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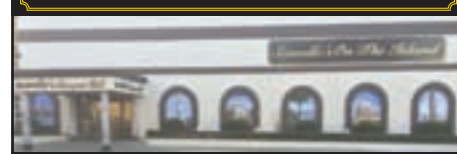
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May 10, 2015

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Hutch Metro traffic study

BY JAIME WILLIAMS

The Hutchinson Metro Center could someday get its own exit ramp off the Hutch.

The idea will be explored with a \$1 million study by the NYC Department of Transportation to address the issue of increased traffic driven by the development.

Senator Jeff Klein announced the funding of the project at the Hutchinson Metro Center on Friday, May 1.

"We wanted to figure out a way to alleviate traffic, and make sure there is not an undue burden on the surrounding communities," said Klein at the announcement alongside Assemblyman Michael Benedetto, the DOT commissioner Polly Trottenberg, president of Simone Metro Properties Joe Kelleher and community leaders.

The study will examine the feasibility of and develop a conceptual plan to construct a new southbound access ramp to the Hutch Metro Center via the Hutchinson River Parkway, in addition to the creation of a service road and two way-public street connecting to the complex.

Community activists from groups including the East Bronx Traffic Coalition, the North-East Bronx Association, and community boards 10 and 11 celebrated the news after months of calling for at-

Continued on Page 4

PROTEST TO CLOSE SHELTER

BY PATRICK ROCCHIO

After the brutal murder of a young mother outside a homeless shelter, a host of elected officials and community leaders in Wakefield came together to call for the shelter's immediate closure.

The death of shelter director Anna Charle, 36, who was gunned down near Project Renewal's Bronx Boulevard residence for men, allegedly by a former client, has sparked outrage in the community over the shelter's management and security.

Many in Wakefield, Woodlawn and Yonkers are now calling for the shuttering of Project Renewal's Bronx Boulevard residence for men at 4380 Bronx Blvd.

Elected officials were united in their desire to have it closed at a press conference outside the shelter Thursday, April 30.

Charle was found with a gunshot wound to the head on the sidewalk not far from the shelter after leaving work about 5:45 p.m. on Monday, April 27.

Continued on Page 4



Celebrating Our Bravest

Adden Rivera visited Engine 89 during an open house on Saturday, May 2 to celebrate the FDNY's 150th anniversary. Events were held at fire houses throughout the city.

Photo by Walter Pofeldt

Obama visits Bronx

BY PATRICK ROCCHIO

President Obama visited Herbert H. Lehman College to announce a new part of an initiative designed to help urban youth, especially young men of color.

The President visited Lehman College in Bedford Park on Monday, May 4 to meet with young men of color from around the country in a roundtable discussion, and to launch a new part of an initiative he began in February 2014 to address persis-

tent opportunity gaps.

The visit brought jubilation to local leaders, and President Obama announced that the My Brother's Keeper Alliance would now include a private-sector partnership with major corporate leaders and companies, an effort that will be led by Joe Echevarria, MBK Alliance CEO and chairman, who grew up in the south Bronx.

"Part of what we wanted to do was to make sure we heard

Continued on Page 11

Former BTR editor releases crime novel

BY STEVEN GOODSTEIN

A former reporter and editor of the Bronx Times-Reporter is now a published author.

On Saturday, April 18, author John Roche released his first novel, 'Bronx Bound' - a fiction book based on fact that reflects parts of Roche's life as a reporter in the crime-stricken Bronx in the late 1980s.

Bronx Bound, which was published by Black Opal Books, takes place in 1988, when the book's main character, Matt Brady, who writes for the local weekly, the Bronx Ledger.

Through his journalistic efforts Brady has aspirations and hopes to get out of both the borough and the dead-end job he finds himself stuck in.

However, when he is sent by his editor to cover a murder story, he discovers that not only does he know the deceased, but also that the story itself is sinking him deeper and deeper into his home town, and jeopardizing his own life in the process.

"I wanted to write a story about the Bronx - where I was born and raised," said Roche. "Given the fact that I worked for the Bronx Times Reporter and other newspapers in the borough for almost 20 years, I guess it was natural for me to have the main character be a reporter for a weekly newspaper."

Roche, who has also written for daily newspapers in the past, claims, however, that he ate, breathed and slept community newspapers.

While working under publisher John Col-



Former Bronx Times reporter and editor John Roche is now a published author after releasing his first novel, 'Bronx Bound'.

Photos courtesy of John Roche

lazzi, he recalled that John always told him that a community newspaper's job is to hold a mirror up for the community so they can reflect on it.

With his new book, Roche hopes to give readers a gripping story, but ultimately something they can reflect on.

"There were a few things I wanted to get across in the book - one, it's always bothered me that in a fictionalized story about a reporter, whether it's a book, movie or TV show, when the reporter gets involved in a major story, the editor always gives the reporter all

the time he needs to work on that one story," said Roche.

"In real life, that couldn't be further from the case. You might be trying to track down a major crime story, but you still have to cover the school spelling bee, some civic meeting or the local guy who invented something. I tried to capture that challenge of juggling ten stories at once, all the time."

Roche worked three stints at the Bronx Times Reporter between the late 1980s and early 2000s as a copy editor, reporter and eventually editor, as well as associate publisher.

