. Gonzalez intentionally started the fire. He was sentenced to 25 years to life in prison and died of a heart attack in 2016, while serving his sentence.

The Happy Land Social Club fire remains the second deadliest fire in New York City history, after the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire, which occurred in the Greenwich Village neighborhood of Manhattan. Ironically, it occurred on the same date as Happy Land, on March 25, 1911. It claimed the lives of 146 garment workers, including 123 women and girls, and 23 men.

Similar to what happened following the recent Twin Parks fire tragedy, where a swath of fire prevention and fire safety legislation was kick-started at all levels of government, the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire also led to new legislation that brought about improved safety conditions in sweatshops. It also prompted the founding of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union which today is called the Unite Here Labor Union. It currently has nearly 300,000 active members.

**Sile Moloney contributed to this story.*



Photo by David Greene

EMS LT. ROY DAVID takes his turn to read the names of some of the 87 victims who lost their lives in the Happy Land Social Club fire of March 25, 1990, during an event marking the 32nd anniversary of the fire in the West Farms section of the Bronx on March 25, 2022.

Out & About

COMPILED BY SÍLE MOLONEY

EVENTS

Celebrate a **Car-Free Earth Day** at Mosholu Parkway South from Van Cortlandt Park East to Bainbridge Avenue on Saturday, April 23, from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. with NYC Department of Transportation. Join Bird, Lime and Veo for e-scooter demonstrations, including accessible scooters for people with ambulatory disabilities. There will also be family-friendly events and environmental focused activities. For more information, go to <https://on.nyc.gov/3EwDEyZ>.

To celebrate the **125th anniversary of DeWitt Clinton High School**, two events will be held, and 100 percent of the profits from both events will go to the DeWitt Clinton Alumni Association Scholarship Fund which benefits the school's students as they pursue their educational careers. An Alumni Association Dinner will take place at Marina Del Rey in the Throggs Neck section of The Bronx on May 26. To register, go to:

<https://www.dewittclintonalumni.com/>. A golf outing at Pelham Bay Golf Course will be held on August 2. To register, go to: <https://bit.ly/3MkAEly>.

Bronx Fashion Week returns to the 3rd floor food court at The Mall at Bay Plaza, located at 200 Baychester Avenue, in Baychester on Saturday, May 7, at 3 p.m. Bronx Fashion Week initiates innovative events that attract a multitude of fashion influencers. The events have become preferred for diverse and inclusive audiences, and their objective is to provide real-time business opportunities to local emerging and established designers, to showcase their skills and abilities in an industry that is often non-accessible.

According to the organizers, Bronx Fashion Week is already shaping up to be one of the most amazing fashion experiences at The New Mall at Bay Plaza. Surrounded by over 100 retailers from The Bronx, the mall has over 25 million visitors per year. Designers being showcased include Callejas

Atelier, Yo Soy Mia, Mia Roman, Boulevard Menswear, Daysi Collection, Macy's, Forever 21, and Ashley Stewart.

MUSIC

The Riverdale Choral Society will perform **Ein Deutsches Requiem** by Johannes Brahms on Sunday, May 22, at 3 p.m. at Christ Church, Riverdale, located at 5040 Henry Hudson Parkway in The Bronx. Tickets are \$25 and may be purchased online or at the door. The concert is dedicated to the memory of Rita Schlein, a former choir member. For more information, call (718) 543 2219 or email riverdalechoral@gmail.com.

In honor of Duke Ellington's birthday and April's Jazz Appreciation Month, spend a beautiful day on the **Happy Birthday Duke! Trolley Tour**, visiting the final resting places of the Jazz Greats of Woodlawn, on Sunday, April 24, at noon. From the dawn of the Jazz Age until today, hundreds of celebrated jazz musicians have been memorialized at Woodlawn.

W.C. Handy, Coleman Hawkins, King Oliver, Bricktop, William "Sonny" Greer, Charles "Cootie" Williams, King Oliver, Milt Jackson, Jackie McLean, Clark Terry, and Florence Mills. Duke Ellington, Lionel Hampton, Illinois Jacquet, Miles Davis and Max Roach are all together in Woodlawn's famous jazz corner. To purchase tickets, go to: <https://bit.ly/3vyTo0g>. Enter through the Jerome Avenue entrance.

ART

Beyond the Canvas exhibition is showing at The Green House Gallery, located at 315 East 201st Street, Bronx, NY 10458, from April 15 to May 15, 2022, and features works by Melissa Martinez, Tehmina Brohi, Blanka Amezhua, and Gabriel García Ramón. The exhibition is curated by Ella Santos. An opening reception will be held on April 22, at 6 p.m. For additional information and appointments, email ella@ellasantosart.com.

MOVEMENT

Bronx Buccaneers football club meets in the Williamsbridge Oval, located at 3225 Reservoir Oval East, Bronx, NY 10467, in Norwood on Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. as part of the team's Tackle football program. Kids are taught the fundamentals of football in a safe, fun atmosphere. Understanding there is more to football, the Buccaneers strive to develop the students/athletes, and the hope is that the players will use the program not only as a steppingstone to advance to upper-level sports in High School and college, but also as a means to engage in positive behavior and as a healthy distraction from idleness which club coaches say can lead to poor decisions. The Buccaneers accept kids from any community, boys or girls, ages 6 to 14. Contact Tasha Andrews at (917) 662-3632 for further information.



