



NORWOOD NEWS

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DELTA VARIANT SPOTLIGHTS VACCINE-HESITANCY AGAIN



Photo by Sile Moloney

DILLETTA PINA, SPEAKS during a recent outdoor meeting of the 52nd Precinct Community Council held Thursday, June 24, 2021. Pina told the *Norwood News* that she is hesitant to get the COVID-19 vaccine as she said the long-term effects of the vaccine are still unknown.

By DAWN CLANCY

Like many New Yorkers, Dilletta Pina, a 70-year-old retiree from Norwood, worries about the highly infectious COVID-19 Delta vari-

ant. To stay safe, Pina never leaves her house without a mask, diligently washes her hands, and practices social distancing. But, like some of her fellow Bronxites, there is

one step she's not yet ready to take, and that's getting the COVID-19 vaccine.

According to the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene,

compared to other boroughs, the Bronx has the lowest percentage of fully vaccinated adults at 42 percent as of July 4, while Manhattan has the

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Gibson Makes History as Bronx BP Nominee
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Mosholu Preservation Corporation (MPC)
3400 Reservoir Oval East
Bronx, New York 10467
Phone: 718 324 4998
Fax: 718 324 2917

E-mail: norwoodnews@norwoodnews.org
Web.: www.norwoodnews.org

Publisher

Mosholu Preservation Corporation

Executive Director of MPC

Jennifer Tausig

Editor-In-Chief, Norwood News

Sile Moloney
smoloney@norwoodnews.org

Interns

Dawn Clancy, Sarah Huffman,
Shania DeGroot

Regular Contributors

David Greene, José A. Giralt,
Miriam Quiñones

Contributor

Michael Horowitz, Adi Talwar

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Van Cott Post Office Briefly Shuts for Repairs

by DAVID GREENE

The United States Postal Service (USPS) Van Cott branch in Norwood is apparently back open following a temporary closure lasting nearly two weeks, and despite a previous notice from USPS confirmation from USPS that the branch would remain closed until Friday, July 11.

Following several, prior, temporary closures due to flooding and the presence of a foul odor in early 2019, the Van Cott post office, located at 3102 Decatur Avenue was, once again, found to be closed on Monday, June 24. On that date, a mobile post office was parked out front in which staff were seen carrying out most regular post office business. Officials at the branch even brought the usual newspaper stand that holds the *Norwood News* outside so that customers looking to pick up a copy could still do so.

The same day, one customer who declined to be identified said, in reference to the closure, "They're fixing the roof." Asked if he remembered the flooding that had shuttered the branch in 2019, he replied, "I think I do."

The same customer added, "I have a postal box here. If they close this post office, I will have to change my address [for] all the people who send me mail." Having later spoken to a post office official, the man added, "He said it will take several weeks. I guess there's a leak. They're on the roof now."

A second customer, "Bobby," a Norwood resident, said, "I think we're so fortunate to have it. Hopefully, in the near future, it will be open. I know they were talking about closing it down." He then urged the *Norwood News* to stay on top of the story. "I hope it stays open," he added.

The exact date of reopening was unclear. Later, on Friday, July 2, a postal worker at the Van Cott branch was overheard telling customers the branch would be back open the following Tuesday [July 6]. As of that date, July 2, the mobile post office was nowhere to be found. On the same day,



Photo by David Greene

WORKERS WERE OBSERVED fixing two connected roofs that house Aydan's Barber Shop and Papa John's Pizza, located adjacent to Van Cott post office, in a photo taken on Friday, June 25, 2021.

Xavier Hernandez, strategic communications specialist at USPS, told the *Norwood News* the branch would not reopen until July 11.

In an email statement, Hernandez wrote, "The Postal Service is the tenant at this facility at 3102 Decatur Avenue so we, like any other tenant, must work with our landlord to resolve issues." He added that due to construction at the location, the branch would remain closed to customers until July 11.

Hernandez said any residents with a post box at the Van Cott branch could pick up their mail at the Williamsbridge Post Office, located at 711 East Gun Hill Road, on the outskirts of Olinville, and that customers needing to conduct other types of business could also visit the Mosholu Post Office at 3464 Jerome Avenue in Norwood, or the Allerton Post Office at 2815 White Plains Road, south of the Parkside Housing Project. Hernandez made no mention of a closer post office branch located at 2963 Webster Avenue in Bedford Park.

The communications specialist was also asked about apparent lunchtime closures at the Botanical Station Post Office, located on Webster Avenue. Residents have claimed there has been a shortage of manpower at the branch and one worker has been shutting the

branch for an hour during the midday rush in order to take a lunch break.

Hernandez said of *that* closure, "The Postal Service continues to flex our resources to mitigate the human impacts of COVID-19. At this time, we can confirm that the Botanical Station Post Office (Webster Ave.) is operating regularly without interruption."

Meanwhile, a postal worker who answered the phone at the Van Cott branch on Tuesday, July 6, was asked if they were open for business. He replied, "Yes we are." When he was informed that the USPS press office was telling journalists the branch would not be open until July 11, he responded, "Thank you. I'll let my manager know." Asked if the branch had gotten rid of the foul odor and had fixed the water leak from 2019, the worker said, "Ahh, yeah."

When contacted once again by telephone on July 6, and when informed that the Van Cott Station was in fact open, Hernandez said, "Not to my knowledge. I can confirm with the station manager but according to the schedule, there may be employees in the office today." He was then informed that one resident and one employee both reported the branch as being open.

Hernandez concluded, "According to the schedule, because we have to work with the landlord, and the landlord's contractor, we were told that we would not be able to be up and running until July 11, but if it's sooner, I definitely want to make sure that information is out there."

Hernandez was then asked additional questions, via email, including whether the Van Cott opening was temporary or if the required construction was now completed in full, and confirmation of the duration of the lease between Van Cott Post Office and the landlord. Hernandez did not immediately respond as of press date. *Norwood News* will continue to monitor the situation.

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INQUIRING PHOTOGRAPHER

By DAVID GREENE



This week, we asked readers their thoughts on the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's (MTA) proposal to eliminate cash transactions at subway stations.



"I don't think it's a good idea because a lot of people don't have the means to acquire a bank card or debit card or credit cards to pay for the subway. How would ending cash transactions make the subway safer? Everyone that has to go somewhere will use the subway, so what would make it safer? I don't understand how that would make it safer. Will it affect me? Actually, it could affect me. I could lose my bank card, and I'd have no means to get on the subway. It's not a good idea."

Sheldon Parker,
Norwood



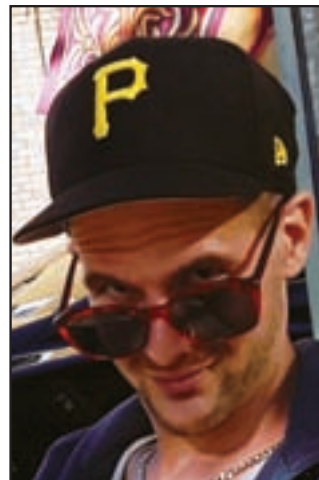
"My opinion is that they shouldn't end it because right now, with the COVID situation that's going on, crime has drastically gone up, especially in the subways. Since COVID hit, I have worked every day, and I see that the crime has drastically increased. So, we need token booths to, at least, be an eye there since we don't have the police involved. At the moment, the police are there but we still need more eyes out there so they shouldn't eliminate cash transactions, because if we need help with anything, they're there to help us."

Allan Mohammed,
Norwood



"I think they're trying to go against poor people. A lot of people don't have access to a smart phone and that kind of technology, and don't have bank accounts. I think that it's a war on poor people. It's a war on working class New Yorkers. I don't believe it's a safety issue. I think they've been trying to clean up New York in their own way, and they haven't really focused on cleaning the actual train and spending the money that way. They'd rather spend it on making it harder for people that work."

Johnny Vudoe,
Norwood



"The MTA has always been disconnected from the needs of riders. Why? Because they are a State authority, and they function at the State level. The trains and buses should be put under the financial control and logistical control of New York City and the five boroughs, not some State agency who really doesn't care, and has proven time and time again that they're incompetent and unresponsive to transit riders. At a time when we should be strengthening and incentivizing using public transit, with the horrible traffic that the Bronx is experiencing, the MTA is making it more inconvenient and less likely that people will ride the trains."

