

State of the Boro Address

BY BOB KAPPSTATTER

There's a "New Bronx" a'coming, with much of it already here or close at hand, Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr. believes.

It was all part of his mantra that he spread at his annual State of the Borough speech, focusing on safety, education and expansion in the coming year for the Bronx.

It ranged from applauding the coming of the new Kingsbridge National Ice Center to announcing an effort to finally fix, once and for all, the dreaded Cross-Bronx Expressway.

Looking to the future

With an eye to the future, the speech also focused on bringing four Metro-North commuter stations to the borough, ferry service to Soundview, and finding an intelligent re-purposing for the General Post Office on the Grand Concourse.

Because of print deadlines, this story is based on an advanced copy of his speech, delivered Thursday at Hostos College on the Grand Concourse before a crowd of city and local electeds, civic, business and other leaders.

As he enters his second full term in office, Diaz's fifth State of the Borough speech came as the borough has seen dramatic drops in crime, undergone a major shift in education with dozens of new charter schools, and a growing economy in both retail and commercial enterprise.

Partnerships

"The Bronx is transforming, all around us. We are writing a new chapter of the history of our borough," Diaz said according to

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REACHING OUT TO FAMILIES IN NEED



Firefighters work on blaze as it tears through homes at 1018-20 Dean Ave. in Throggs Neck on Thursday, Feb. 13

Photo by Edwin Soto

Throggs Neck community donates to fire victims

BY PATRICK ROCCHIO

The Throggs Neck community is coming together to help after a horrific local fire that injured 19 and left three families homeless.

Donations of cash and gift cards were being accepted at St. Benedict's Church after the Thursday, Feb. 13 fire that destroyed one home and severely damaged an attached one on Dean Avenue near Bar-

kley Avenue.

Five firefighters and 14 civilians were injured, mostly from smoke inhalation, with three of the civilians suffering major but non-life threatening injuries, fire officials said.

The Pirraglia family, which owned the destroyed building at 1018 Dean Ave., also had just lost a grandmother when the accidental electrical fire broke out

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Squeeze play on Pelham Parkway

BY PATRICK ROCCHIO

This time it was two trucks that couldn't get through.

But protestors over a narrowed service road on Pelham Parkway South's service road say next time it could be a firetruck.

Despite community protests over potentially blocked emergency vehicles, the city built a four-foot wide sidewalk on the park side of the road in 2012.

With winter snow and ice making it even narrower, two large delivery trucks found

themselves blocked in between Williamsbridge Road and Jacobi Medical Center on Friday, Feb. 14 because they could not squeeze past two illegally parked cars on each side of the road near Narragansett Avenue.

Community Board 11's John Fratta, its administrative manager who is overseeing the parkway reconstruction for the board, said that snow and ice exacerbated the problem because drivers could not park cars right up against the curb.

"This just reinforces what we have said over and over again with DDC (Department of Design and Construction), that placing that sidewalk there and narrowing the roadway is dangerous and could become a nightmare," he said.

"The bottom line is if a firetruck had to get through in a situation like we had Friday, the firetruck would not get through. That has been our bone of contention since Day One when those

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Truck driver tries to figure out a way through along Pelham Parkway South service road after being hemmed in, with controversial four-foot wide sidewalk on park side no help.

By Dr. David Stevens

Still a 'no go' on City Island project

City Island Civic Association opposes latest plan for senior home

BY PATRICK ROCCHIO

It's still no.

The City Island Civic Association will continue to legally challenge a plan to build a senior apartment building on the island.

After major opposition, the developer scaled down its original plan by 75%, but the association is still not happy over the revised plan by the Italian Hospital Society, which is seeking a variance on local zoning regulations.

The CICA filed another challenge to the variance application before the Board of Standards and Appeals on Tuesday, Feb. 11.

The case is due back before the BSA on Tuesday, Feb. 25, with preliminary discussions on Monday, Feb. 24.

The renewed chal-

lenge came as the IHS presented a scaled-down building plan that switched it from an assisted living facility with programming and 214-units, to a 54-unit senior apartment complex without programming at Schofield Street and City Island Avenue.

The BSA previously turned down zoning variances for the 214-unit facility and for another plan that called for 150 beds.

Community Board 10's Housing and Zoning Committee voted unanimously on Wednesday, Feb. 12 not to support the latest zoning variance.

"It was a resounding no, they had no interest in supporting that resolution," said Kenneth Kearns, CB 10 district manager.

"There was a lot of

consideration, a lot weighing, and debate," he said. "We just felt that the last presentation really did not really answer the community's questions, and it almost continually violated community standards, so we voted it down."

He added that the board objected because the plan would still put a residence for frail seniors into a flood plain (post-Superstorm Sandy), and still exceeded the floor area ratio for residential buildings on City Island.

Questions were also left unanswered about parking, handicapped parking, sanitation, or any services that may be available for the elderly population, he said.