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NEIGHBORHOOD NOTES

COMPILED BY SÍLE MOLONEY



COVID-19 UPDATES

Omicron BA.2 (Stealth) Variant

The Omicron BA.2 (stealth) variant is now the dominant coronavirus strain in the U.S. since late March 2022, according to the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC). The Omicron variant is comprised of a number of lineages and sub-lineages, the three most common being BA.1, BA.1.1 and BA.2.

As of April 19, citywide COVID-19 cases were increasing but hospitalizations, and deaths were still on the decline, according to NYC Department of Health & Mental Hygiene (DOHMH). Meanwhile, the NYS Health Department is now using an alert level system that tracks COVID-19 transmission and health care capacity in the city. These levels aim to help New Yorkers understand what precautions need to be taken and how to best protect themselves and others based on each level. For more information in English and other languages, go to: <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/covid/covid-19-alert-levels.pdf>.

The risk rate was low as of April 19, despite rising cases. However, Dr. Ashwin Vasan, health commissioner with NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, said during the last week in March, “We’re asking for a bit more patience and a bit of grace. Cases are definitively rising, and it’s gotten our attention. They will continue to rise over the next few weeks, and it’s likely that over these weeks, we will move into a different level of overall risk across the city. Masking, along with getting vaccinated, getting boosted if you’re eligible, testing regularly, and getting treated are the best tools we have to take on this virus, whatever it throws at us, and you should integrate those tools into your daily lives as we adapt to the next phase of this pandemic.”

DOHMH officials said additional at-home testing kits are being distributed en masse to all New Yorkers in the coming weeks to allow people to stay at home if sick, and a new telemedicine service will also be implemented to ascertain whether New Yorkers who contract the new variant need access to life-saving COVID-19 treatment [oral pills], to prevent hospitalization and death. DOHMH officials said that if people do need the treatment, it will be delivered same day to their homes so that, again, they will not need to leave their homes, thereby curtailing the spread of the virus and keeping the City open.

COVID-19 Vaccination Updates

NYS Department of Health (DOH) officials have said New Yorkers who are 12 and older who received their Pfizer-BioNTech initial vaccine series at least five months ago are now eligible for the Pfizer-BioNTech booster. New Yorkers who are 18 and older who received the Moderna initial vaccine series at least five months ago or the Janssen/Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine at least two months ago, are eligible for a booster dose.

Children aged 5 to 11 with certain immunocompromising conditions who received their Pfizer-BioNTech initial vaccine series at least 28 days ago are eligible for an additional dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine. Dosages vary for different groups. All individuals 5 years of age and older that reside in the United States are eligible to receive the vaccine. FDA

fact sheets for recipients and caregivers on each vaccine are available on the FDA’s website.

COVID vaccines are widely available at pharmacies, local health departments, clinics, Federally Qualified Health Centers, and other locations across the state, irrespective of immigration status. To schedule an appointment directly at a New York State-run site, go to <https://am-i-eligible.covid19vaccine.health.ny.gov/> and follow the instructions. Walk-in appointments are also accepted at New York State mass vaccination sites for all eligible individuals.

State Health officials said a booster dose helps maximize protection, prolongs the vaccine’s durability, and continues to safeguard communities against the virus. Visit the CDC’s website: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/different-vaccines/janssen.html>, for more information.

Guidelines for Business & Other Public Settings

For the latest COVID-19 business guidelines and industry guidance from New York State Department of Health, go to: <https://forward.ny.gov/active-industry-guidance>. All businesses must develop a written business safety plan to outline how their workplaces will prevent the spread of COVID-19.

According to the NYC Department of Health & Mental Hygiene, workers in New York City who perform in-person work or interact with the public in the course of business must show proof that they have received a COVID-19 vaccine. Businesses may not allow any unvaccinated workers to work at their workplace. A workplace is considered any location — including a vehicle — where you work in the presence of at least one other person. New York City has discontinued the Key to NYC vaccination requirement as of March 7, 2022, for customers. Businesses can still choose to require proof of vaccination.

New York State announced that effective March 2, masks are no longer required in schools. However, Mayor Eric Adams announced on Friday, April 1, that New York City will keep its school mask mandate in place for children under 5 due to the recent uptick in coronavirus cases in New York City and because such children cannot yet get vaccinated. The State also announced that effective February 10, the statewide indoor business mask or vaccine requirement is lifted.

As of March 1, masks are still required at indoor train stations and onboard subways, commuter rail, buses, and paratransit vehicles. New Yorkers do not have to wear a mask at outdoor train stations and platforms, or at bus stops, but must wear a mask once they board a train, bus, or paratransit vehicles. Riders who refuse to wear a mask could get a \$50 fine.

COVID-19 Vaccine Exceptions and Reasonable Accommodations

This private sector workplace requirement does not apply to people who work alone, at home or otherwise, and do not have in-person contact with co-workers or others in the course of their business; people who enter a workplace briefly for a limited purpose, such as to use the bathroom; performing artists and college or professional athletes; or people who have requested reasonable accommodations for medical or religious reasons. If a worker is granted a

reasonable accommodation, businesses must record the basis for the accommodation and keep supporting documentation.

MTA Rider Feedback Survey

New York City Transit and the MTA are inviting New Yorkers to participate in a survey to obtain feedback on public transportation on subways and buses in New York City. To complete the survey, go to: <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/NYCT-CoMET>.

