

Boro's best respond to train wreck

BY DAVID CRUZ

Last Sunday's massive Metro-North train derailment in the Bronx put local hospitals to the test.

The news was tough – four people dead and 63 injured from a 5:54 a.m. train from Poughkeepsie.

The eight-car passenger train bound for Grand Central Terminal rolled to its side at 7:22 a.m. as it rounded a notoriously curvy track near the Spuyten Duyvil station.

EMS techs at the crash site accessed the injured, triaged them and quickly called the Bronx's trauma centers – Jacobi Medical Center, Montefiore Medical Center and St. Barnabas Hospital – standard protocol for major catastrophes.

"We don't want to inundate one hospital," said FDNY spokesman Frank Dwyer, adding the first rule is to remove "the most seriously injured people off site as soon as possible and to a hospital."

EMS pegged 11 victims as "red tags," considered high-priority, rushing them to Manhattan's Columbia-Presbyterian, the closest trauma center by the crash site.

Continued on Page 4



Photo by Laura Stone

All Decked Out For Santa

Ava Marie Vetere is balanced by none other than the Santa Claus himself! Jolly Saint Nick took time out of his hectic schedule to celebrate Throggs Neck's annual Christmas Tree Lighting ceremony. More photos on holiday lightings can be found on pages 8 and 9.

SUBWAY CLOSURE CHAOS

Dyre Ave. #5 renovations

BY DAVID CRUZ

The 12 days of Christmas could spell 14 days of headaches for some straphangers.

That's because the Pelham Parkway Station on the 5 Dyre Avenue subway line is set to close Monday, Dec. 9 as emergency work gets underway for the following two weeks.

Trains from both directions will skip the stop until Dec. 23 when crews are expected to finish.

"It was necessary to close this station for two weeks to execute this emergency asbestos abatement and minor repairs," said MTA spokesman Kevin Ortiz.

The station, in a quiet area just north of Pelham Parkway, appears severely rundown with paint flaking, stark lighting. Tracks are missing between the two platforms of the station, once an express stop for the defunct New York, Westchester and Boston Railway.

The project's timing comes during the busy holiday season as Bronxites prepare for Yuletide gatherings while hitting the local big box stores for gifts.

But Ortiz noted the "relatively light" ridership numbers, with the station ranking 7th in lowest commuter use, implying few com-

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Explosion at Westchester Square

BY PATRICK ROCCHIO

A father and son critically injured in an explosion that collapsed the roof of their Westchester Square auto repair shop were reported out of danger.

Firefighters had to crawl under the collapsed roof to rescue one of them,

officials said.

Benedetto Mondello, 63, and his son Benny Mondello, 35, were opening their B&L Auto Repair shop at 2601 Westchester Ave. about 7:45 a.m. on Wednesday, Nov. 27 when the blast tore through a secondary building on the property,

causing it to collapse, said fire officials.

Fire Marshals determined it was a natural gas explosion, but the exact cause was still under investigation, officials said.

As of print press time, Benedetto Mondello was in "good condition" and his

son Benny was in stable condition, said Jacobi Medical Center spokesman John Doyle.

An FDNY spokesman said that there were no flames when firefighters arrived, but as is standard procedure at building col-

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Firefighters at the scene of an auto repair shop explosion and collapse near Westchester Square. Photo by Walter Pofeldt

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Throggs Neck holiday lights switch on

Merchants group show spirit of the season

BY PATRICK ROCCHIO

The Throggs Neck Merchants Association's lights are back on this year, transforming the shopping strip into a Winter Wonderland.

The merchants, through generous donations, strung Christmas lights across the shopping streets of East Tremont Avenue shopping strip from Dudley Avenue near Lehman High School all the way to Miles Avenue, said TNMA treasurer John Cerini, noting there are 48 strands of lights and four pole decorations this year.

The lights are paid for by merchants who contribute money to the yearly effort.

For those merchants who do contribute, they are given posters to display in their store windows, he said.

Cerini said the TNMA is asking the community to support merchants who contributed for the lights.

"Please look for the posters in the store owner's windows," said Cerini, "and if you don't see a poster, ask them why they did not contribute."

The job is a major undertaking every year, and a group of merchants visit every store up and down the shopping strip several times to collect funds for the lights, he said.

The lights were turned on Thanksgiving weekend, said TNMA president Steve Kaufman.

The lights, along with the Christmas Tree Lighting at Derosa O'Boyle Triangle on Dec. 1, hosted by Assemblyman Michael Benedetto along with the TNMA, bring the holiday spirit to the community, he said.

"The merchants are generous in contributing to make sure that were able to put up the Christmas lights



The Throggs Neck Merchants' Christmas lights brighten the holiday season in the community.

Photo by Patrick Rocchio/file photo

and have our welcoming spirit on East Tremont Avenue," said Kaufman.

"We have an active com-

munity and an active group of merchants that want to see Tremont Avenue flourish, and want the people

to have a very happy and Merry Christmas," he said. "We don't want darkness in our lives, we

want happiness and celebration."

