

Tasered man's death ruled a homicide

BY ROBERT WIRSING

A cause of death has been determined for a Pelham Bay man Tasered twice by a NYPD sergeant.

According to Julie Bolcer, NYC Office of Chief Medical Examiner's public affairs director, the medical examiner has ruled the police-involved death of Ariel Galarza a homicide.

Galarza died from cardiac arrest following physical exertion, restraint and use of a conducted electrical weapon in a person with hypertensive and atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease, acute drug intoxication of cocaine and n-ethylpentylone and obesity.

The Drug Enforcement Administration classifies n-ethylpentylone as a type of synthetic cathinone, more commonly known as 'bath salts'.

The National Institute on Drug Abuse stated synthetic cathinones are unregulated, mind-altering substances marketed as cheap substitutes for other stimulants such as methamphetamine and cocaine.

OCME added Galarza's death resulted from another person's actions and not primarily from natural causes.

"The classification does not imply any statement about intent or culpability and as with all classifications made by OCME, the evaluation of the legal implications of this classification is a function of the District Attorney and the criminal justice system," Bolcer explained.

As previously reported, 45th Precinct police officers responded on Wednesday, November 2 at 5:35 p.m. to a call of an emotionally disturbed man armed with a knife behaving violently at 1840 Mayflower Avenue.

Upon arrival, three uni-

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ILLEGAL TOWING CRACK DOWN

Local precincts launch operation to stop 'spotters'

BY PATRICK ROCCHIO

Commanders at some borough police precincts have launched operations to crack down on unscrupulous tow truck drivers after receiving complaints.

Cops at the 45th Precinct, including its commanding officer Captain Carlos Ghonz, told the public at a precinct council meeting on Thursday, April 6 that they had launched operations to stop 'spotter' tow trucks - drivers who watch parking lots.

These trucks wait for motor-

ists to leave a parking lot to go elsewhere before hooking up cars even though they do not have permission from the lot's owner or manager to tow.

The NYC Department of Consumer Affairs, which regulates tow truck operators, requires that store managers sign off on any towing operations at establishment parking lots, cops said.

In some cases in the 45th Precinct, police said 'spotters' have been demanding fees in excess

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TNLL Opening Day

Throgs Neck Little League got into the swing of the spring season at its annual Opening Day Celebration on Saturday, April 8 with a time honored parade and on-field ceremony.

(Above, l-r) Anthony Arroyo and Nicky Toapha prepared for their first game of the season.

Photo by Silvio Pacifico

TN Bridge Open Road Tolling causes delays

BY ROBERT CHRISTIE

Construction has started at the Bronx Whitestone and Throgs Neck bridges as the Metropolitan Transit Authority gets set to introduce its new Open Road Tolling initiative in the fall.

The MTA began lane closures on Wednesday, April 5 to begin the necessary road work for the project.

The lane closures will continue throughout the spring and summer as the MTA finishes the

work.

For example, at the Throgs Neck Bridge from Friday, April 14 at 10 p.m. to Saturday, April 15 at 5 a.m., two southbound tolling lanes heading towards Queens will be closed for roadwork.

The MTA will notify the public of more impending lane closures as the work continues in the coming weeks.

The agency is asking that motorists give themselves ample time

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TreeTop Development is planning two affordable buildings at the above site.

TreeTop Dev. plans two Mott Haven apartment buildings

BY ARTHUR CUSANO

A major developer announced plans to demolish four properties in Mott Haven to construct two apartment rental towers, using a newly resurrected state tax exemption program.

The \$160 million project is being funded by TreeTop Development, based out of Teaneck, NJ, which owns properties across the city, as well as New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

The project consists of two 12-story apartment buildings that will total about 360,000-square-foot - a roughly 260,000-square-foot residential rental building with ground-floor retail space, and an approximately 100,000-square-foot rental property directly across the street.

The development will be a mix of market-rate and affordable units.

Construction will begin by the end of 2017, according to Ryan Smith of Beckerman Public Relations, the developer's publicist.