"Raph,"
Pelham Parkway



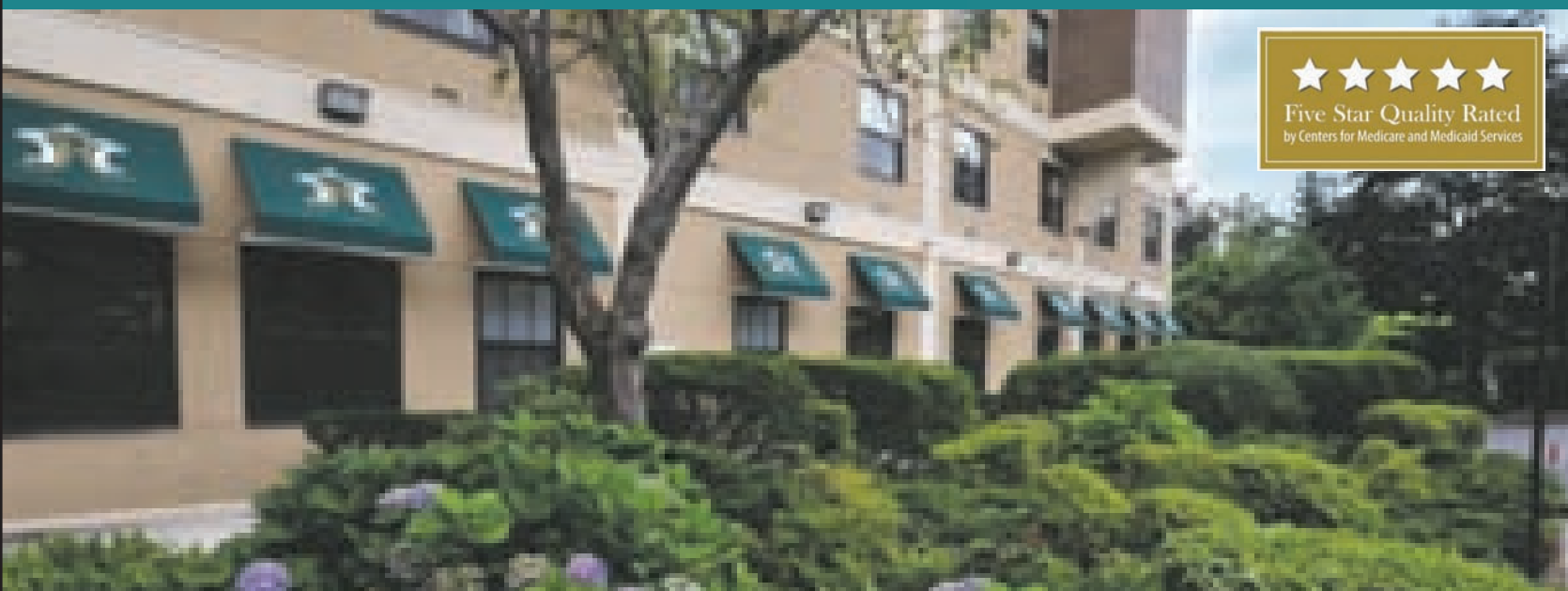
"We fail as a city when we use technology as a tool to exclude, rather than include our most vulnerable neighbors. Lots of New Yorkers rely on cash to move around the city. Advocating to keep a cash option is not a luddite position. Seeking efficiency at the expense of excluding parts of our population from accessing the MTA violates the spirit of providing a public service."

Jonathan Soto,
Throggs Neck



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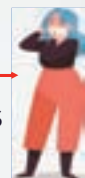
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NEWS BRIEFS

By SÍLE MOLONEY

NYC Vaccine Referral Bonus

Mayor Bill de Blasio recently announced the NYC Vaccine Referral Bonus Initiative, which provides \$4 million in direct payments to civic, faith, tenant, and other associations in exchange for referring New Yorkers for vaccine appointments.

Through the new program, community organizations, associations, civic groups and small businesses will be eligible to receive a \$100 bonus for every community member for whom they make a vaccine referral, who goes on to receive the COVID-19 vaccine at a City-run site or via in-home vaccination. Each organization is eligible to receive a maximum of \$20,000 through August 31. 501 (c) 3 status is not required, and organizations that are currently receiving City funding can apply.

To apply, go to <https://forms.cityofnewyork.us/f/VaccineReferralBonus> and fill out the form. Organizations will be approved for participation based on the following criteria: experience working in low-income neighborhoods and/or marginalized communities, capacity to perform outreach, and ability to receive payment/have an EIN number.

Diverse organizations are encouraged to sign up. After sign-up and approval, the organization's name will be listed in the VaccineFinder system as a referring organization and can begin receiving credit. Additionally, organizers from the Test & Trace Corps who work on the City's vaccination efforts will get in touch to support the selected organizations throughout the process. Organizations should e-mail vaxbonus@nychhc.org with any questions.

Affordable Housing for Seniors

Gerald Caliendo Architects has released new renderings for a proposed 8-story, residential building at 1281 Hoe Avenue in Crotona Park East, which will comprise roughly 28,500 square feet and will be dedicated (100 per-

Opinion

Why Veterans' Issues Matter

By CHAD ROYER

Veterans make up one of the most vital demographics within our local community. Many of us may have heard about our veterans, or know someone who is a veteran, but how much do we really know about our veteran colleagues, friends and neighbors, and the challenges they face?

Bronx Community Board 7 (CB7)'s Veterans Affairs Committee dug deeper into this topic by seeking feedback from several agencies and partners, and from veterans, themselves. To date, the committee has covered quite a few important veterans' topics, such as the importance of accessing dental care, why caregivers are important, knowing one's rights as a tenant, transition to civilian life, discharge upgrades, addressing the need for reduced MTA fares for veterans, and veterans' exemption

tax credits for veteran homeowners.

Our veterans put their lives on the line to ensure our basic freedoms and our democracy, as a nation. They also continue to fulfill missions within our community, like participating in our workforce, joining community clean-up events, raising families, and serving in leadership roles in our government. Our veterans want to do more, and this adds to the reasons why they are important to us. They also want to be able to have a good quality of life, and because our veterans put their lives on the line for our country, we need to do more for them.

In this regard, a few members of our neighborhood ought to be recognized for their resilience, and for their countless hours of service to the community in relation to their work with our veterans: Mr. Shawn Kingston for his outstanding work in the VA and his contributions to veteran outreach efforts, Mr. Emmanuel Martinez, Bronx Community Board 7 chair, for his vision in helping our veterans on the ground and for advocating for their well-being; Mr. Sirio Guerino, the father, son and grandson of

a veteran, for his countless hours devoted to community clean-up events and for his lobbying of our elected leaders to address various neighborhood issues; and Mr. Amjad Mujaahid, the original veterans committee chair of Bronx CB7, who continues to advocate for better health outcomes for the veterans in our communities.

Our veterans are proud warriors who can share valuable life lessons with us. One of the best ways to be supportive of our veterans and families is acknowledging our veterans, finding out what their needs are, and most importantly, understanding them both individually and collectively. What better way to start than by joining the groups, clubs and organizations which support them, like our veterans committee, or by arranging buddy check-in calls. Bronx CB7's veterans committee would also love to have more veterans attend more of our meetings so we can listen, learn and tell your story.

Chad Y. Royer is a local resident, a member of Bronx Community Board 7 (CB7) and current chair of Bronx Community Board 7 Veterans Affairs Committee.

cent) to affordable housing for seniors, as reported by the real estate site, YIMBY. Mark Shakarov is the current property owner and is listed as 1281 Hoe Avenue LLC on the building permit applications filed with the City's buildings department.

The residential component of 23,000 square feet of space will yield 45 units, all of which will comprise affordable homes for seniors. Amenities will occupy a portion of the building's second and eighth floors and are set to include multiple roof terraces, a laundry room, and bicycle storage. A portion of the roof will also support solar panels. Community facilities will take up the remaining area of 1,950 square feet. The ground-floor facility will be used as an ambulatory diagnostic center. No completion date has yet been announced

New Affordable Housing Lottery

A new affordable housing lottery has launched for apartments at Jerome Avenue Residences, a 21-story, mixed-use building at 1325 Jerome Avenue in Mount Eden, as reported by the real estate site, YIMBY.

The development is designed by GF55 Partners and developed by The Doe Fund.

Available via New York City's "Housing Connect" program are 101 apartments for residents at 40 to 60 percent of the area median income (AMI), ranging in eligible, annual income from \$25,200 to \$88,800. Prospective renters must meet income and household size requirements to apply and applications must be postmarked or submitted online no later than July 13, 2021.

Residential amenities include bike storage lock-

ers, a shared laundry room, storage, a recreation room, an outdoor terrace, and a community center. According to YIMBY, a percentage of units will go to community board residents and New York City employees. Go to: <https://housingconnect.nyc.gov/PublicWeb/details/2088> for more information.

To request an application by mail, send a self-addressed envelope to: Jerome Avenue Residence, PO Box 440, Wading River, NY 11792.

New Yorkers Protest Election Tally

A small group of protestors gathered at 32 Broadway in Manhattan on Tuesday, July 6, for a "Voter's Voice Against Fraud" rally. It was not clear which, if any, organized group had arranged the rally as calls to the contact number listed on the poster, went to voicemail.

The group called for three actions: a redo of the June primary elections in September, a federal investigation to stop alleged corruption at the New York City Board of Elections (BOE), and the imprisonment of those responsible for the alleged fraud.

It followed recent reports whereby the BOE was forced to rescind and republish results of the ranked choice voting tabulation of the mayoral race due to the erroneous inclusion of about 130,000 test votes in the initial tally. The error led many on social media to question the validity of both the initial and the subsequent count, particularly as it appeared to substantially reduce the lead held by Brooklyn Borough President and mayoral candidate, Eric Adams, over fellow candidates, Kathryn Garcia and Maya Wiley. Further protests were apparently planned for Wednesday, July 7.



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Van Cortlandt Park Reopens “Cool Pool” for Summer Season

By SARAH HUFFMAN

Children from the Kingsbridge Heights Community Center and the Davidson Community Center broke out their best swimwear on Thursday, June 24, for Van Cortlandt Park’s “Cool Pool” reopening.

The kids joined NYC Parks’ commissioner, Mitchell J. Silver, and Bronx Parks’ commissioner, Iris Rodriguez-Rosa, for the first splash of the summer season. Kingsbridge Heights Community Center student, Anisah Gamble, said of taking the big jump into the pool, “It was scary, and then fun!”

Meanwhile, Janissa Francisco, a staff member at Kingsbridge Heights Community Center, said it felt great to be back at the pool for the summer. “It’s really nice that they opened this up after being closed for so long,” she said. “It’s a great opportunity to be out here. As long as the kids are enjoying it, then I’m enjoying it.”

The pool reopening was also attended by Assembly Member Jeffrey Dinowitz (A.D. 81) and District 11 Council Member, Eric Dinowitz, the latter retaining his seat in the recent June primary election. Both joined

Silver and Rodriguez-Rosa in making some remarks before Silver jumped in the pool with the kids. The four officials used the occasion to welcome the community back to the pool, and explained the upgrades and changes that have been made to the facility during the off season.

“This is not just a pool. It’s a place, a destination you can spend the entire day,” said Silver. “I have to tell you, jumping into the pool is one of my favorite events. It’s going to be a little bit colder this year, but that’s okay.”

During his speech, Silver, who was honored for his work later that day at a separate Lawn Party hosted by Van Cortlandt Park Alliance, thanked everyone who worked at the park for making it the facility that it is. “Through the darkest days, you’ve been incredible,” he said. “You’ve come to work as essential workers. Our parks are essential. Therefore, you are essential. So, I just want to thank you so much for coming to work, starting back in March, the lockdown, until this very day,” Silver said.