One of the most generous contributors, said Cerini, is Jim McQuade, owner of Schuyler Hill Funeral Home at 3535 E. Tremont Ave.

McQuade said that when the merchants association restarted after a dormant period, he, Bronx Times founder John Collazzi, and others made bringing back the holiday lights a priority.

"This is my neighborhood, and my home. I love this community and am proud of it," said McQuade. "It's Christmas, through the good times and the bad times. As business people, we have to say thank you to the community. We want this community to be thankful that they are living here, appreciate it, and know that the merchants back them."

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Subway

Continued from page 1
muters will be affected.

The holidays aside, news of the closure didn't sit well for Muhamed Caba of Fordham, outraged the closure will add another 15 minutes to his walk to the nearby Morris Park Avenue station.

"I need this train to go to work every morning," said Caba, a teacher's assistant. "That means I have to get up extra early."

Priscilla Almonte, a sophomore at St. Catharine Academy, was surprised to learn about the station's temporary shutdown as she waited for a downtown train to take her home. Notifications were posted days before the closure went into effect.

"This is a huge problem for me," said Priscilla. "I take this every day."

News of the disruption will even affect Brian Gonzalez, manning his pastry push cart in front of the Esplanade station where morning and afternoon straphangers stop for coffee and donuts.

But Janice Smith, starting at a service change notification sign, welcomed the closure for the sake of commuters.

"It needs to be fixed," she said, pointing at the rundown walls. "All this is painted lead. People have to walk here every day!"

Straphangers will have to rely on free shuttle buses that will run between the Pelham Parkway and nearby Morris Park stations.

Or they can jump on

the Bx12 bus on Pelham Parkway South and White Plains Road at the No. 5 train stop, shuttling to the Morris Park station.

The two-week snag pales in comparison to the 6 subway line rehabilitation project, which has already knocked out service for the Castle Hill and Middletown Road subway stations. Facelifts for the Buhre and Zerega 6 line stations will happen shortly.

Much like the 6 line stations, the MTA intends to upgrade Pelham Parkway though the 2015-2019 MTA Capital Budget Plan, expected to be voted on by Albany next year.

Bronx legislators are also lobbying their fellow colleagues to include the Metro-North expansion plan into the upcoming, five-year budget.



There'll be no service at the Pelham Parkway number 5 subway stop from Dec. 9 to the 23. You can blame asbestos for that one.
Photo by David Cruz

Crash

Continued from page 1
The rest were taken to the Bronx centers.

St. Barnabas Hospital

Dr. Ernest Patti was off that Sunday at St. Barnabas Hospital – until he and other staffers received a page of a mass casualty incident.

Twelve crash victims were headed to the intensive care unit, with blunt trauma injuries from a broken jaw to a fractured spine.

"Your heart starts feeling heavy because you're thinking of the people's families as you're taking care of them," said Dr. Patti, the center's senior attending physician for emergency services.

Luckily, extra staffers were on hand thanks to a shift change happening midway. Nighttime staff worked with their daytime counterparts as they triaged the victims, rushing many to surgery.

"You gotta keep cool, you gotta keep the ship going straight ahead and you gotta make everybody else feeling calm and confi-



The Metro-North train crash killed four people and injured 63, with half of them going to the borough's area hospitals.
Photo by the Associated Press (AP)

dent," said Dr. Patti.

"You run on adrenaline," said Dr. Patti. "And when you finally leave, you crash."

Montefiore Medical Center

The ER staff at Montefiore Medical Center in Norwood got the first call shortly after 8 a.m.

They were shocked but had already been primed to take on an event such as a train crash with constant drills.

"When we were initially being told there were 70 to 75 casualties, that was a number we were prepared to deal with immediately," recalled Peter Semczuk, Montefiore's VP of Clinical Affairs. "Had they brought every single patient to us we could've taken care of all of them."

Thankfully, Montefiore's medical treated only four victims, suffering from "back aches, neck pain, post-concussion kind of syndrome...people complaining about headaches," as Semczuk recalled.

"We prepare inevitably for the worst case and hopefully we end up with something better than the worst case," said Semczuk, "and that's clearly what hap-

pened here."

Jacobi Medical Center

Janice Halloran didn't need the call from EMS to tell her about the crash. She already saw the breaking news report on tv.

At home on standby, Jacobi Medical Center's senior associate director of emergency medicine and admitting rushed out of her Morris Park home shortly before 8 a.m.

She rallied her ER team for standard operating procedure for emergencies – "every day for us is a dress rehearsal."

Thirteen patients were brought to the hospital, with injuries that ranged from chest to head pain.

But Halloran emphasized the emotional toll on the victims, who were "really shaken up," a reason why staffers set up a Family Crisis Center.

"Once we're done treating them, we would re-unite them with their family in the family center, give them a little time together," said Halloran.

By the time it was all over, Halloran's ten-hour marathon was over. She refused to "abandon ship."



