

Diaz: The Bronx is the place to be

BY ROBERT WIRSING

The Bronx is the place to be according to a new report released last week.

On Friday, February 27, Borough President Ruben Diaz, Jr. officially issued his annual development report which highlights the total investment in the Bronx since he first took office in 2009.

The report notes that collectively the borough has seen more than \$7.212 billion in total development within all categories since the beginning of his first term.

Last year alone, the Bronx witnessed over \$1.13 billion in new development.

This report's debut follows on the heels of last week's 'State of the Borough' address in which the borough president outlined his continued vision for the ongoing prosperity of the Bronx's economy.

"The Bronx continues to grow stronger and stronger each year, as we create new jobs, build new housing and improve quality of life in the borough," said Borough President Diaz. "We will continue to attract the type of investors that want to help the Bronx flourish and reach its full potential."

Diaz, Jr.'s report illustrates other development highlights from last year including a total of \$788 million in residential development, \$483 million in institutional development, and \$134 million in commercial development across the borough.

Last year saw approximately 405 new addresses issued.

There has been a steady increase in unsubsidized residential development throughout

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EDC EXPLORES FERRY SERVICE

BY PATRICK ROCCHIO

Bringing ferry service to Ferry Point Park is being explored.

On the heels of a mayoral announcement that ferry service will link Soundview and Manhattan by 2018, Councilman James Vacca set up a meeting with the New York City Economic Development Corporation to discuss the possibility of having a ferry service link from Ferry Point Park to Manhattan.

The meeting took place on Thursday, February 19 at the NYCEDC's offices in Manhattan.

According to attendees, representatives from the Trump Organization, which is opening a golf course in the park, a

ferry service operator, and Steve Kaufman, the president of the Throggs Neck Merchants Association, took part in the discussion.

The councilman said he thought that the meeting was constructive, but that bringing ferry service to Ferry Point Park was going to be a work in progress.

"We did have several ideas that we brought up to EDC," said Vacca, adding "There is going to be a lot of communication, I hope, between all parties involved."

Vacca said it is only logical that ferry service should help people in areas most distant from Manhattan that are also close to waterfront.

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NYBG Orchid Show Blooms

The annual Orchid Show opened at the New York Botanical Garden on Saturday, February 28. For more photos from the exhibit, see page 12.

Photo by Walter Pofeldt

RAIN to repay misused Medicaid program funds

BY PATRICK ROCCHIO

The state attorney general has reached a settlement with one of the Bronx's largest non-profits.

On Wednesday, February 25, Attorney General Eric Schneiderman's office announced that they had settled with Regional Aid for Interim Needs, which they state diverted about \$800,000 in Medicaid funding to make mortgage payments

on the agency's administrative offices on Morris Park Avenue while they were under reconstruction, vacant and not in use from 2003 to 2008.

This was in violation of RAIN's contract with the city's Human Resource Administration, which oversees the Medicaid funding that the city receives from the federal government and the state Department

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Providence Rest's new seawall under construction

BY ROBERT WIRSING

The expansive seawall which has bravely defended Providence Rest from wrathful storms throughout the years is undergoing a much needed renovation.

"We consider this 650-linear foot sea wall 'Our Great Protector' and it is keeping our over 200 residents and property safe from the storms that may come," Susan Steinberg, Providence Rest LNHA administrator expressed.

The eastern portion of the Country Club-based nursing home is surrounded by the majestic Eastchester Bay.

This prime location allows residents to take in the scenic nautical sights while experiencing a deep sense of serenity while sitting by the water's edge.

Unfortunately, such a location can be both a blessing and a curse.

According to Steinberg, the stack stone gravity sea wall has absorbed the brunt of many storms and suppressed the bay's swollen waters.

She added that during Hurricane Sandy, Providence Rest was spared major damage.

However, the combination of incredibly potent gale force winds, high tide, and storm surge has



Susan Steinberg (l), Providence Rest administrator; Senator Jeff Klein and Sister Seline Mary Flores, Providence Rest CEO.

Photo courtesy of the Office of Senator Jeff Klein

taken its toll on the wall's integrity.

Situated only 23 feet from the bay is the nursing home's Ferrari Pavilion which houses approximately 80 residents.

If not for the repair efforts being made, Steinberg said that the building's foundation would be at severe risk of becoming compromised.

The seawall is composed of

large boulders, but some were lost during its battle with the ferocious hurricane.

Following Hurricane Sandy, Providence Rest began working with Senator Jeff Klein and FEMA to start repair efforts.

According to Steinberg, approximately \$318,000 was awarded for the project, but it was not enough.

As a result, they applied for the

Superstorm Sandy Social Services Block Grant and an additional \$1.5 million was awarded toward the project.

Starting this month, construction began on the seawall.