The commissioner later

gave a shout-out to the pool’s lifeguards and reminded people not to get in the water when there is no lifeguard on duty. He also reminded caregivers to keep children away from the water when they are unattended, even when there are lifeguards on duty.

During the event, Silver also acknowledged the death of a Parks’ employee, José Columbus, who had been a longtime lifeguard at Van Cortlandt Park pool. He spoke about Columbus’ contributions to the park’s community and asked attendees to hold a moment of silence to honor him.

The speakers each said what they loved about Van Cortlandt Park and what it means to the community. Jeffrey Dinowitz said the park and pool were part of the lives of thousands of local families and gave these families a place to enjoy themselves in the summer.

“I’m very proud that we have this in our community. So, I just want to say ‘thank you’ to everybody who keeps this pool great, keeps it beautiful, keeps it running, makes sure everybody is safe,” the assemblyman said.

The kick-off event marked the first time Van Cortlandt Pool has opened its gates since the start of the pandemic. During its hiatus, the pool has been transformed into a “cool pool,” an NYC Parks’ initiative that was started in 2018 to revamp public city pools that had not been upgraded in a long time.

All NYC cool pools have been repainted with summer-themed wall art, and have been provided with poolside lounge chairs, cabana-style shade structures and newly planted greenery. The pools also offer free poolside activities such as sports, games, arts and crafts and fitness classes.

Van Cortlandt Pool was one of three other pools which are new to the ranks of cool pools across the city. A total of 16 cool pools received much needed renovations and upgrades as part of the program.

Rodriguez-Rosa said the transformation is amazing. “It’s taken a whole host of people to make this happen, and as it was said before by the council member, it’s important for you to be able to take care of the parks in the City of New York. So, please help us maintain our

parks, and we’re here for you,” she said. “We want you to enjoy the pool. We want you to enjoy the parks, so welcome.”

According to officials, the cool pool renovations were completed by both in-house staff and contractors. The Van Cortlandt Pool renovations cost approximately \$250,000, excluding staff time allocated to the preparation and oversight of the improvements at the site.

Meanwhile, Silver confirmed that Van Cortlandt’s pool will be open at full capacity for the summer, which is good news for the two million people who visit NYC’s outdoor pools each summer season. Van Cortlandt’s main pool holds 682 people, and the capacity of the wading pool is 92. The pools will be open from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m., with a break in the afternoon from 3 p.m. to 4 p.m. for cleaning.

The pool officially opened on Saturday, June 26, and will remain open until September 12. Mask wearing is required when entering the facility and social distancing is still being encouraged. Free sunscreen is also provided.

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Rev. David Hernquist, Pastor
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Toddlers Raise Money at “Trike-A-Thon” for St. Jude’s

by DAVID GREENE

Over 120 preschoolers from the New York Institute for Special Education recently participated in the school’s annual “Trike-a-Thon,” in efforts to raise needed funding for St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital. The event, held on Thursday, May 13, at Frampton Hall on Astor Avenue in Pelham Gardens, had students from the school’s ‘readiness program’ ride their tricycles through the halls of the school to raise money and awareness for the urgent work that St. Jude’s carries out each year, treating an average of 8,500 children with cancer and other life-threatening diseases.

Students aged three to five obeyed speed limits as they peddled their way around corners and down corridors to the applause of staff, with 12 classes taking turns and racing in teams throughout the course of the day. According to Elouise McIver, resident occupational therapist, the school has been holding its annual Trike-a-Thon event and supporting St. Jude’s for 20 years. “We love this event because it not only supports St. Jude’s, which is a wonderful organization, it allows our students to showcase their skills with tricycle riding, which makes them independent,” said McIver.

She added that the special needs school was closed for in-class learning last year due to COVID-19 and that this year, parents were still unable to physically attend the event, despite sanitizing protocols being in place. Instead, they were able to watch the event on the school’s website. McIver said she believed the students were able to raise several hundred dollars for St. Jude’s as faculty members of the school sponsored different classes that had participated in the event.

The New York Institute for Special Education was founded in 1831 as The New York Institute for the Blind and is one of the oldest schools in America that provides education and specialized services for children with disabilities. The school relocated to the Bronx in 1924, and currently has more than 250 students from across the five boroughs and Westchester County, including over 100 students who reside in the Bronx and who attend the school’s preschool program.

As reported, youngsters on both sides of Pelham Parkway often celebrate Halloween with an annual parade which was cancelled last year due to the coronavirus. In efforts to make up for that, the NYPD’s 49th precinct, based on Eastchester Road, held two separate, outdoor, socially-distanced pumpkin-carving



events at the station-house on October 22. A trick or treat event was also held around the same time. The success of the event helped create a safe, new, likely annual tradition for families in the Pelham Parkway and Morris Park areas.

Speaking to *Norwood News* at the time, Barbara Philips, who works with the children at the school, told us their disabilities range from developmental delays to language impairments, and many have social difficulties. Funding comes through the Board of Education. “They’re referred through the local school district,” said Philips. “So, we’re not really private, but they do have to come through their local district in the Bronx to come here, and they do have to have an underlying disability.”

She said the school can always use more money. “I don’t think we’ve had a tuition increase in a few years, and I think what we’re facing now is the children are coming with more difficulties, so they need more services, and we don’t always have the funds to be able to hire people like that.”

She stressed that the school had a very good board of directors who she said fully supports their programs. Philips said that during the worse part of the pandemic, many of the usual activities had to be suspended, and that this had caused set-



Photos by David Greene

ABOVE LEFT, YOUNGSTERS obey the mandatory speed limit during the New York Institute for Special Education’s annual “Trike-A-Thon” held at the school on Thursday, May 13, 2021.

LEFT, A YOUNG student at the New York Institute for Special Education peddles her tricycle around the school during a “Trike-a-thon,” to raise money for St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital on Thursday, May 13, 2021.

ABOVE, A YOUNG student is pulled over during the school’s annual “Trike-A-Thon” at the New York Institute for Special Education on Thursday, May 13, 2021.

backs with the children’s progression, since they usually try to hold an activity at least once a month for them.

Philips said she and her colleagues found that when they held activities for the children that allowed them to move around, like last year’s trick or treat event, when their parents took them out into the community, the children were less frightened as they had learned skills during those activities that they could later apply in a community setting.

“Whether it be a party or another trick or treat, they could learn those skills here, not be afraid of sounds that they are not familiar with, and then the parents will be able to cope with them better,” she said at the time.

Speaking about the impact of the shutdown on the children, and how they had to adapt to remote learning, she said, “You know, it’s hard, because you might have families that have two or three children. They have one device in the home for remote learning. They, themselves, need it for work, you know, so it’s very difficult managing their sensory needs at home, if the TV’s

too loud or sometimes, if they feel uncomfortable, they can’t tell the parent what they feel uncomfortable about.”

She said keeping the children busy in ways other than being on an iPad, was important. “We call the families, and we tell them that heavy work is good for the children, and what does that mean? That they need to feel their bodies in space so can they push the laundry basket? Can they take the cans of groceries and put them on the shelf for you?”

Philips continued, “So, while you don’t think you’re working with your child, and you don’t have time to work with your child, they’re helping you with household activities, right? And it’s benefiting them. So, you know, maybe in the bathtub, go over shaving cream and do the ABCs or the numbers, up their ADL skills. Can they do a fork, knife, and spoon? So, we do try to make them [the parents] realize that they really are doing work with them at home. I think over the COVID, we had so many children that were toilet trained, and the parents were acknowledged that you do realize what you’re teaching them?”

Philips said the biggest frustration was often behavior difficulties, which were compounded by being at home for six months. “They need to jump and run, and get outside,” she said.

She said parents would sometimes bring their kids to street fairs, but the kids wouldn’t go on the bouncy castles until they first tried them out in a familiar environment at the school and experienced them safely. Afterwards, she said they were often able to handle it in the community.

Asked about accessibility in general and the challenges faced by parents in getting around the borough with their children, Philips said, “So, things like that are intimidating to parents,” she said. “They may not know why their child will not get in an elevator, and you know, it could be so much as a perfume scent that’s bothering them.”

She said, again, a lot of it was teaching the children to get familiar with their surroundings. “We have an event here in the spring. It’s called big meals on campus, and we get fire engines, the ambulances, motorcycles, and the street cleaners, and a lot of the kids are afraid they’re going to be sucked up [by the various machines]. So, they get to see the sounds, and hear the sounds so that the parents have told us when they go back to the community, they’re not as afraid,” she said.

* Síle Moloney contributed to this story.

CRIME FILE

COMPILED BY SÍLE MOLONEY & DAVID GREENE



Police Search for Concourse Gunman

The NYPD is seeking the public's help identifying a gunman, shown left, who opened fire on two young men sitting inside a vehicle outside Top Spa Nail salon, located at 2835 Grand Concourse at East 198th Street, in Bedford Park.

Police say the incident occurred at 2:35 a.m. on Saturday, June 12, when the assailant approached an 18-year-old male and a 17-year-old male who were sitting in their car. As the pair drove away, the suspect fired multiple rounds at their vehicle. Neither was injured. Attached is a screenshot of the video taken from the incident location.

NYPD Seizes \$54,000 in Illegal Fireworks

The NYPD announced on Saturday, July 3, that it had taken \$54,000 worth of illegal fireworks off the streets in the weeks leading up to Sunday's Fourth of July holiday. Agency of-

ficials said these actions were made in collaboration with the NYC Sheriff's Office, the FDNY Fire Marshall and the NYC Fireworks Task Force which is comprised of multiple agencies including the New York State Police, New Jersey State Police, and Port Authority Police. Police also seized six illegal firearms as part of the operation.