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Christmas lights back on Allerton Avenue

BY BEN KOCHMAN

Allerton Avenue is lighting its way out of the shadows.

If you're strolling down the commercial strip between Bronx Park East and Laconia Avenue this holiday season, look up: you'll see a bit of local history being made.

Christmas lights were set to go up on the buzzing stretch for the first time in over a decade on Thursday Dec. 5, thanks to a Santa Claus-sized donation from local healthcare juggernaut Centerlight.

More than just lights

"We just wanted to boost the morale on this great street," said Gene DeFrancis, president of the Allerton International Merchants (AIM), an organization started last year that aims to bond local businesses.

But these lights bring more than mere Christmas cheer to Allerton. They also signal that the neighborhood is stepping out of



One Allerton Avenue shop is already in the Christmas spirit. The stretch was set to get large-scale lights Thursday Dec. 5.

Photo by David Cruz

Morris Park's shadow to become a destination in its own right, local business owners said.

"This was a great neigh-

borhood back when I was a kid, but it's spiraled out of control," DeFrancis said. "We've had enough."

The lights, identical to

those draped over the wires on Morris Park Avenue, ring in at \$8,000 from vendor New York Christmas. Centerlight, which oper-

ates a nursing home and rehab center on the Allerton strip, jumped at the chance to chip in \$5,000 toward the lights.

Chipping in

"The people in our facilities and in the neighborhood appreciate the festivity, so we made room in our budget," said James O'Neill, director of Community Outreach at the center.

Sonny Vataj of Exit Realty fronted the other \$3000. Now AIM, the business association, hopes that local shops will chip in to repay Vataj and contribute toward the additional \$600 electric bill.

"We know that a lot of people are struggling, but we're trying to convince them that paying is worth it," DeFrancis said.

Vataj, who guaranteed the lights by vouching for the extra \$3,000, said that he expects the other businesses will hop on board and pitch in once they see the lights welcoming visi-

tors to the shopping strip.

Local shops that do pay toward the lights will receive an honorary sticker in their window.

"I am confident that I'll get the money back," he said. "And I'll be going door to door until I do."

The merchant association has endured a bit of skepticism so far. The avenue's previous merchant group disbanded in the late 90s. The nabe has since fallen into disrepair, local business owners said.

Trash piled up on the street. The avenue became less appealing for pedestrians. And the beloved Christmas lights went out.

"Having no lights sends the message to the public that we don't care how we are seen," said Sal Farenga, co-owner of the Farenga Brothers funeral home on Allerton and Radcliff Avenues.

Ten years later, the lights are set to be back and as bright as ever.

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Mother of three killed walking home

Morris Park local struck steps from house

BY BEN KOCHMAN

A mother of three died four days after being struck by a car steps from her Morris Park home on Thanksgiving Eve.

Maria Lucaj, 55, was crossing Williamsbridge Road at Neill Avenue at around 6 p.m. on Nov. 23 when a 19-year-old driver turning left onto Williamsbridge hit her, said Deputy Inspector Lorenzo Johnson, commanding officer at the 49th Precinct.

Lucaj rolled onto the windshield and then fell into the street, police said. The 55-year-old was transported to Jacobi Hospital, where she died on Sunday, Dec. 1.

Double green light

The driver, identified by police only as a 19-year-old female, stuck around after the collision to cooperate with authorities. She is not currently facing any criminal

charges. An ongoing investigation by the NYPD Collision Investigation Squad (CIS) is likely to issue the driver a summons, said a source close to the case.

Both the driver and Lucaj were traveling with the green light at the time of the collision, Johnson said. But if the investigation finds that the driver violated state law by not "exercising due care," she could be fined up to \$750. Her license may also be suspended.

Lucaj lived with her husband and three children in a three-story home next to Enzo's Restaurant, just a few feet away from where the collision took place. She was walking home when she was hit, a family member said. Friends of the family described Lucaj as healthy and a hard worker. Born in Eastern Europe, she came to the Bronx over 40 years



The intersection of Williamsbridge Road and Neill Avenue where Maria Lucaj was fatally struck.

Photo by Ben Kochman

ago, said a source close to the family.

A funeral service was

held Wednesday afternoon.

A deadly night

Lucaj was the fifth New

Yorker killed by motor vehicles in the span of only a few hours on a cold, wet

Thanksgiving eve.

Two women were struck and killed on Forest Hill Road in Staten Island at around 5:30 p.m., police said. A cyclist was killed after being hit by a truck in Maspeth, Queens just before 5 p.m. In the Lower East Side, a Con Ed truck pinned an 88-year-old woman to the ground before she was pronounced dead at a nearby hospital, the NY Post reported.

Meanwhile, the City Council Committee on Transportation, headed by Bronx Councilman James Vacca, charged at a hearing Wednesday, Dec. 4 for the NYPD to present to the Council twice a year about its hit-and-run investigations.

According to NYPD statistics, the CIS investigated 58 hit and run cases in 2012. Only 15 cases resulted in an arrest.