He also wrote articles in the Bronx Times-Reporter's weekly side edition, 911: The Bronx Bulletin, in the early 1990s, which likely contributed to the topic of Roche's first novel.

However, he also sees the book, which he wrote in spurts over a two-year period, as a positive dedication to his hometown borough.

"Although there's crime and other problems in it, the book in my eyes is also a love letter to the Bronx," said Roche. "It's a special place, and no matter what changes the borough goes through, the Bronx retains its unique character because of the people. I tried to get that out there, maybe to replace some of the stereotypical ideas often portrayed about the borough. I wrote a crime novel because, as a reporter, I'm always attracted to putting the pieces of a puzzle together - but it's more than a mystery - it's a homage to the Bronx."

Roche held a book launch and signing at Brewski's new literary deck, located at



John Roche's first novel, 'Bronx Bound', was released on Saturday, April 18.

3718 East Tremont Avenue, on Monday, May 4, where he personally signed copies of his book for all in attendance. Donations to the Throggs Neck Benevolent Association were also made.

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Rally to close homeless shelter

from Page 1

Police arrested West Spruill, who was charged with murder and criminal possession of a weapon, according to the criminal complaint filed by District Attorney Robert Johnson.

Assemblyman Jeff Dinowitz said that officials deliberately withheld information before the shelter opened that many of the men to be housed there had been convicted of violent felonies.

"The tragic shooting that occurred near the Project Renewal homeless shelter on Monday highlights the major security concerns that we have repeatedly warned the Department of Homeless Services about," he said. "This shelter came into Wakefield with no input from the community and over the objections of its residents."

He pointed out there were numerous sex offenders living in the shelter and that it had strained the resources of the 47th Precinct with an influx of 911 calls since it opened.

"Project Renewal deals with an incredibly tough population with serious mental health issues, the formerly incarcerated, as well as registered sex offenders," said Councilman Andrew Cohen. "This work cannot be done without adequate resources."

Cohen said he had spoken in February with DHS Commissioner Gilbert Taylor to request more security at the Bronx Boulevard shelter, but that it was not until the intervention of Mayor de Blasio's office two days after the murder that more peace

officers were assigned.

Councilman Andy King urged people to remember Charle, and offered condolences to her family, but he also said that if the shelter cannot be run safely, it has to go.

Senator Jeff Klein called Charle's death the latest in a string of heinous threats and serious safety concerns stemming from the shelter.

Fr. Richard Gorman, CB 12 chairman, said that DHS operates in an "incredibly incompetent and disingenuous manner."

Many of the elected officials took issue with the number of homeless shelters either open or planned to open in Wakefield, indicating that there were too many for one community.

A service provider and advocacy group, Homeless Services United, staged its own vigil outside the shelter during the press conference.

"This is not a day for politics," a statement released by the group said. "It is a day to give thanks for the life of Ana Charle and for the thousands of New Yorkers who work tirelessly every day in their commitment to end homelessness."

Charle, a native of Spain, lived a quiet life in Whitestone, Queens and had two young daughters.

Neighbors of the shelter who attended the rally took a dim view of the facility.

"Right now my tenants want to move out because they have children," said Orville Johnson, a property owner in the community.

The men from the 108-bed facility fol-



Pictured are Kenny Agosto, representing Senator Ruth Hassell-Thompson, Councilman Andy King; Councilman Andrew Cohen; Assemblyman Jeff Dinowitz and Community Board 12 chairman Fr. Richard Gorman at the press conference on Tuesday, April 30.

Community News Group / Photo by Patrick Rocchio

low people around and beg for money, said Wakefield resident Suzie Durgaeersaud. Some of the men from the shelter have made her feel threatened, she added.

Men from the facility loiter at a closed gas station near the facility and make obscene comments to passing women and children, said Stanley Basdeo, who added that catcalls and other forms of harassment have scared his wife, who walks past them on her way home.

"The ladies are the ones who are being subjected to what is going on here," he said. "They are the ones being chased and harassed."

Local resident Maurice Faucette said the men there hang out in front of the facility, and they do not seem to have anything to do.

After the strong criticism of the shelter's operations by local elected officials, the Coalition for the Homeless issued a sharp rebuke.

"Punishing the other residents of Project Renewal's Bronx Boulevard Men's Shelter by closing it down would be the worst response to this tragedy," the coalition, a large homeless advocacy group, stated. "Rather than taking the easy way out, we need our elected officials to contribute to real solutions."

Hutchinson Metro traffic study planned

from Page 1

tention to the increased traffic in the area as a result of the development, which is still growing.

The Marriot Hotel will open this month, the 550,000-square-foot 911 call center adjacent to the the campus has yet to be completed, and in February Simone Development announced a 33-acre expansion of the center which will include a second hotel, retail, and office space, among other uses.

As it stands, the Hutch Metro Center's tenants have created 8,000 jobs in the Bronx, said Klein.

"We need to create jobs," he said. "And at the same time we have to recognize the strong, vibrant communities in the Bronx and make sure we protect them."

Trottenberg echoed Klein in explaining the need for the study, which will comprehensively examine traffic in and around the development.

"We need to figure

out what we can do to make sure this complex thrives economically while taking into consideration the needs of the community," she said.