Jerome Park: Man Arrested after Tossing Weapon

Officers from the 52nd precinct on routine patrol on Thursday, July 1, arrested a man who they say tossed a weapon near the corner of Morris Avenue and Jerome Avenue in the Jerome Park neighborhood. The man was apprehended at 10:15 p.m. after a short pursuit. Officials said a 9 mm handgun was recovered at the scene. Police charged Javon Holland, 21, of Binghamton, N.Y., with criminal possession of a weapon. A person arrested and accused of a

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

Bedford Park:

33-Year-Old Man Shot

Police are looking for the gunman who shot and wounded a 33-year-old man in Bedford Park on Sunday, June 27, at 9:05 a.m. According to police, the man was shot several times inside a five-story apartment building on East 199th Street, close to Marion Avenue, in the 52nd precinct, and sustained several wounds. EMS responded and transported the victim to St. Barnabas hospital in stable condition. There are no arrests currently, and the investigation is active and ongoing.

Norwood Shooting

For the second time in a little over five weeks, two men were shot near East Gun Hill Road in Norwood and police are, once again, searching for the gunman responsible. The shooting took place outside 3511 Hull Avenue, between East Gun

Hill Road and East 211th Street, and was reported at 12:05 a.m. on Tuesday, June 29. Police said, "Two 24-year-old males were shot in the back by an unidentified individual who fled eastbound on East Gun Hill Road." Both men were transported to St. Barnabas Hospital, their conditions were not thought to be life-threatening, and no arrests have been made. The investigation remains, "active and ongoing." As reported, an earlier shooting took place on the sidewalk outside East 211th Street in Norwood at 2:30 a.m. on Sunday, May 23.

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

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CB7 Addresses Rezoning Changes, Parks Projects & Traffic Concerns

By SARAH HUFFMAN

Bronx Community Board 7 (CB7) held one of its last meetings before the summer break on Thursday, June 17, to discuss neighborhood updates and various motions that were due to be tabled at the Board's executive meeting held on June 23.

It was an eventful meeting that touched upon a variety of topics and saw four motions passed. Two were presented by the housing, land use and economic development committee, one by the parks' committee and one arose during the new business section of the meeting.

The first motion which was passed by the Board pertained to the proposed "FRESH II" text amendment to prevailing City zoning laws. FRESH stands for "Food Retail Expansion to Support Health Program."

The amendment expands upon the existing FRESH program which was designed in 2008 to offer incentives to developers to build supermarkets that provide fresh, accessible food in neighborhoods where such produce is in short supply, and in efforts to promote more healthy eating. FRESH II aims to expand the program to a greater number of new City districts.

Bronx CB7 Land Use committee member, Erick Ascensio, presented the motion in support of the text amendment. A question was raised as to whether there were any incentives for community members to shop at such supermarkets, once opened. Ascensio clarified that the

amendment did not include such a stipulation. "It's mostly to allow supermarkets and fresh produce to be more available to communities that can be considered food deserts," he said.

The second motion concerned the proposed text amendment to zoning laws for health and fitness outlets. Most health and wellness related businesses, such as gyms, spas, martial arts studios, therapists, and yoga studios need special permits from the Board of Standards and Appeals to operate. The aim of the proposed amendment was to ease red tape to allow the opening of such businesses in certain City districts. Ascensio proposed the motion that CB7 would support the amendment because such businesses were neighborhood amenities.

Committee member, Andrew Laiosa, brought up the issue and potential for human trafficking that sometimes occurs in massage parlors. Laiosa expressed concern that the proposed amendment would make it easier for people with ill intent to open such businesses, thereby making it harder to tackle human trafficking. The committee discussed the fact that the amendment pertained more to zoning laws [relating to construction] rather than the operational permits needed to run certain types of businesses within such buildings. The motion was subsequently passed.

The Parks' committee then presented the third motion, which related to a letter from a local labor union which was asking CB7 to support the adoption of the

"Design Build" concept for procurement and construction in the district's local parks.

The purpose of the Design Build concept is to combine design work with construction work on parks projects, ideally reducing the cost of such projects as well as the amount of time needed to complete them. "Originally, in the letter, the union asked that we put this in our 'Needs Assessment,' which would go in with our budget in the fall," said Parks' chair, Barbara Stronczer.

She said that she had gotten in touch with the union and had asked if there was anything else the board could do to help because the board reviewed a lot of parks projects. "They pointed out that we could contact our elected officials and ask for their support. It might be helpful," she said.

The motion was subsequently passed for the board to send a letter to Community District 7 (CD7)'s three City Council representatives to ask that they support the Design Build concept.

At the end of the meeting, during the new business section, committee member, Edgar Ramos, said that the NYPD had requested CB7's support, by way of writing a letter to CD7's elected officials, to request that new legislation be put in place to help the NYPD control traffic problems relating to the use of scooters and dirt bikes. Ramos explained that there was very little the NYPD could do to control such vehicles under the existing laws and rules relating to parking,

traffic, and towing.

Ramos added, "I ask everyone, you know, when you're having conversations with your elected officials, just kind of put the center here, you know. Let them know the NYPD needs their help so they can help us," he said. The committee briefly discussed the traffic issues relating to such vehicles before passing the motion.

Health committee chair, Michelle Avila, then updated the committee on COVID-19 rates in the area, saying that there had been a decline of 1 percent or less than 1 percent in positive COVID-19 rates in some neighborhoods from June 6 through June 12.

Meanwhile, in terms of COVID-19 vaccination rates, Avila reported that such rates were being monitored, and that the Bronx was behind other boroughs. She reminded members to encourage people to get vaccinated and to talk to others about the importance of doing so. She also said the health committee planned to carry out some outreach over the summer to dispel vaccine rumors and encourage people to get vaccinated.

CB7 Board chair, Emmanuel Martinez, reinforced the message, reminding everyone to continue to be cautious about COVID-19. "We still have to continue protecting ourselves because, you know, the virus mutates when it wants and especially now, in the summer, when more people are going to be out and about, it's even more important for us to continue with our safety protocols," he said.

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Van Cortlandt Park Consecration of Enslaved African Burial Ground

By MIRIAM QUIÑONES & SÍLE MOLONEY

In gratitude for the sacrifice of the African Ancestors who built what is now Van Cortlandt Park, the African Burial Ground, located within the park, was consecrated during a special, live-streamed Juneteenth ceremony on June 19.

Cultural consultant, Peggy King Jorde, hosted the proceedings. According to newjersey.com, King Jorde has been involved in memorializing and preserving African burial grounds for nearly 30 years, after what started as a one-time project on a Manhattan site during her time working in the design and construction office of former New York City mayor, the late David Dinkins.

That work grew into a passion that drove King Jorde to international activism, and the work on that first pioneering ancient burial ground project in Manhattan has served to inform and guide other similar preservation projects all over the United States, as well as on the island of St. Helena, located in the South Atlantic Ocean, a midway point along the transatlantic slave route.

Speaking to UN News in November 2020, King Jorde explained that the Manhattan project had been the first to garner a huge level of civic engagement and this inspired the setting of a precedent in preserving other such historical sites.

Speaking on the importance of the work, she said at the time, "In unearthing some of not necessarily the remains, but getting to the top surface of the ground, there are things that archaeologists can learn, or be able to convey to the community and help build that picture of who these people were, who the community was, how they were laid to rest, but more than anything else, the burial ground is a tangible reminder."

She added, "It is a kind of site that [for] everyone, in some personal way whether you are of African descent or not, resonates or has significant meaning. It's real. You know that there are people who are lying there and that that is unquestionable history that is before you."

Meanwhile, ahead of a live viola performance, acclaimed musician and direc-



Photo by Miriam Quiñones

A LIBATION CEREMONY is presided over by Chief Baba Neil Clarke and Khuent Rose Steelpan at a ceremony marking the consecration of African Burial Ground, located within Van Cortlandt Park, to coincide with Juneteenth on June 19, 2021.

tor of curriculum and artist development for the Bronx Arts Ensemble, Judith Insell, said she was incredibly honored to share the music of the group's teaching artists and artists in general with the audience. "On behalf of the Bronx Arts Ensemble, our board, our board chair, Bob Fanuzzi, myself, as executive director, our teaching artists, our musicians, we all are so humbled to be asked to present at this event, an event that is of the greatest importance to our organization," she said.

"To honor the ancestors of African enslaved individuals today is one of the highest honors we could be asked to give our talents to," she added. "So, with that said, I am going to give you some of my talent." She then performed, "I want Jesus to walk with me."

Among the attendees were Congressman Jamaal Bowman (NY-16), Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz (A.D. 81), and District 11 Councilman Eric Dinowitz. For



Photo by Miriam Quiñones

CHIEF BABA NEIL Clarke blesses the ground during a libation ceremony marking the consecration of Enslaved African Burial Ground, located within Van Cortlandt Park, to coincide with Juneteenth on June 19, 2021.

his part, Bowman said that it was with a lot of emotion that he spoke at the event. "I want to thank everyone who was involved in putting this event together," he said. "I want to thank everyone who was involved in not letting us forget our history because Black history is our history, and African history is our history."

The program also included "traditional negro spirituals," performed by soloist, Beverly Fleming-Camejo, remarks by artist and historian, Kamau Ware, curator of the Black Gotham Experience exhibition at the Museum of the History of New York, and a benediction by Rev. Dr. Hermon L. Darden, senior pastor at St. Stephen's United Methodist Church.

The day's events were presented respectfully by Van Cortlandt Park Alliance, Van Cortlandt Park House Museum, Kingsbridge Historical Society, and by the "Enslaved People Project" task force steering committee at the City's Parks' department. It was supported, in part, by public funds from the City's department of cultural affairs in partnership with the City Council.

The libation, which is the act of pouring out a drink as an offering to a deity, was presided over by Chief Baba Neil Clarke, who explained he would be using the Olukumi dialect of speech during the ceremony. According to SciELO South Africa, Olukumi, along with Yoruba, is spoken in Nigeria, and is an endangered language.