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Local board boots Facebook haters

CB 11 scratches five and will 'do it again'

BY DAVID CRUZ

The hatemongers hitting the Bronx blogospheres are hurting the community, says Joe Bombace, who wants to put a stop to it. "These are cowards hiding behind the keyboard with malicious gossip," said Bombace, blasting nameless firebrands at the Nov. 13 Morris Park Community Association gathering.

"If anybody has a problem with me, say it to my face!" he warned.

For the past few years, hate-filled blogs have circulated around cyberspace, spewing offensive and racist rhetoric towards well-respected community leaders in the east Bronx.

The growing popularity of social media sites and easy-to-use blogging platforms have made dissemination simple, often allowing troublemakers to unleash tirades under false names, blurring a line between to what's considered hate speech and what's protected by the First Amendment.

But as Community Board 11 District Manager Jeremy Warneke sees it,

"the Internet is full of cowards."

"This is the problem with the Internet in general," Warneke continued. "It's like bullying. They can hide behind a website."

CB11 has its own Facebook page that's listed on nyc.gov, the city's official website. Policies are in place to remove belittling haters from Facebook should any negative spats develop.

"We've booted five people from our Facebook group," noted Warneke, who won't hesitate to do it again.

In one incident early this year, several CB11 members were outraged over a blogger's personal attacks on fellow members, compelling the executive board to inquire with the city Law Department over any legal action. So far, no outcome has been determined.

It could be since it's extremely difficult for members to sue, said Guylaine Harrison, professor at Monroe College's School of Criminal Justice.

"Even though they're volunteer members, they're

really acting in a capacity of a public official," noted Harrison.

There is a caveat -- members can sue so long as actual malice, the intent to harm with complete disregard for the truth, is established. So should a lie be disseminated and proven wrong, there is grounds to sue, though the chances of an attorney taking on the case is slim, said Harrison.

And while hate speech holds broad protections across the nation thanks to the First Amendment, major Internet firms such as Google, Yahoo and Facebook have guidelines that limit hate speech, including a clause that bans libelous comments, especially if they're geared towards someone's religion, ethnicity, or gender.

It's unclear whether those protocols are enforced.

As in the past, Warneke extended an olive branch in resolving cyber-feuds.

"Try working with us," said Warneke. "Become a solution to the problems we face."

VETERANS TREATED TO MAGIC AND A MEAL



A cool slight of hand trick by magician John Turdo wows Sarah at a thank you lunch sponsored by the Never Forget Foundation and the Wounded Warrior Project. Military vets and their families were treated to the sitdown meal at Engine 45 in West Farms on Nov 30. Photo by Silvio Pacifico



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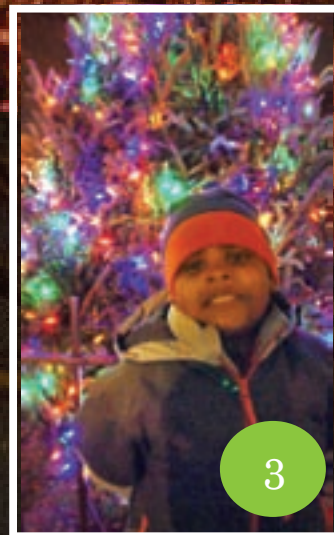
Light The Lights



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The holidays in the east Bronx isn't the same without the traditional Menorah and Christmas lighting. But several community groups got into the holiday spirit with several lighting events taking place in late November and early December, kicking off the season of giving.

(1) A bright Christmas tree illuminates the night sky in the northwest Bronx for the 2nd annual Christmas Lighting sponsored by the Jerome-Gun Hill Business Improvement District on Dec. 1.

Photo by Patricio Robayo

(2) Sen. Jeff Klein speaks at the Jerome-Gun Hill BID's Christmas lighting ceremony, standing alongside "La Reina del Barrio" Rhina Valentin, serving as host.

Photo by Patricio Robayo

(3) Matthew Carrasco stands by the traditional, colorful tree at the Throggs Neck Christmas Tree Lighting.

Photo by Laura Stone

(4-5) Santa Claus came to town! Kris Kringle poses with Mrs. Claus and two Throggs Neck youngsters. Photos by Laura Stone

(6) Pelham Parkway's 2nd annual Menorah Lighting at White Plains Rd. and Pelham Parkway South on Nov. 27 drew plenty of community leaders including (l-r) Joe McManus; 49th Precinct Deputy Inspector Andy Johnson; Assemblyman Mark Gjonaj; Edith Blitzer, president of the Pelham Parkway Neighborhood Alliance; PPNA's Jeffrey Panish; Rabbi Ben Huven; Rabbi Levi Klyne and Rabbi Shmuel E. Zuckerman.

Photo by Aracelis Batista

(7) It was a damp but cheery evening for City Island's Menorah Lighting on Nov. 27, as several dozen turned out on the eve of Hanukkah, also falling on Thanksgiving. Olga Berde Mahl and Assemblyman Mike Benedetto witness the initial lighting of the menorah at Hawkins Park.