It is reported the reconstruction project is progressing at an efficient pace despite the harsh winter weather.

"During Hurricane Sandy, the

seawall at Providence Rest was left severely damaged and in need of major reconstruction. Today, I'm happy to say the project is well underway and the seniors and staff who live and work there will soon have a sturdy new seawall to protect them from extreme weather and future storms. I'm proud to have been integral in securing more than \$300,000 in funding to get this project off the ground, and I look forward to seeing the seawall completed this spring," Senator Klein stated.

Steinberg explained that construction equipment is currently occupying the fenced off premises near the seawall.

The original walkway has since been demolished and will be replaced with a new one.

The seawall will be filled in with cement to make it more resilient against future storms and hurricanes.

She added that the next phase in the project is to install steel pilings in front of the seawall to reinforce the structure and is expected to be completed by winter's end.

In addition, a parapet will be installed atop the wall to prevent rising water from affecting the area as it did previously.

MP Patrol returns from 2-month hiatus

BY JAIME WILLIAMS

The Morris Park Civilian Patrol is back on the streets after an almost two-month hiatus.

At the most recent 49th Precinct Community Council meeting, commanding officer Captain Timothy McCormack announced that in light of the killings of officers Ramos and Liu on December 20 and other targeting of law enforcement at the time, the precinct had suspended the civilian patrol at the end of the year.

Patrols by the precinct's auxiliary officers were also restricted.

Those restrictions were recently lifted, McCormack said at the February 24 meeting. The civilian patrols are back on, and patrols by auxiliary officers are slowly re-

suming.

"You'll start to see more of them out there," said McCormack.

Although the Morris Park Civilian Patrol operates independently of the local precinct, the Morris Park Community Association was glad to comply with their request to stop patrolling, said president Tony Signorile.

"The 49th Precinct was nice enough to look after our guys and their safety," he said. "It made sense."

The patrol's volunteers were very happy to hear the news that they could get back on the streets, said Signorile, and community members who have been looking for the patrol these past weeks will be glad as well.

"They feel safe when they see us driving in the

neighborhood," he said.

The Morris Park Civilian Patrol is made up of 12-15 volunteers who drive around the neighborhood in the community association's blue cars almost every evening, and many days as well, said Signorile.

They're looking for suspicious activity to report to the police, and provide information to help them make arrests.

Last summer the Morris Park Civilian Patrol helped the 49th Precinct catch a burglar who broke in to a retired cop's house on Hone Avenue while the patrol was nearby.

The patrol has been a presence in the neighborhood for decades, and this year's hiatus was the first Signorile could recall.

The patrol was founded



The Morris Park Community Association's civilian patrols are back on after a January to February hiatus.

Photo by Walter Pofeldt

in the 1970s in connection with the Morris Park Community Association after the father of an association officer was

mugged.

It's been successful all these years thanks to the dedication of volunteers who spend their free time

patrolling, said Signorile, and they could always use more help.

"The more, the better," he said.

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EDC explores ferry service request



Ferry Point Park is being suggested as a ferry landing site by local advocates.

Community News Group / Photo by Patrick Rocchio

From Page 1

Ferry service under the Bloomberg administration was concentrated in communities that were closer to Manhattan where there were already other transit options, he added.

"Ferry service should be for neighborhoods like Throggs Neck where it takes you over an hour to get to work in Manhattan," said Vacca. "My entire district has some of the longest commutes in the city."

If you look at documents prepared by transportation advocates, areas in the east Bronx, Staten Island and parts of Queens are referred to as 'transportation deserts,' and yet these far-flung parts of the city have taxpayers just like anywhere else, said Vacca. The city should give every consideration to bringing water taxi ser-

vice to Ferry Point Park, the councilman said.

"I am just not giving up on this, and that is that," he added.

Part of the argument made to NYCEDC by the local leaders was that the borough is being undeserved with only one planned stop while other boroughs already have or will have several ports, said Kaufman.

Another argument made on behalf of the Throggs Neck and Ferry Point community is that with the opening of the new golf course and new malls, ferry service at Ferry Point Park would help alleviate increased auto traffic, Kaufman added.

"It is a perfect fit," he said of the ferry service in the park.

It would benefit both Bronx commuters looking to reach Manhattan, and

patrons of the new Trump Golf Links at Ferry Point, he added.

"It would be perfect for people coming from Manhattan could use the ferry instead of a car to get (to the golf course), and also our people would have a ferry ride to Manhattan or other areas of New York City which would be a more pleasant ride to get to work," he said.

The response from the corporation was not totally negative, and it was something that NYCEDC hoped that the Trump Organization would get involved in, said Kaufman.

The goal is to create a happy marriage between Trump and NYCEDC to bring a dedicated ferry line to the park, he added.

