

Store rents soar on local strip

BY BEN KOCHMAN

White Plains Road continues to experience its growing pains.

Six storefronts on the east Bronx shopping strip are either boarded up or actively seeking new tenants as rents rise and a new crop of businesses - catering to shoppers with more money to spend - roll into town, leaving some older shops hung out to dry.

"I never want to see anyone go out of business, but this is nature," said Joe Thompson, executive director of the White Plains Road Business Improvement District (BID), a coalition of the street's shops.

Discount shops gone

The most recent victims of the stretch's transition from discount mom-and-pop shops to more high-end stores are Okey Dokey Beauty Supply and clothing shop Weekend, both set to close by the end of the month.

A Chinese food restaurant has also been shuttered across the street, with its former red awning starting to come apart.

But as some old shops leave, newer businesses are thriving.

"We've seen more traffic over the last few years," said John Ycaza, manager at BX Sports, a sporting goods store that has been on the strip for 15 years and which boasts shiny displays and renovated floors. "It's a great vibe here."

Spike in new biz

Many new shops have moved in just over the last five years, including a Planet Fitness, 7-11 grocery store and The Children's Place, which sells kids clothing, all catering to the neighborhood's changing clientele.

White Plains Road has been a marquee location beneath the

Continued on Page 4



Photo by Walter Pofeld

Easter Bunny Celebration

Conner Harty poses with the Easter Bunny at the Locust Point Civic Association Breakfast held on Saturday, April 12.

AUTO THEFTS ZOOMING

Country Club, Waterbury LaSalle hit

BY PATRICK ROCCHIO

Two east Bronx neighborhoods have been getting hit with a rash of car break-ins and thefts.

While overall crime is down in the 45th Precinct, stolen vehicles and stolen contents are tilting the numbers, cops say.

Both heavily residential Country Club and Waterbury-LaSalle neighborhoods have been hardest hit.

Capt. James McGeown, the

precinct's commanding officer, has been urging local residents to take precautions to protect their vehicles - including using common sense in locking them.

McGeown said that two precinct sectors covering those neighborhoods have seen an increase in auto thefts and thefts of such items as iPads, laptops, sneakers, credit cards, tools, and car mirrors.

Starting in March and

Continued on Page 4

Fear traffic mess with new malls

BY PATRICK ROCCHIO

Community leaders and elected officials are bracing for increased traffic on east Bronx roadways because of major new developments.

They have growing concerns over a lack of a "master traffic plan" for the entire area with a number of facilities, including three new shopping malls, a major new 911 call center, and an expanding office park complex, as well as the new golf course at Ferry Point Park.

Traffic is already problematic

on the Bruckner Expressway between the Bruckner Interchange and Co-op City and the Hutchinson River Parkway between the Bronx-Whitestone Bridge and Co-op City.

The addition of large new facilities expected to generate traffic may make the situation unbearable if there are not major infrastructure improvements, said John Marano, Community Board 10 chairman.

Initial meeting

A number of officials and key

stakeholders met Feb. 21 as a first initial step to deal with problem.

Among those at the meeting were representatives from Gov. Cuomo's office, Board 10, the city and state transportation departments, the Thruway Authority, Prestige Properties (Bay Plaza), Simone Development (Hutchinson Metro Center), and a representative from the new Throggs Neck Shopping Center in Ferry Point.

"The builders vented their frustrations: that these are going

Continued on Page 15



Aerial view shows location of new indoor mall at Bay Plaza at Co-op City, with surrounding highways.

Fear C.I. Bridge traffic light mess

BY PATRICK ROCCHIO

Two new traffic signals at each end of the City Island Bridge are raising local's fears over even more traffic chaos.

The city Department of Transportation installations come amid a storm of controversy over the new bridge design, but they were put in place to accommodate pedestrians because the bridge's southern pedestrian path was closed after a water main was relocated there for a related replacement project.

"DOT installed new signals at either end of the bridge to allow pedestrians and cyclists to cross to the northern path, which remains open," said DOT spokesman Nicholas Mosquera.

According to DOT, as motorists approach the bridge heading to the island they will see a flashing yellow signal to remind them that they are in a work zone and that they should drive

with caution. They will only see a red signal at that light if there is a pedestrian crossing.

Once motorists cross the bridge and come onto the island, "the signal is currently timed to provide the majority of time to bridge traffic, and DOT is in the process of installing a system that will provide a green signal to Bridge Street only when a vehicle approaches," said Mosquera.

Traffic backups

Barbara Dolensek, second vice-president of the City Island Civic Association, said that the new signals will cause traffic back-ups unless the city can make changes to the lights.

She said that the light are required under federal guidelines, but that they islanders wished the city would have had an engineer look into the "special situation" and low pedestrian volume at the bridge.