The IHS also passed on four alternate plans that would have offered

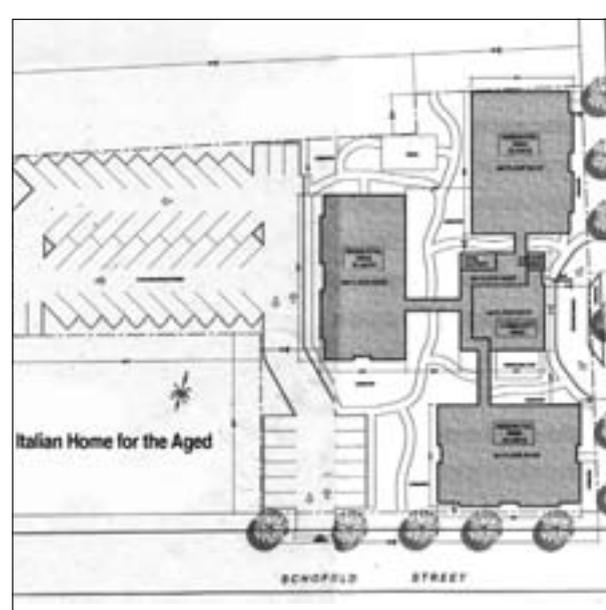
less dense developments for the location, and stuck to their senior housing plan, Kearns added. One of the alternate plans called for just 21 units.

CICA President Bill Stanton called the IHS's presentations and actions "duplicitous."

Judging from the track record of its dealings with the community, he said he saw no reason for a change of course.

John Doyle, CICA corresponding secretary, said that it was his understanding that the IHS still wanted to charge upwards of \$1800 per month without any supportive services.

"From an anecdotal standpoint, there is a lot of real estate on City Island where you can



These plans were part of documents filed by the IHS showing what the most recent proposed senior housing facility would look like.

get a lot more land for a lot less money than the Italian Hospital Society board members are proposing," said Doyle.

Any discussion of building at the location would also have to involve environmental remediation, accord-

ing to BSA filings, as the site at 222/32 City Island Avenue was contaminated when it was a boat-building yard.

Dr. Domenico Mignone, IHS president, did not respond to a request for comment as of press time.

Saving children from gun violence

Proposed law named after West Farms shooting victim

BY JAIME WILLIAMS

A proposed law by Bronx legislators is taking aim at curbing playground shootings.

"Luisito's Law," named after a 4-year-old boy who was shot in the arm this summer while playing at a West Farms, was introduced in the state legislature Wednesday, Feb. 19.

Senator Jeff Klein, Assemblyman Luis Sepulveda, and other Bronx representatives gathered with Luisito's family at Vidalia Park that day to announce the law, which would increase minimum sentences for anyone who shoots a gun within 500 feet of a park, playground or schoolyard, and for those who shoot kids younger than 10-years-old.

Luis "Luisito" Oyola Jr. was stuck by one of multiple stray bullets during a fight that broke out in the

park, on 180th Street and Vyse Avenue.

"We need to get tougher on the dummies that are going around shooting like it's the wild wild

We are not going to allow our playgrounds to become shooting galleries.

Senator Jeff Klein

west," said Lorine Padilla, Oyola's grandmother. "We need to send a message that is a deterrent to them."

The man who shot Oyola is awaiting trial on assault charges that carry a minimum penalty of 1.5 to 4

years in prison. If the law passes, those who shoot a gun in a park could face 3.5 to 15 years, and those who shoot a child under age ten would face a minimum of 5 to 25 years.

"This legislation will send a message to criminals that if they bring violence into the lives of these innocent children, they will face serious time behind bars," said Assemblyman Sepulveda.

Sepulveda said this issue is personal to him because he lives in the neighborhood and often goes to that park with his family.

"What if that day it had been me, my wife and our two-year-old child in the park?" he asked.

Padilla described how painful it was to watch the doctors at St. Barnabas digging around in her grandson's arm to try and pull the bullet out.

"My grandson was be-

ing a three-year-old boy when this idiot decided it was ok to pull out a gun and shoot," she said.

She urged other members of the legislature to pass the bill.

"Luisito's Law" is part of a recent push to further reduce gun violence in New York. Other efforts that Senator Klein has championed include the NY SAFE act, which tightened gun control, and Operation SNUG, which uses former criminals or gang members to mentor at-risk youth in hopes of reducing violence.

But this proposed law is specifically about keeping young children safe, and the people who harm them behind bars.

"We are not going to allow our playgrounds to become shooting galleries," Klein said. "If you take aim at our children, we will fire back you."



Four-year-old Luisito Oyola Jr. (right) stands in front of Vidalia Park with his twin sister, Braelyn and grandmother Lorine Padilla at the announcement of Luisito's Law.

Photo by Aracelis Batista

Bronx Bambi head count

Parks Dept. to monitor deer population

BY BEN KOCHMAN

Oh, deer —but how many deer are here?

City Islanders who have insisted for years that Pelham Bay Park's roads need deer warning signs may soon be getting the evidence to back up their claims.

The city Department of Parks and Recreation is taking the first step in its plan to count the borough's deer population this month, sending small planes equipped with heat-seeking cameras over Pelham Bay Park, along with Van Cortlandt Park, Riverdale Park and Bronx Park.