Sophomore Skills Course

The 2022 New York Cares/Fordham Bedford Community Services Sophomore Skills program is a partnership to offer college preparation classes to high school sophomores. This program will be offered through Fordham Bedford Community Services. This year, the course will be offered remotely. If you are accepted into this program, New York Cares volunteers and FBCS Staff will tutor you and share strategies to prepare you for success in taking your SAT Exam. This tutorial program is a 2-hour, weekly-commitment that lasts from April 2022 to June 2022. The class is from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. For more information, click <https://bit.ly/3LGoJEQ>.

Notice of Replacement of Trunk Water Mains, Rehabilitation of Sewers in Norwood and Woodlawn Heights

NYC Department of Design and Construction (DDC) has advised that a replacement of the trunk and distribution water mains and a rehabilitation of the sewers is taking place in Norwood and Woodlawn Heights during the second quarter of 2022. Residents should expect water service interruptions, trash collection changes, new traffic patterns, and increased levels of dust and noise while the project is ongoing.

DDC has advised of the following impacts to the community:

There will be a temporary rerouting, around the clock until June 30, of BX16, BX34, and BXM4, northbound, from Bainbridge Avenue, between East 212th Street and Jerome Avenue, to Jerome Avenue, between East 212th Street and Bainbridge Avenue. Board the bus at 210th Street.

There will be a temporary rerouting, around the clock until June 30, of BX10, westbound, on East Gun Hill Road and the intersection of Bainbridge Avenue. Board the bus on East Gun Hill Road between Rochambeau and Dekalb Avenues.

There will be no curbside parking, around the clock until June 30, on Bainbridge Avenue, between East Gun Hill Road and 211th Street.

There will be a temporary lane closure, around the clock until June 30, northbound, on Bainbridge Avenue between Jerome Avenue and East Gun Hill Road. Residents are asked to be mindful of traffic detours and message boards.

Donate Life Month

April is National Donate Life Month. Residents are encouraged to register as an organ donor. Montefiore Health System is hosting a number of educational events throughout the month. Email ltrevino@montefiore.org or call (718) 798 4285 for more information.



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Public and Community Meetings

The next 52nd **PRECINCT COMMUNITY COUNCIL** meeting will be held on **Thursday, April 28, at 7 p.m.**, in person at The King Hall Building, Monroe College, located at 2501 Jerome Avenue, Bronx, NY 10468. Call the 52nd Precinct Community Affairs office at (718) 220-5824 to be added to the email list. Proof of vaccination required.

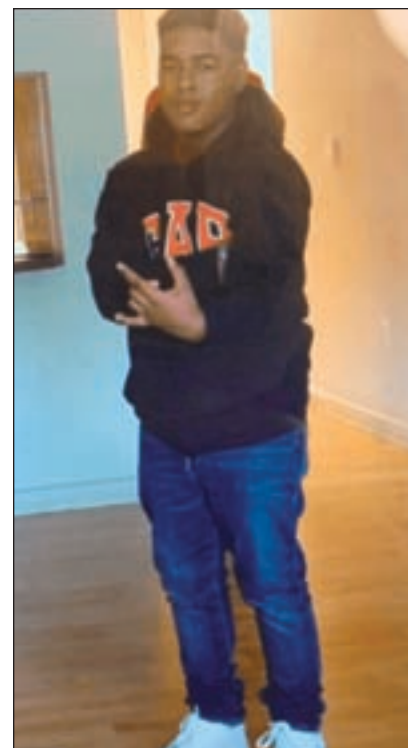
Since the COVID-19 pandemic hit in March, **BRONX COMMUNITY BOARD 7** meetings have been held via ZOOM. The next full board meeting will be held on **Tuesday, April 26 at 6.30 p.m.** via Zoom. The meeting ID is 859 4776 2187 or by phone (646) 558-8656. Contact KCabreraCarrera@cb.nyc.gov to be added to 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 April. 6. For further details, contact bedfordmosholu@verizon.net.

Fordham Manor: Search for 13-Year-Old Missing Boy

By SÍLE MOLONEY

The NYPD is seeking the public's assistance locating a 13-year-old boy who was reported missing in Fordham Manor on Sunday, April 17. Angel Berroa of 2700 Jerome Avenue, Bronx, NY was last seen on Friday, April 15, at 7.30 p.m. inside his home. He is described as male, is around 5 feet, 6 inches tall, Hispanic, weighs 140 pounds, and has brown eyes and brown hair. He was last seen wearing a black sweater, black pants, and black sneakers. Anyone with information regarding this missing person is asked to call the NYPD's Crime Stoppers Hotline at 1-800-577-TIPS (8477) or for Spanish, 1-888-57-PISTA (74782). The public can also submit their tips by logging onto the Crime Stoppers website at <https://crimestoppers.nypdonline.org/>, or on Twitter @NYPDTips.



Woodlawn helps you plan ahead for peace of mind in person or virtually

Brookside Cremation Garden

When a death occurs, most New Yorkers aren't sure who to turn to or what to do. We recently spoke with The Woodlawn Cemetery about how they help individuals put their end-of-life preferences in writing ahead of time to prevent their loved ones from having to make decisions on their behalf.

Norwood News: How does Woodlawn help families with making difficult end-of-life decisions?