"The problem with this set up that is that it is by-



The new traffic lights on both sides of the City Island Bridge were put in place to help pedestrians, and for bridge reconstruction work, but locals fear even more traffic jams coming with the busy summer months.

Photo by Patrick Rocchio

the-book according to federal guidelines, and they are designed for places where there is a lot of pedes-

trian traffic," she said, adding that the light situation "has caused a ruckus."

She said that so far, on

at least one occasion she was delayed while leaving the island. The CICA would like DOT to reconsider the

placement of the lights, she said.

Elected pitches in

Dolensek said that the CICA "has been back and forth with DOT, and with Councilman Jimmy Vacca on the matter."

Vacca concurred with the islanders concerns.

"Ever since the lights went up, there have been major traffic backups on the bridge on weekends," he said. "After I received complaints from City Island residents, I asked DOT to reassess the necessity of these lights, and they have promised me they will do so."

DOT commissioner Polly Trottenberg was scheduled to meet with islanders on Wednesday, April 16, after the Times Reporter deadline.

That meeting is primarily to discuss bridge reconstruction issues, including the design of the new bridge. Presumably, the matter of the lights will also be discussed.



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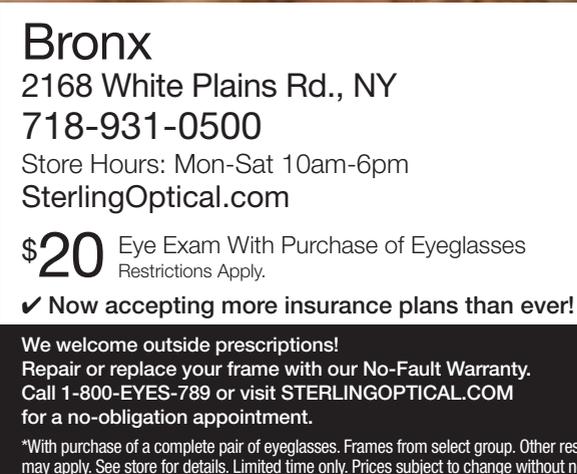


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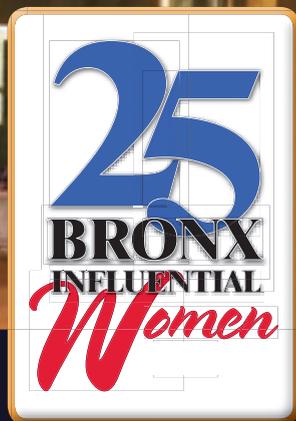
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FREE PARKING

Car thefts on rise in Country Club

From Page 1

through the beginning of April, he said thieves have driven off with seven vehicles, as well as eight incidents where expensive tires and rims have been stolen from late model vehicles. Seven other vehicles have been broken into and items stolen.

"A lot of this happens on the midnight tours, so we moved some extra resources to the midnights," said McGeown. "We have a midnight conditions team so we had them concentrating in the area, and I moved one of my anti-crime teams to that area."

He noted that in the past week or so, there have been no car thefts reported.

Keys left

One of the most serious problems, he said, is that in at least five of the seven cases where cars were sto-

len, the owners left their keys inside.

In one case, a thief stole a valet key from inside a glove box of a 2014 Honda CRV that the owner did not realize was even inside, he said. But other times, people leave keys inside their vehicles either by accident or purposefully.

He also noted another phenomena: "If they have two cars, they are leaving the keys for one of the cars inside of the other one, and thieves are stealing them that way."

Earlier in the year, there was even a case of a thief who had stolen a car that had keys belonging to another car from the same household returning later to drive off with the other car.

What you can do

Other than not keeping valuables inside vehicles,

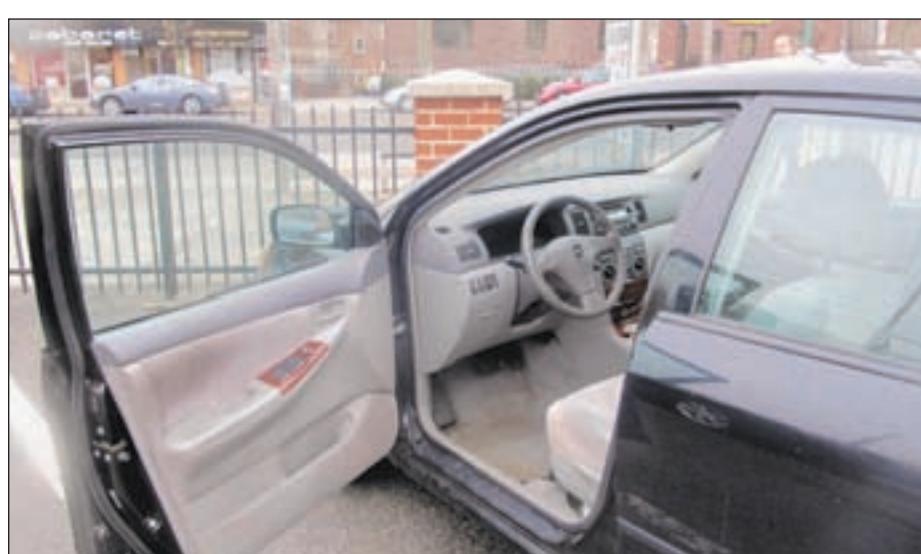
McGeown urged vehicle owners to be vigilant because many car thieves just walk through the community feeling car handles to see if they are unlocked.