The project's assemblage includes three adjacent properties on the west side of Gerard Avenue between East 144th and East 146th Street, along with a corner property across from it at 125 E. 144th Street.

The project is just east of the Major Deegan Expressway, in an area populated by warehouses.

Some of the properties were vacant, while the rest have made plans to relocate their businesses.

"We believe that this underutilized land is primed to be put to use for development of high-quality housing that is currently lacking in the neighborhood," said Azi Mandel, co-founder and managing partner of TreeTop Development.

The developer intends to take advantage of the just-renewed 421-a state tax incentive program, which is available for new housing developments with three or more units, located on sites that were vacant, underutilized, or had a "nonconforming" zoning use.

Under the program, owners are exempt from paying the increase in property taxes that results from the new construction for a period of years.

The updated program is operating under the monitor of Affordable New York, and now includes wage requirements for construction workers on certain projects.

Governor Cuomo announced the program's renewal as part of the 2018 fiscal budget on Monday, April 10.

Under the revived program, developers of new residential projects with 300 units or more in designated areas of Manhattan, Brook-

lyn and Queens would be eligible for a full property tax abatement for 35 years if the project creates a specific number of affordable units and meets the new wage requirements.

The units must remain affordable for 40 years to reap the total tax benefits.

For all other affordable developments in New York City, tax exemption eligibility would be tied to the number of affordable units. The new program is expected to create an estimated 2,500 new units of affordable housing per year, according to the Governor's office.

"We're excited about the return of the city's 421a program, which will further solidify our development plans, and help the neighborhood realize its potential much quicker," Mandel said.

The south Bronx has seen an enormous surge in private and public development over the past year, as available land for development in Manhattan and Brooklyn becomes scarce and unaffordable.

The push has also sparked fears of gentrification - the New York Times named the south Bronx as one of its places to visit for 2017, but then drew the ire of longtime residents for mentioning just trendy new businesses.

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Tasered Pelham Bay resident's death ruled a homicide

from Page 1

formed officers and a sergeant were confronted by Galarza, 49, who allegedly threatened them with an intact glass bottle when they entered his basement apartment inside the multi-family, 2-story house.

Sergeant William Melrose, a 13-year veteran, discharged his Taser at Galarza who fell to the floor, but quickly recovered and continued to struggle with officers attempting to restrain him.

A second Taser jolt was delivered by Melrose by pressing the device directly against Galarza's body, an approved NYPD tactic called 'dry stun'.

While in custody, Galarza entered cardiac arrest, however police were able to administer CPR.

Galarza was rushed to Albert Einstein Hospital where he died at 7:22 p.m.

According to neighbors and published reports, Galarza struggled with from Page 1

learning disabilities, a mild form of asthma and suffered a stroke early last year.

Galarza's family plans to sue the city and the NYPD for \$10 million for the negligence, carelessness and recklessness of the NYPD, sergeant Melrose and other NYPD members in causing Galarza's wrongful death.

"Though Galarza had underlying health problems, the fact of the mat-



The police-involved death of Pelham Bay resident Ariel Galarza has been ruled a homicide. Photo courtesy of Facebook

ter is that he died of a heart attack caused by being shocked twice with a Taser," expressed Sanford Rubenstein, the family's lawyer.

Rubenstein is claiming that Galarza being Tasered twice violated the NYPD Patrol Guide.

The NYPD Patrol Guide states in cases of mentally ill or emotionally disturbed persons, physical force will only be used to the extent necessary to restrain the subject until delivered to a hospital or detention facility.

It also states Tasers should only be used against persons actively resisting, exhibiting active aggression or to prevent individuals from injuring themselves or others present.

NYS Attorney General Schneiderman's Special Investigations and Prosecutions Unit is investigating Galarza's death under the state's executive order granting the AG the authority to prosecute cases of unarmed civilians who die during confrontations with police.

Galarza's family await the AG's determination as to the issue of criminality regarding his death and has called for a grand jury.