Photo by Aracelis Batista



Tracy Madio serves up hot chocolate during Throggs Neck's annual Christmas Tree lighting.

Photo by Laura Stone

CITY ISLAND ART EXHIBIT



Over 200 paintings were on display at the opening of “A painting a Day”, an exhibit held at the Fe Fi Faux Gallery at 276 City Island Ave. The works are available for purchase.

(Above) City Islander and long time Bronx Rotary member Marguerite Chawick-Juner shows off her array of paintings at the gallery.

Photo by Walter Pofeldt



AMSU STUDENTS RECEIVE SCHOLARSHIPS

On October 18, , Academy of Mount Saint Ursula students Maame - Sarpong Duah and Thahia Ahmed received the Michael Gordon Foundation, Inc. Scholarship award. Each scholarship award covers full tuition for one year. The Michael Gordon Foundation, Inc. was established in 1991, to aid children under the age of 18 in areas of education, health and welfare. Much like the mission of the Michael Gordon Foundation Inc., the mission of the Academy of Mount St. Ursula serves college bound women of diverse cultures by instilling a love of learning and a broader global view. Congratulations to Maame - Sarpong Duah and Thahia Ahmed on the award.



KINGS HARBOR HONORS OUR VETERANS

The Kings Harbor nursing facility saluted the area's veterans on Nov. 14. Maritime Cadets also made an appearance at the event.

Photos by Alex Belisle

(Above) Maritime cadets were on hand for a ceremonial folding of the American flag.

(Right) Leonard Wilson, who served in the US Navy, was among those honored at the event.



PELHAM BAY ASSEMBLY OF GOD HARVEST



Who needs trick or treating? A group of Bronx youngsters gathered at the Pelham Bay Assembly for a more low key God Harvest Party on Halloween night, Oct. 31. The night was highlighted by a costume contest, and there was candy to be had as well.

(Above) The costumed crew gathers for a group shot.

Photo by Edwin Soto

PUERTO RICAN DISCOVERY DAY



James Monroe Senior Center in Soundview held its Puerto Rico Discovery and Heritage Celebration on Friday, Nov. 15. Attendees were entertained and some participants dressed in traditional wear. Assemblyman Marcos Crespo visited the party.

(Above) Assemblyman Marcos Crespo, senior center director Glisette Rivera and China Suarez enjoy the celebration.

Photos by Alex Belisle

BRONX YMCA HEALTH EXCHANGE FORUM



The Bronx Chamber of Commerce and Bronx YMCA hosted a forum on one of the more talked about topics this year--the new federal Affordable Care Act. Bronxites like these grouped together to learn more about the law early this month at The Bronx Council on the Arts.

Photo by Alex Belisle

ANCIENT ORDER OF HIBERNIANS ANNUAL DINNER



The Ancient Order of Hibernians-Bronx County-Division 3 held their annual dinner at Maestro's on Sunday, Nov. 3. Almost 100 guests supported the dinner and the funds raised will support the annual scholarship program which benefits Irish-Catholic 8th graders and helps reduce their tuition costs in high school. President Robert Nolan, third from the left, gave each of the evening's honorees an award with a replica of a Harp, symbol of Ireland, mounted on a wooden base.

At the awards presentation are (l-r) award winners Thomas Purtell, Chief, NYPD Organized Crime Control Bureau; James Organ, former state assistant Commissioner of Labor for three governors; Nolan; and award winners Queens Assemblywoman Catherine Nolan, chair of the assembly education committee; John Dunleavy, chairman, New York City St. Patrick Day Parade Committee; AOH New York State president James Burke; and Michael Flynn, state AOH director district 4. Photo courtesy of Bob Nolan



VILLA MARIA 61ST ANNUAL CARD PARTY

Villa Maria Academy held its 61st Annual Card Party at Villa Barone Manor on Thursday, Nov. 14. The theme of this year's celebration was Hooray for Hollywood, celebrating old-school Hollywood.

(Above) Lights, camera, action! Erim Pelinkovic, Bobby Gilbert, and Richie Rodriguez enjoy the festivities.

(Below) Kayla Grill channels her inner Marilyn Monroe. P

otos by Laura Stone



THROGGS NECK DENTAL APPRECIATION DAY



Throggs Neck Dental at 3161 E. Tremont Avenue a held patient appreciation day on Saturday, Nov. 2. Visitors enjoyed food and information, and a clown and face-painting was there for the children. Enjoying the day are Throggs Neck Dental owners Dr. Leonard Klein and Dr. Jeffery Susman, the office staff and the clown played by Sandy Boller.

Photo by Walter Pofeldt

Fountain (of) service honored

Street renamed for Ben and Dotty Abrams

BY BOB KAPPSTATTER

Of course, there were the egg creams.

But those weren't the only great things about Ben and Dotty Abrams' Pelham Parkway neighborhood luncheonette and candy store.

For more than 20 years, the couple also created a neighborhood hangout and gossip central for hundreds of neighbors coming into the shop at 200 Holland Ave.