Debate needs 'teeth'

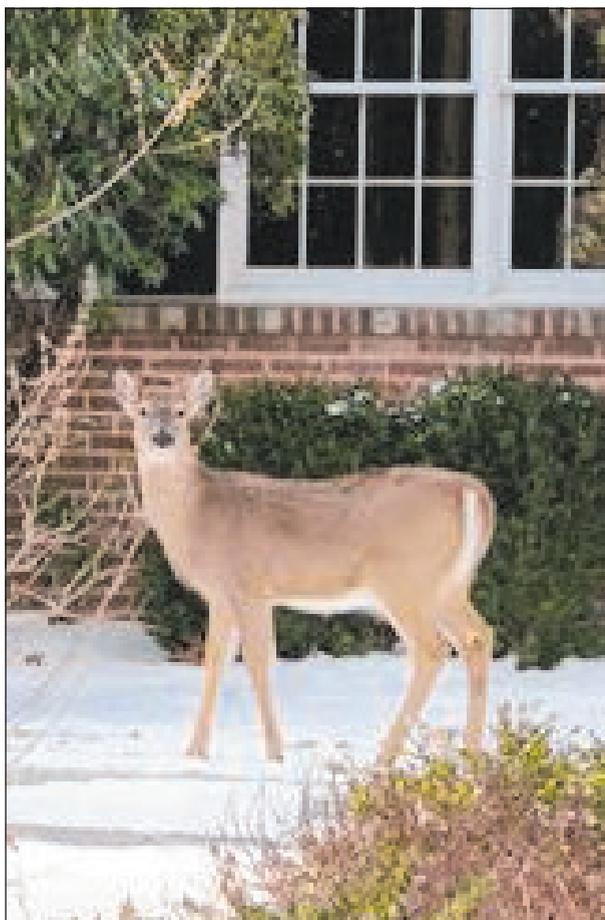
The planes cruise 1,000 feet above the park and use infrared radar to hone in on the deer living within. Combined with the results of a ground survey, the Parks Department will soon have a baseline count of just how many does and stags call the Bronx home.

The project costs Parks \$19,000, but could be priceless for City Islanders looking to add teeth to their argument that the stag situation is dire enough for Pelham Bay Park to have signs alerting drivers to the deer danger.

"There have been deer in that park for years," said Barbara Dolensek of the City Island Civic Association, which voted at its January meeting to pen a letter to the city Department of Transportation asking them for the warning signs.

Danger to cars?

Dolensek said she first spotted a buck standing in the road between Orchard Beach and Bartow Circle eight years ago. Just a couple months ago, she had to slow down her car to avoid a young doe



The Parks Department will soon know just how many deer live in the borough's parks. The deer population has been increasingly meandering south from residential areas of Westchester and northern regions into local borough parks. AP Exchange

standing at the entrance of Orchard Beach.

"I know that you need to proceed with caution," she said. "We need the signs in there telling people to watch out for these deer."

Stags seen in West Bx

Deer have also been sighted in the west Bronx, said Christina Taylor, executive director of Friends of Van Cortland Park.

"I don't see them a huge amount, but we do see them from time to time," Taylor said.

She said the deer likely follow the parkways down from Westchester County

before nestling in her local park. Parks staff members walking through the trees early in the morning, she added, have noticed the stags roaming about.

Dolensek guessed that about a dozen deer may live in Pelham Bay Park, while Taylor said she had "no idea" how many deer had taken up residence in Van Cortland Park.

The Parks survey should provide clarity on the issue. The agency says it will use its baseline deer count to track deer population changes over time, and then use it as a resource to manage deer population.

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TN community reaches out to fire victims

From Page 1

that morning in the middle of a fierce snowstorm.

Outpouring of help

"People have been really generous," said Father Stephen Norton, pastor of St. Benedict's Church, where the Pirraglias are parishioners. "Because we are who we are, obviously and most importantly, they are asking for prayers," as well as for financial assistance, he said of some of the victims.

The parish decided to accept cash donations in church and at the rectory, and gift cards to local department stores because they did not have the ability to accept clothing and household items, he added, with the drive continuing through the weekend.

"They suggested and asked if we could help them out financially and with pre-paid cards, and people have been really

good about that," said Norton.

"It is tough because of the fire of course, but the people who own the building were in the process of trying to bury a grandmother," he added.

Hampered by storm

The four-alarm blaze tore through 1018-20 Dean Avenue the day of one of the worst Nor'easters of the season, starting on the first floor and quickly spreading the second and third floors.

The snow fall and winds from the Nor'easter made fighting the fire especially difficult, since two attached homes are only one block from Eastchester Bay, said Fire Department spokesman Frank Dwyer.

"It made for very difficult conditions," with the winds fanning the fire even more, said Dwyer. "In addition, there were issues with frozen hydrants



Firefighters had an especially difficult time fighting the blaze because of the snowstorm and the wind from the direction of Eastchester Bay

that our firefighters had to overcome."

"The wind was blowing from the bay, and the firefighters were trying to spray water on the fire," said neighbor Richard Tagliarino, "but it was going the other way."

He said he saw a child being taken out of the building in an ambulance.

Frozen hydrant

Neighbor Anne Fucci, said she saw firefighters trying to open a hydrant, "but it was frozen."

"The firemen did an excellent job," she said. "They were here all day long and I saw how they performed."

It took 170 firefighters to put out the fire, which was first reported at 9:25 a.m. and under control by 12:26 p.m.



The Pirraglias are seen here during a graduation of the St. Benedict's School Playhouse. Their home sustained the brunt of the damage
courtesy of Bailey Provetto

State of the Borough Address

From Page 1

his draft speech. "And we are doing so in strong partnership with our institutions, businesses, elected officials, non-profits and, most importantly, the 1.4 million citizens who call the Bronx their home."