The residential neighborhoods surrounding the Hutchinson Metro Center has seen a significant influx of traffic as a result of the development, said NEBA director and CB 11 Transportation Committee chair Vincent Prezioso, and he expects the situation to worsen as the complex

grows.

"Developers are building, but not addressing transportation issues," said Prezioso about the problem.

Answering the question of why the developers are not funding the infrastructure improvements, the senator said it was the responsibility of the city and state, and he felt it was important to secure the funding.

"Anything that deals with public roadways is public dollars," said

Klein. "I think a study and the ultimate structural improvements to alleviate traffic is money well spent."

The study is planned to be completed in the next 12 months, and although it will likely be years before any improvements are made, Prezioso is optimistic that the project will produce results.

"We're very hopeful this study is going to provide the solution to our problem."



A \$1 million study will explore building a direct access ramp from the Hutchinson River Parkway into the Hutchinson Metro Center.

Courtesy of Senator Klein's office



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TreesCount!2015 to map all street trees

BY ROBERT WIRSING

Mother Nature will soon be getting some help from several tech-savvy Bronx volunteers for the upcoming Trees Count! 2015 census.

On Friday, April 24, NYC Parks Commissioner Mitchell J. Silver, FAICP, announced the Arbor Day launch of the TreeCount! mobile app, which will be utilized to register and collect data during the nation's third largest street tree census.

Trees Count! 2015 officially commences on a Tuesday, May 19's event held at Julio Carballo Park in Hunts Point.

NYC Parks seeks 5,000 volunteers and is partnering with local civic and neighborhood groups to result in a successful census.

Approximately one-fifth of all trees inhabiting city land are street trees which provide enormous public benefits

If interested, volunteers can visit www.nyc.gov/parks/treescount for additional information and to register.

According to NYC Parks, training sessions' times and dates are still undetermined, but those interested should register in order to stay informed.

"We want New Yorkers to feel a connection to their street trees right outside their windows, to our wild forests along the coast, and to all the open spaces in between," Commissioner Silver expressed.

He added, "Our street trees beautify



Volunteers collecting data during a street tree count.

Photo courtesy of TreeKit

neighborhoods, make our communities more resilient in the face of climate change, and increase property values. The important work our volunteers will be doing during Trees Count! 2015 will help us support the next generation of both trees and stewards and will allow us to gain insight into what we can do to make our urban forest even stronger. Trees count, can we count on you?"

According to NYC Parks, Julio Carballo

Park was selected for this event due to their partnership with Sustainable South Bronx and desired to join with them in starting Trees Count! 2015 by counting the first trees in the Bronx.

A NYC Parks spokesperson revealed over 2,000 trees have been planted in Hunts Point which is one of many neighborhoods parks pays particularly close attention to during the MillionTreesNYC Campaign, as it was a neighborhood in need of trees.

This census will aid parks in identifying urban forest trends and changes, be used to calculate environmental and economic benefits, create the most accurate and publicly accessible tree map in the world and inspire a new generation of stewards to protect and care for the trees in the Bronx and citywide.

This year's upcoming tree census is the third in New York City's history and will also mark the first time where innovative new technology and mapping tools will be used to count trees.

Since 2010, NYC Parks has collaborated with TreeKit, a non-profit organization to map more than 12,000 street trees throughout western Queens.

In 2013, both parks and TreeKit partnered with OpenPlans and CartoDB to prototype and test a mobile data entry tool simplifying this process.

The TreeKit mapping method and Aza-vea's accompanying mobile app are the foundation of Trees Count! 2015.

"Our community has really evolved from being one of concrete and bricks to one which is becoming more energy efficient and environmentally conscious," Dr. Ian Amritt, Community Board 2 chairman explained. "The Trees Count! 2015 event is a very engaging event which will not only help the environment, but it will also help bring our communities much closer together."



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LGBT push for school security officers

BY ANDY HUMM

Four out gay members of the City Council are siding with anti-gay lobbyists in their quest to secure tens, perhaps hundreds of millions of dollars in city funds to pay for school safety officers in religious and other private schools, despite the fact that many of these institutions teach that homosexuality is immoral and do not allow out gay or lesbian teachers.

Public education, civil liberties, and LGBT advocates are blasting the bill — as well as a state legislative proposal to give tax credits to private school donors — as tax-giveaway boondoggles at a time when public schools and libraries are starved for resources.

Among the 46 co-sponsors of the bill, Intro 65, are Majority Leader Jimmy Van Bramer of Queens and councilmembers Corey Johnson of Manhattan, Carlos Menchaca of Brooklyn, and Ritchie Torres of the Bronx.

Van Bramer, Johnson, Menchaca, Torres support city funding for security guards at religious institutions

The bill's few opponents include out councilmembers Daniel Dromm of Queens, who chairs the Education Committee, and Rosie Mendez of Manhattan.

Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito is also not co-sponsoring, and the de Blasio administration testified against it at an April 14 hearing, saying the police department should decide when and where to assign security officers in schools.

The bill's chief sponsor is Brooklyn Councilman David Greenfield, who is also the 'volunteer' director and counsel for TEACH NYS, which "advocates on behalf of the 500,000 Catholic, Jewish, and Independent school children in New York State," according to his Council web page.

Greenfield touts his success in enacting legislation recently "that provides for \$600 million in tax credits for parents of all school-age children in New York."