Not that they were worth remembering for that alone, as local City Councilman Jimmy Vacca put it on Tuesday, Dec. 3 by holding a ceremony officially co-naming the intersections of Holland and Antin avenues and Bronxdale Avenue as "Ben and Dotty Abrams Way."

"Ben and Dotty Abrams deeply loved their community, and they were staples in Pelham Parkway South for decades," Vacca said. "I

can think of no couple more deserving of this honor, and I am proud to rename this intersection in their memory. This street sign will forever preserve their legacy and serve as a reminder of their many contributions to Pelham Parkway."

The honorary co-naming was approved by the City Council in September 2013 at Vacca's request to honor the Abrams' six decades of community service in Pelham Parkway.

Joining Vacca and community leaders and friends and family was former Bronx Borough President and New York State Attorney General Bob Abrams, who thanked Vacca and called it "a thrilling event for my family."

The younger Abrams could certainly credit his parents for instilling in him the community and political service that gave rise



Former Borough President and state Attorney General Bob Abrams (far left) joins Councilman Jimmy Vacca (holding sign), Assemblyman Mark Gjonaj, and others for street renaming in honor of Abrams' parents.

to his political career.

Ben Abrams, who passed away in 1984, spent many years as an active member of the Hubert H. Humphrey Democratic Club, the Pelham Parkway Jewish Coun-

cil and B'nai B'rith, as well as a volunteer at Our Lady of Mercy Hospital. He also engaged in an active petition drive that helped secure new benches along Pelham Parkway and Bronx Park

East, among other things.

Dotty, who passed away in 2003, was a member of the Ruth Kizon Group for Handicapped Children, selling raffle tickets and attending annual luncheons

to help raise funds to provide support for children afflicted by disease and physical handicaps. She was also an active member of the Pelham Parkway Cancer Society, raising money for programs.

"My mom and dad were pillars of the community, operating their luncheonette for over 20 years in Pelham Parkway, living in Pelham Parkway for almost half a century, and establishing enduring friendships and relationships," said Abrams.

"The store became an important meeting place in the neighborhood, where residents of Pelham Parkway would come in for sandwiches, sodas, ice cream, school supplies, greeting cards and toys, and talk about neighborhood events, politics and world activities."

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Hip Hop prof pens street lit

'Pure Bronx' tells tale of rough urban life

BY BEN KOCHMAN

Meet street literature with an Occupy Wall Street edge.

A Bronx professor and one of his students have penned a novel about a young couple's desperate attempt to break out of South Bronx housing projects at any cost—even kidnapping a Wall Street head honcho.

"People call us gangsters because we steal cars and sell parts on the black market, but the biggest gangsters in the world are the people who own banks and run governments," says Khalil, the 21-year old heroin dealer at the heart of "Pure Bronx," written by Fordham Professor Mark Naison and his student Melissa Castillo-Garsow.

Naison, a white guy from Park Slope, Brooklyn, is popularly known as the Hip Hop Professor, who chairs the Department of

African-American studies at Fordham.

"Pure Bronx" is Naison's entry into a new genre of urban literature, or "street lit." Street lit has surged in popularity in inner cities over the last 15 years, and often tackles the same theme: hustling out of the ghetto.

This novel is no exception. Khalil, along with his lover Rasheeda, who works nights at a strip club to pay her way through college, hatch a plan to get rich quick in the first years of the Obama presidency.

The pair kidnap one of Rasheeda's clients, Robert Seidman, a Bernie Madoff-inspired sketchy business man.

From there, mayhem ensues.

"Readers might not be surprised by the politics, but they might be surprised by the amount of violence

and sex," Naison said. "I haven't written anything like this."

The idea for the novel started in a creative writing class Naison teaches at Fordham. The prof wrote the first chapter, a drug deal scene in a playground near Khalil's stomping grounds, Mott Haven's Patterson Projects.

Naison asked his class to help him continue the book. Castillo-Garsow, then a graduate student at the university, jumped on board. She ended up writing the portion of the book that tells Rasheeda's story.

The authors went to great lengths to describe life in the South Bronx under the Cross Bronx Expressway to a T. "Pure Bronx" bounces around scenes sketched from real-life. Readers get a glimpse of life at a strip club at the Hunts Point garage on E. 138th Street and Grand

Concourse. At one point, Khalil hijacks a car from the Gateway Mall alongside the Deegan Expressway.

Along the way, the love pair encounter a vivid portrait of the diverse South Bronx population.

"We wanted to portray the Bronx as it really is," Naison said. "That makes immigrants from so many places: Africa, the West Indies, Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, people from Honduras."

Underneath the tale of violence, sex and intrigue is an undercurrent of social criticism—no surprise given Prof. Naison's loud stance against gentrification and against Wall Street.

"An interesting question is if what Khalil and Rasheeda do is justified," he said. "That's for the reader to figure out."



Fordham professor Mark Naison (right) penned his version of "street lit" with one his students, Melissa Castillo-Garsow.