"Most of these guys stealing cars do not want to make a lot of noise," said McGeown. "These guys basically walk around the neighborhood feeling car door handles. So if you see someone suspicious, call us and we will check them out."

Community response

One family living on Country Club Road recently had one of their cars ransacked, said Country Club Civic Association president Marcia Pavlica.

They awoke in the morning to find loose change and other items missing from a car, and to their astonishment, the door left wide open, she said.



A car door was left as wide open as this one after it got rummaged through by a thief on Country Club Road. Cops are warning locals to make sure they lock their cars - and don't leave keys in the ignitions.

Photo by Patrick Rocchio

While they were concerned about the crimes, Pavlica said break-ins of this sort had become increasingly rare.

Community Board 10 chairman John Marano echoed the police depart-

ment's concerns.

"People feel safe around here, and that is a great feeling," he said. "But this can happen anywhere, not just in the Bronx."

Marano said that it is one thing for someone to

forget their keys in the car, but if they are leaving their cars running in front of their house to run inside for 30 seconds, or leaving keys inside their vehicles, they are setting themselves up to be victims.

Rents soar on White Plains Road

From Page 1

elevated subway for years, but many high-end shops moved out around 15 years ago, when crime went up and the nabe underwent a mass exodus, said Thomp-

son, a community leader for nearly five decades.

Today, many of the newer families are more settled and can afford more expensive goods.

"People nowadays are

spending differently than before," said Thompson. "Businesses need to grow to survive."

Okey Dokey, a beauty shop that sold wigs, weaves and other similar goods on the strip for 18 years, did not survive. And its owner, Jimmy Kim, is still wondering what exactly happened.

"More competition, higher rent, it all means down, down, down for me," said Kim.

New stores coming

More change is on the way. A new supermarket around the corner on Pelham Parkway South, as well as a new pharmacy, will open up in the next few months.

But at least one nabe activist is worried that the new crop of businesses



Out with the old: Okey Dokey Beauty Supply and discount clothing shop Weekend will soon be gone from the fast-changing White Plains Road shopping district.

Photo by Ben Kochman



And in with the new: A pharmacy, and a supermarket, will soon be coming into the commercial stretch.

Photo by Ben Kochman

paying higher rents will leave a gap in the kind of friendly shops that make a neighborhood inviting.

"We need real fam-

ily stores, like bakeries and restaurants," said Edith Blitzer, president of the Pelham Parkway Neighborhood Associa-

tion, who lives on nearby Lydig Avenue. "But with rents these high, they won't afford to move here."



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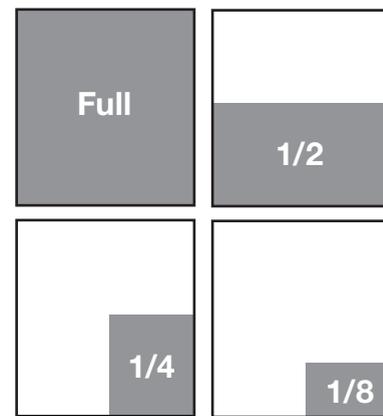
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Bedford Park church preservation grant

BY JAIME WILLIAMS

Call it the little church that could.

A Bedford Park church with about 45 members restored their landmarked building to its former glory after raising over \$80,000 in less than two years.

The Bedford Park Congregational Church is being recognized for their efforts May 6, when they will be presented with a Lucy G. Moses Preservation Award from the New York Landmarks Conservancy.

"This is one of our greatest achievements," said of the award.

'Like a family'

Ponnuraj called his small congregation very ethnically diverse, but "like a family," with some members coming to the church for 40 years.

The church, part of the United Church of Christ, was established in 1889 and built a few years later at 309 E. 201st St. at Bainbridge Avenue. Officially landmarked

in 2012, it will celebrate its 125th anniversary this fall.

"This is a very special year," said Ponnuraj.

In urgent need of roof repairs, the church contacted the New York Landmark Conservancy in 2010 for help.

In September, 2011, the Conservancy pledged a \$25,000 Robert Wilson Challenge grant, which the congregation more than matched, raising \$44,189, said Elaine Maddux, a member of the church's board of trustees and its treasurer.