Rubenstein said he and the family await a full report from the medical examiner when asked about the drugs found in Galarza's system.

The NYPD declined to comment due to the ongoing litigation.

Local precincts launch operation to stop tow truck 'spotters'

from Page 1

of the \$62.50 'drop fee' permissible for unhooking a car about to be towed.

Some tow drivers are requesting as much as \$150 in cash as the 'drop fee' in lieu of towing a vehicle, and not accepting credit cards as the DCA requires.

Bob Bieder, 45th Precinct Community Council president, said that the tow truck complaints were news to him.

"I was surprised to hear about it - that it was going on in our community and happening on a regular basis all over the city," said Bieder.

"To hear that they are holding people hostage when they shouldn't be, and towing them when they shouldn't be (means) basically that they are stealing cars," said Bieder.

The 45th Precinct is in the process of challenging the medallions of tow operators who operate unlawfully in accordance with DCA procedures, precinct personnel said at the meeting.

In the neighboring 49th Precinct, Captain Thomas Alps commanding officer, said that they are addressing similar issues by giving notice of violations to tow truck operators to the DCA.

"We have been receiving complaints about excessive fees that violate DCA guidelines, unauthorized tows from commercial lots where there is no agreement between ownership (and) tow company and no signs posted in the lot," stated Alps.

The precinct has also received complaints regarding excessive storage fees charged by tow operators beyond guidelines, he stated.

"We try to intervene in some cases to successfully resolve issues without enforcement," stated Alps.



We have been receiving complaints about excessive fees which violate DCA guidelines (and) unauthorized tows from commercial lots where there is no agreement between ownership/tow company." - Captain Thomas Alps, 49th Precinct commanding officer.

In the process of doing enforcement, precinct cops have seized illegal radios that allow some tow drivers to monitor frequencies in violation of law, he stated.

They also seized unlicensed tow trucks where they have also found large quantities of marijuana packaged for sale, stated Alps.

"The tow trucks have been put on notice that we will not stop our enforcement until they cease all illegal behavior," stated Alps.

Joe Thompson, 49th Precinct Community Council president, said that the tow truck issue has flared up in the precinct over the past two months.

"We are working with DCA so that there are limits on (the tow trucks)," he said.



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Empire City gets ready to payout largest jackpot

Empire City Casino, one of New York's most successful casinos has launched a new ad campaign entitled 'Real Winners, Real Money, Real Deal'. Who better to enlist as advertising pitchman for Empire City Casino than its biggest jackpot winner? Howard Gershowitz of Suffolk County, Long Island is back in the 'slot-light' in the Yonkers casino's new ad campaign after scoring Empire City's record-breaking jackpot worth \$1,473,503 on October 25, 2015.

Coincidentally, the same jackpot that made Howard G. a very wealthy man, has grown since Howard's fateful day and is fast approaching the record-breaking amount and could even exceed it. This record-breaker is ripe again for winning and is only available on two Wheel of Fortune slots at Empire City Casino. Now, anyone could be the next Howard G.

Howard's lucky roll was the only million-dollar plus jackpot in the history of not only Empire City Casino but all New York State racetrack casinos. Howard hit on the Wheel of Fortune Triple Star slot machine - one of the most pop-



Howard G. hit for nearly \$1.5 million at Empire City in 2015; jackpot on same machine expected to soon eclipse that record-breaking win.

ular slot machines in the world. There have been many television show-themed slots that have attempted to bring the action from the screen to the slot world, but none have succeeded in the dazzling style of Wheel of Fortune, which has captivated gamblers for years with high jackpots and spin-

ning money wheels.

When this latest jackpot is hit, it will give Wheel of Fortune 'bragging rights' to the three highest jackpots in the history of the Yonkers casino and six of the top 10 highest jackpots. Three Bally slot machines - Hot Shots, Blazing 7's and Stars & Bars - can also boast major scores rang-

ing from nearly \$250,000 to \$571,000, all ranking in the top ten jackpots at Empire City Casino.