Photo provided by Mark Naison

Castle Hill's Ladder 47 turns 100

'These guys know what they are doing'

BY BEN KOCHMAN

100 years later, much has changed in the east Bronx.

But the firefighters at Castle Hill's Ladder 47 are still going strong.

Fire Department officials, firefighters and their families packed the Castle Hill Avenue firehouse Wednesday, Dec. 4 to celebrate the unit's 100 years of service.

It's been a busy year for FDNY centennials. Ladder 47 was one of over 30 companies the city opened 100 years ago, in 1913, to serve an increasingly spread out population.

Capt. Joseph Biggers took the helm of the company in those first years. The house's nine firefighters back then served an area of mostly rural farmland.

The area has since been transformed into urban

sprawl, sparked by the construction of train lines and highways. As more and more people flooded the area, generations of firefighters kept up with the demand.

"The population here was once a fraction of what it is today, but the dedication here has never waned," said Fire Commissioner Salvatore Cassano at the event.

Today the company has a team of 26 firefighters serving out of the firehouse alongside Engine 64. The ladder company is responsible for rescuing residents out of homes and venting roofs to let smoke escape, while the engine company uses its fire engines to extinguish blazes with pumps and hoses.

The stairs of the firehouse are lined with plaques commending the crew on jobs well done.

"Every time the Four-Seven is mentioned, it's with respect," said FDNY Chief of Department Edward Kilduff. "These guys know what they are doing."

Veteran firefighters were on hand to catch up with old friends. Good times were toasted: The company has saved countless lives over the years, as well as dealt with smaller community concerns, like keys locked in cars.

The station's tough times were also remembered. Ladder 47 had firefighters responding to the scene of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, for example.

"During all of those tough moments you gain strength knowing that we all came through that together," said George Holzmänn, who served as a firefighter here for 26 years, following in the footsteps of his father Franz. "It's pretty

emotional for the guys to come back and relive it."

Lieutenant Ernesto Tirado, who started at the station as a fireman and now is back with the unit, said that he's honored to work with a team that stays consistent day by day.

"Everybody I've worked with has always taken saving lives as their goal in life," he said. "That's all you can ask for."

Irish Bagpipes cascaded through the room as the company received a commemorative plaque honoring 100 years of serving an area that stretches into West Farms, Hunts Point and Throggs Neck.

That's 100 years of hard work and lifelong friendships.

"It really is, at the end of the day, about the relationships," said Holzmänn, the 26-year FDNY vet. "We all depend on each other."



The plaque received by Ladder 49 honors 100 years of serving the East Bronx.

Photo by Ben Kochman

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The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) has received a Brownfield Cleanup Program (BCP) application and Draft Remedial Investigation Work Plan from 1903 West Farms, LLC for a site known as 1899-1905 West Farms Road, site ID #C203070. This site is located in the Borough of Bronx, within the County of Bronx and is located at 1899-1905 West Farms Road. Comments regarding this application must be submitted no later than January 10, 2014. Information regarding the site, the application, and how to submit comments can be found at:

<http://www.dec.ny.gov/>
chemical/60058.html

or send comments to Ruth Curley, Project Manager, at NYSDEC-DE, Remedial Bureau B, 625 Broadway, 12th Floor, Albany, NY 12233-7016:

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or call 518-402-9768. To have information such as this notice sent right to your email, sign up with county email listservs available at: www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/61092.html

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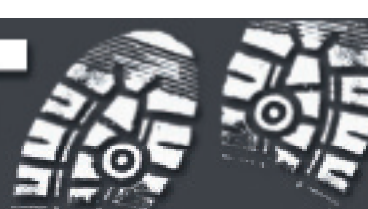
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WHEELIN'-N-DEALIN'

All that talk of behind-the-scenes wrangling over who's going to be the next City Council Speaker has so far overlooked the most important part of the negotiations – the committee chairmanships and myriad other jobs that go with the final deal.

This is where the five Democratic county leaders really get into the (No) Smoke Filled Room.

"If you buy into the way things went with the past several council speakers," a longtime Bronx/City Hall insider told us, "when they got elected, not just the key chairmanships were divided between the county leaders, but also positions within the Speaker's office, the Council, and administrative positions. It's almost like they have an organization chart, and the county leaders carve up the jobs."

As far as HOW MUCH each county leader gets, "he who brings the most Council votes to the table has the most juice."

That would be Bronx/Queens Congressman **Joe Crowley**,

head of Queens party. With up to 15 council members following his marching orders, he's looked at as the potential king - or queen - maker.

Add Bronx party boss **Carl Heastie** and other county leaders reportedly leaning to support Crowley's choice to bring in the winning council vote for the anointed Speaker.

"So that just blasts the so-called Progressive movement in the council to smithereens," added our wise political friend.