Cake sales

The Conservancy pledged a second \$25,000 challenge grant in 2012 for additional work, which the congregation again matched, with another \$37,547.

Ponnuraj said that to raise the money in, congregants ramped up their annual Fun Fair and sale, which usually garners about \$10,000.

They also held frequent luncheons, cake sales, rafes, lawn parties and a flea

market.

"It was not an easy journey," said Ponnuraj.

He said his congregation members are extremely grateful to those that supported their fundraising, and are incredibly generous to the church themselves.

"Although we are very few in number, people love this church," said Ponnuraj.

He said the upcoming award means a lot to the members of his congregation.

Organ next

But they already have their sights on their next restoration project: the church's organ. He said the organ is a 1938 model which has been out of commission for several years.

"Many of the old-timers would like to hear the sound of the organ," said Ponnuraj. "It gives the life to the church."

But that project, he said, will have to wait a year or two.



Rev. Dr. Christopher Ponnuraj outside the recently restored Bedford Park Congregational Church on the corner of Bainbridge Avenue and East 201st Street. Photo by Jaime Williams

Student slashed on MTA platform

BY BEN KOCHMAN

A 15-year-old student at Christopher Columbus High School was slashed in the back after a fight between two groups of high school students waiting for a train at the Morris Park No. 5 sub-

way station. A shouting match started between his group and another group of students from a rival school, 49th Precinct commanding officer, Deputy Inspector Lorenzo "Andy" Johnson, said of the ongoing investigation.

The fight turned physical, and at some point one of the teenagers whipped out a sharp object and slashed the 15-year-old victim "lightly in the back," said Johnson.

Searching for clues

Police at the 49th said they have yet to apprehend a subject in the stabbing, but are investigating, with the help of Transit District 12—which polices the platform—and staff at both of the schools where the brawling teenagers are students.

Cops at the NYPD Intel Division are also surveying social media for clues, said Johnson.

Kid-on-kid fight spike?

Violence in a Morris Park train station is rare, he added, but the precinct has seen some spats between groups of young people in recent months.

"Unfortunately we're seeing too much of younger kid-on-kid violence," said Johnson.

On Feb. 19, police arrested an 18-year-old after a fight between two groups of teenagers bubbled over into gun violence on a commercial stretch of Van Nest Avenue.

That incident resulted in a 79-year-old woman being hit with a stray bullet and transported to a nearby hospital, where she made a full recovery.

Not a random act

Police officers at the 49th Precinct stressed that locals should not be concerned about using

Unfortunately we're seeing too much of younger kid-on-kid violence.

Lorenzo Johnson

Deputy Inspector, C.O. 49th Pct.

way station.

The teenager—who was transported to Jacoby Medical Center with minor injuries—was waiting with a group of friends for the train at around 3 p.m. April 19 when

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the platform in the future.

The incident was isolated, police officers say—and the precinct as a

whole boasted the lowest violent crime rate in the city in 2013.

"Without a doubt, this was not a random act,"

said Johnson. "These were a bunch of kids who had an agenda. New York City Transit is the safest it's been in 10 years."

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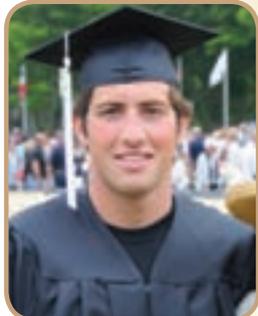


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BENEDETTO GIVES TO WOUNDED WARRIORS



Assemblyman Michael Benedetto presents a check for \$2,200 for the Wounded Warriors Project to Tashel Speirs, who organized a recent fundraiser for the veterans' group. Benedetto, who chairs the Assembly, Veterans Affairs committee held his own fundraiser in November for the Wounded Warrior Project: a football game between Bronx and Queens elected officials, with the Bronx squeaking by with 20-19 victory.

Photo courtesy of Assemblyman Benedetto

ST FRANCIS XAVIER PAJAMA PARTY



It was bingo and pj's at St. Francis Xavier School's annual pajama party March 28 at the Morris Park school.

Photo by Edwin Soto



Grace Leventy and Anne Ring with their dazzling hats.

GJONAJ'S ENGLISH TEA PARTY



Morris Park's finest donned their 'Sunday best' at an 'English Tea Party' thrown by Assemblyman Mark Gjonaj Friday, Apr. 11. Stella Oliveri (left, background) won 'best dressed' after sporting her 50th wedding anniversary dress that she designed herself. Lucy Sanders, decked out in purple, was looking fabulous as well, as Gjonaj took the mic to give out awards.

Photo by Aracelis Batista

(Above right) That's some serious headwear: Helen Monero won 'best hat' and a \$50 gift certificate to Don Coqui.