Citing his new theme, he said "We are modernizing the Bronx—creating the "New Bronx"—and ensuring its strength and vitality not just today, but for centuries to come."

Focusing on safety, Diaz cited "huge gains in crime prevention...setting the pace for the entire city."

Safer borough

With crime down to levels not seen since the early Sixties, he noted that

the Bronx, by certain measure, is now a safer place to live than such cities as Philadelphia and Boston "and much safer than New Orleans or Washington, D.C."

Noting that his office has pumped almost \$24 million into 173 educational projects since he took office in 2009, Diaz pledged to keep working with school and university leaders "at every level to discuss capital needs, curriculum and the shared issues that face our public schools."

Jobs and housing

And while the borough still struggles with some of the highest unemployment numbers in the state, Diaz pointed to the creation

of more than 14,000 local jobs.

On the booming housing front, he boasted investments of more than \$600 million, with nearly 13,000 new units.

"We are a place of growth, a place where new business is moving and existing businesses are expanding," he noted. We have seen hundreds of millions of dollars in new housing, and thousands of new jobs. We are seeing major new projects built here, and even bigger ideas on the horizon. We're getting safer. We're marketing ourselves as a destination, and we're receiving national and international attention for our efforts."



Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr., here hitting the streets in July 2013, believes the Bronx is booming.
Photo by Aracelis Batista



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E. Bronx burglary suspect trips up

On the lam since summer, busted for shoplifting

BY BOB KAPPSTATTER

East Bronx detectives finally got their man.

Nestor (Frankie) Marrero, on the lam after failing to show up for a court date last summer on a string of charges involving home invasion burglaries in the east Bronx, was finally nabbed.

They ran him through the computer and Bingo, he had two outstanding warrants.

Detective Bobby Rogers

Police had feared he ran away to the Dominican Republic, where extradition

laws are lax.

Instead, he was nabbed right in the Bronx, arrested for shoplifting at the Home Depot on Gun Hill Road in Allerton.

"They ran him through the computer and BINGO!" said Detective Bobby Rogers of the 45th Precinct, the original case officer, "he had two outstanding warrants."

Marrero was arraigned on Friday, Feb. 14 on a grand jury indictment charging him with several burglaries, grand larceny and petit larcenies mostly involving elderly victims in Morris Park, City Island and other nearby neighborhoods.

This time, a judge ordered him held on \$10,000 cash bail or bond.

The 39-year-old career criminal had earlier been released twice without bail after being arrested for the east Bronx burglaries, but



Nestor (Frankie) Marrero.

NYPD photo

failed to show up for an August 12 court hearing.

Police said the intimidat-

man ruse to gain entry to the homes of elderly victims to rip them off while they weren't looking.

Marrero had been fired from the window company and either remembered some of his jobs or took work slips with him "so he had an excuse to enter the homes, supposedly to check on the windows," said Detective Rogers.

A neighborhood fixture around Morris Park and Throggs Neck, Marrero was arrested three times in June and August, charged with burglarizing local homes - twice with elderly or handicapped victims inside.

But at his two arraignments, judges released him without bail, despite Marrero being a predicate felon and prosecutors asking for high bail.

Police said Marrero failed to show up in court

for a scheduled hearing on Aug. 12, with a new arrest warrant awaiting him for yet another burglary.

After an earlier story in the Bronx Times Reporter, yet another victim, who recognized Marrero's mug shot in the paper, came forward.

Detective Rogers rushed the victim straight into the grand jury after interviewing him at his home, police said, with the jury issuing a felony indictment on the new burglary charge.

Rogers then went to court on Aug. 12 with the new arrest warrant. But when Marrero failed to show up, the judge issued a bench warrant for his arrest for failing to appear.

Marrero's landlord on Sampson Street told the detective at the time that Marrero had moved to the Dominican Republic with his wife, still owing him over \$5,000 in unpaid rent.

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SEN. KLEIN, MISS USA VALENTINES FOR VETS



Miss USA 2013 Erin Brady and state Senator Jeff Klein greet veteran Bynum Terry at Klein's 19th Annual Valentines for Vets event at the James J. Peters VA Medical Center on Feb. 14.

Photo by Aracelis Batista



Left to Right: Jim Mullarkey, Miss USA Erin Brady, state Senator Jeff Klein, Kathryn Cross, and Naheema Pack. Front: veteran George McGinnis.

Photo by Aracelis Batista



SESAME STREET VISTS WHEDCO

Elmo and Jenny the Music Teacher from Sesame Street Live's Elmo Makes Music! visited children from Garden of Dreams partner organization, WHEDco, during their after school music class Fri., Feb. 14.

Courtesy WHEDco



CB 9 YANKEE YOUTH AWARDS

Five locals were honored for their efforts at improving quality of life within Community Board 9, which includes Soundview, Parkchester and Castle Hill, on Feb. 12. The helpful community members netted Yankees Community Council Youth Leadership Awards at CB9's district office.