One argument NYCEDC made against the Ferry Point Park proposal was that the water where a ferry landing would have to be situated was too shallow, said Kaufman, who added that this could easily be solved by dredging.

How the ferry would be paid for had not been discussed, and it was probably too soon to get into specifics, said Kaufman.

While the ferry would have to make some kind of profit, he said, it is not the only concern, since other parts of the city will have much more ferry service, even with the new line to be added.

"Our argument is that even if it cannot make a profit, we should have the ferry service and we should not be discriminated against," said Kaufman.

NYCEDC did not respond to requests for comment as of press time.

A representative from the Trump Organization was not available for comment.



Crossroads Plaza is one of the many new developments slated for our borough.

Photo courtesy of the Borough President's Office

Diaz: The Bronx is the place to be

From Page 1

these years and the Bronx has topped last year's record of 63% unsubsidized units with a total of 69% unsubsidized units this year.

This represents 2,547 unsubsidized units out of a total of 3,697 housing units developed last year.

Last year's noteworthy commercial developments included 15 new retail stores, three restaurants, a TD Bank in Parkchester, a Hotel Hampton Inn and a boutique in Highbridge, four storage facilities, five warehouses, an auto laundry, and two gas stations.

Residential highlights detailed were four 1-family houses, 44 2-family houses, 20 3-family houses, 81 multifamily buildings including six supportive housing buildings, and 98 alterations.

Institutional developments described in the

report included a new natatorium for Riverdale Country School, P.S. 317, Children's Aid Society College Prep Charter School, the Metropolitan Lighthouse Charter School, Fordham University's Faber Hall and Loyola Hall, a new building at Bronx Community College, Bronx Council on the Arts Gallery, MTA training facility, NYPD training facility, St. Barnabas Hospital building, and a mosque in Van Nest.

The report's 'Top Ten Projects by Total Investment in 2014' included Riverdale Country School's Natatorium for \$100 million, Melrose Site C: 203-unit mixed use and 59-unit supportive housing with HDC/HPD financing for \$91 million, 134-unit multifamily building with HDC financing for \$58 million, 149-unit supportive housing with DOMH and HASA

funding for \$55 million, \$49,399,000 for P.S. 317, 136-unit supportive housing and 200-bed homeless shelter with HPD/DHS financing for \$34 million, \$33,670,450 for a 150-unit multifamily with HDC financing, 60-unit HIV supportive housing with HPD financing for \$27 million, and Children's Aid Society College Prep Charter School for \$27 million.

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CB 10 hears developer's hardship plea

BY PATRICK ROCCHIO

Community Board 10 heard a developer's hardship plea with regards to a vacant parcel in Locust Point last week.

After being rescheduled several times, CB 10's Housing and Zoning Committee heard the plans for new homes near Hammond Cove on Wednesday, February 25. The developer is listed on documents as John Comer.

The developer indicated his plan is to build 5 two-family homes on Longstreet Avenue where only two homes are allowed under the present zoning. He is seeking a variance.

An attorney presented the committee with the information, with no vote taken. In order to obtain the variance, plans need to be filed before the Board of Standards and Appeals.

If this happens, CB 10 would like to have a public hearing in the Locust Point community, said Ken Kearns, the board's district manager.

"His central argument is that if he is not allowed to build five houses, he can't recover his investment, but that is everybody's argument" said Kearns. "It is not



This vacant land, on an undeveloped part of Longstreet Avenue in Locust Point, may see five two-family homes, if a developer's plans are approved.

Community News Group / Photo by Patrick Rocchio

an innovative argument."

The site, situated so close to the cove that pilings would be required, is along an undeveloped part of Longstreet Avenue between Glennon and Hatting places.

It would require a new street in front of the homes, sewer connections, and would have to comply with city resiliency require-

ments for new construction near the waterfront.

Since the required infrastructure improvements are substantial he wishes to build more to spread the costs over more homes.

Kearns said that the board viewed the hardship claim with skepticism.

"That is everybody's argu-

ment," he said. "That is why the Board of Standards and Appeals exist."

Mary Jane Musano, a meeting attendee who is a Waterbury-LaSalle Community Association board member, said that the surrounding communities are watching this development because they feel it will set a precedent for builders in nearby neigh-

borhoods.

"He is asking for all sorts of variances and I don't think he deserves any of them," said Musano, who added she feels the developer should accept the results of his decisions and not ask the community to bail him out.

The plans that were presented at CB 10 seemed identical to those the developer presented to the Locust Point Civic Association late last year, said the organization's president Joe Donovan. If there were any differences, they were minor, technical details, he said.

"The community board wanted to hear what (the developer) had to say," he said. "They wanted clarification on the exact variances he is going to be looking for."