"Public schools have to come first," Dromm argued in opposition to Greenfield's proposal. "We are supposed to have separation of church and state. Where does this city funding for private schools end?"

At his committee's April 14 hearing, Dromm said the potential annual price tag of the bill could be \$250 million, while Greenfield's office said the council's estimate is \$50 million.

Currently, safety officers are deployed at the discretion of the NYPD, not the demand of individ-

ual schools.

The legislation would create a new entitlement for any private or religious school — as well as any public school — that requested safety staffing.

"Bias crimes against the religious community are on the rise," Greenfield wrote in an email to Gay City News, citing "the recent stabbing of a yeshiva student at 770 Eastern Parkway" in Brooklyn and "the four Jewish students that were killed by terrorists in Toulouse, France."

Dromm said that safety officers are responsible for internal order in schools, not protection from terrorist threats, which is provided by police based on specific evidence it obtains.

But Becky Stern, a spokesperson for Greenfield, said, "The NYPD in their testimony and questioning agreed that the primary job of a school safety officer is to prevent the wrong people from entering a building."

"Regardless of a parent's religious belief, the child is entitled to a very basic level of protection," Greenfield wrote. "That is why, for example, the city already pays for services such as transportation and nursing that keep all of our children safe."

Asked about the limits of what tax dollars would be used for, Stern wrote that is "the job of the legislature to decide these issues on a case-by-case basis. We do that every day. In this case, there is very clearly a need for security for children."

Saying the issue "has nothing to do with politics," Van Bramer argued, "We want to make sure that all children are safe at all schools." Asked whether he is concerned that some of the schools have an anti-gay mission or message, he responded, "It's about the safety of the children who go to them," but he declined to say whether that overriding concern would trump evidence that a school were racist or anti-Semitic.

Torres similarly defended his sponsorship of the bill.

"I deeply detest the anti-gay beliefs of religious schools, but why should that mean that the students attending these schools receive no guarantee of school safety at all?" he said. "School safety is a basic public good, and the students of all schools, be it public or private, are entitled to a minimal standard of public protection."

He also ducked a question about whether the same would hold true for a school with a record of other kinds of discrimination.

At the Education Committee

hearing, Dromm pressed witnesses on whether their religious schools would discriminate against safety officers who were openly gay. At first, the witnesses invoked their religious exemption under city human rights law, even though that exemption is limited to those carrying out religious functions and does not apply to support personnel. One witness finally conceded that the officers would be employees of the NYPD and could be openly gay.

Among the lead advocates of the bill are the Catholic Community Relations Council, the political arm of the Archdiocese of New York, and Agudath Israel, representing the Orthodox Jewish community — both of which have vociferously fought advances in LGBT rights in Albany and at City Hall for decades. Both groups are currently lobbying against passage of the Gender Expression Non-Discrimination Act and a ban on licensed mental health professionals providing so-called "conversion therapy" for minors, both measures pending in the State Legislature.

David Tanenbaum, testifying for Greenfield's Council bill on behalf of Agudath Israel, said his group's survey of a sampling of Jewish schools found "the vast majority" would be interested.

Religiously-affiliated organizations such as Catholic Charities currently receive millions in city contracts to provide social services, but they are required to sign stipulations they will not discriminate on the categories protected in city law — including sexual orientation and gender identity — in either hiring or the provision of services. Religious schools do not certify that they are not discriminatory and have availed themselves of existing religious exemptions.

Many on the council — and certainly the six members of its LGBT caucus — have opposed city funding for the Boy Scouts, because of that group's discriminatory policies, but most are apparently indifferent when it comes to public support of discriminatory religious and educational organizations.

The New York Civil Liberties Union testified against the council bill, saying the group "is strongly opposed to the use of government funding and services to support religion, including religious schools. This is an inappropriate use of city resources, and skirts dangerously close to government sponsorship of religion, forbidden by the First Amendment to the US Constitution."

The Greenfield school safety officer initiative emerges as Cardinal

Timothy Dolan and other religious leaders are pushing in Albany for state tax credits for giving to private and religious schools.

Out gay Senator Brad Hoylman, a West Side Democrat, calling the tax credit scheme "unprecedented," warned it would divert "essential resources from public schools" by creating incentives for wealthy individuals and corporations to provide funds to religious and other private schools.

The Senate passed a version of the bill, but it was not included in the budget deal agreed to by Governor Cuomo and legislative leaders.

Assemblymember Dick Gottfried, a Chelsea Democrat, is also opposed to the tax credit proposal and predicted the Assembly would not bring such a measure up for a floor vote.

Hoylman said he also opposes the Council initiative to fund security officers for private schools.

"As a public official, we have to stay focused on taxpayer dollars funding public schools," he said. "There are shortages of security officers in the public schools."

Testimony from the NYPD before Dromm's Education Committee made clear that the issue is not about providing security resources when specific threats are identified. Assistant Chief Brian J. Conroy, the commanding officer of the School Safety Division, testified against the bill, saying that while its intent was "understandable," it "undermines the normal budget process."

He also said, "If legislation requires that the commissioner deploy particular staff to particular locations and if this type of legislation serves as a model for other similar initiatives... the jobs of both the police commissioner and the mayor would be deeply compromised, potentially compromising public safety as well."