This past November, Linda H. of Thornwood, NY, took home a \$961,411.81 jackpot also from a Wheel of Fortune slot machine - the second largest in the ten-year history of Empire City. Linda's hit

eclipsed the \$571,049 score won by former runner-up Manuel Esteche in February of 2015 on the Blazing 7's.

Empire City recently celebrated its 10th anniversary and ranks as the sixth largest casino floor in the country, including Las Vegas and Indian casinos nationwide. More than 8 million visitors a year try their luck at Empire City Casino, hoping to hit one of the many six-figure jackpots on the behemoth gaming floor.

"Right now there are 11 six-figure jackpots ready for the taking at Empire City, almost half of them above \$300,000 including the \$1.4 million life-changer," says Ryan Munroe, Empire City's director of gaming operations. "With over 5,200 slot machines available, there's no need to travel far when you can win this kind of money so close to home."

At the time of this writing, six-figure jackpots at Empire City range from just over \$100,000 to more than \$1.4 million on slots with minimum bets from one cent to ten dollars. To be eligible to win the top jackpot, a player must make the maximum bet on the machine.

Cary Leeds Center Tennis Stadium opens

BY ROBERT CHRISTIE

Bronx residents, elected officials and even a celebrity, were present to cut the ribbon on the new Cary Leeds Center Stadium on Sunday, April 9.

The new \$26 million tennis stadium sits behind the New York Junior Tennis League's Cary Leeds Center for Tennis & Learning in Crotona Park.

The stadium dedication featured Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr., tennis legend Billie Jean King, and NYJTL chairman Martin Goldberg.

"For 45 years, NYJTL has been delivering services in this community," said Goldberg. "The opportunities to help children and their families have increased exponentially now with the completion of the Cary Leeds Center."

The stadium features two courts - the Victor Kiam Stadium Court and the Pershing Square Stadium Court - and can seat up to 800 people.

NYJTL funded the new stadium with \$13 million in private funds and \$13.5 million in public funding.

The new facility will help NYJTL, which has a tennis program in each of the 51 city council



Tory Kiam cuts the ribbon opening the stadium court named for his father, Victor. Other members of the Kiam family, NYJTL board members, and elected officials are also on hand.

Silvio J. Pacifico

districts, to continue serving children throughout the Bronx and the other four boroughs.

NYJTL has been operating in the Bronx since its inception in 1971.

In addition, the organization held a professional tournament in Crotona Park for 20 years until construction began on the new stadium in 2012.

"This happens to be one of the most underserved - if not the most underserved - districts in the bor-

ough," said Joe Ceriello, director of marketing at NYJTL. "So we thought this is where people need the most help."

The center sits in a 3-mile radius of 30,000 children, is in walking distance from 25 schools, and is near multiple shelters.

Rafael Salamanca, councilman of the 17th district, was pleased with the arrival of the new stadium.

"We've already seen the great work the New York Junior Tennis

League has done in teaching local kids the game of tennis and these facilities will only allow NYJTL to continue that work," Salamanca said.

The organization, which was founded by tennis great Arthur Ashe, mentors 10,000 children annually through both tennis and character building programs, according to the league.

Ceriello said tennis is just the 'hook' to draw children in and teach

them more than just the game.

"We deal with a lot of kids who have a lot going on in their lives and this can grab their focus and hold their attention," he added.

"But then around tennis - which we teach in all of our programming - we introduce character development, nutrition, healthy living, academic development and education enrichment," he also said.

For example, NYJTL has partnered with Emblem Health to teach kids better nutrition.

Also, the organization has partnered with local police for a Volley Against Violence program which supports sports as an alternative to making bad choices.

NYJTL has committed to providing 6,000 hours of free tennis annually for the community.

Ceriello said the organization plans to fund its community service programs through commercial training programs for tennis.

He said NYJTL is also in talks with the Women's Tennis Association and the United States Tennis Association for possible professional tournaments at the new facility.