The board was told that multiple variances would be sought, including those for setback and permitted square footage, said Donovan.

"The tone I got is that the board did not seem to have a favorable opinion of the request," said Donovan, adding he does not see the plan gaining community support, at least in the form it was presented.

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New Pelham Bay restaurant already a hit

BY STEVEN GOODSTEIN

Italian and seafood restaurants aren't hard to find in the Bronx. However, a new establishment has already proved that it stands out.

DaFranco & Tony Ristorante, located at 2815 Middletown Road near Westchester Avenue and the Middletown Road IRT train station, has been open for just over three months and has already been awarded for its delicious cuisine and romantic atmosphere.

The restaurant, which officially opened on Wednesday, December 3, came to fruition when brothers Frank and Tony Hasanramaj considered opening an Italian restaurant.

They were already partners of Frank's Pizza on 2823 Middletown Road, just up the block from the restaurant, a pizzeria that has been open for 15 years.

In time, it came to Frank and Tony's attention that a location just up the block from the pizzeria had space available.

"The best thing about this restaurant's location is that we see so many

familiar faces that we saw in the pizzeria," said Frank, who was born in Kosova and moved to the United States when he was 17. "We've also seen customers travel in from Manhattan and Westchester, which is a great sign for potential future expansion."

Hasanramaj went on to mention that in the short time that the restaurant has been open, it has received visits from the Bronx's big names, such as Borough President Ruben Diaz, Jr., Councilman James Vacca and president of the Throggs Neck Merchants Association, Steve Kaufman. He explained that once the winter months pass he will open up the backyard patio to give customers more space and seating options.

"We have received a lot of support since we opened and we hope our customers keep coming back for all occasions," he said.

One of the biggest restaurant occasions of the year, Valentine's Day, was a huge hit at the new eatery. For the holiday, DaFranco & Tony Ristorante was full, and led to the restaurant being acknowledged as February's Most



DaFranco & Tony Ristorante, which opened just three months ago, has already received tons of positive feedback and support from the community. Community News Group/Steven Goodstein

Romantic Restaurant by restaurant reviewer Tasty Ladies NY.

"The food is excellent and it's a great new restaurant for the area," said Bailey Provetto, founder and

owner of Tasty Ladies NY.

"I love the Bronx - we have the best restaurants with the best variety of cuisine and I love to promote them," she said.



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Snow clogs White Plains Road municipal parking lot

BY STEVEN GOODSTEIN

Most of a public municipal parking lot on White Plains Road is still covered with snow from the winter's storms.

The White Plains Road Municipal Parking Field, located on 2071 White Plains Road between Maran Place and Brady Avenue, still has yet to be plowed or shoveled after NYC received an accumulation of over two feet (and counting) of snow this winter.

The 35,000 square foot parking lot, which currently holds 93 cars, including five handicap spots, is purposed for half-hour Muni meter parking and monthly parking, the latter of which requires a permit.

Half the spaces are reserved for permit parking and its these vehicles that are preventing the lot from being plowed because they don't have to move for up to a month.

"Every winter, for years, I see this same occurrence take place," said Elaine Feder, treasurer for

the Pelham Parkway Neighborhood Association.

Feder, who is a longtime Pelham Parkway resident, also explained that the DOT and/or the Sanitation Department needs to take control of the situation and remove the snow before it turns to ice. "Somebody needs to take responsibility," Feder added.

According to neighborhood businesses, since the lot is out of commission, parking is at a premium on White Plains Road and nearby streets.

"The fact that this municipal parking lot has not been cleared of snow has caused an issue for drivers looking to park in the lot as well as drivers looking to park on the street," said Joe Thompson, who works across the street as executive director of the White Plains Road Business Improvement District.

"This issue definitely affects us (the BID) because when drivers can't park in the municipal parking lot, they use up the limited

street parking."

Thompson has been trying to add more parking spaces in the White Plains Road Municipal Parking Field for years along with Community Board 11, but the process has been difficult, since residents living in nearby apartments have complained of exhaust and gas emissions from pre-parked cars in the past.

"Sanitation groups have maintained the White Plains Road strip, and have done a great job clearing the area of snow after each storm," said Thompson. "It's harder to clear the snow from a municipal parking lot when the lot isn't empty of cars. If there was a way that the city could communicate with the lot's permit holders about when they should move their cars during a snowstorm, clearing this lot would prove to be a lot easier."

The DOT did not return requests for comment.