The UJA-Federation issued a statement saying, "Every child in New York City deserves to be safe while in school. Introduction 65 has the support of over 90 percent of the New York City Council, and of UJA-Federation, because of its intention to improve security at schools."

UJA, however, refused to answer any questions about the de Blasio administration and NYPD's problems with the bill or whether there are limits on the public funding of private, discriminatory schools.

Councilmember Mendez said basic student safety is the responsibility of the private or religious schools themselves.

"They charge tuition, they should pay for their own security,"

she said. "I was against having churches in schools. There should be separation of church and state. As a member of the LGBT community, I know that a lot of these schools discriminate against us and if they city is going to provide any kind of funding, the schools should not be discriminatory."

Councilmembers Johnson and Menchaca did not respond to repeated requests from Gay City News asking for their thinking on the bill they are co-sponsoring.

Allen Roskoff, president of the LGBT Jim Owles Liberal Democratic Club, strongly opposes the tax giveaway.

"Religious institutions pushing this bill have a long history and present-day reality of discriminating against the gay community," he said. "Why should they be able to discriminate on our dime? Where is the concern for the safety of LGBT students and staff in these anti-gay religious schools? These Council members say they care about anti-gay bullying. How is a child being told by religious leaders that he or she is immoral for being gay not bullying?"

Gay civil libertarian Bill Dobbs said, "Religious freedom does not mean socking overburdened taxpayers for special treatment worth hundreds of millions. Religious freedom means don't disturb religion, it doesn't mean you throw your wallet their way."

The United Federation of Teachers is lobbying against the tax credit measure in Albany but has not taken a position on the Council bill.

However, Class Size Matters, a public school advocacy group, has taken on the Greenfield bill.

"Our public schools are starved for resources," said Leonie Haimson, the group's executive director. "We are at 15-year high in terms of class size. More and more taxpayer money is being diverted to parochial, private, and charter schools."

The funds at issue, she said, could better be used to augment "the school capital plan, relieve overcrowding, and begin to reduce class size. I see no evidence that there is a threat to these students. Surely they can afford to pay for their own security."

Harvey Robins, a former director of operations for the city, said, "For what the Council wants to spend on this, they could open libraries seven days a week — and the last one to do that was Mayor LaGuardia during the Great Depression."

Wilcox Avenue fire tears families apart

BY ROBERT WIRSING

Two Throggs Neck families are looking for help piecing together their shattered lives after a fire tore through their childhood home this week.

On the evening of Monday, May 4 around 6:30 p.m., Theresa Manno entered her 1114 Wilcox Avenue 1-family home's kitchen after returning from work.

Immediately, her children bolted down from the second floor stairs telling her they smelt smoke, which she saw coming from the second floor.

Without hesitation, Manno gathered her children, contacted the FDNY and her niece, Lisa Porrazzo, who also resides in the house with her three sons, but was not home and fled.

Upon their departure, Manno and her children turned, and to their horror their home's top floor was engulfed in flames.

FDNY trucks arrived within seconds of Manno's call.

Porrazzo soon arrived with her sons who she picked up from school after she completed grocery shopping for the evening.

No one was home all day and Manno believes the fire may have started only 10 minutes prior to her return home from work.

Firefighters broke the 2nd and 3rd floor windows and were successful in preventing the fire from spreading any further.

No one was harmed, but both families lost many of their possessions and their pets ran away, but were found safe and sound.

"It was absolutely horrible seeing this unfold in front of us," Manno expressed. "We all grew up in that house which my grandfather built and we've lost almost everything we own. This is very bad, but it could've been much worse."

She added the first floor is fine despite some flooding, however the second floor is completely trashed.

Porrazzo's apartment on the third floor is charred and reeks of smoke.

The cause of this fire is still undetermined, however Porrazzo and Manno suspect old wiring may be to blame.

Both families are waiting for their insurance company to determine if the house can be rebuilt, and remain hopeful it will.

"We're all scattered between three houses now," Porrazzo said. "I haven't slept or ate since this has happened and my son, Justin has lost everything he owns. He didn't even have any shoes until I bought him new ones yesterday."

Justin, 6, suffers from chronic asthma as well as eosinophilic esophagitis and requires a nebulizer to administer his medication.

Unfortunately, Justin's nebulizer must be replaced after being contaminated by



1114 Wilcox Avenue bears the scars of this Monday evening's fire which has left its two families scattered. Community News Group / Robert Wirsing

smoke and due to an allergic reaction, he cannot wear any of his unscathed clothes or play with his toys which were left behind.

To add insult to injury, she was informed insurance will not cover Justin's nebulizer and his EpiPen.

According to Porrazzo and Manno, looters crept into their home after the blaze was extinguished and stole three TVs, video games, toys, Joseph Manno's wrestling belt, jewelry, and Porrazzo's late husband's tools and other possessions.

All of these items have since been recovered.

Recently, community members established online fundraisers aimed in aiding these families during this extremely trying time.

A GoFundMe donation page supporting Porrazzo and her sons can be found at www.gofundme.com/tsj2s8.

A GoFundMe page aiding the Manno family can be found at www.gofundme.com/tse62c8.

"We want to thank everyone for all of their generosity and support during this time," Joseph Manno, Theresa's son, said. "We're sticking together and trying our best to stay positive despite all this. We lost a lot of our possessions, but those can always be replaced, a life can't."