"I'm here as a musician, but I'm also here as clergy to function in this capacity," Clarke said, adding that his colleague, Khuent Rose Steelpan, was there in a similar capacity. He contextualized

the ceremony by referencing the ongoing civil rights struggle in the country and "the state and foundation of this democratic experiment that we are purportedly participating in."

He explained that the African Ancestors who were brought to the United States were aristocrats, statesmen, economists, blacksmiths, hunters, agriculturalists, navigators, architects, carpenters, bakers, herdsman, horsemen, tanners, historians, scholars, community leaders and urban planners.

"All of that disappears under this label of slaves or enslavement," he said. "In addition to being brilliant singers, dancers, musicians, instrument makers, craftsmen, acrobats, athletes, dramatists, is this knowledge... those skills are the roots of the resourcefulness, the creativity, the resilience so fundamental to these United States, to the contributions that were made to these United States, that this country has been late to acknowledge and give credit to."

Clarke continued, "These are the people who we are here today to give the recognition to, and to pay homage to and honor... not slaves, not just enslaved people, but to all those qualities, all of those characters, all of those skills that these individuals embody, that they brought to this stolen land to help build this country that we know today as the United States."

He went on to explain that in the African tradition there has always been an acknowledgement of life, of existence and of the universe within which people exist. "It is the spoken Word that we use because in the beginning, there was the Word, and the Word 'God' was 'God' and the Word was with God so, this is nothing unusual. This is something in Africa [that] is nothing strange," he said.

"This is something that Africans have always done, in acknowledgement of this that we are part of, not in control or not in direction of, because if you leave this asphalt for too long, guess what? It's going to get taken back," he said.

He then explained that during libation, people paid homage to the Creator and to all the forces that are emanations of the energy of the Creator, the Alpha and the Omega, and to all of those individuals and entities that people are subject to, and dependent on, and coexist with, in order to complete life's journey as spiritual beings, in a human incarnation, on a journey of a lifetime.

During the central stage of the libation ceremony, Clarke said, "Sometimes, water is used because water is the substance of life." He added, "Without water, there is no life. Sometimes an alcoholic drink is used because it is a stimulant, and it is to stimulate the spirit."

In conclusion, referring once again to the Ancient Ancestors, he said, "They are celebrated for the sacrifices that they made so that we could be here today, because the only reason that we see as far as we do is because we stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us."

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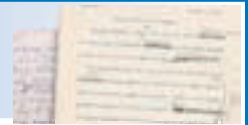
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NEIGHBORHOOD NOTES

COMPILED BY SARAH HUFFMAN & SÍLE MOLONEY



COVID-19 Updates

COVID-19 restrictions are now lifted, as 70% of adults have received their first dose of the vaccine. New York State's health guidance and industry specific guidelines are now optional across commercial and social settings. Effective May 19, New York State has adopted the CDC's Interim Public Health Recommendations for Fully Vaccinated People for most businesses and public settings.

See more information here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/fully-vaccinated-guidance.html>. See New York's guidance for implementing the new CDC recommendations on <https://forward.ny.gov/>. The Open Enrollment Period for uninsured New Yorkers has been extended through December 31, 2021. New Yorkers can apply for coverage through <https://nystateofhealth.ny.gov/> or directly through insurers.

Health care workers can text NYFRONTLINE to 741-741 to access 24/7 emotional support services. Any New Yorker can call the COVID-19 Emotional Support Hotline at

1-844-863-9314 for mental health counseling.

The Delta variant is on the rise in New York City. According to Yale Medicine, there have been reports of symptoms that are different from those associated with the original coronavirus strain. It seems like cough and loss of smell are less common, and headache, sore throat, runny nose, and fever are more common [in the Delta variant] based on the most recent surveys carried out in the U.K., where more than 90% of the cases are due to the Delta strain.

Youth Run Farm Stand

Van Cortlandt Park Alliance reopened its Youth Run Farm Stand on July 7. This is the 10th anniversary of selling locally grown produce and other locally sourced goods. The farm stand is located in the Train Park, at Orloff Avenue and Gale Place and is open on Wednesdays from 2 p.m. to 7 p.m. Organizers accept WIC, FMNP Checks, EBT, SNAP, cash and credit/debit cards. For every \$2 spent on EBT/SNAP, visitors will receive \$2 in Health Bucks (maximum of \$10/day), including new Pan-

demic EBT (P-EBT) benefits for all families that have school-aged children.

Fostering a Guinea Pig

Friends of Pelham Parkway recently reported having found 11 abandoned guinea pigs under a tree, off Pelham Parkway. Animal Care Centers of NYC now has over 80 guinea pigs and is running out of housing. Anyone interested in owning or fostering a guinea pig and has a cage/set-up to do so should contact foster@nyacc.org.

Scavenger Hunt

Woodlawn Cemetery and Conservancy is hosting a scavenger hunt and firefly picnic on July 11 at 5:30 p.m. The event is at the Woodlawn Cemetery and attendees should enter through the Jerome Avenue gate for parking. Attendees should bring their own blanket, picnic basket and mason jars. The event is free and open to the public, but registration is required. To register, visit www.woodlawn.org/conservancy and scroll down to tours and events. Click on 'read more' and scroll down for the regis-

tration link.

New York City Cooling Centers Open

New York City Cooling Centers are open in cases of extreme heat. These centers are spaces where people can go to enjoy air conditioning during a heat emergency. You can find a cooling center near you by calling 311.

Training for Small Businesses

The NYC Department of Small Business Services is providing no-cost, online training to help business owners and employees in NYC. For more information, go to: <https://www1.nyc.gov/nycbusiness/article/nyc-means-business-training-for-your-employees>.

Bronx Community Relief Effort Updates

Sign up for Bronx Community Relief Effort updates. Applications for grant funding from the Bronx Community Relief Effort are currently closed but the next round of applications will open soon. Head to their website to sign up for updates, or periodically check here: <https://the-bronx.org/> to see when the application window reopens. Check

out <https://www.uschamber.com> for a list of current grants, loans and programs for small businesses.

New York Forward Loan Fund

The New York Forward Loan Fund is continuing to accept applications to assist those impacted by COVID-19. This program will target small businesses with 20 or fewer full-time equivalent employees, nonprofits and small landlords that have seen a loss of income or rental income. If approved, these loans will need to be paid back over a five-year term with interest. Go to: <https://www.connect2capital.com/partners/new-york-forward-loan-fund/> for more information and the application.

Volunteer Events

The Bronx River Alliance is hosting volunteer events at Starlight Park (1490 Sheridan Boulevard) every Thursday in July from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. For more information, you can contact their volunteer coordinator at volunteer@bronxriver.org, call 718-542-4284, or visit www.bronxriver.org.

Norwood Goes Electric with installation of First Electric Vehicle Charging Station

by DAVID GREENE

New York City recently took its first step in developing a public infrastructure for electric vehicles (EVs) as officials from the Department of Transportation (DOT), Consolidated Edison (Con Ed) and Flo Energy unveiled a new EV pilot program and the first of 100 charging stations to be installed across the five boroughs between now and October.

A press conference announcing the milestone was held on Thursday, June 24, at the southeastern corner of Putnam Place and East Gun Hill Road in Norwood, where the new state-of-the-art, curbside EV charging port is now located. Two customers at a time can charge their vehicles at Putnam Place while four vehicles can charge up at the newly installed charging station at 5935 Broadway in Riverdale.

DOT Commissioner Hank

Gutman told invited guests, "Welcome to a beautiful and historical day here in the Bronx. The survival of our city and indeed our entire planet depends upon our ability to reduce our carbon footprint and to do it now. This is why the [De Blasio] administration is so focused on promoting bikes, buses, mass transit and other alternatives to the use of a private vehicle."

Gutman continued, "It doesn't take up excessive sidewalk, it doesn't interfere with any of the other uses that we make of the City streets and sidewalks, well designed, well executed, and we're looking forward to having the next, I guess, 99 installed, and seeing how the public enjoys using [them]."

According to Gutman, the pilot program will consist of 100 "Level 2" charging stations which will be located in 20 neighborhoods across the

five boroughs by EV owners, and an additional 20 charging stations that will be built for New York City's own fleet of vehicles.

Ben Furnas, director of the Mayor's Office of Climate and Sustainability, told those in attendance, "In the fight against climate change, and for cities, action on climate means transforming our streets to support walking and biking and transit, and it also means making sure that every car on the road is an electric." Furnas added, "Con Ed and DOT are doing just that, from bike lanes to bus lanes to open streets."

Meanwhile, Lenny Singh, senior VP of Con Edison's Customer Energy Solution unit, said, "Curbside charging makes adopting EVs more convenient for our customers. Not having to run a drop-cord three stories down certainly is convenient."

He added, "It makes EV

ownership even easier, especially [for] those who live in apartment buildings like the ones we're standing next to today and those without access to their own charging stations."

According to Singh, the long-term plan is to install 21,000 Level 2 charging stations and 525 "fast chargers" across the city. Singh added that Con Edison was investing \$1.5 billion in three transmission projects that will deliver renewable energy that will eventually charge the EV charging stations from offshore wind turbines.

Singh concluded, "The future of the energy supply in New York is renewables, things like offshore wind and solar. EVs will increasingly be charged by those renewable sources and we're ensuring that our grid and the grid of New York City is equipped for that transition." According to City officials, the goal is for

New York to be powered by 100 percent renewable energy by 2040.

Charles Miller, an Allerton resident and the proud owner of a 2012 Nissan Leaf EV, was delighted with the new charging station as it means he no longer has to pay for a parking space outside his apartment building and run several extension cords out his third floor window in order to charge his car.

As he charged his car at the new station, Miller said, "If you're in this area, it's going to give you about an hour to chill." He added that the new chargers were going to be convenient in the sense that no EV owner would be left stranded due to not being able to charge up. "That's the best part about it," he said.

A one-hour charge will cost \$2.50 for more than 6 kilowatt hours, and an EV will cover about 25 miles from that charge.