ST. BARNABAS HOLYLAND PILGRIMAGE



Dr. Mark Macaoay, (2nd from right) a pediatric dental resident at St. Barnabas Hospital, volunteers at Trudi Birger Dental Clinic in Jerusalem through the DVI (Dental Volunteers for Israel) organization. St. Barnabas Hospital allows its residents the opportunity to participate in humanitarian missions around the world.

Photo courtesy of Andover Communications

ST. RAYMOND PARISH ART SHOW



The fourth annual St. Raymond Parish Art Show was held on Sunday, March 23 at St. Raymond Elementary School. Artwork in a variety of media, including pencil, pen and ink, painting, and sculpture by students from all three parish schools was exhibited. It included over 1,000 pieces of artwork created by the students ranging from Kindergartners through 12th graders.

(Right) St. Raymond's Elementary School student Jeanae Escobar (whose artwork is on display) and her mom, Annabel.

(Above left) Frank Pena (l), whose daughter, Cassidy, goes to St. Raymond Elementary School, admires the students' art work.

by Silvio Pacifico



M.S. 101 MARCH MADNESS CARD PARTY

It was March Madness at M.S. 101's annual Card Party Mar. 21. School parents, administrators and supporters piled into the Lafayette Avenue school for the fundraiser. (bottom) Rose Francomano , Maureen Andreozzi , Carol Brumley-McManus, Ronnie Scaduto , Stephanie Brumley (top) Nancy Glibbery , Vicky Taranto

Photo by Walter Pofeltd

MOMMY TO BE EXPO AT VILLA BARONE

Oh baby! A group of expectant mothers-to-be gathered at Villa Barone Manor Sunday Mar. 23 to receive advice from maternity experts. The soon-to-be moms also picked up some wares from infant care vendors.



(Above) Keva Moolenaar of Love at First Bite and Expo organizer Angela Porcelli with expectant moms Natalie Gutierrez and Miram Flores.



(Above) Veronica Gonzalez visited the maternity Expo with son Liam in tow.

(Left)) Mothers-to-be Michelle Pujols, Glenny Pazmino, Jismar Salazar, and Jesmy

Photo by Silvio Pacifico

Push for teen community board members

Councilman Torres: Let the youth in!

BY BEN KOCHMAN

The borough's youngest City Councilmember is pushing community boards across the city to think young.

Ritchie Torres, the 25-year-old elected representing the central Bronx, wants the boards—neighborhood's first line of defense on a myriad of issues including land-use changes and liquor license approvals—to appoint at least one 16- or 17-year-old member.

"As a 16 year old you can do work, pay taxes. In many ways you're already an adult," said Torres. "If we are going to encourage young people to be civically engaged, how can we not allow them a chance to serve on their local board?"

Input on young issues

Torres is one of the main sponsors of a Council resolution in support of a proposed state law that would lower the minimum age of a community board member from 18 down to 16. Adding a younger voice on the board would give communities a more diverse set of opinions, said Torres. It would also give young people a larger say on issues that matter

to them.

"One of the bigger issues right now is education," he said, "and no one is more affected by education than young people."

The movement for teenagers on community boards has picked up political momentum in the last few weeks. Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer is among those spearheading the proposal.

But for Torres, the push is personal. He says he was inspired to go into politics as a 16-year-old Lehman High School junior, when he served as "district manager for a day" at Community Board 10 – which serves the easternmost slice of the borough – learning the ins and outs of local politics from his mentor, Councilman Jimmy Vacca, who was district manager at the time.

"I learned more about the inner workings of civic government in that one day," said Torres, "than I had in all of my years of schooling."

Board 10: concerned

But John Marano, current chairman of Board 10, said he's skeptical about having 16-year-olds on community boards.

"These kids are already studying, already in school," said Marano. "Do they really have the time to give the same effort and time commitment as our other members do?"

Marano added that 16- and 17-year-olds are already free to pop into the board's district office or attend a public meeting anytime to learn the ways of civic government.

Board 10 is composed mainly of retirees who serve as volunteers. Let alone teenagers, he noted that there's no member on his board younger than at least 30.

But Marano says his board is already diverse enough.

"We have business owners, electricians, steam fitters," he said, "People from all of the different neighborhoods."

Torres said having at least one teenager on the board can only help – especially on each board's youth committee, which is meant to handle issues affecting young people.

"How can there be a youth committee," he asked, "and yet not have anybody young on that committee?"



PAL TEEN IMPACT CENTER OPENS

The Police Athletic League opened its new Teen Impact Center at Junion High School 22 in Morrisania on Monday, April 7. The program there will provide local youth with recreational opportunities in 13-week sessions.