PROFIT AND LOSS

With west Bronx City Councilman **Fernando Cabrera** in hot - if not legal - water over allegedly trying to shake down Kingsbridge Armory developers for \$100,000 a year for 99 years for a basically defunct religious non-profit he was affiliated with, we can only say:

Former Senators **Efrain Gonzalez** and **Pedro Espada Jr.**, former City Councilman son **Pedro G. Espada**, and ex-City Councilman **Larry Seabrook** are all currently cooling their heels

in the federal pen for "dipping their beaks (see Godfather II)" into non-profits.

EMPTY SEAT

With **Gov. Cuomo** saying he has no plans at this point to call special elections to fill some vacant assembly seats around the state, it looks like Assemblywoman **Vanessa Gibson's** 77th A.D. seat in Highbridge/Concourse may have to remain vacant for awhile.

Vanessa won the November election to fill term-limited **Helen Foster's** City Council seat there, and will be sworn in Jan. 2.

Cuomo recently told the Politicker blog that "It's a balance of the cost and the hardship of the election versus the community's right to representation. But we don't have any plans as of now."

That could mean waiting until the September primary (or June, if the legislature shifts it back to then) until a potential winner is declared - with Bronx Dem Party Boss **Carl Heastie** screwed out of picking a replacement and having to deal with an open election. He got stuck

with the same problem in a tight and dirty little race to fill disgraced Assemblyman Nelson Castro's west Bronx seat, though the party-backed candidate, Victor Pichardo squeaked in.

Local 77th A.D. District Leader and organization insider **Venancio (Benny) Catala**, who ran Vanessa's successful Council race (with strong backing from the Bronx Democratic machine), is looking like the leading contender at the moment. But some of the losers in the council race, have also reportedly been emboldened to go for the council seat. Stay tuned.

FREE

The Bronx Democratic Party is holding its annual Holiday Party Monday, Dec. 9 at the UFT offices at 2500 Halsey Street just below Westchester Square. Free food, free booze, and the public invited, sez the flyer.

As for us working journalists, we of course will pay.

LIBERTY DEMS

The Liberty Democratic Association holds its sixth annual awards

dinner Thursday, Dec. 12 at Mae-stro's.

Among this year's honorees: Congressman **Charlie Rangel**, UFT Bronx Rep **Jose Vargas**, 49th Precinct Community Council prexy **Joe Thompson**, and Dr. **Hamud Al-Silsi** of the Bronx Muslim Center.

DIAPER DOOTY

Congrats to Soundview Assemblyman **Marcos Crespo** and wife **Virginia Molina** on birth of daughter **Graciela Sarai**.

MOURNING

The loss of Bronx Times Reporter's hard working ace reporter and photo assignment editor **David Cruz**, off to greater glory as new editor of the Norwood News, replacing **Alex Kratz**, now running a writing center at a South Bronx charter school. And as we tell all new editors (from personal experience), good luck and God have mercy on your soul.

COP CORNER

Congrats to Sgt. **Brendan Rafter**, makin' the money, named as commander at Soundview's

4-3 Detective Squad; **Ellis Deloren** of Bronx Robbery, and **Sharon Harvey** at the 4-5 Squad in Throggs Neck, both upped to detective second grade.

PASSINGS

Former northeast Bronx Democratic Assemblyman **Vincent Marchiselli** passed away Nov. 29 at Lawrence Hospital, in Bronxville at age 85. The former funeral home owner served in Albany from 1974 to 1984 as part of the borough reform movement that battled Dem party bosses. He was narrowly defeated in the redrawn 82nd district by **Larry Seabrook**.

BRONX BIRTHDAYS

Nov. 27 – **Phil Foglia**
Dec. 3 – Assemblyman **Jeff Dinowitz**

Dec. 11, 1931 **Rita Moreno** (Rosita Dolores Alverio)

BRONX QUOTES

"I take people to the Bronx, Brooklyn, I take 'em to Harlem. I don't care. Don't make no difference to me." **Robert DeNiro**, Taxi Driver (1976)

Explosion

Continued from page 1

lapses, additional units were quickly called in, raising the incident to two alarms.

Fire Chief Patrick Rudick said at the scene that the two victims said that an air compressor used to inflate tires had exploded, and that firefighter from Squad 61 performed rescue operations.

Aman Bachan, 30, said he was working at a BP gas station across the street from the fire when he heard a loud bang.

"We ran outside and saw that the building had collapsed, and called 911," he said. "It was shocking...and frightening too."

Dom Rocchio, the owner of Dom's Auto Body, around the corner from B&L on Blondell Avenue, said that he knew both father and son quite well, and has been friends with Benedetto Mondello since he immigrated from Italy in the late 1960s.

"I hope they are alright," he said, adding about the two men and their family, "they are very nice people."

The incident closed traf-

fic backups as the entrance and exit of the nearby Hutchinson River Parkway at Westchester Avenue were closed. Local buses also had to be rerouted, causing commuter delays.

"My son called me an this morning and told me that his bus had been delayed because of the collapse," said Chary Sloan, 62, of Morris Park, who was standing near the scene. "I hope no one was hurt...I walk past the building sometimes, but...a lot of the buildings here are old and they might not be very well maintained."

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