Morris Park Community Association's Dinner Dance

The Morris Park Community Association toasted an exemplary community leaders at its 43rd annual dinner dance on Saturday, April 8 at Marina del Rey Caterers. Community leaders, elected officials, family and friends all joined in honoring this year's honorees Benjamin Soccodato, educational consultant and former P.S. 83 principal and Dr. Edward Casey, longtime Calvary Hospital staff member, general practitioner and palliative care physician on their many achievements and successful careers.

Honoree Dr. Casey (front, r) received congratulations from his wife, children, spouses and grandchildren.

Photo by Laura Stone



(l-r) Assemblyman Michael Benedetto; NYS comptroller Thomas DiNapoli; Silvio Mazzella, MPCA board member; Al D'Angelo, MPCA vice president; Senator Jeff Klein; Tony Signorile, MPCA president; Frank Agovino, MPCA second vice president; Chris Alessandro, MPCA treasurer; Thomas Messina representing Congressman Crowley and Assemblyman Mark Gjonaj.

Photo by Laura Stone



Honorees Dr. Casey (2nd from l) and Benjamin Soccodato (c) proudly accepted their special commendations from (l-r) Assemblyman Gjonaj, Senator Klein and Congressman Eliot Engel.

Photo by Laura Stone



Jackie DiMaggio performed a rousing rendition of the National Anthem.

Photo by Laura Stone



Tony Signorile (r) received a special commendation from Mariel de la Cruz representing Comptroller Scott Stringer.

Photo by Laura Stone



The SUNY Maritime College Color Guard gave a crowd pleasing opening performance.

Photo by Laura Stone



Honoree Benjamin Soccodato (c) attended the awards gala with (l-r) his daughter-in-law Charisse Soccodato, daughter Jacqueline, son Ben, wife Lois, daughter Amy and son-in-law Raymond Downs.

Photo by Laura Stone



Parks advocates and NYC Parks officials, elected officials including Councilman Andrew Cohen and Assemblyman Jeff Dinowitz, and skateboard enthusiasts celebrate the beginning of construction on the new skate park on Tuesday, April 11.

Photo by Edwin Soto

Van Cortlandt Skate Park groundbreaking

BY PATRICK ROCCHIO

Youth who are learning to skateboard will soon have a safe place to do so in Van Cortlandt Park.

A ceremonial groundbreaking was held on Tuesday, April 11 on a new skate park and a separate basketball court in Van Cortlandt Park near Broadway and West 242nd Street.

The skate park will be the first public facility of its kind in the borough's northwest corner when it is completed, ceremony attendees said.

The overall \$1,118,000 project is the culmination of a about ten-years of efforts by community youth to get a skate park built so they don't have to travel to upper Manhattan, for example, or practice in the street, said attendees.

Council funding was allocated by former Councilman Oliver Koppell and supported by his successor Councilman Andy Cohen.

The mayor's office also provided funding, according to the NYC Parks Department.

The skate park will help transform the western portion of Van Cortlandt Park, becoming a destination for skaters of all ages, said Cohen.

"This reflects modern attitudes about the use of the park, really responding to the

needs of young people and the interests of young people," said Cohen at the groundbreaking ceremony.

Another advocate for the project, Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz, urged Parks at the ceremony to get the skate park built. According to Parks, anticipated completion is the spring of 2018.

The assemblyman said during the ceremony that about a decade ago, a young man came to his office with more than 1,000 petition signatures from community people requesting a skate park.

"I think what this shows is that when the community comes together (and) has a specific goal for something that is good...we can actually make it happen," said Dinowitz.

The assemblyman believes that with the addition of the skate park, Van Cortlandt Park will now have something for everyone.

Daniel Padernacht, Community Board 8 chairman, thanked the City Council for funding and the Parks Department for their hard work.

"The skate park is going to offer a great place and a safe place for skateboarders and children to come out and practice," said Padernacht.

The Van Cortlandt Park Conservancy and the Friends of Van Cortlandt Park took



Michael Alfano has been advocating for the construction of a skate park in Van Cortlandt Park for about eight years. Photo by Edwin Soto

part in the groundbreaking.