Photo by PAL

Push for better postal service

HP board working with new Bronx postmaster

BY BEN KOCHMAN

Hunt's Point locals are hoping that the borough's new Postmaster will hear their pleas to improve service at what they claim is the borough's worst post office.

Community Board 2 met with new acting Postmaster Lilliam – most recently the postmaster of Puerto Rico – on April 3 to send a clear message: enough is enough!

Positive changes

"This is our tax money," said Rafael Salamanca Jr., CB 2's district manager. "A lot of these problems should have been fixed years ago."

Since the meeting, some progress has been made, he noted. The Post Office on Manida Street has reopened its side entrances and fixed a front door that had been broken.

The facility also now has mailing supplies in the waiting area. Previously, visitors would have to wait in line, only to then be given the necessary supplies and forms to fill in, and then have to wait in line again.

"We're very satisfied with the fact that she was able to address those simple issues," said Salamanca.

Big gripes remain

But now that the Board has Rodriguez' attention, they won't rest until other issues are tackled as well. One of the board's biggest gripes are major waiting times at the Southern Boulevard post office branch, which they say is severely understaffed.

Another common complaint is slow snow removal. The Post Office works with a private contractor to clean the snow,

but Salamanca says that the city Department of Sanitation had to step in and clean the mess instead, after community complaints.

"It seems like they never made it to our side of the district," Salamanca said. "Maybe they should hire a new contractor."

'special' delivery

Mail delivery in the nabe has also been unreliable. One local told the Times-Reporter that he receives so much mail addressed to others that he often does his own unofficial rounds around the neighborhood, dropping off the mail himself.

"I get mail from all over the place and it's unbelievable," said Roland Lopez, who lives on Dawson Street. "Maybe they can only do so much, and I don't know where the



With both side doors blocked off, visitors to the Manida Street post office in Hunts Point could only enter through the driveway for years—one of a slew of issues locals would like fixed.

Photo by Ben Kochman

problem is, but something is happening, and it has not been taken care of."

Lopez, who serves on the community board and attended the recent meet-

ing with Rodriguez, said he was optimistic that she could help right the ship—if she sticks around long enough.

Rodriguez is the

Bronx's fourth postmaster in as many years.

"We have constant turnover in this position," said Salamanca Jr., "and I don't know why."

THROGS NECK AND VAN NEST



Mike Sassano, General Sales Manager of LaSorsa Auto Group, presents a check for \$1,477 to the Van Nest Little League for painting supplies for a new mural on their clubhouse by artist Garcia. (L-r) Garcia of the "Look Out Crew", Chris Amerosa, Joe DeFazio, Jr., Mike Sassano, VNLL President Jerry Weihe, and Senator Jeff Klein. Photo by Silvio Pacifico

The Van Nest and Throggs Neck little leagues held their opening day festivities on Saturday, April 12. At Van Nest, a mural by a well-respected artist known as Garcia was dedicated. Garcia donated his time to the league, while LaSorsa Auto Group donated supplies. LaSorsa got to showcase some of their new vehicles during opening day and presented the league with a check. At Throggs Neck Little League, a parade around the community was followed by an on-the-field ceremony with U.S. Senator Charles Schumer, city Comptroller Scott Stringer and local electeds



State Senator Jeff Klein, U.S. Senator Chuck Schumer, and Assemblyman Michael Benedetto with attendees on opening day at the Throggs Neck Little League. Photo by Silvio Pacifico



Former Assemblyman Steve Kaufman with the team he sponsored at TNLL on opening day. Photo by Silvio Pacifico



They're happy to march, but they would rather play. The children march around the Throggs Neck community before the opening day at the little league field. Photo by Silvio Pacifico



Van Nest Little League Board Member Joe DeFazio, Jr. address opening day crowd. Photo by Silvio Pacifico



Mila Mckenna, age one, with her mom Laura and brother Michael, and his friend Ryan Reiley at Van Nest Little League's opening day ceremony. Photo by Silvio Pacifico

Is it a bird, a snowman, a baby?

Folks guessing at new street art for Fordham Road biz district

BY BEN KOCHMAN

Some thought it was a snowman.

Others said it might be an Egyptian sphinx.

One passerby guessed the latest piece of outdoor artwork along the borough's largest shopping district was a larger-than-life portrait of the Monopoly man.

But no matter what it is exactly, Fordham Road has a new guest.

Community leaders gathered Wednesday, April 16 to unveil "Tomorrow," a nine-foot wooden sculpture standing at E. Fordham Road and Webster Avenue for the next year.

Japanese artist Akihiro Ito built the piece by molding slabs of wood into a plump man-like being.

Ito said *he* thought the sculpture was a giant baby, but viewers are invited to find their own meaning.

"For me, it's a baby," he said. "But if anyone looks



A snowman? Giant wooden child? Whatever it is, it'll be on E. Fordham Road and Webster Avenue for a year. Photo by Ben Kochman

at this and feels any sort of human connection, I'll be happy."