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Fordham Flea Market Attracts Vendors from all over The Bronx

By MIRIAM QUIÑONES &
SHANIA DEGROOT

Vendors and small businesses from all over The Bronx gathered at the new Fordham Flea Market to display their wares during its grand opening on Sunday, July 27, as shoppers showed up to support local enterprise.

As it was a hot day, sellers congregated under tents and music was heard in the background, keeping the day moving along amid a convivial and relaxed atmosphere. Local handicrafts, arts and crafts, gifts, accessories, and self-care products were among the items on sale at the market. According to the market's organizers, the goal is primarily to support those local businesses which are minority-owned, immigrant-owned, women-owned and LGBTQIA-owned by providing a safe venue for them to express themselves.

Lani Falove is the owner of "A Flare of Home," a Bronx-based, Black-owned small business that specializes in providing music-themed home goods which aim to create a particular mood in any setting. She said all her products are made by hand in The Bronx, and her candles help create a great atmosphere in the home.



Meanwhile, Marco Shalma, founder of Bronx Night Market and president of MASC Hospitality Group, the organization responsible for launching Ford-



Photos by Miriam Quiñones

(L TO R) LITTLE KICK gives Dwayne Smith a try of pineapple hot sauce from Fordham Flea market at 1 Fordham Plaza in the Bronx on Sunday, June 27, 2021.

(TOP) GIOVANNI CUEVAS (right) from Bambu Candles and Soaps and a colleague sell candles at Fordham Flea market at 1 Fordham Plaza in the Bronx on Sunday, June 27, 2021.

ham Flea Market, said, "The team and I want to support the dozens of new business owners, aka home-entrepreneurs, created out of necessity during the pandemic, and apply our reach, experience, and connection to the community in bringing more commerce, marketing, and engagement opportunities to these vendors, all the while showcasing the level of professionalism The Bronx has come to expect of us."

The long-running and highly popular Bronx Night Market is noted for its theme which celebrates culture and cuisine, spotlights the city's distinctive offerings, and promotes innovative food concepts, all while encouraging visitors from across New York to visit the borough.

On July 11, the market will hold its next event, and from July 18, it will be open every Sunday. Vendors and small businesses can apply online to participate, and the market also organizes seasonal pop-up events in collaboration with NYBG, SummerStage, NY Road Runners, and CUNY.

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Street Co-Named for Famed Bronx Chef

By MIRIAM QUIÑONES, MICHAEL HOROWITZ & SÍLE MOLONEY

Beloved, local character and restaurateur, Joe Torres, was honored during a street co-naming ceremony in Soundview on June 26, in the presence of family, friends, neighbors, former customers and elected officials. “Joe Torres Way,” a section of street encompassing Westchester and Thierrot Avenues was renamed in memory of Torres on the recommendation of Assemblyman José Rivera and Freddy Jr Perez, president at FPJ Amusements & Entertainment Services, Inc.

It was an apt tribute to Torres, who owned and ran Joe’s Place, an upbeat, family-friendly, Puerto-Rican style restaurant, located at 1843 Westchester Avenue in Soundview, for more than two decades. The local icon died in March 2020 following complications relating to COVID-19.

Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr., his father, outgoing city councilman, Ruben Diaz Sr. (C.D. 18), District 17 Councilman Rafael Salamanca, District Leader Tommy Torres (A.D.53), Marcos Crespo, senior vice president for community affairs at Montefiore Health System,



Photo by Miriam Quiñones.

FAMILY AND FRIENDS of the late Joe Torres Sr., Liza, Olga, Aide, Joe Jr., Margarita, Barbara Aponte-Neithardt and Emy Torres Duberek, celebrate the co-naming of Westchester and Thierrot Avenues in Soundview as “Joe Torres Way,” on June 26, 2021.

former Assemblyman Adam Clayton Powell, photographer and recent honoree on the Bronx Walk of Fame, Joe Conzo Jr., and Joe Conzo Sr. were among those present to pay tribute to the late Torres.

Singers, Nayibe La Gitana and Frankie Vazquez, kept everyone entertained and dancing to the beats of salsa music on the day, while Eva Bornstein and Janet Sanchez, both from the Lehman Center for Perform-

ing Arts and good friends of Torres, delighted in the occasion, hugging each other and saying they felt sad yet happy that the restaurateur’s legacy was being honored.

On the menu at Joe’s Place, prior to the establishment’s closure, was a variety of seafood, steaks, and Spanish dishes. Torres was known to cater to both regular people, as well as the rich and famous, including baseball great, Alex Rodriguez, and award-winning performer, Jennifer Lopez. Salsa great, Eddie Palmieri, and other notables from the world of salsa were also known to frequent Torres’s restaurant, both as customers and as performers.

Liza Torres, the restaurateur’s daughter thanked everyone involved in putting the event together and said her father would have loved it. “It was super painful not being able to have a funeral last year,” she said, adding that her father would have been more impressed by the number of people who showed up for the celebration than by the street co-naming itself. Gesturing to all those gathered, she said, “This, right here, is what he would have wanted.”

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Public and Community Meetings

The 52nd **PRECINCT COMMUNITY COUNCIL** meeting are usually held on the **third Thursday of each month at 6 p.m.** at the precinct at 3100 Webster Avenue. Masks and social distancing are required at meetings. Call the 52nd Precinct Community Affairs office at 718-220-5824 for further details.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic hit in March, **BRONX COMMUNITY BOARD 7** meetings have been held via ZOOM. The next full Board meeting will be held in **September**, after the summer break. Details will be circulated ahead of the meeting. Contact mirosario@cb.nyc.gov to be added to the distribution list.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic hit in March, **BEDFORD MOSHOLU COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION** meetings have been held via ZOOM. The meetings are usually held on the **first Wednesday of each month at 8 p.m.** The last meeting for the season was held on June 2. The group breaks for July and August. For further details, contact bedfordmosholu@verizon.net.

Rivieccio Financial Advisors Launches

By SÍLE MOLONEY

Anthony Rivieccio, founder and CEO of The Financial Advisors Group, a local, online business celebrating its 30th anniversary this year, confirmed on June 30 that 65 percent of the group will be sold to outside management investors. At the same time, Rivieccio launched a new financial business, Rivieccio Financial Advisors.

Rivieccio said he first got into the finance world on July 1, 1991, when he became a licensed broker. By 1996, he had moved into investment planning at JP Morgan Chase. As the industry changed and became more regulated, Rivieccio created The Financial Advisors Group in 1996 with two other partners. He said 25 years later, the business has morphed to an online business, serving clients outside both the borough and the country.

"Our latest fiscal year, ending June 30, 2021, shows some good numbers," he said. "Client services has been increasing 20

percent a year, our Investment Management division has been pumping at 22 percent a year, client turnover has been a bit rough at 15 percent a year - bottom line, after 25 years in business, we are a fully based cashflow firm." He said although the business is not booming, it is standing tall.

Rivieccio is still a member of the board of The Financial Advisors Group but is no longer the majority CEO. "New management will be concentrating on investment management, through their custodian partner since 1997, The Vanguard Group. I will, of course, still retain 35 percent ownership," he said.

Since July 1, he is now the full owner and CEO of a private, virtual family office, Rivieccio Financial Advisors, the focus of which is to assist anyone, virtually, with the tenets of personal finance and advice, whether it's assisting with budgeting, debt, taxes, investment, insurance, retirement or estates and wills.

CORRECTIONS

In the Norwood News June 24-July 7 edition, on page 20, "Bengali Community Celebrates the End of Ramadan," Sanjana Khan's surname was misspelled as Kahn. There was also a reference in the same story to the Eid picnic being ice cream-themed, whereas this was not actually the case. We apologize for these errors.

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?

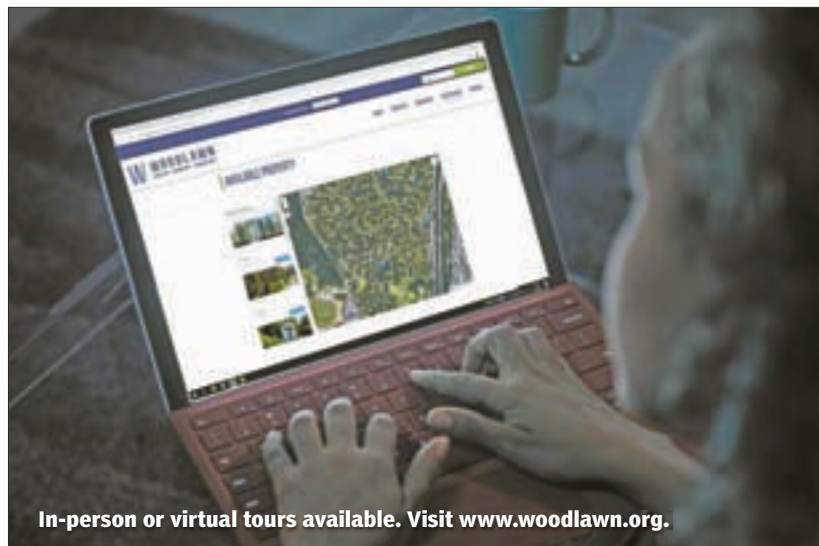
Woodlawn: First, we explain how important it is to have a place they can come back to over the years to visit their loved one who has died. This is an essential part of the grieving process and one that is

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.



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Letters To The Editor

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

Happy 57th Birthday to Bronx Public Transportation

July 2021 marks the 57th anniversary of federal government support for public transportation. The success of public transportation can be traced back to one of the late President Lyndon Johnson's greatest accomplishments, which continues to benefit many Americans today. On July 9, 1964, Johnson signed into law the "Urban Mass Transportation Act of 1964." This has resulted in the investment of several hundred billion dollars into public transportation, over time.

Millions of Americans, including many residing in the Bronx today, utilize various public transportation alternatives, daily. These include local and express bus, ferry, jitney, light rail, subway, and commuter rail ser-

vices.

All these systems use less fuel and move far more people than conventional single-occupancy vehicles, and most of these systems are funded with your tax dollars, thanks to Johnson.