Additional reporting contributed by Robert Wirsing



A majority of the White Plains Road Municipal Parking Field still hasn't been plowed or shoveled weeks after multiple snowstorms hit the Bronx

Community News Group / Steven Goodstein



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Bronx Chambers Awards Bauquet



The Bronx Chamber of Commerce held its 15th annual Scholarship Banquet and Bronx Centennial Banquet. Special guests included former Mayor David Dinkins, acclaimed actor Danny Aiello, and many international, federal, state and city officials. Honorees were Bronx Lebanon Hospital receiving the Longevity Award, Monroe College taking home the Education Award, Macy's receiving the Trailblazer Award and the late Alfredo Thiebaud, who was posthumously honored with the Humanitarian Award.



Former Mayor David Dinkins receives his award from Joseph Kelleher (r), chamber chairman, and Lenny Caro (l), chamber president.
Photo by Patrcio Rabayo



A posthumous award was presented to Alfredo Thiebaud's daughter.
Photo by Patrcio Rabayo



Actor Danny Aiello performed a half dozen tunes for the Chamber dinner attendees.
Photo by Patrcio Rabayo



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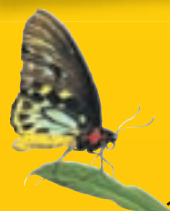
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SUMMER 2015

Drive for Albanian flood victims

BY JAIME WILLIAMS

As you gear up for spring cleaning, consider clearing out your closet for a cause.

Three local organizations have teamed up for a clothing drive to benefit victims of flooding in Albania.

The Albanian American Open Hand Association, the Pelham Parkway Neighborhood Association, and the

Albanian American Women Hope & Peace Organization have partnered to send aid to Albanians whose possessions were destroyed in the wake of heavy rain.

"These people lost everything," said Aleksander Nilaj of the Albanian American Open Hand Association.

During the first week in February, flooding left about

42,000 acres under water in four southern districts in Albania, causing more than 600 families to be evacuated, according to reports from the Associated Press. Two women died from flooding and cold weather, and residents lost about 3,500 sheep and cattle.

"These people are in desperate circumstances," said

Andrea Siegel of the PPNA.

"It's good to help people living in those conditions," said Mimoza Dajci, of the women's organization.

The groups are collecting clothing and toiletries to send to Caritas Albania, a Catholic humanitarian organization.

The organization will hand out clothing to those in need, said Nilaj, and his contacts there will send back photographs of the distribution.

The groups are planning to come together to pack up the goods near the end of March.

This is not the first time the PPNA and the Open Hand Association have collaborated to provide aid. Last year they sent 125 boxes, with at least 4,000 lbs. of clothing, to Bosnia after a similar catastrophe.

"We try to help whoever is really wanting at the time," said Siegel.

In the spirit of lending a helping hand, the organizations will continue to accept clothing donations, as well



(l-r) Edith Blitzer of the Pelham Parkway Neighborhood Association; Mimoza Dajci of the Albanian American Women Hope and Peace Organization; Aleksander Nilaj of the Albanian American Open Hand Association and Andrea Siegel of PPNA.

Community News Group / Jaime Williams



Flooded street in Darzeze village, Albania, on February 7. Thousands of army, police and emergency personnel have evacuated hundreds of families and helped others survive in the difficult conditions.

AP Photo/Hektor Pustina

as toiletries and canned food, Gjonaj's office at 2018 Williamsbridge Road, Councilman James Vacca's office at 3040 E. Tremont Avenue, Councilman Ritchie Torres's office at 573 E. Fordham Road and the Apple Bank for Savings at 626 Pelham Parkway during business hours.

They want the effort to be ongoing, in order to collect aid for those in need closer to home, said Edith Blitzer, president of the PPNA.

"You don't have to wait for an emergency," she said.

There are many local drop off points for the drive including Senator Jeff Klein and Assemblyman Mark

for other drop off locations or hours, contact Nilaj at (718) 913-2151, Blitzer at (917) 826-4410, or Dajci at (917) 645-7452.

Bronx Faces and Voices highlights '70s recollections

BY JAIME WILLIAMS

Stories of the Bronx in the 1970s often focus on the borough as a symbol of urban decay.

But a new book, *Bronx Faces and Voices: Sixteen Stories of Courage and Community*, focuses on the people who played a positive role in that era of the borough's history.

The book, recently published by Texas Tech University Press, is a collection of oral histories told to Emta Hill in the early 1980s. Hill and her collaborator Janet Munch spoke at the Bartow-Pell Mansion on Thursday, February 26 as part of the museum's local author spotlight series.

The original oral histories were collected as part of the Bronx Regional History Project, directed by Hill when she was a professor at

Lehman College.

More than 400 oral histories, in addition to photographs and other documents, were collected and archived as part of the project. Hill herself conducted 30 interviews about Bronxite's experiences before and during the 1970s.

Hill left Lehman College after 20 years for University of Indiana Kokomo in 1990, but said the conversations she had with Bronxites through the project stuck with her.

"I had never forgotten these stories," said Hill.