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Prolonged renovations anger residents

BY STEVEN GOODSTEIN

Renovations of a Norwood apartment building are causing multiple inconveniences, according to its residents.

The construction that is currently taking place at 3034 Grand Concourse, located between 202nd and 203rd streets, has generated numerous inconveniences.

Its residents claim that the process is taking way longer than expected and is affecting their health in the process, among other problems.

The five-story, 55-unit residential building began undergoing renovations in early April.

Prior to the beginning of the renovations, building landlord Steven Finkelstein notified each tenant of the building's situation and stating that the renovation plans, which includes new hot water service, apartment doors, windows, kitchens, bathrooms, painted walls and even a lobby security camera, would take between ten days and two weeks in total to com-

plete.

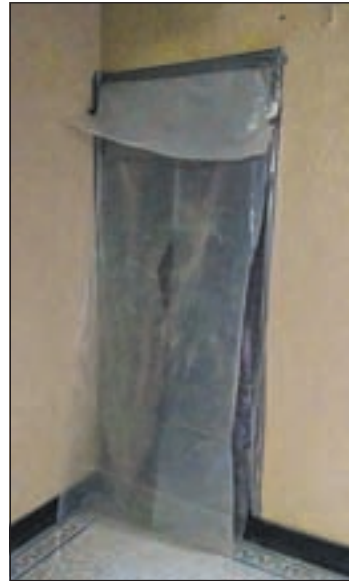
However, as of Thursday, April 30, residents complained that the renovation process was taking way longer.

Tenants stated that some apartment units haven't even been started yet.

"As of right now, these renovations don't look like such a good thing for this building," said Bronx-born Margaret Schroder, who has lived in the building for 65 years. "It's taking the contractor over a month just to complete the kitchens, and even though they are finally starting to work on the bathrooms, this process has been prolonged - everything could have been finished in a week or two."

Schroder, along with other tenants also complained about potential health issues.

During the renovation process, dust and other debris has collected in the hallways of the building from previous weeks of work - which has left various residents, who don't have an elevator in the entire building, with cardiovascu-



Double-sheeted plastic was put over each apartment unit's door when the Department of Buildings inspected the building last week.

Steven Goodstein / Community News Group

lar difficulties.

Many tenants have filed complaints with the Health Department.

"It wasn't until four weeks after these renovations began that the Department of Buildings inspected the building and put double-sheeted plastic over each apartment door - at least it protects us a bit from the debris," Schroder said. "However, this is still a safety hazard, and the right thing to do would be for them to offer face masks so residents don't have to breathe in any harmful chemicals."

"Yes, they put double-sheeted plastic on the doors - but it's already falling off some doors," said resident Hector Carrion, who has lived in the building for 18 years. His wife, Claudia, had asthma prior to these renovations, making the situation more difficult for them. "This is ridiculous - they said these renovations would take ten days to complete, and it's taking at least four times longer than that."

Other problems have surfaced as a result of the renovations.

Residents who were forced

to order food in or had to stay in a hotel are concerned they will not be reimbursed.

During the renovations, there was also a temporary bathroom placed on the fifth floor on each side of the building for residents whose bathrooms were out of order.

The landlord insists that there is a light at the end of the tunnel, giving a timetable of one to three more months for all renovations to be completed.

"Many residents have issues that they need assistance with during this renovation process, and I am doing my best to help them," Finkelstein said. "It is important to work with all residents to achieve the overall goal, maintaining a good relationship."

"I know this is a huge inconvenience for these residents right now, especially with the delays. The process is difficult, but these renovations will eventually result in a better place to live and to own," he said.

Pelham Bay Taxpayers have a new president

BY PATRICK RUCCHIO

The Pelham Bay Taxpayers and Community Association, a venerable organization with a long history, has a new leader.

Michele Torrioni, who first became civically engaged in her east Bronx community just two years ago, has assumed the role of president of the organization upon the passing of its previous leader Joe Oddo in March.

Torrioni grew up in Pelham Bay on Wilkinson Avenue but now lives in nearby Waterbury LaSalle. Her family, including her mother, still resides in the home her great-grandfather built in 1928, she said.

She said she will work to increase membership to the organization, including both residents who are new to the community and people like herself, whose families have been there for generations.

"I want to pick up where Joe Oddo left off," said the new president. "I know organizations have a hard time getting people involved, especially the younger generation."

Top concerns among PBTCA members are issues like the need for more police, dirty streets, the new nearby 911 Call Center and the traffic expected from new developments, traffic at Amendola Plaza and dealing with changing times.

When she grew up in Pelham Bay, de-



Michele Torrioni

Photo courtesy of Michele Torrioni

ades ago, it was a somewhat different place, said Torrioni.

"My mom and I remember when we all knew our neighbors in Pelham Bay and we

left our doors open," said Torrioni. "It was different times."

She said that she feels in the past the neighborhood was more family-oriented,

and even though there were always larger buildings, it had a close-knit feel.

Of course there is no stopping change, she said, but she believes that there are a core of people, both longtime residents and newcomers, who care about maintaining the community as a viable place to live.

"I want people to stay involved and be informed of what is going on," she said, adding there are many who are passionate about the community and who want to stay.

Torrioni said she is conscious that she is filling some big shoes in terms of her predecessors. The organization goes back to at least the 1960s.