Woodlawn: Our Family Service Associates work with individuals and families to address their preferences about end-of-life arrangements. This includes offering our complimentary Personal Planning Organizer, to gather all the information needed for final arrangements in one place. Then, when the time comes for loved ones to make decisions, the process is easier. Not to mention you can secure today's payment rate with the decisions you make.

NN: What type of information is typically needed when making arrangements?

Woodlawn: Essentially, the location of all of your important documents. This includes social security numbers, marriage licenses, and military discharge papers. Where to find bank, retirement, and investment accounts. How to locate insurance policies, veterans, and social security benefits, and of course, preferences for funeral and cemetery arrangements.

We provide families with a Personal Planning Organizer so they can collect all the information that the funeral home or cemetery will need and ask for at the time of death. When properly filled out, this organizer can simply be handed over to the funeral home and cemetery so bereaved family members don't have to dig through documents for these details in their time of grief. We offer book-lets for singles, married couples, and a Spanish version.

Woodlawn: During these unusual times, our Family Service Associates are able to meet with families either in person (with safety precautions) or virtually. If you choose to meet virtually, our staff can walk you through property selection via our website. If needed, multiple family members can participate in a contactless appointment at the same time. We are here to make sure that all your questions are answered and that you receive the highest level of service whether you choose to meet with us in person or virtually.

NN: What are some of the options that Woodlawn offers for memorializing a loved one?

Woodlawn: There are many options for traditional burial and cremation including private mausoleums, community mausoleums, traditional burial with a headstone, cremation benches, niches, and more. It's important for an individual to express their preferences between traditional burial and cremation, and which type of burial is preferred: in ground, above ground, or cremation. This is a great example of a question

that can be addressed in the Personal Planning Organizer. Most people have a strong opinion on their own final disposition, and it's important to make sure those preferences are in writing.

NN: With the rise in cremation, what kinds of questions are you hearing from families?

Woodlawn: Most families want to know what their options are. After all, according to a 2019 report by the National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA), the cremation rate in the U.S. is projected to be 78.7% by 2040. That is a huge increase compared to previous years. Families need to know there are meaningful options for cremated remains. We hear from so many who have the cremated remains of a loved one at home and aren't sure what to do with them. We'll make sure you understand all of your options and talk through what is best for you and your family.

NN: What do you say to these families?

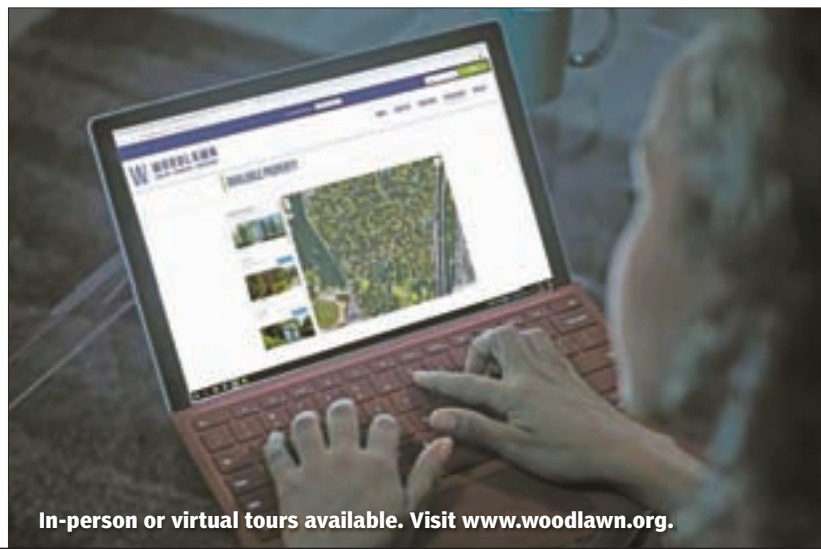
Woodlawn: First, we explain how important it is to have a place they can come back to over the years to visit their loved one who has died. This is an essential part of the grieving process and one that is

often overlooked. Then we advise them to come to Woodlawn to see their options for themselves. We have something for everyone and every budget. We also make sure to tell families that Woodlawn is proud to be an exclusive provider in the Bronx of the Cremation With Confidence™ Guarantee. This means that we own and operate our own crematory and follow a 10-step process that ensures your loved one is treated with dignity and respect throughout the cremation process. We take our responsibilities very seriously and want families to know that.

NN: What is the next step families should take?

Woodlawn: Call us to make an appointment to meet with one of our Family Service Associates in person or virtually. They will help you know exactly what to do and explain your options so you can ultimately reduce stress on your family. Call **718-920-0500** or visit **www.woodlawn.org** for more information.

The Woodlawn Cemetery is located at **4199 Webster Ave., Bronx, NY.**



In-person or virtual tours available. Visit www.woodlawn.org.





Health Equity During National Minority Health Month

By ELIZABETH SPURRELL-HUSS

April is National Minority Health Month which also includes National Public Health Week. This year, many healthcare and public health organizations, like the U.S Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), are using the month to raise awareness about health equity and why it is important for everyone.

What is Health Equity?

Research has shown that our health depends on much more than what we eat (or don't eat!), our genes, or how well we follow doctors' orders. In fact, where we live, work, play, and pray greatly influences our health and longevity.