One of the skaters who as a youth advocated for the skate park, Michael Alfano, 21, said that he had been working on making it a reality with his skateboard team 'Pixelated' since he was just 14.

"We just thought that this was the perfect place for it," he said of its location, adding that members of his team attended numerous CB 8 meetings over several years to make sure the project was on the board's agenda and progressing.

According to Parks, the skate park will have a concrete pavement with raised elements, while the basketball court will include asphalt paving, color seal coating and backless sports benches.

Bronx Coworks offers rentable office space

BY ROBERT CHRISTIE

Up and coming entrepreneurs and local business owners will now have a place to get some work done thanks to the new Bronx Coworks on Third Avenue.

Creators of the Bronx Coworks and members of the 3rd Avenue Business Improvement District invited local community members and elected officials to a ribbon cutting at the new offices on Thursday, April 6.

Councilman Rafael Salamanca believes the space will be key for local business owners.

"Bronx Coworks will be a great resource for local small businesses," said Salamanca. "We've seen similar models thrive in other parts of the city, and this offers a great opportunity for entrepreneurs and small businesses that either started in the Bronx and want to stay local to do so, and for others to locate here."

"This could be huge," he added.

Bronx Coworks is similar to the WeWork program which offers rentable office space throughout Manhattan, Brooklyn and Queens.

The co-working space, located on the third floor at 2825 Third Avenue, offers small offices, large offices, conference rooms, Wi-Fi, and a large common area with multiple sofas.

Members must pay an annual membership fee of \$35 to use the space.

From there, Bronx Coworks offers multiple options to accommodate various needs.

If someone is looking to use the facility for a day, they can pay \$25 and have access to Wi-Fi and the common area.

The \$250 per month option allows you access to the common area, Wi-Fi, a personal locker and use of the conference room for 30 minutes.

The \$375 per month option offers a desk in a bullpen area with other people who are also working.

The plan also includes 60 minutes of conference room use and access to a smart TV.

If you're running a more professional operation, you can rent a private office starting at \$525 per month.

The plan includes amenities similar to the previous options while offering filing cabinets and a lockable door.

Bronx Coworks also offers options for people looking to rent only the conference room.

Roger Saad, vice president of the BID and a stakeholder in the 2825 Third Avenue building, said Bronx CoWorks is a cheaper option for local business.

Saad said usually new businesses would have to

find an office space, lease it, put down a security deposit and then spend money building the space to their liking.

"All of a sudden you're in the red," he said. "Here you don't start off in the red - you start off positively."

Michael C. Brady, director of the 3rd Avenue BID is excited about the possibilities the office space provides for the Bronx.

"Bronx Coworks is offering a co-working facility that one - promotes Bronx businesses - but two - builds a business network that can go beyond the Bronx," said Brady

He also said having a co-working space can help with displacement in a redeveloping south Bronx.

"What better way to avoid displacement than offering affordable office space for Bronx-based businesses," he said.

Brady said the space is already being used by an architect, graphic designer, freelance writers and even some major companies.

In addition, said Brady, a couple banks are looking to move some of their extra office needs to the facility.

The BID director also stressed that the space was not created using public funding.

Previously the space was used by a health and fitness center.



(l-r) Roger Saad, Bronx Coworks operating manager and co-founder; Councilman Rafael Salamanca and Michael Brady, The HUB/Third Avenue Business Improvement District executive director, celebrated the co-working center's grand opening.

Photo by Aracelis Batista

St. Philip Neri School's UPK program in limbo

BY STEVEN GOODSTEIN

One of the borough's oldest schools will lose a quality program after only two years.

St. Philip Neri School, a K to 8 school which has been in existence for over a century, will lose its Universal Pre-K program a year earlier than originally expected.

The school's UPK program, a NYC Department of Education program which was promised to schools of all boroughs by Mayor de Blasio in 2015, offered assistance to many of the community's low-income families, was abruptly cancelled on Thursday, March 9.