(L-r, back row): Chauncey Martin, Christina Valentin, Hector Valentin, Michael Valentin, Cheryl Marrow, Matthew Ibrahim, Jessica Caraballo Maribel Mercado and Yoram Rodriguez (Front row) Cathrine Perez and Diana Mohaber

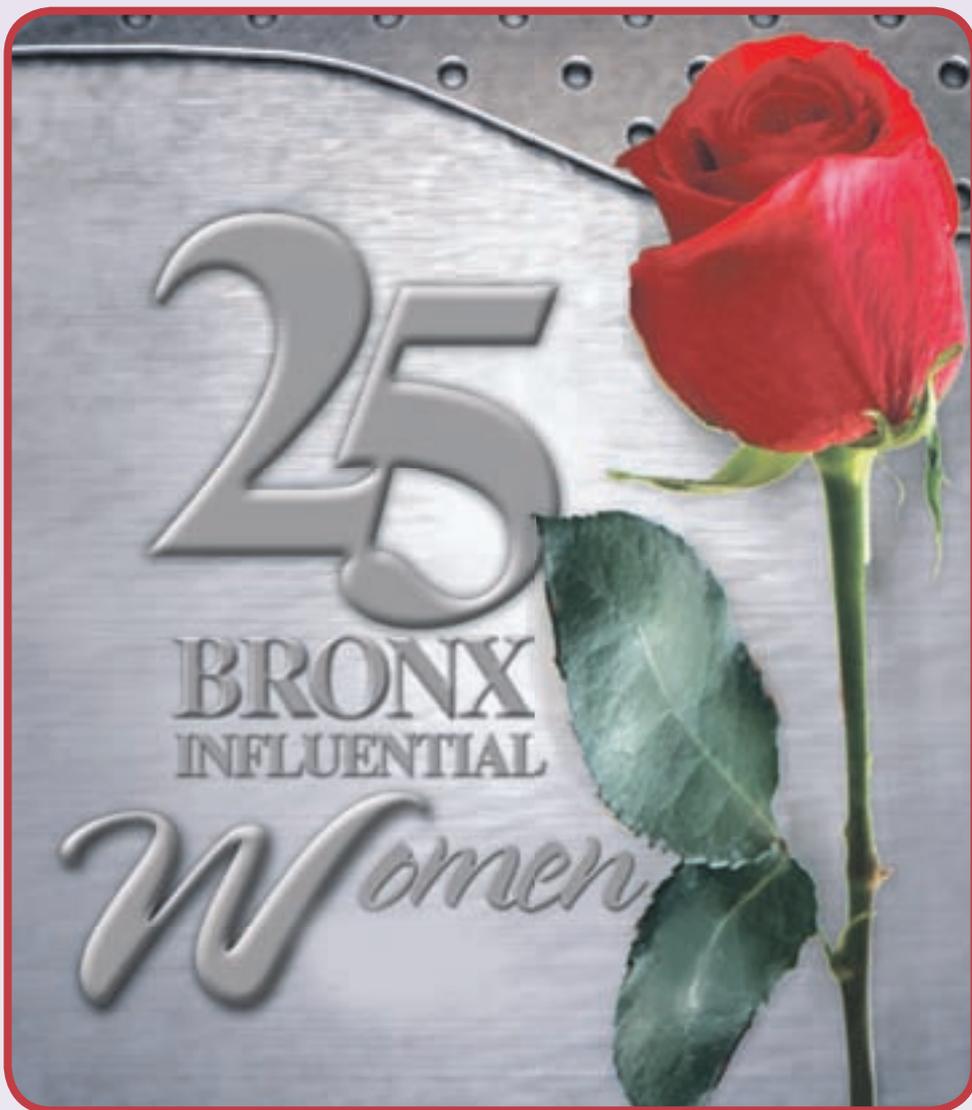
Photo by Walter Pofeldt

KLEIN CUTS C-TOWN RIBBON



Community representatives gathered Saturday, Feb. 15, for the grand opening of C-Town supermarket in the Woodlawn area of the Bronx. The neighborhood of Woodlawn had been without a full-service supermarket for 22 months. From left to right: Assemblyman Dinowitz (D-Riverdale); Abdul Hamid, co-owner of C-Town; Senator Jeffrey D. Klein (D-Bronx/Westchester); Jamal Hamid, co-owner of C-Town; Kenneth Switzer, representative of Congressman Eliot Engel (D-NY-16); and Council Member Andy Cohen (D-Riverdale).

Photo courtesy of Senator Klein's office



Commitment Dedication Excellence

These special words are reserved for those individuals who have devoted their own life to improve the lives of others. This year the Bronx Times, through a series of in-depth profiles, salutes 25 Influential Bronx Women. Each woman's unique accomplishments will be highlighted in a keepsake publication on April 11, 2014.

Please join us in recognizing the
25 Bronx Influential Women of 2014!

The 25 Bronx Influential Women for 2014

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Board of Directors, Hostos Community College

Melissa Munoz Patterson
*General Counsel,
Regional Aid for Interim Needs, Inc.*

Sister Lesley Block, O.P.
Residence Manager, Thorpe Family Residence

Jessica Clemente
President/CEO, We Stay/Nos Quedamos, Inc.