The project sought out community leaders and activists, and Hill said that her interview subjects would often lead her to other individuals she would not have found on her own.

"They were guiding me to interesting people

who were not making headlines," said Hill.

Their stories illustrate a strong sense of community during a relatively unstable time.

"These were the people that didn't leave," said Hill. "These were good people protecting their communities, protecting each other through the worst of it."

Nearly 30 years after the oral histories were initially documented and archived, Hill decided she wanted to share them with a larger audience.

She organized 16 of her most interesting interviews with activists, religious leaders and politicians—edited with a light hand—into the publication.

"I wasn't writing a book, I was documenting memories," said

Hill of the process.

And while the stories she's documented are deeply personal, they are also of historic value.

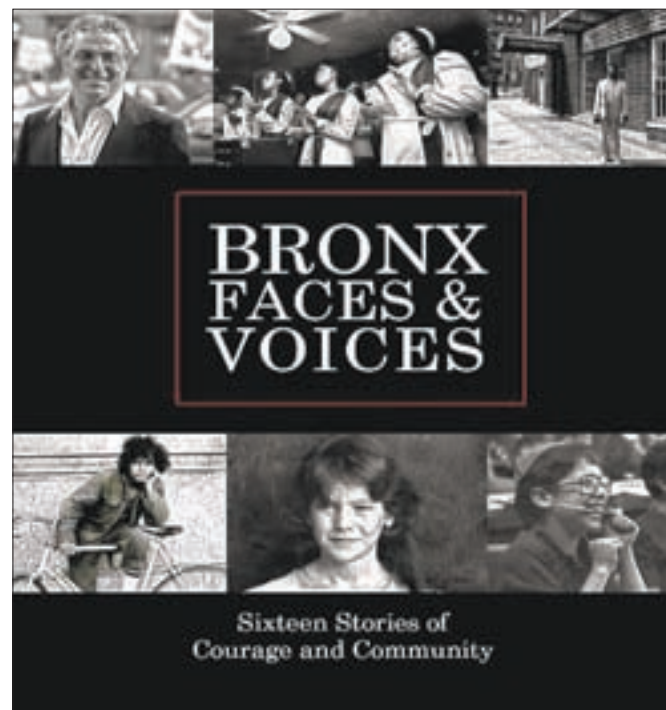
In order to create a book that would be useful to academics, Hill collaborated with Munch, an associate professor and special collections librarian at Lehman College.

Using Lehman College's archives, Munch wrote the extensive, illuminating footnotes that add context to the subjects' stories.

"I was able to draw on all the resources we have," she said. "The oral histories that are in the book are just part of the collection."

"It takes you back in time," said Munch.

Bronx Faces and Voices is available in print and as an e-book through Amazon.com.



Emta Brady Hill and Janet Butler Munch discussed their book, *Bronx Faces & Voices: Sixteen Stories of Courage and Community*, at the Bartow-Pell Mansion Museum's local author spotlight series

Courtesy of Bartow-Pell Mansion Museum



Orchid Show opens at New York Botanical Garden

Everyone's favorite event, the Orchid Show, opened at the New York Botanical Garden on February 28. The exhibit, 'The Orchid Show: Chandeliers,' transforms the galleries of the Enid A. Haupt Conservatory into a breath-taking collage of vibrant color.



'Notorious' VN property has new management

BY ROBERT WIRSING

A notorious Van Nest building may be heading towards redemption.

For years, 1663 Garfield Street has been a public nuisance to the area's residents.

Local residents refer to the building as a crime den where trespassers have unrestricted access.

In late 2012, a male teenager armed with a loaded semi-automatic pistol was apprehended on its rooftop.

The building has been neglected by its owner and property manager, Erik Clayton, since ownership changed hands in 2011, according to Councilman Ritchie Torres.

That same year, the NYC Housing Preservation and Development placed the program in a protective housing code enforcement program.

Councilman Torres and his office convinced HPD to continue inspecting 1663 Garfield Street and pursue an Article 7A proceeding, which would have placed the property in the hands of a

court-appointed administrator.

"I am proud to have successfully persuaded the Department of Housing Preservation and Development to pursue a 7A administrative proceeding against the most notorious slumlord in Van Nest. The appointment of an administrator shows that city government can successfully advocate for tenants when landlords abandon their responsibilities," the councilman said.

The Article 7A program aims to repair buildings in such catastrophic disrepair that its condition is deemed dangerous to tenant's lives, health or safety.

All restorative responsibilities are transferred from the owner to a court-appointed overseer.

A building can be nominated for a 7A by HPD recommendation or tenant petition. To qualify, every apartment must have at least two serious violations.

Upon nomination, a housing court judge may appoint

private administrators to manage the property if it meets the 'abandoned' and 'dangerous' criterion.