Unfortunately, in many parts of the U.S., including in The Bronx, there are large discrepancies when it comes to how healthy different communities are. Called *health inequities*, these gaps in health are often due to a history of unfair policies and practices that have left neighborhoods without access to healthy food, safe streets, affordable homes, good jobs, or quality schools.

Despite its rich history of community organizing and advocacy, The Bronx is considered New York State's unhealthiest county. According to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's County Health Rankings, since 2009 the Bronx has ranked 62 of New York State's 62 counties in both health outcomes and health factors.

Health outcomes include things like length and quality of life, while health factors include things like smoking, cancer screening, poverty rate, and housing problems. This means that The Bronx is overburdened by chronic diseases like diabetes, cancer, and asthma, and overall quality of life for Bronx residents is poorer.

However, there is some good news. According to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's County Health Ranking, Bronxites are living longer, on average, than just a few years ago. Bronx residents are also using more opportunities to exercise and are drinking less alcohol.

We all deserve to live our healthiest life! Promoting health equity means increasing opportunities for everyone to live our healthiest life, no matter who we are, where we live, or how much money we make. While we all need to be responsible for our own health by eating well, exercising, getting enough rest, and seeing our healthcare provider regularly, some groups have been given fewer opportunities to do these things, and their overall health suffers.

Groups that have often faced discrimination and/or been excluded from opportunities for health are people of color, people living in poverty, people with disabilities, and women.

What Can You Do?

We must work together to improve the condi-

tions that impact health, especially for groups who lack access or who face discrimination. In honor of National Minority Health Month, here are some tips for how to improve health equity in your community:

- Start a conversation about health equity in your church, school, community center – wherever!
- Share health education and resource information with your networks.
- Get to know your elected officials; call or write and ask them to prioritize the health of The Bronx.
- Advocate for policies that improve access to affordable housing, quality schools, healthy food, and safe streets.

Let us know what your health priorities are; complete our Community Health Needs Assessment at <https://www.gnyhasurveys.org/CHNA2022>.

What is the Community Health Needs Assessment?

Do you live in the Bronx? Montefiore wants to know what matters to you! Every three years Montefiore completes a Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) to understand the resources and health needs of our communities. We use this information to support the needs of our patients and communities across the borough.

Go to the following link to answer a brief, 10-minute anonymous survey and share it with your community: <https://www.gnyhasurveys.org/CHNA2022>

Elizabeth Spurrell-Huss is director of health equity programs in the office of community and population health at Montefiore Health System.

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U.S. VA Calm Fears amid News of VA Medical Center Closures

By SÍLE MOLONEY

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) deputy secretary, Donald Remy, sought to alleviate fears among Bronx veterans during a visit to the Bronx VA medical center on Friday, April 8, in the context of VA's ongoing Asset and Infrastructure Review (AIR), a study of the current and future health care needs of veterans across the country in the context of existing VA medical centers.

His visit follows recent suggestions by the U.S. VA to potentially close the Brooklyn and Manhattan VA medical centers. Though no date has been set for such potential closures, the news has, nonetheless, caused concern among Bronx veterans about the impact any such closures may have on the Bronx VA facility.

Located at 130 West Kingsbridge Road in Fordham Manor, the hospital's official name is the James J. Peters Veterans Affairs Medical Center, and it is a tertiary care facility, serving some of the 58,000 local U.S. veterans in New York City and beyond. Tertiary care means highly specialized medical care, usually over an extended period of time that involves advanced and complex procedures and treatments, performed by medical specialists in state-of-the-art facilities.

The Bronx VA facility is also a teaching hospital providing a full range of patient care services, with state-of-the-art technology, as well as education. VA officials say it is the top performing VA for research in the region, and that comprehensive health care is provided through primary care, tertiary care, and long-term care in areas of medicine, general and specialty surgery, psychiatry, physical medicine and rehabilitation, neurology, oncology, dentistry, geriatrics, and extended care.

The center is part of VA Network 2, which includes facilities in Manhattan, Brooklyn, Castle Point and Montrose (Hudson Valley), Northport (Long Island), St. Albans (Queens), New York, and East Orange and Lyons in New Jersey. The center's acting director, Rosemary Cancel-Santiago, accompanied Remy, among others, on the tour of The Bronx campus, where a brief press conference was held in front of the Fisher House building.

During his remarks, Remy said he wanted to visit The Bronx facility to hear what was on the minds of the staff



Photo by Síle Moloney

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF Veterans Affairs (VA) deputy secretary, Donald Remy (gray suit) holds a brief press conference during a visit to the Bronx VA medical center, located at 130 West Kingsbridge Road in Fordham Manor on Friday, April 8, 2022.

both in terms of the opportunities they saw at the center and also the challenges they faced in serving veterans.

"I learned about our robotics program that helps our veterans who have spinal injuries, get up and walking, those who might have limited mobility, those who are paralyzed altogether, and the equipment that helps them have a better life through being able to be mobile, and to engage in the fashion that they have in the past," he said.

Remy added that he also talked a lot with the teams about mental health services. "We have one of the greatest mental health capacities here in The Bronx, at this medical center," he said. "Utilizing the services and expertise available here.....the focus on mental health is fantastic."

In reference to the AIR commission, which he equated to a market assessment, he said, "One thing that's important for people to understand is we don't plan on leaving any market." He added, "There are lots of people that have suggested that the air commission recommendations will result in the abandonment of any particular market [serving veterans]. That's not the case."