Brigitte Lozada
Recreation Specialist, NYC Parks

Aviva Davidson
Artistic Director, Dancing in the Streets

Michelle Dolgow Cristofaro
Chief-of-Staff, Bronx Chamber of Commerce

Shannon Lee Gilstad
*Community Engagement Coordinator,
BronxCentric!: Bronx Movers and Shakers*

Sister Mary Rita Miguel, S.de M.
Servants of Mary

Denise Matranga
*Director,
Our Lady of the Assumption Parenting Center*

Claudia V. Mera
*Police Officer, 40th Precinct
Community Affairs Unit*

Sabrina Kizzie
Real Estate Educator, Author

Melissa Barber
*Medical Doctor, Interreligious Foundation
for Community Organization*

Flora Montes
*Board of Directors,
Bronx Museum of the Arts*

Marianne O'Hea Anderson
*Pelham Bay Park Administrator,
NYC Department of Parks and Recreation*

Lilyanna Pekic
Keppler Title

Gail Nathan
*Executive Director,
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Doris Quinones
*Director of Development & Community Relations,
Bronx House*

Carla Precht
*Founding Executive Director,
Bronx Children's Museum*

Véronica Torres
*Consultant, New Yankee Stadium
Community Benefits Fund, Inc.*

Holly Block
*Executive Director,
Bronx Museum of the Arts*

Andrea Verdesche
Owner, Andrea's Dance Studios

Roseann Carotenuto
*Bronx Superintendent of Schools,
Archdiocese of New York*

Arlene Mukoko
Television Journalist, BronxNet Television

Cecilia DeBrino Hass
*Assistant Director of Facilities Planning,
Einstein College of Medicine*

Rally for Grand Concourse subway lift

South Bronx residents urge MTA to fix long-dormant elevator

BY BEN KOCHMAN

A group of South Bronxites is pleading with the city for a lift.

But the MTA claims that fixing this particular lift is too tall of a task.

Locals in the South Bronx rallied Monday Feb. 17 outside the subway station on the Grand Concourse and E. 149th Street, where over 30 years ago an elevator once transported riders from the mezzanine down either one floor to the No. 4 IRT line, or down two flights to the No. 2 and 5 lines.

Decades of disrepair

The lift has been out of operation for decades now. And a \$19 million renovation to the station, completed in December 2013, did not include elevator repairs.

That leaves the over 13,000 straphangers that use the stop daily to their

own devices as they climb and descend the 83 steps from street level to the 2 and 5 trains on the station's bottom floor.

"There's an imminent danger here," charged John "Indio" Washington, who lived in the area back when the elevator worked. "We have mothers with strollers, and so many people with asthma. How can we ask them to come up three flights of stairs by themselves?"

Rallying for a lift

Protesters from the South Bronx Community Congress have been pressuring the MTA to fix the lift since 2012, when a group of disgruntled seniors living at the Michaelangelo Apartments brought the issue to their attention.

Since then, they've staged two rallies at the site and collected hundreds of signatures from commu-



Locals rallied Feb. 17 for the MTA to restore elevator service to the 2/4-5 line subway at Grand Concourse and E. 149th Street.

Photo by Ben Kochman

nity groups and students at nearby Hostos Community College.

But the MTA has no plans to budge on the issue. The agency has already

agreed to install elevators at 100 stations citywide by 2020 to abide by American Disabilities Act guidelines—and the E. 149th Street and Grand Concourse is not

among the chosen stations.

Straphangers who are either disabled or who want to avoid the stairs can hop on the Bx19 bus one stop to the Third Avenue 2/5 sta-

tion, which has elevators.

Need not as high?

The E. 149th/Grand Concourse station was kept out of the elevator plan partly because other stations had a greater need, said an MTA spokesperson.

Though the station is near landmarks like the General Post Office and the heavily used Gateway Mall, it only ranked 109th in the city's 2012 ridership ranks. The Third Avenue stop on the other hand ranked 48th with over 24,000 straphangers coming through daily.

But locals are not giving up just yet. They plan to ramp up the pressure with another, larger rally with Hostos students in March.

If that doesn't work, there's always divine intervention, said longtime local Alonso Correa:

"We may just have to wait for a miracle."

BRONX

POLAR BEARS

AT ORCHARD BEACH



These Bronx Polar Bear Club members join hands to play Ring Around The Rosy Cheeks in the icy waters.

Photos by Silvio Pacifico



While the rest of us shivered, these thrill seekers and fitness enthusiasts enjoyed a swim in the frigid waters off Orchard Beach during the Bronx Polar Bear Plunge on Saturday, Feb. 15. The event's theme was "Take the Plunge with Someone You Love"

(Above) Liga Freimane strikes an Arctic Sport Illustrated swimwear issue pose.