Exempting constant recorded instances of maintenance failure, housing judges may allow the owner a final chance to make the necessary repairs.

Once assigned, the 7A administrator is required to utilize all rent rolls to make repairs. The administrator is also permitted to raise rents to cover the cost of the improvements.

The Garfield Street building has only six units.

According to HPD, there are 89 open violations on the property, approximately 15 violations per unit.

The court case's success marks a clear victory in protecting the rights of 1663 Garfield Street's residents.

Bernadette Ferrara, Van Nest Neighborhood Association vice president and longtime Van Nest resident, explained that VNNA had the councilman visit this building during a commu-



Located in Van Nest, 1663 Garfield Street is known to many as crime plagued. Photo by Walter Pofeldt

nity tour.

"His speciality is in housing and we made it a point for him to visit this building. We have children that live on that block," Ferrara said.

Ferrara, a Community

Board 11 board member representing Van Nest, added that the community is receptive to the administrator, who is welcome to attend VNNA's monthly meetings at the Monsignor Fiorentino

Apartments.

"We would like to see this administrator be more proactive with the community and help raise the quality of life here in Van Nest," she expressed.

NY Yankee Leadership winners

BY PATRICK ROCCHIO

Youth from the east Bronx were honored for their volunteerism and sense of community.

As it is throughout the borough, the winners of the New York Yankee Youth Leadership Awards in community boards 10 and 11 volunteer in their schools and neighborhoods.

Martin Prince, CB 10 chairman, said that these young men and women are following a tradition of service to the community.

"The most basic way to help is through volunteer service, which shows commitment to a community and a cause," said Prince. "We are always going to need people who can speak for the community and themselves."

Five young people were presented with awards, including a \$750 check, on Monday, February 23 in a ceremony at CB10.

Madeline Bonsignore from Preston High School; Gabriel Cuilan of Truman High School; Jason Alexan-

dre Jenkins, Salesian High School; William Mendez of Monsignor Scanlan High School and Joel Rivas from Lehman High School were honored.

At Community Board 11, community associations nominate the winners.

The civic-minded youth were presented with their checks and certificates at the board general board meeting on Tuesday, February 26.

Taking home honors were Grace Correa, Allerton Avenue Home Owners and Tenants Association; Danielle Giocondo, Morris Park Community Association; Andrew Melillo, North East Bronx Association and Stephanie Russell, Parkside Resident Council.

According to information furnished to the Bronx Times, Bonsignore is a Confraternity of Christian Doctrine teacher at St. Clare's Church and a member of the Preston Student Team Ambassador Recruitment program. She is in her junior year.



Community Board 11's winners are pictured: (front, l-r) Correa, Russell, Melillo, and Giocondo.

Community News Group \ Photo by Parick Rocchio



CB 10 winners (front, l-r) William Mendez accepting for his son, Jason Jenkins, Madeline Bonsignore, Gabriel Cuilan and Joel Rivas.

Photo by Walter Pofeldt

Cuilan attended a trip protesting gun violence and tutored younger children at the Young Achievers After School program in 2013 and 2014.

Jenkins, a sophomore, volunteers at a food pantry where he prepares and distributes food. He is also a math and science tutor for younger students.

Mendez is a math tutor at Scanlan's Peer Instructional Network, does clean-up and tree planting with the Bronx River Alliance and is an assistant to clergy and commu-

nity at Holy Cross Church.

Rivas took part in a three-day renovation of a Peruvian school, and was a soup kitchen volunteer in 2011 and 2012. He is a tour guide for Haitian college students in New York City.

Correa is a volunteer at a Veterans Administration hospital and with the Allerton Avenue Home Owners and Tenants Association.

Giocondo completed many hours of service at CB 11 and she also received a leadership award from the New York City Commission

on Women's Issues.

Melillo volunteered at CB 11, dealing with everything from office walk-ins to assisting the district manager with on-site visits.

Russell serves as a mentor for Peer Group Connection at Lehman High School where she works to inspire younger children to become engaged leaders.

As part of the awards, the youth will take part in an on-the-field ceremony at Yankee Stadium at one of the New York Yankee games this season.

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State-supported tax prep sites open

BY STEVEN GOODSTEIN

There is an alternative way for residents in the Bronx, the city and the state of New York to file their taxes - affordably, safely and in a timely fashion.

On Wednesday, February 18, Governor Cuomo announced the launch of an expanded network of free tax filing assistance sites across New York, which includes the opening of three FSA, or facilitated self-assisted, tax preparation locations in the Bronx.

The three locations include Eastchester Library, 1385 E. Gun Hill Road, Melrose Library, 910 Morris Avenue and Mott Haven Library, 321 E. 140th Street, just off of Alexander Avenue.