Through the years, Torrioni said, there have been some notable leaders of the PBTCA, including Florence Collucci, the aunt of Councilman James Vacca, who has the Wikinson Playground named after her.

There was also longtime president Michael Crescenzo, who was known as the 'Mayor of Pelham Bay,' and before Oddo, former president Anita Valenti, who revived the organization when it was flagging.

Torrioni works in advertising. She graduated from local schools: P.S. 71, J.H.S. 101, and St. Helena Business High School.

Jacobi, NCB get new chief medical officer

BY JAIME WILLIAMS

Meet the new chief of medicine of the North Bronx Healthcare Network.

Native Bronxite Dr. John Morley was recently appointed by the NYC Health and Hospitals Corporation to serve in that role for Jacobi Medical Center and North Central Bronx Hospital.

Morley will oversee the medical staff at the two public hospitals, which combined treat more than 150,000 patients annually.

Morley has decades of experience in both clinical and management roles.

He is a trained anesthesiologist who also has critical care certifications in internal medicine and pulmonary medicine.

He previously served as medical director of Albany Medical Center, the medical director of NY State's Department of Health systems Management Division, and as senior vice president and deputy chief Medical Officer of NYC HHC.

His range of experiences both in hospitals and state government have given him a broad understanding of the healthcare system that helps him to do his job, said Morley.

Part of that job requires implementing ever-changing regulations in ways that improve, or at least don't impede, patient care.

"I really spend time each day on the 'how,'" he said.

It's an exciting time in the healthcare industry, said Morley, with major changes

coming in the way physicians are incentivize, and the arrival of improved data and information systems which will improve patients care.

Ultimately, great patient care is the goal of any hospital, and the chief medical officer can create an environment where healthcare providers are supported in their jobs.

"I believe in the collaborative approach,"

Morley said of his philosophy.

Morley describes a medical staff as being like a football team. During a game, the tight end doesn't just run and expect the quarterback to find him—he runs a particular pattern, Morley said.

Within the hospitals, that means healthcare providers don't just need to understand their individual job, but what other's jobs are and where they fit in the healthcare process.

In his role, Morley also works to facilitate communication between the hospital administration and the medical staff.

"Doctors don't always speak the same language as administrators," he said.

Enhancing that communication is critical to Morley's mission of continuing to improve patient care and the network's reputation.

"The best hospitals have a strong partnership between the medical staff and the hospital administration – that's how great patient care is delivered," said Morley.



Dr. John Morley, the new chief medical officer of Jacobi Medical center and North Central Bronx Hospital. Community News Group / Jaime Williams



Councilman Andrew Cohen and Assemblyman Mark Gjonaj with Jasmine Mack, Jabari Grubb, Community Board 7 chair Adaline Walker-Santiago, Lenard Ware, Michiko Grubb Ware, Joseph Mack and Mina Grubb at the street dedication for community activist Margaret Mack on Saturday, May 2 at West Mosholu Parkway South and Jerome Avenue. Photo by Edwin Soto

Street named for housing activist, Margaret Mack

BY JAIME WILLIAMS

Outside Tracy Towers, a tribute to a tenant leader was recently installed.

West Mosholu Parkway South at Jerome Avenue was named the 'Margaret Mack Triangle' in a ceremony hosted by Councilman Andrew Cohen on Saturday, May 2.

Mack was a life-long resident of the Bronx with a passion for civic engagement.

A longtime tenant at Tracy Towers, she was heavily involved in the tenant's association and acted as the corresponding secretary.

Mack championed many of her fellow residents' causes over the years, including bringing attention to heat and hot water problems, roof leakage, dirty hallways, faulty elevators, and other health and safety issues.

She was also instrumental in organizing tenants in 2011 to fight a 77 percent rent hike over three years, said tenant association president Jean Hill.

Mack was invaluable in helping the tenants bring the issue to court, where a judge trimmed the hike for the many elderly and fixed income tenants who live there.

"She was like my right hand," said Hill.

Mack also served alongside Hill on Community Board 7, where she was a longtime member, serving as the chair of the Parks and Recreation Committee, as well as on the Transportation Committee.

In this role, she advocated on matters related to local schools, educational centers, libraries and senior related issues in the Norwood neighborhood, according to

Ms Mack's achievements convey a stabilizing force within her community, a legacy which still remains and likely will for many years to come.

Andrew Cohen
Councilman

Councilman Cohen's office.

While Mack was mild mannered, beneath that lay a fighter and a fierce advocate for what she believed in, said Hill. But above all, Mack was always there to help out other tenants in any way she could.

"She was a neighbor in the true sense of the word," said Hill. "She will be truly missed in this building, and by me personally."

The tenants association and CB 7 supported the proposal to dedicate the street to Mack, which was brought to fruition by Councilman Cohen's office.

"I am happy to be able to honor her memory by renaming West Mosholu Parkway 'Margaret Mack Triangle,'" said Cohen. "Ms. Mack's achievements convey a stabilizing force within her community, a legacy which still remains and likely will for many years to come."

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Ida Keeling - an inspiration at 100

BY STEVEN GOODSTEIN

A Riverdale woman approaching her 100th birthday is setting records for her age and setting examples for all ages, showing that she is #CenturyStrong.