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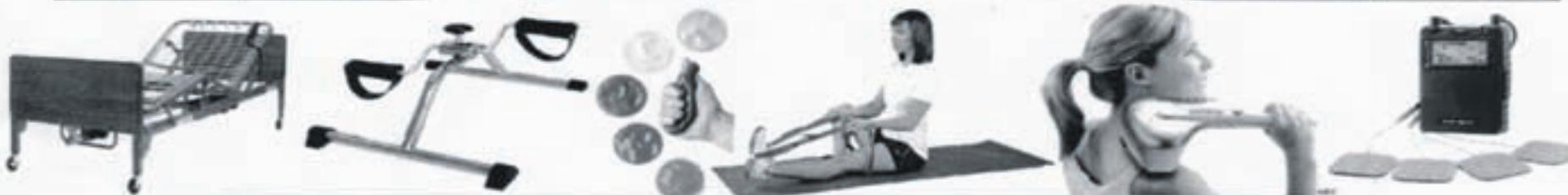
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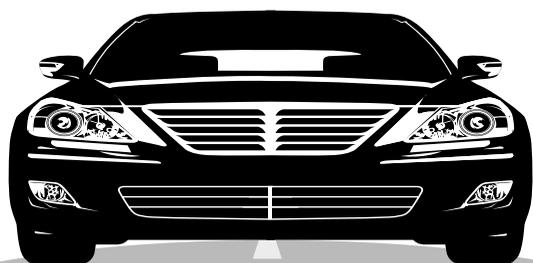
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WEST BRONX BRAWL

That brewing challenge by west Bronx City Councilman **Fernando Cabrera** to state Senator **Gustavo Rivera** has elicited a response from Gustavo that boiled down, translates to "Bring it on!"

Rivera told us he'd rather be working to see more Democrats around the state elected to the Senate — to regain their DULY ELECTED majority without **Jeff Klein's** breakaway four-member Independent Democratic Conference tilting it away by co-leading with the Republicans.

But that said, Gustavo had two responses about the Cabrera challenge:

Formally: "We live in a democracy and he is entitled to run if that's what he wants to do. Ultimately, I am focusing on my constituency."

Informally: "If he wants a fight, he's going to get one."

As for Dem Party backing, while it's probably a headache for Party Boss **Carl Heastie** to have to deal with two incumbents

going head-to-head in a primary, it looks as if the party's resources will be available to Gustavo, at least for petition gathering, since he does not have that strong an organization at this point.

SOUTH BRONX BRAWL

So, with petitioning due to begin March 2 for the congressional races, we eagerly await word from **Councilwoman Anabel Palma** if she's serious about challenging south **Bronx Congressman Jose Serrano**.

We keep hearing two sides to Joe's strength or weakness if he actually finds himself facing a challenge for the June 24 congressional primary, after coasting into office challenge-free since 1990.

The naysayers cite the fact that he's only got \$17,000 in the campaign kitty and no real organization to carry his petitions, do the door knocking and phone banking.

The other camp says he could still easily clobber a challenger, given that he'll still have party backing as an incumbent, easily get union support, and as ranking

member of the all-powerful House Appropriations Committee, can fill his campaign coffers overnight from various fat cats.

Meanwhile, it looks like clear sailing for both Congressmen **Eliot Engel** and **Joe Crowley**.

With Manhattan/north Bronx state Senator **Adriano Espinola** and the Dominican camp breathing down his neck, **Charlie Rangel's** situation COULD be another matter. But more about that later.

STAY TUNED

Sorry to be a tease, but we're sworn to secrecy and can't say it out loud right now. But get ready for an announcement that is gonna shake the local political world in a wide swath of the north Bronx. Hopefully, you'll be seeing it in the column when it goes up on the web Thursday (bxtimes.com) and in print on Friday.

SNOOKI SIGHTING

Former "girls just wanna have fun" Assemblywoman **Naomi (Snooki) Rivera** seen working the room at last weekend's 43rd annual conference of the state

legislative black, Puerto Rican and Hispanic Conference in Albany. The annual gathering attracts minority lawmakers, leaders and community members from across the state as well as a traditional who's who of state politicians. Anybody know what she's been up to these days, give a call....

BIG NIGHT

Big night Wednesday, Feb. 26 as the Bronx Chamber of Commerce holds The Bronx Centennial Gala at the Marina del Rey, with special guests Boro Prez **Ruben Diaz Jr.**, music legend **Jose Feliciano** and hocky great **Mark Messier**.

Honorees will be Montefiore Medical Center, the Trump Golf Course at Ferry Point Park, Simone Development Marriott Hotel and Kingsbridge National Ice Center.

Black tie is optional, but hey, spiff it up for this \$250 a seat event and help make the Bronx shine.

CAMERA SHY

BronxNet's cable TV BronxTalk host **Gary Axelbank** grousing

a short list of local electeds are camera shy, not returning phone calls or accepting requests to be interviewed.

We have the names, but we'll cut them some slack - for now. So call Gary, awright awready!

COP CORNER

Bronx in the house. With new PC **Bill Bratton** making his chess moves at 1 Police Plaza, it's interesting to note the high ranking moves include two among a number of brass who've made their bones in the Bronx before moving up the greasy pole. Bratton on Tuesday named former Bronx Chiefs of Detectives **Joseph Resnick** and **Robert Boyce** as heads of the Internal Affairs Bureau and Chief of Detectives, respectively.

A good man. He may have squeezed our shoes, as cops say, a few times, but former Four-Four Detective Squad boss, Lt. **Jim Ruane**, done good for his 27 years on the job, and most lately keeping us safe at night with the Joint Terrorism Task Force, crossing over next month to the Fordham Uni-

versity "police department." Best of luck, you mean man!

Thirty and out. First Grade Detective **Vic Harris**, the senior man at the 40th Precinct squad in Mott Haven kickin' it in after 30 years, with a shindig Thursday night at Michaelangelo's on Arthur Ave.