Each of the state's FSA sites, which are staffed by the State Department of Taxation and Finance tax experts, who are IRS-trained and certified, are

Location (and language assistance)	Dates and hours	Contact
Eastchester Library 1385 E Gun Hill Road Bronx, NY 10468 Spanish	Thursdays 10:00am - 3:00pm Saturdays 2/21, 3/7, 3/21, 4/11 10:00am - 3:00pm	(718) 663-3292
Melrose Library (South Bronx) 910 Morris Avenue Bronx, NY 10461 Spanish	Mondays Starting 2/23 10:00am - 3:00pm Saturdays 2/21, 3/7, 3/21, 4/4, 4/11 12:00pm - 4:00pm	(718) 588-0110
Mott Haven Library (South Bronx) 321 East 140th Street (at Alexander Ave.) Bronx, NY 10454	Tuesdays 2/24 - 4/14 10:00am - 2:00pm	(718) 665-4878

A chart of the locations, dates and times of each FSA session taking place in the Bronx, along with language assistance. Contact information is also included.

Photo courtesy of the New York State Department of Taxation and Finance

available to residents and families who earned less than a household gross income of \$60,000 last year.

Last year, more than 70% of the 10 million New Yorkers filed their

taxes with a tax preparer, which is both expensive and risky, considering that a tax filing can cost hundreds of dollars and that not all 'tax preparers' are registered with

the IRS and the NY Tax Department.

However, FSA sites ensure that tax payers can now electronically file their taxes safely with the right assistance. Se-

lect FSA sites also offer staff who can speak in foreign languages, such as Chinese, Spanish or Russian, which will greatly benefit the city and state immigrant population. The FSA locations at the Eastchester and Melrose libraries offer staff fluent in Spanish.

Appointments at all FSA sites are recommended, but walk-ins are accepted on a first-come, first-served basis.

"By helping hard-working families and individuals file their taxes, we're ensuring that more people can get their taxes done on time and accurately," said Cuomo. "We want to help cut down on confusion - and by enhancing free access at dozens of key assistance centers across the state, more families and individuals can maximize their refund."

The new FSA sites will also compliment previ-

ously-existing locations, as well as previously-existing VITA, or Volunteer Income Tax Assistance, locations, which offer free tax assistance to residents who earn \$53,000 or less, people with disabilities, the elderly and limited English speaking taxpayers.

Currently, there are 200 VITA locations throughout the five boroughs, and more than 800 locations in New York State where individuals can visit to get their federal and state returns e-filed for free.

"To support taxpayers, we have many employee volunteers helping New Yorkers do their taxes accurately at no cost," said Nonie Manion, executive deputy commissioner of the New York State Department of Taxation and Finance. "Not only do taxpayers prepare their taxes free of charge, but they'll learn how to do it themselves for future years."

RAIN to repay misused Medicaid program funds

From Page 1

ment of Health to fund programs like those run by RAIN and other service providers.

The Department of Investigation initiated the investigation, which was later referred to the state, said a attorney general spokeswoman.

The money used to pay the mortgage was part of programming funds, and was designated for an affiliate, RAIN Home Attendant Services.

"Nonprofits cannot be used as the personal piggy banks of their management," said Schneiderman. "This organization wrongly diverted taxpayer dollars meant to help the elderly to pay off a mortgage on a vacant building."

In a statement, Anderson Torres, RAIN's chief executive officer, said that the organization was pleased to put this behind it.

"The settlement resolves matters between RAIN, the New York Attorney General and the New York City Human Resources Administration," he said, adding "Neither RAIN nor any of its current officers, directors or employees violated any law or regulation."

The investigation found that RAIN's former executive director, Louis Vasquez, made the mortgage payments.

Vasquez was also the subject of a

separate DOI investigation that found he improperly used a corporate American Express account to pay personal expenses.

The DOI Investigation ended in the Mayor's Office of Contracts requiring the reconstitution of RAIN's board of directors. Vasquez resigned as of September 30, 2013, and the new board was ordered to repay any money used for personal expenses.

As part of this settlement RAIN will repay the nearly \$800,000 used to make the mortgage payments to Medicaid.

RAIN has ten Bronx based full-service community senior centers and provides transportation services, home-delivered meals, assistance with benefits and entitlements, case management and elder abuse services, and a community-based mobile meals program for seniors and a homeless and hungry population.

With a reconstituted board in place, and the settlement behind it, RAIN's CEO says the organization will continue its mission, which it has pursued since 1964.

"RAIN is pleased to continue its mission of the past 50 years to serve the needs of our city's elderly and for social activities, meals and health care," said Torres. "We appreciate the continued support of the community at large."



The attorney general's investigation found that Louis Vasquez, R.A.I.N.'s former executive director, improperly diverted state funds to make mortgage payments on the organization's office space.

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