He said the AIR's mission was to try to make sure the VA was best positioned, together with the community, to provide the services that veterans needed and how it could best deliver those services to the VA communities that needed them the most. "This is just the beginning," he added. "These

are recommendations that are being made to a commission," he said, adding that the commission would then assemble, take the recommendations, analyze them, hold public meetings, and ultimately make determinations as to what they'll recommend to the president.

"Then, the President will make determinations that have to go to the Congress, so we're a long way away from any changes being made," Remy said. In terms of his visit highlights, he said, "What I've seen in many of our medical centers is an acute attention to our women veterans. Our women veterans are our largest growing group of our veteran population, and we need to make sure that any veterans, especially our women veterans feel welcome, they have the services that they need... I see that here in the Bronx, and I've seen them around the country."

Asked what local veterans could expect were the takeaways from his visit, Remy said, "I've heard a lot here. I'll take some of that back." He vowed to stay in touch with the Bronx VA's local management team about the needs of the center and how the U.S. VA could address those needs. "We talked a lot about staffing and resources and making sure that we have the people available to provide the services to vets, and how we can help make that happen," he said.

Asked what message he had for those veterans who felt they were being abandoned, Remy said, "We're not

abandoning anything. Anybody who has served this nation is more than eligible, and more than welcome to be served by the VA in any community across the country."

Remy was then asked directly about the future viability of the Bronx VA facility. He said, "This is a medical center that is designed to provide services for our veterans. I'm sure that your viewers or listeners have looked at the air commission recommendations. We may realign some of the services here, but our VA medical center here in The Bronx will continue to provide service to our community."

The deputy secretary was then asked what structural and personnel changes local veterans could expect to see when it comes to potentially serving incoming veterans from outside the region [due to possible closures in Brooklyn and Manhattan] while continuing to serve veterans returning from active service.

Remy referred the question to Cancel-Santiago to answer, who said, "We currently have concurrent construction projects to upgrade and modernize our infrastructure to [inaudible] the facility, to receive additional veterans and enhance services that we provide, and we're going to partner with our academic affiliates to ensure that we attract the highest...specialty care services, to provide to veterans based on demand, including women veterans."

She added, "In addition to that, we offer really healthy recruitment and retention benefit packages for nurses. We've just established a nursing residency program, and we are proud to say that we are and will be ready to accept physician veterans at all levels in the future."

Finally, Remy was asked if any changes were made down the line to The Bronx facility, and if veterans were referred to other locations, would the medical staff at such locations be trained in dealing with veterans, specifically. "As I said before, we're going to make sure that our veterans can receive the service they...[inaudible]. Now, it may be the case that, sometimes, that service is offered somewhere else, but we'll make sure that that's available, whether it's in the community, or it's here in The Bronx VA or some other facility to ensure the services that they need will be provided."

Black Maternal Health Week Coincides with Reopening of Tremont Wellness Center

By SÍLE MOLONEY

The Family Wellness Suite at Tremont Neighborhood Health Action Center reopened for in-person services on Wednesday, April 13, having been closed amid the pandemic during which time it provided virtual services. The reopening coincided with the beginning of Black Maternal Health Week and as well as the reopening of in-person services at the City's other wellness centers located in East Harlem and Brownsville, Brooklyn.

The wellness suite, located at 1826 Arthur Avenue in Tremont, provides mothers and their families with a safe, welcoming, and supportive space where they can participate in a range of parenting and birthing classes, connect to community resources, and receive critical supplies.

Anita Reyes, assistant commissioner at the Bronx Neighborhood Family Wellness Suite bureau, welcomed Dr. Ashwin Vasani, the City's health commissioner, Dr. Michelle Morse, chief medical officer and deputy health commissioner, to the center for the occasion.

Reyes mentioned a couple of the resources offered in terms of childbirth education. "We have parenting classes, as well as breastfeeding classes that we offer to the parents," she said. "We also have free resources like cribs, and car seats distribution, as well as diapers. So, we give to those families in need."

Reyes highlighted that during the pandemic, the center was still helping families get the resources they needed. "We did a lot of virtual work....and so, this week, we're really excited for the Black Maternal Week," she said. "That's why we're here. We're reopening the fam-

ily wellness suite so that all New Yorkers can have a place to come."

Reyes said the Tremont site is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday to Friday and welcomes families to come and get the information and resources they may need. "We encourage everyone to please spread the word, let people know that we're here to help connect people to the services," she said before introducing Vasani on his first visit to The Bronx as the City's new health commissioner.

For his part, Vasani said the reopening event was particularly meaningful to everyone at the health department because it coincided with Black Maternal Health Week. "As a father of three, I remember how overjoyed my wife and I were when we learned we were going to have a baby," he said. "I also remember how much anxiety we felt and how unprepared we felt. After all, parenting is really hard and throws a lot of things at us, most of it unexpected, and no-one goes into it knowing everything." Vasani said he remembered how much support he and his wife received from family, friends, and relatives and how it made a world of difference to them as they embarked on their journey into parenthood.

"Frankly, we've done it two more times since, and each time we've needed that support even though we've learned with each child," he said. "So, I know the support that we [the City] can offer people in places like this, and it makes such a difference to getting families off to the best start they can."