Fast forward to today. Fortunately, we have the MTA and its various operating agencies, including NYC Transit subway, bus and Staten Island Railway, Metro North and Long Island Rail Roads, MTA Bus and Westchester Bee Line Bus.

Depending upon where you live, consider the public transportation alternatives. Try riding a local or express bus, commuter van, ferry, light rail, commuter rail or subway.

Using MTA Metro Cards provides free transfers between the subway and bus. This has eliminated the old two-

fare zones, making public transportation an even better bargain. Purchasing a monthly Metro North or MTA subway/bus pass reduces the cost per ride and provides virtually unlimited trips.

In many cases, employers can offer transit checks which help subsidize a portion of the costs. Utilize this and reap the benefits. It also supports a cleaner environment.

Many employers now allow employees to telecommute and work from home. Others use alternative work schedules which afford staff the ability to avoid rush-hour gridlock. This saves travel time and can improve mileage per gallon. Join a car or van pool to share the costs of commuting. The ability to travel from home to workplace, school, shopping, entertainment, medical,

library etc. is a factor when moving to a new neighborhood. Economically successful communities are not 100 percent dependent on automobiles as the sole means of mobility. Seniors, students, low and middle-income people need these transportation alternatives. Investment in public transportation today contributes to economic growth, employment, and a stronger economy. Dollar for dollar, it is one of the best investments we can make.

**Larry Penner
Great Neck**

COVID-19

It has been common knowledge for years that all major developing countries have possessed the ability to conduct germ warfare. The Wuhan crisis is no exception. Was a virus created in the lab and deliberately leaked into the local, wet markets for experimentation on the people of Wuhan? This is totally consistent with China's poor record on civil rights and its

complete lack of concern for all Chinese people.

The virus created in Wuhan is by no means a poor reflection on all Asians, especially Americans. It is simply a reaffirmation of the communist Chinese government's inhuman disdain for human life. They are the ones to blame.

Now, we, the American people, are required by our government to get the vaccine, without being told what the short/long-term side effects are. This is inherently a violation of our civil rights.

The one benefactor from the spread of the virus is the environment. Consider how working from home reduces the amount of carbon emissions caused by the automobile.

**Joe Bialek
Cleveland, OH
(former Bronx resident)**

Editor's Note: Americans are not required by the government to get the COVID-19 vaccine.

Plant-Based Diet

The scarcity of animal meat caused by the COVID-19 pandemic kept our outdoor grills safer on Independence Day. Folks who grilled hamburgers and hot dogs faced a nasty choice. The U.S. Meat and Poultry hotline advised grilling at high temperatures to

avoid food poisoning by E. coli and Salmonella bacteria, but the National Cancer Institute warned that high-temperature grilling of processed meats generates cancer-causing compounds. Fortunately, we no longer need to choose between food poisoning and cancer!

A bunch of enterprising U.S. food processors have met this challenge head-on by developing a rich variety of convenient, healthful, delicious, plant-based, veggie burgers, veggie dogs, and soy nuggets. These products don't harbor nasty bugs or cancer-causing compounds.

They are also missing the cholesterol, saturated fats, drugs, hormones, and pesticides of their animal-based alternatives, and they are waiting for us in the frozen food section of our favorite supermarket, along with nut-based ice creams, and other dairy-free desserts.

Following Independence Day, let's declare our independence from the meat industry and their barbecue bugs! Let's welcome convenient, delicious, healthful, eco-friendly, compassionate, plant-based meats and dairy foods into our kitchens!

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Montefiore



Out & About

By SARAH HUFFMAN

Events

The New York City Park department's "Movie Under the Stars" series will be showing the Disney Pixar film, *Coco*, on Thursday, July 8, at dusk (around 8:30/9 p.m.) at Gun Hill Meadow (Mosholu Golf Course) at 3545 Jerome Avenue. The event is free and open to the public, but seating is limited. Social distancing will be encouraged, regardless of vaccination status.

New York City Parks department's is hosting a "Toddler Obstacle Course" at the Williamsbridge Oval Recreation Center at 3225 Reservoir Oval East on Tuesday, July 13, from 10:30 a.m. to noon, as part of its Summer 2021 Pop-up Program. The course will consist of a variety of obstacles and competitors can try to beat their own time and that of their competitors. Siblings and families are welcome.

New York City Parks Department is hosting a **Scavenger Hunt** at the Williamsbridge Oval Recreation Center at 3225 Reservoir Oval East on Wednesday, July 14, from 4 p.m. to 5:30 p.m., as part of its Summer 2021 Pop up

Program. Attendees are invited to explore the park by searching for clues to a prize.

The NYC Parks department is hosting **Toddler and Youth Programs** throughout the summer, starting July 6, at the Williamsbridge Oval Recreation Center at 3225 Reservoir Oval East. Sidewalk Chalk Fun with Tatiyana is on Mondays from 4:30 p.m. to 6 p.m., Family Fun with Tatiyana is on Tuesdays from 11 a.m. to noon, and Art Time with Tatiyana is on Tuesdays from 4:30 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Toddler Art with Ana is on Thursdays from 11 a.m. to noon, Water Games with Tatiyana is on Wednesdays from 4:30 p.m. to 6 p.m. and Bingo with Ana is on Thursdays from 4:30 p.m. to 6 p.m. Recycle Art with Ana is on Fridays from 4:30 p.m. to 6 p.m. and Arts and Crafts with Ana is on Saturdays from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

The NYC Parks department is hosting **Adult Programs** throughout the summer, starting July 6, at the Williamsbridge Oval Recreation Center at 3225 Reservoir Oval East. Chair Aerobics

with Ingrid is on Mondays from 10 a.m. to 10:45 a.m., Mobile Media Workshops with Shawn is on Mondays from 11 a.m. to noon, Circuit Training with Sarah is on Tuesdays from 10 a.m. to 10:45 a.m., Riding to the Beat with Ingrid is on Wednesdays from 10 a.m. to 10:45 a.m., Mobile Media Workshops with Shawn are on Wednesdays from 11 a.m. to noon, Kripalu Yoga with Michele is on Thursdays from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m., Art Studio with Ana is on Fridays from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m.

For all NYC Parks hosted events, masks are required for unvaccinated people or those who cannot maintain social distance. Social distancing is strongly encouraged.

The Van Cortlandt House Museum will have **Story Hour with the Goats**, every Thursday (weather permitting) at 2 p.m. starting on July 1. Attendees should meet under the Linden tree by the goat enclosure. Admission is free. There will be reading from a selection of goat-themed picture books each week. If the weather forecast calls for rain, organizers suggest calling on the morning of July 1 to confirm if it is still happening.

Music

Bronx Arts Ensemble's **Virtual Benefit Concert Featuring Bobby Sanabria: ¡Jazz Puertorriqueño!** is available to watch until July 10. The concert is free, with viewers encouraged to donate to Bronx Arts Ensemble. The concert features artistic works by important Puerto Rican composers and highlights string players from the Bronx Arts Ensemble. To access the concert, viewers can go to bronxartsensemble.org/events and scroll down for the link.

Art

The Bronx Museum of the Arts is hosting a performance entitled **5 Indices on a Tortured Body: The Female Body** on July 10 at 2 p.m. This event is the first of a five-part series which is being performed in conjunction with the exhibit *Wardell Milan: Amerika. God Bless You If It's Good to You*. Registration for the event is free. The link to register can be found at bronxmuseum.org under the events tab.

The Bronx River Arts Center is hosting **Summer Art Classes** for all ages starting July 6 through Aug. 9, including painting, printmaking, drawing, photography, and ceramics. Most of the classes are being offered in person, but some are taking place over Zoom or in a hybrid format. To register, visit www.bracbx.eventbrite.com.

Movement

Get your body moving this summer at **HITT Cross Training Circuit** now through Sept. 17 at St. James Place tennis courts. Hosted by the New York City Parks' department, this free training program for adults combines a variety of exercises to reduce risk of injury and improve overall fitness. The classes are on Monday and Wednesdays from 8 a.m. to 8:45 a.m. at St. James Recreation Center, located at 2550 Jerome Avenue. Social distancing will be encouraged, regardless of vaccination status. Masks are required for people who are unvaccinated or who are not maintaining a social distance.

Gibson, Adams, Lander Win BP, Mayoral and Comptroller Races as Bronx Dems Hail New Era for City

By SÍLE MOLONEY

The Bronx Democratic Party released a statement on Tuesday night, July 6, following the latest results of the absentee ballot count and ranked-choice voting tabulation in the Democratic primary elections, which saw victories for progressive candidates and history-making wins in races across the borough.

Though the election results have not yet been ratified by the New York City Board of Elections (BOE), Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams secured enough absentee votes to win the Democratic nomination after a tight race to become Mayor of New York City. Meanwhile, having won her primary race, Councilwoman Vanessa Gibson (CD-16) is set to make history as the first Black Bronx borough president, as well as the first woman to hold that office.

Progressive councilman, Brad Lander, is the Demo-

cratic nominee for city comptroller, and the Bronx City Council delegation will be led by a majority of women of color. Party officials highlighted that those candidates who were supported by the Bronx Democratic Party will go on to represent the borough in the Council after winning their respective primaries: Diana Ayala (District 8), Eric Dinowitz (District 11), Kevin Riley (District 12), Marjorie Velázquez (District 13), Pierina Sanchez (District 14), Oswald Feliz (District 15), Althea Stevens (District 16), Rafael Salamanca Jr. (District 17), and Amanda Fariás (District 18).

Reacting to the latest results, Adams wrote in a tweet on Tuesday night, "I grew up poor in Brooklyn and Queens. I wore a bulletproof vest to keep my neighbors safe. I served my community as a State Senator & Brooklyn Borough President. And I'm honored to be the Democratic nominee to be the mayor of the

city I've always called home. Thank you, New York!"