Locals passing by the sculpture on a recent afternoon definitely felt some-

thing – a mixture of amusement and confusion.

Some stopped to give the chubby wooden sculpture a wide hug, or a firm poke in its midsection. Others

observed it from a cautious distance, trying to guess just what exactly it was.

"It's a snowman, right?" asked Parvez Rana, who works at a nearby snack stand on Fordham Road.

"What is it? Is it Egyptian?" asked shopper Maria Macchia, adding: "I just like it, that's all."

"I just like that it's different," said a local who only gave her name as Rosalind after giving "Tomorrow" a hug. "For me, it means renewal."

The Fordham Road Business Improvement District commissioned the piece in collaboration with the city Department of Transportation's Art program. From 2012 to 2013, the same wooden public art stood at the entrance to Fort Greene Park in Brooklyn.

Fordham BID officials said they hope the statue will invite visitors to slow down and take in their sur-



Fordham Road BID executive director Wilma Alonso embraces the strip's newest guest. Photo by Ben Kochman

roundings as part of the BID's ongoing program of adding seating and beautifying the area.

"Sometimes Fordham road is very commercial heavy, retail heavy, a

place that people just pass through," said Deputy BID Director Daniel Bernstein. "But I want to make it a place where people can stop, look around and stay awhile."

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Tenant gripes get Senator Klein's ear

BY JAIME WILLIAMS

Long suffering residents at a problem-plagued apartment complex are finally finding some relief after a local elected stepped in to help.

As part of the relief, Senator Jeff Klein attended the ribbon-cutting ceremony Tuesday, April 15, for the reopened community room at Winthrop Gardens, which had been closed to residents for years.

Klein has been acting as mediator between management and tenants in the three-building Allerton complex since they reached out to his office with numerous complaints.

Beyond the reopening of the community room, main issues include elevators that often break down and are frightening to ride in, and maintenance of the parking lot.

Resident and community leader Joe Thompson sees both as safety issues.

Lynn Artesona, president of the tenants association, said there is not enough staff to keep the building's hallways properly cleaned and maintained. There are about five workers for three buildings with 328 apartments.

Artesona said that management is now responding to maintenance issues tenants brought to Klein's office.

"They were sitting back on their laurels until they had a meeting with Senator Klein," she said.

The reopened community room will only be used for tenant association meetings, but a Klein spokesperson said its hoped the room can be made available for other events in the future as discussions with management continue.

Thompson said the events that used to be held there gave elderly residents something to do and a place

to go. But in-house tenant association meetings are still a victory for the building's elderly and disabled residents, who know the community room is convenient and accessible.

"He's extremely effective when it comes down to these issues," Thompson said of Klein.

"When I first learned of the issues faced by residents at Winthrop Gardens, I knew that we had to do something to ensure that basic services and safety were addressed head-on," Klein said in a statement. "That's why I met with residents and management in February to discuss how we can work together to improve these conditions. With the long-awaited reopening of the community room, I believe Winthrop Gardens is heading in the right direction."

A spokesperson for The Pinnacle Group, which owns and manages the



Senator Jeff Klein cuts the ribbon on the reopened community room at Allerton's Winthrop Gardens apartment complex. (L to R): Richard Harley, The Pinnacle Group; Isak Radoncic, The Pinnacle Group, Klein; David Radoncic, building management; Lynn Artesona, Tenants Association; Hazel Miura, director of housing; and Joe Thompson.

Photo by Edwin Soto

property, said that when the company acquired the Olinville property around 2005, the buildings were in poor condition. He said that since then the group has

been improving the property and will continue to be responsive to issues.

"The company was pleased to work with Senator Klein to identify is-

suues," he said, adding that Klein's office has helped to organize tenant requests so that Pinnacle can focus on those that need to be addressed.

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CNG IS AN EOE



It was out with the old, in with new on Monday, April 14, as Bronx Dems followed in Boro Prez **Ruben Diaz Jr.**'s footsteps by endorsing state Senator **Adriano Espaillat** over incumbent **Charlie Rangel** for congress.

Most folks are still hedging their bets on Rangel going down - he still has clout. But it's certainly making this race look like the 2012 down-to-the-wire one where Charlie beat Espaillat by only a thousand votes.

Bronx Dem Boss **Carl Heastie** finally did get off the throne a week after we questioned his delay in endorsing anyone, to throw County support, such as it is these days, to Espaillat.

As a high ranking party insider put it, "Charlie is history, Adriano is the future."

And even if Charlie

squeaks by again, "the party's thinking is Charlie may likely step down after a while into his term."