Gremlin. Oops, sorry, we had a mind melt in the print column last week. It's First Deputy Commissioner **RAFAEL Pineiro** (another former Bronx boss). Apologies.

ON BOARD

Elvin Garcia, who worked as a regional field director for Mayor Bill's general election, named as his Bronx borough director at the Community Affairs Unit in City Hall

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY

To Hunter College journalism Prof. **Buddy Stein**, celebrating his fifth year as editor at the Mott Haven Herald.

BRONX BIRTHDAYS

Feb. 18 - Congressman **Eliot Engel**

Feb. 25 - **Sylvia Lask** (Happy 80th!)

Squeeze play on Pelham Parkway

From Page 1

sidewalks were installed."

At the scene on Friday, truck driver Frank Reynolds, 51, with about 20 years experience, said the two illegally parked cars made it difficult for him to proceed.

"I don't want to risk it, and the police officer here told me not to risk it," he said as he sat parked on the street. "I would have stopped on my own."

Reynolds said he was

concerned that the edges of steps on the side of his rig would hit the cars.

Another stuck truck driver, Benjamin Soto, who said he was delivering supplies to Jacobi, had to back up several blocks to Williamsbridge Road.

Dr. David Stevens, a dentist whose practice is along Pelham Parkway South, filed a since dismissed legal challenge to get the city to dismantle sidewalk. He again voiced

his concerns about the roadway.

"It is a horrible road," he said, "There is no wiggle room here."

Fratta said that further legal action could become a possibility if emergency vehicles are blocked from getting to the scene of an emergency and people are injured.

The only acceptable solution to the problem, he said, is to remove the sidewalk completely.



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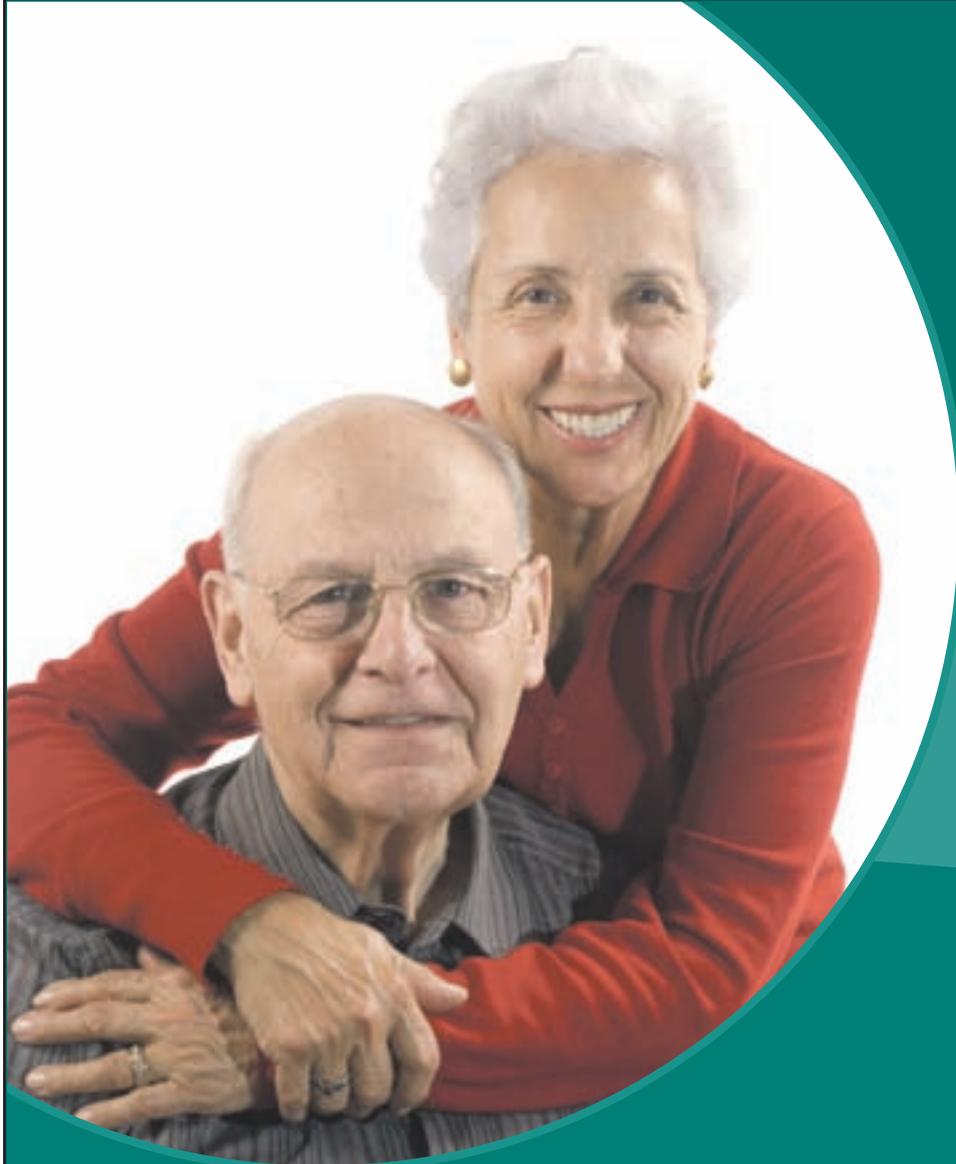
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