On Friday, May 15, Riverdale resident Ida Keeling will celebrate the milestone of her 100th birthday. Take note, however - as this is not your typical 100-year old.

Keeling was born in 1915 in Harlem, where she was raised and attended various public schools.

Living in Harlem for a majority of her life, Ida worked mostly administrative assistant jobs in Manhattan, including tenures at the American Hebrew Congregation, the Department of Motor Vehicles and Harlem Hospital, the latter of which she worked in the records department.

After spending over eight decades living in Harlem, including 38 years at St. Nicholas Houses, Keeling moved to Queens, where she spent the next eight and a half years of her life before moving to Riverdale in 2001.

The late 1970s and early 1980s were very difficult for Ida, how-

ever. Keeling lost two of her four children, Charles and Donald, who both were killed in drug-related incidents in 1979 and 1981.

After both of these incidents took place, Ida's daughter Shelley took Ida, who was 67 at the time, to a 3.1 mile (or 5K) mini-run in 1982 in attempts to get her mind off of the tragic losses.

"After she participated in the mini-run with me, it seemed like a big burden was lifted off of her shoulders," said Shelley Keeling, who also participated in the mini-run. "The experience gave her something positive to focus on after so many negative events in her life took place."

Following the mini-run, Keeling continued to stay active by running and taking part in different races worldwide.

In 2005, at age 90, Ida won a medal and a lifetime award after participating in a race in Atlanta, Georgia.

In 2008, she set a world record for her age group in Clermont Ferrand, France.

In August 2014, the 99-year old participated in the 100-meter sprint event at the Gay Games in Akron, Ohio and, again, set another record for her age group.

Although she takes part in track and field events, Keeling considers herself a sprinter and has specialized in the 60-meter sprint for the last two decades.

"My mom isn't exactly breaking records as much as she is setting them - even though she's broken several of her own," said Shelley. "She has inspired many younger individuals and even people who are the same age as her."

Shelley added that she plans to run with her mother again during the upcoming summer.

Along with running, Ida, who suffers with arthritis, also takes part in biking, jump roping and even participates in a yoga class twice a week.

Despite the fact that she is approaching triple digits in age, Keeling says that, "age is just a number."

"There are people who consider themselves 'old' just sitting around at home and waiting to die - that's just stupid," said Ida. "If I could, I would tell them to stop feeling sorry for themselves and to get active, but there's nothing wrong with recharging yourself when you need to."

Despite taking care of herself



Ida Keeling (l) runs with her daughter Shelley during a photo shoot for Vogue magazine in August 2012.

hoto courtesy of Norman Jean Roy

thought her life, Keeling is still thankful and feels blessed to see another year of life.

"Exercise is one of the world's greatest medicines," Ida said, who is currently working on her new book, 'Back in the Day', which will reflect her life experiences.

"Combine exercise with a

positive attitude, determination, focus and nutrition - and an individual can go a long way. It's an honor that my story can set an example for others."

A birthday party will be held for Keeling at Battery Gardens Restaurant, 1 Battery Park, from noon to 4 p.m. on Saturday, May 16.

Obama visits Bronx, announces youth initiative

from Page 1

directly from young people who oftentimes are growing up in really tough situations -- single-parent households, low-income communities, crime-infested areas," said President Obama after meeting with the youths, adding that they faced obstacles like being stopped by police for no reason, domestic abuse inside the home and situations where schools don't seem invested in their success.

"And yet, despite all that," the President continued, "these young men are succeeding in some remarkable ways. And part of what I heard from them was that they're succeeding because somewhere along the line they've received a mentor, somebody who's just paying attention to them and giving them some sense of direction."

MBK Alliance will support program interventions targeting six key life milestones, including reading at grade level by 3rd grade, graduating from high school ready for college and career, and successfully entering the workforce.

To those ends, \$80 million in in-kind and monetary donations have been raised for MBK Alliance, a new independent non-profit, from large corporations, and the organization has a board and leadership team that is a who's who in business, sports, and many fields.

In the Bronx, the excitement of President Obama's presence may have been almost as exciting as the new plans to help a sizable portion of its youth.

Congressman Jose Serrano said that the MBK Alliance is a chance to invest and change the lives of millions of boys and young men of color.

"As recent events in different parts of our nation and as data shows, we need to do more to level the playing field for African-American and Latino men in this country by supporting their development, supporting them through every important milestone of their life, and making sure they have access to the resources, support, and opportunities they need to thrive, succeed and give back to their communities," said Serrano.

Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie said he was proud to be part of the historic visit.

"The President's 'My Brother's Keeper' Alliance is working to eliminate and overcome the obstacles faced by so many young men of color," said Heastie. "All too often, these young men face barriers to education, to employment, to economic opportunity."

Borough President Ruben Diaz, Jr. said that the initiative, which combines both public and private resources for a greater good, is welcomed in the Bronx and around the country.

"I was thrilled to welcome President Obama to the Bronx today, but I am even more excited to hear his words," said Diaz. "The President's stated commitment to the future of urban youth, especially young men of color in the United States, through the launch of his 'My Brother's Keeper Alliance,' is worthy of considerable praise."

Assemblyman Jeff Dinowitz said he was proud that the president came to his alma mater, Lehman College, to announce the priority initiative.



President Barack Obama speaks about My Brother's Keeper at Lehman College.

Photo by Silvio Pacifico

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