With that scenario, Gov. Cuomo would likely call a special election to fill the remainder of the two-year term, Harlem Assemblyman and Manhattan Dem Boss **Keith Wright** would likely grab the seat, and given the changing demographics of the district, "Adriano could take him out for the next full term," sayeth our insider. "It's Adriano's time."

OLLIE

D for Decision Day is fast approaching for former state Attorney General and recently term-limited Riverdale City Councilman **Oliver Koppell** to decide if he has enough traction (and bux) to mount a challenge against state Senator **Jeff Klein**.

Koppell said he would make his decision shortly

after the state budget was passed, which was three weeks ago. His latest deadline is now after Easter.

One of the key issues he could be weighing, according to a savvy Riverdale political insider, is just how **BADLY** Ollie could lose to Klein, who has a **VERY** big campaign warchest, and just how much money Ollie can raise. He'd probably need \$500,000, "and this is April already," our source noted.

The regular Senate Democratic Conference has no love for Klein over his grabbing their majority away by joining his Independent Democratic Conference with Senate Republicans. But how much they're willing to push back using Koppell and risk their own members facing Klein-backed challenges is another question.

"It's like a bar brawl,

pushing someone to fight," said the source. "It doesn't mean they're gonna be in the fight."

SEPARATION ANXIETY?

And speaking of the Independent Democratic Conference, could regular Senate Dems be seeking rapprochement with Jeff? Rumors are going 'round that regular Dem **Mike Gianaris** of Queens has reportedly put out feelers to Jeff, with a possible co-leadership deal if Jeff moves his IDC back across the aisle, stripping the GOP of its coalition majority rule.

A source inside Jeff's camp, playing coy, **MOSTLY** downplayed the rumor. But then again, it wouldn't be the first time that a "planted" rumor actually becomes reality.

'NO COMMENT'

News veteran, lawyer and Bronx native **Terry**

Raskyn succeeding **Steven Reed**, who's retiring after nearly 24 years as spokesperson for Bronx D.A. Rob Johnson.

GRAND OPTIMIST PARTY

The Bronx County Republican Party will be holding its candidate screenings by appointment beginning May 5th for all local assembly and senate seats. Contact Chairman **John Greaney** at County headquarters at 718-792-5800 or through the county website the bronxgop.org to arrange an appointment for interviews by district leaders.

BACK TO BACK

The two Ruben's - Senator Diaz Sr. and Boro Prez Diaz Jr. - are celebrating their birthdays only days apart. April 22 for Papi, turning 71, and April 26 for Jr., turning 41. Being politicians of course, it means both will be taking the oc-

casions to raise some campaign bux.

Ruben the Younger will be tossing his \$500-a-head birthday fundraiser Wednesday, April 30 at **Jimmy Rodriguez'** hot hot hot Don Coqui Restaurant on City Island, while The Rev simply sent out a mailing seeking contributions "to help me keep fighting for New York's senior citizens, students, veterans, businesses, and families."

PROUD DAD

80th Assembly District State Committeeman/Liberty Dem Club stalwart **Joe McManus** talking up his artist son Mike's show opening April 26 at the Heath Gallery, 24 W. 120th St. Show runs through May 16.

BRONX BIRTHDAYS

April 16 - City Councilman **Fernando Cabrera**
April 25 - **Al Pacino** (Alfredo James Pacino)

Fear traffic mess with new malls

From Page 1

to be fine developments that are going to be economic engines of the Bronx," said Assemblyman Michael Benedetto, who attended. "At the same time the DOT expressed its frustrations that they are just building these malls, and maybe that City Planning should have been involved sooner."

Benedetto said he has been concerned for quite some time, and discussed the matter about three years ago with Lt. Gov. Robert Duffy when he visited the Bronx.

The assemblyman has secured funds in the state budget to enlarge Exit 11 off I-95 near one of the main entrances to Bay Plaza, where a new indoor mall is steadily rising.

City Planning study
"DOT is working with the City Planning Department on their review of this portion of the Bronx, and is also participating in preliminary discussions with New York State DOT, elected officials and other stakeholders," said city DOT spokesman Nicholas Mosquera. "While the details of this process, including the participants in any such study and the timeline, are still being determined, we look forward to getting feedback from the community and working closely with these representatives to address any traffic and safety concerns along the corridor."

Local community and civic leaders are now forming their own working group on how to address the traffic

issues, including the Country Club Civic Association, Waterbury-LaSalle Community Association, and the Pelham Bay Taxpayers.

Arlene Grauer of the CCCA one issue is that many of these projects are "as of right", as well as environmental impact statements only required for the new Ferry Point Park Golf Course and the 911 Call Center.

"We are happy to have the shopping," she said. "But it is like getting candy without the dental plan."

Marano said he also is glad to have the malls, but he criticized all levels of government for not working together on plans to improve the infrastructure when they were first notified of these projects.

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