Meanwhile, Dinowitz released a statement on Wednesday, July 7, confirming he had received 61.3 percent of the vote in the final round of ranked choice voting, saying, "I am thrilled to have won the Democratic Primary. It is an absolute honor to serve my community and I look forward to continuing to be a voice for the North Bronx in the City Council," he said.

Bronx Democratic Party chair, State Sen. Jamaal T. Bailey congratulated all of the candidates on what he described as their well-deserved victories and wished them success in their roles. "Congratulations to our next mayor, Eric Adams, Bronx borough president, Vanessa L. Gibson, and comptroller, Brad Lander, on their wins," he said. "These victories are a testament to the dedication and hard work of the candidates, countless staff members, volunteers, and supporters, and their forward-thinking vision for The Bronx."

Bailey added that the wins were historic for The Bronx and for the entire city. "As we work towards more representative leadership and an

equitable recovery, the Bronx Democratic Party is proud to have supported so many incredible progressive women running to represent our borough," he said. "We look forward to working alongside our new leadership to ensure The Bronx emerges from this crisis stronger than ever."

Reacting to the news, New York City Council Speaker and city comptroller candidate, Corey Johnson said, "I first got into public service to help the city I love. I was inspired by the motto I learned from my mother years ago: do the most good for the people who need it most. From the Community Board to the City Council, I've tried to do the right thing for my community and for all New Yorkers, from Fair Fares to the Climate Mobilization Act, to negotiating four multi-billion-dollar city budgets."

He added, "Today, after seeing the numbers released by the Board of Elections, it's clear that the right thing to do is to suspend my campaign for comptroller. This was a hard-fought campaign and I congratulate Brad Lander on his victory. I'm proud of everything we accomplished, and deeply grateful to every single

volunteer and supporter who helped us get this far. This will always be the greatest city in the world, and I'm honored to have been part of the fight for its future."

Meanwhile, Kathryn Garcia, runner-up in the mayoral race, scheduled a press conference for Wednesday morning to give her reaction to the results, as did Brad Lander. Gibson was also due to hold a pre-planned press conference on Wednesday morning during which she was due to preside over the co-naming of a street in honor of the late Bronx teen, Brandon Hendricks, a gifted basketball player who was about to start college last year when he became another tragic victim of gun violence.

The councilwoman released a statement on Tuesday night in which she thanked her supporters from across the borough, saying she was honored to be the Democratic nominee for Bronx borough president, that she was committed to working with all stakeholders and that her priorities would be to help the borough recover from the pandemic and address inequality. "Thank you for your vote of confidence and support," she said.

Delta Variant Spotlights Vaccine-Hesitancy Again

(continued from page 1)

highest, at 63 percent.

While citywide infection, hospitalization, and death rates have all dropped significantly since COVID-19 vaccines became available, the Delta variant, a highly infectious mutation of the COVID-19 virus, has some health experts worried that another deadly spike in cases could occur, especially in Bronx communities with low vaccination rates, and among the vaccine-hesitant, like Pina.

“We don’t know the long-term effects of these vaccines yet,” Pina told the *Norwood News*. “They were developed so fast. It’s scary.” According to the College of Physicians of Philadelphia, in some cases, it can take up to 15 years to develop and approve a vaccine. However, because of the immediate need to end the pandemic and the unprecedented global research and cooperation that was undertaken to achieve this, the entire vaccine development process was prioritized and accelerated. This included making billions of dollars in funding immediately available, testing, clinical trials, obtaining emergency use authorization, manufacturing and distribution.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) said COVID-19 vaccines are overwhelmingly safe and effective, with minimal life-altering side effects. Regarding the Johnson and Johnson (Janssen) vaccine, as of June 28, 2021, 12.3 million doses have been administered in the United States. Of that total, there were 38 (0.0003 percent) confirmed reports of people later developing blood clots. Blood clots can occur in people who have low platelets.

Additionally, the CDC said the chances of dying from a COVID-19 vaccine are rare. Of the over 324 million doses administered in the United States between Dec. 14, 2020, and June 28, 2021, the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS), a national warning system to detect possible safety issues with vaccines approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), received 5,718 (0.0018 percent) reports of death among people who got a COVID-19 vaccine. Many were elderly and it’s not certain if the vaccine or some underlying conditions were the principal reasons for such deaths. By contrast, as of July 4, the total number of COVID-19 cases in the United States was 33,685,075, and the number of deaths totaled 604,752 or 1.79 percent.

However, it’s not necessarily the vaccines that make people unwilling to roll up their sleeves, but rather

what they represent. For some people in historically marginalized, low-income communities who have an inherent mistrust of government-mandated programs, it triggers the legacy of the Tuskegee experiment.

In the 1930s, 600 Black sharecroppers in Macon County, Alabama, were denied life-saving treatments for syphilis through a program spearheaded by the United States Public Health Service.

More recently, skepticism about the COVID-19 vaccines grew when a nurse alleged that six Mexican women were involuntarily sterilized while being held at an Immigration and Customs Enforcement center (ICE) in Georgia. However, unlike these examples of medical misconduct, where individuals were denied their rights and were unlawfully misled, citizens of the United States are not required to take a COVID-19 vaccine. It is a choice.

For Pina, however, she likens the situation to being treated like a guinea pig, making the vaccine a harder sell. Compounding her skepticism is the fact that other long-known health issues that have plagued lower-income communities in the Bronx, such as asthma, hypertension, and diabetes, have not received the same level of attention as she is seeing with the COVID vaccines.

“In our communities, we never get this much attention for our medical needs. We’ve had high rates of asthma in the Bronx for years, and nobody’s addressing that with this much intensity,” said Pina. “Every other commercial on TV is about the vaccine. They’re pounding us every day about getting the vaccine. But if the government is really concerned about poor communities of color, why aren’t they investing money in people with diabetes and asthma, and giving them free insulin and asthma medications? How is it that now they have all this money for the vaccine?”

Sandra Albrecht, a professor of epidemiology at Columbia University’s Mailman School of Public Health, says arguments like Pina’s are valid. “You have the City and health officials wanting everyone to get vaccinated so we can bring case rates down and reopen. But from the community’s point of view, I can see why they would balk at that because they feel like they’re taking the vaccine so that the City can reopen and the economy can come back,” Albrecht said. “These economic wins don’t always translate to wins for these communities. For historically marginalized people, it can feel like

they’re doing the City a favor by getting vaccinated, and getting nothing in return.”

The return is, of course, increased protection from COVID-19 for everyone, through herd immunity. In addition, Albrecht says while Pina’s arguments deserve consideration, they don’t change the fact that science and research have shown that people with underlying conditions such as diabetes and asthma have a much higher risk of dying from COVID-19 than those who do not have these conditions. Therefore, indirectly, these long-known health conditions are being addressed.

“I know that’s not always been seen as a big enough of a motivator, but I think if people can understand that [that] is a big reason why they should get vaccinated, so that they don’t succumb to COVID, and they don’t have to deal with the hospitalization associated with COVID, then they’ll be more willing to do it,” Albrecht said.

As previously reported by *Norwood News*, the Bronx was once the pandemic’s epicenter, often leading the City in infection rates, hospitalizations, and deaths from COVID-19. In early March 2020, almost one percent of Bronxites had been hospitalized with the coronavirus. That was double Manhattan’s COVID-19 hospitalization rate which, at the time, was the lowest of all five boroughs at 0.5 percent. Additionally, according to March 2020 data provided by the City’s health department, the Bronx also had the highest rate of deaths at 0.3 percent, compared to Manhattan at 0.15 percent.

The Bronx’s current low vaccination rates, coupled with widespread vaccine-hesitancy and the looming threat of the Delta variant, has Bronxites like Michelle Avila, chair of Bronx Community Board 7’s (CB7) health committee, fearing for the borough’s future.

“I am very concerned,” Avila told the *Norwood News* in an email. “While vaccination is an individual’s choice, we are in this public health crisis together. So long as these factors remain, our communities remain vulnerable to an outbreak. No one wants to go back to that situation. The pandemic upended people’s health, livelihood, and way of life. The only way we return to normal is to continue to increase vaccination rates and protect those that can’t be vaccinated at this time.”

Jason Autar, chief operating officer at Bronx Rising Initiative, an or-

ganization dedicated to addressing COVID-19 related health care disparities in the Bronx, also believes that increasing vaccination rates is critical to avoiding another wave of cases. To get more people vaccinated, his organization has created pop-up vaccination sites and has even gone door-to-door, throughout the pandemic, to help seniors and essential workers register for vaccine appointments. However, for Autar, getting people vaccinated is a short-term win. He said what really matters is building and earning the communities trust beyond the pandemic.

“You really have to meet people where they are, and it’s not a one-time thing,” he said. “It’s showing up constantly, and demonstrating that we are part of the community, and we look like the community, and we speak the languages. It’s so important not to paint entire swaths of a community with broad strokes.”

Additionally, Autar hopes that as people see their family members, friends, and neighbors being vaccinated, without experiencing adverse reactions, that proof will trickle down and motivate the vaccine-hesitant to get vaccinated. “You have to take a multifaceted approach with this,” Autar said. “It can’t be one size fits all.”

Autar is also concerned that now that the City has reopened, Bronxites will let their guard down and may not take the usual safety measures like hand-washing and mask-wearing as seriously as they did during the height of the pandemic. He said this is also more worrisome in a borough that has the lowest vaccination rate.

As for Pina, she’s beginning to feel the impact of not being vaccinated outside of her immediate community. “The Late Show with Stephen Colbert is a show I would love to see, and I wanted to get tickets,” she said. “It turns out that now he’s got the shows in person, but if you’re not vaccinated, you’re not getting in. So that’s it. I won’t be able to do it now.”

However, not being able to see Colbert live still isn’t enough of a push for Pina to want to get vaccinated, and at this point, she doesn’t know what would be. “I don’t have anything specifically that I could say, well, if this particular thing happens, then I’ll take it,” she said. “I’m still hesitant about it. That’s not to say, in the future or maybe even next year, I’ll get it. But I guess right this minute, I don’t know.”

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