Vasani said the family wellness suites provide spaces for families to come together during pregnancy, after child-



Photo by Síle Moloney

ANITA REYES, ASSISTANT commissioner at the Bronx Neighborhood Family Wellness Suite bureau, Dr. Ashwin Vasani, the City's health commissioner, Dr. Michelle Morse, chief medical officer and deputy health commissioner and other officials tour the reopened Family Wellness Suite at Tremont Neighborhood Health Action Center, located at 1826 Arthur Avenue in Tremont, on Wednesday, April 13, 2022, the day the center reopened for in-person services, having been closed amid the pandemic.

birth [and for infant health support], for free childbirth and safe sleep classes, crib distribution, doula support, yoga classes, and more.

"Having this event during Black Maternal Health Week is absolutely no coincidence," Vasani said, adding that the wellness centers embodied the City's commitment to reducing what he called "the absolutely unacceptable inequities in maternal health."

"In New York City, on average, the rate of pregnancy related deaths is 9.4 times higher for Black mothers compared to white mothers," the health commissioner said. "This is consistently one of the starkest inequities we see in any health outcome in our city, and these outcomes are not driven by race, they are driven by structural racism."

He then said the Adams administration and the health department was laser focused on closing those gaps. "That's why the city is investing in resources and in programs just like this, including safe and respectful provider care, expanding our doula program citywide, neighborhood-based services like the ones you're learning about today, and ensuring quality reproductive care."

Vasani said more needed to be done to improve Black Maternal Health and committed to working to ensure all families had safe pregnancies and deliveries. Part of that work is related to the center's ethos regarding the social determinants of health and maternal health. "Food is a maternal health issue, housing is a maternal health issue, safety is a maternal health issue, economic security is a maternal health issue," he said. "It is in place-based approaches like embodied here at the action center where we can support our new mothers, our families, holistically, upstream, to get them off to the best start possible."

For her part, Morris said the center was one of the happiest places to be despite the challenges of COVID, and said she always felt cared for at the center because wellness was at the center's core.

"That's why this is such a beautiful space for families to be able to come back to in-person, and be able to actually access the services," she said.

Morris built on what Vasani said regarding the importance of Black maternal health and health inequity. "As a Black woman, myself, and as someone who is so honored to get to celebrate Black Maternal Health Week with all of you, this is urgent," she said. "This is urgent and we have services that are really available to all members of the New York City community to try to address these challenges."

"By resuming the opening of our direct, in-person services here at The Bronx Tremont Action Center, the family wellness suites are providing a range of resources that are vital to empowering people and families to provide the strongest start for their babies, before and after birth," she said. "The impact of this work is felt not only in the services we provide, but also in the gratitude that we receive from families and the conversations we have with families that use these services."

Morris concluded, "All you have to do is walk into the family wellness suite, your blood pressure will go down, you'll find yourself start to smile, you'll have a warm greeting from Eilish, who's our research coordinator, and I can tell you, you will feel better."

Asked if the City had seen any improvements in Black maternal health over the years or if the situation was getting worse, Morris said, "I think there are always silver linings when you're trying to address really deep health inequities. Some of the things that we've already seen is increased access to doula services, for example." She added, "We are really excited that over the coming years, we hope to see more progress in the specific health outcomes and again, I think, from our perspective, the work of health equity is a long-term investment and takes up quite a bit of a horizon to see improvements."



Photo by Síle Moloney

A STAFF MEMBER gives a baby care demonstration to a class of expectant mothers at Tremont Neighborhood Health Action Center, located at 1826 Arthur Avenue in Tremont, on Wednesday, April 13, 2022, the day the center reopened for in-person services, having been closed amid the pandemic.

Fencing at P.S. 340 a Hit with Students!

(continued from page 1)

ago, I wanted fencing in the schools because it's equity, you know?" she said. "I mean [in] inner city schools....these children don't have an opportunity [to try fencing] because it's expensive."

Turchiaro belongs to the Tim Morehouse fencing club, located on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. She fenced as a kid and in college but dropped the sport in her adult life. She started fencing again a little over two years ago, right before the pandemic hit, when she looked into attending adult classes. Since then, she's taken classes both virtually and in person, and has even been to a few tournaments.

"I love it," Turchiaro said. "It's just an amazing sport and so, I'm so thrilled that these kids are having an opportunity to be a part of it. Maybe some will do it again, maybe some won't, but when they all grow up, if they decide to go to college, and if they offer fencing in the college; you never know! They may just jump right in and say, 'Hey! I did that when I was a kid!'"

According to the Academy of Fencing Masters Blog and contrary to what is depicted in Hollywood movies, in modern fencing, the blade of the sword is not sharp. The tip is flat and is protected by a rubber cushion or metal button. The foil, the lightest sword type at 500 grams, used by beginners, also bends under pressure, reducing the physical impact of a target "touch" on an opponent's body. Scores are awarded when an opponent is "touched" on the torso with the flat tip of the sword. This is also the origin of the phrase "*Touché!*" meaning "touched."

According to Olympics.com, fencing demands speed, anticipation, reflexes, and great mental strength. The footwork involved is not unlike that used by a boxer. In addition to the foil sword, heavier swords include the épée and the sabre, which have different compositions, techniques and scoring target areas on the body.

According to Turchiaro, the kids have a half hour after school to eat a snack and do homework, which they must show they've completed before getting "*en garde*" for their fencing class. As many may recognize from watching movies like "Pirates of the Caribbean," *en garde* is French for "on guard," and is the expression uttered by referees to instruct fencers to get

into position before combat begins.

Right now, the school doesn't have enough equipment for every single student, so half the kids work with a coach while wearing the protective equipment and handling their swords, while the other kids practice their footwork and other fencing moves with another instructor. After half an hour, the kids switch for a further 30 minutes.

Turchiaro said the school plans to have a tournament on site at the end of the academic year for the students to show off what they've learned. One student named Donik said he wanted to join the club because he'd tried karate and martial arts before and was always interested in being an athlete. "I've learned how to parry," he said, referring to a particular technique whereby a fencer blocks an opponent's attack using the sword, as opposed to retreating backwards to avoid the attacker's advance.

"I learned the movement, the stances, how to avoid my opponents attacks, and how to attack my opponents," Donik said. Another student, Jayda, said she learned how to lunge (a forward thrusting movement used when attempting to touch the torso of an opponent with the sword), retreat, and recover. She is excited for the competition at the end of the year. Another student, Kamila, said she joined fencing because she thought it would be a fun way to exercise.

Turchiaro said some of the kids have shown real talent and she wants to refer them to a fencing school that has a more affordable sliding fee scale. She had wanted to bring fencing into the schools for a long time and started talking about it with Huey Tan, another member at the Tim Morehouse fencing club.

Tan, the SVP of Signature Bank, informed Turchiaro that her company had a grant that the school could apply for to help fund its fencing program. The two applied for the grant and won \$10,000 to pay for a coach and equipment for the kids.

"It's a very generous grant to start off from nothing," said Tan. "I think the important thing is really the idea was there. Amy loves fencing. She has always wanted to give something to the school because fencing typically is a sport that is very expensive and she loved the school so much, and then my bank happened to have special grants."

Tan volunteers with Turchiaro every Friday after school, and assists the coach, Luka Oboladze, with the kids. Oboladze works as a coach at the Tim Morehouse club but agreed to come to the school because he loves working with kids and knows many of them cannot afford to take classes at the club.

"Then, you see the smile when you see they do a good job and you feel happy about it," he said. "When you see they're making a result, they're growing up, they're learning, and you're helping them; it's part of your job. It's just a wonderful feeling."

Turchiaro said aside from finding funding and an instructor, the school also had to get the program approved by the New York City Department of Education (DOE) and the school's administration. Once they won the grant, they were able to get the money to the DOE and took the summer of 2021 to complete the necessary paperwork.

"The principal, the assistant principal, they have been so supportive and so helpful" Turchiaro said. "I've been a lunatic and they put up with my craziness! This is an incredible school though. It's a little bit of an unusual school. It's like a real family here. They're so open and just loving people."

Turchiaro explained that when the school initially sent out a general sign-up form, they ended up receiving a lot more interest than they had anticipated, and couldn't take everyone on in the first round but are hoping to have more sessions in the future.

Aundree Noriega, assistant principal at P.S. 340, said to gauge interest, at the end of the last school year, they showed a fencing video to the students of a young student from New Jersey, and another of a man and a woman competing in the Olympics. After the video, Turchiaro told the kids that fencing was something they could aspire to doing, and that just because it was expensive and an elite sport, it didn't mean it was something they couldn't try.

They sent out feelers to the students and had 40 kids say they were interested. This year, they sent out the permission slips and got back 200 applications for 20 spots in the current session, which is running for 10 weeks. The goal is to bring in a new group of students in the next session.

Alexei Nichols, principal of P.S. 340, said there were not many fencing pro-

grams in The Bronx and that Turchiaro was excited when she approached them about the idea. "She was very persistent, and she came to us, and we were like, 'Absolutely! Like, make it happen!'" said Nichols.

Turchiaro said the kids are loving the club and that it is helping them to learn perseverance and persistence, to be more attentive, and to follow directions. "It's just been great to see," she said. "They didn't realize how hard it was going to be. They're like, 'Oh, like our muscles are sore! I don't know if I can do this!' We had to give them a little pep talk because those mats are heavy. The gear is a little uncomfortable, and they have to really position themselves properly, and you know, 'On guard! Advance! Retreat!' There's a lot of language that they're using."

Noriega said fencing is also helping the students apply the skills they learn in the class during the school day. Meanwhile, Nichols said a few students joined the first session and decided the sport wasn't for them. He said the majority, however, accepted the pep talk and continue to try the sport.

She added that the kids are required to do their work, be a good citizen, and be respectful during the day in order to attend fencing class after school. She said more kids have been behaving because they want to attend the class.

Meanwhile, Nichols said, "We always say, 'healthy body, healthy mind, healthy mind, happy kid!' The more they can become fit and work their muscles, and learn about how to become fit, the more they feel good about themselves. We are huge on wellness, and this is a program that fits into that."

Nichols and Noriega also agree that it's all about access and exposure for the kids. "We always say even though we're a public school, we want kids to get the same exposure as you would in a private school and have the same opportunity," Noriega said.

Turchiaro said fencing opens doors for kids, like international travel for tournaments and college scholarships. Noriega echoed this, adding that there are so many opportunities for high school and college scholarships if any of the kids continued the sport on their own. "Anything that makes a kid smile that much with a sword in their hand, it's got to be worth something," she said.

**Sile Moloney contributed to this story.*

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