However, the announcement of the cancellation was not made to faculty and staff until nearly three weeks later by the school administration.

St. Philip Neri School's administration announced that the UPK program closure decision occurred because the school did not provide appropriate intervention for students with various educational needs, even though the Archdiocese did not assist in providing special education services or hiring special education teachers for the program.



St. Philip Neri School had its UPK program cancelled after two years, even though the Archdiocese signed a three-year contract to house the program.
Steven Goodstein / Community News Group

The UPK program was comprised mostly of students who struggled with severe social-emotional, developmental and academic delays. If the program is not reinstated, the closure will directly effect 100 needy students who were already enrolled for the 2017-18 school year.

An additional 117 students were also interested in participating

in the program, but were unable to register after it was cancelled. Registered families have since received an email that the school is no longer participating in registration for the program, with no further explanation.

The school believes the decision was unwarranted, since the program received positive feedback from the school's instructional

specialists as well as parents.

"I am fearful for the community - because many families here are going to lose a great program that they were promised," said one UPK staff member, who requested to remain anonymous until receiving more closure from the DOE and the Archdiocese. "Other UPK programs (in the Bronx) will be more difficult for families to reach

without transportation."

They added that the UPK program also played a role in helping the school retain student enrollment.

"We've had parents come into our school, in tears, explaining to our staff that they love our school and they want to enroll their children in the program - and we have no response," the UPK staff member added. "These parents are looking for answers that we can't give them - and even worse, we are not equipped with the support and/or staff to meet the needs of these students."

According to the school, the Archdiocese signed a three-year contract with the DOE to house the UPK program for the 2015-16, 2016-17 and 2017-18 school year.

The Archdiocese of New York confirmed that the decision was made by the DOE in an effort to strategically redeploy and redistribute the school's resources and that the cancellation of the program will take place at the end of the school year.

It is still unclear how many other schools in the Bronx will lose their UPK programs.

Study: SUNY Maritime offers high ROI

BY PATRICK ROCCHIO

SUNY Maritime continues to rank high in terms of graduates' starting pay and 'return on investment' in terms of tuition.

The state college located in Throggs Neck, which trains students in engineering and seafaring careers, ranked fifth in the nation in SmartAsset's recently released third annual study in terms of where college students are getting the most return on investment for their educations.

The school ranked in a top ten list that included Ivy League schools Stanford, Harvard and Princeton and prestigious technical universities like Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Georgia Tech.

With an average starting salary of \$69,700, according to the study, and tuition costing \$7,446 with scholarships and grants averaging \$5,886 per year, the school received a 86.94 'college education value index' in the study.

Another annual study conducted by Payscale.com, also found in three separate years from 2014 to 2016 that SUNY Maritime bachelor's degree graduates earn the highest mid-career sala-



The college's training ship, docked off the campus, is in an integral part of the students' experience. The ship, Empire State IV, will soon need replacement with a newer vessel.
Community News Group / Patrick Rocchio

ries in the country, with a bachelor's degree graduate earning \$144,000 ten years after graduation in 2016.

The school's assistant director of career planning and development, Michelle Reina, said that she believes the higher salaries have to do with the offshore maritime and engineering fields the students attend the college to enter.

The nature of the curriculum does not allow time for self-reflection or academic exploration, with many of the students spending between 45- to 90-days at sea over summer recesses, she said.

The school has its own training vessel, the Empire State IV, she said, and for the students who choose an offshore maritime track at the school, this is a classroom. "It is a unique field," she said.

"You come here knowing exactly what you want to do and get into."

While many students pursue engineering careers on land, said Reina, many SUNY Maritime students work to obtain a Coast Guard license permitting them to work as merchant mariners, said Reina.

Once they graduate and are certified they could be at sea four or five months at a time, she said.

"They don't have days off, they are working every holiday," she said. "That is really where their salaries (rise)...it is definitely students that are shipping out that increase the overall salaries."

She added that she does not believe it is a field for everyone, and that typically the students who do become merchant marines sail for five to ten years and then transition back to land-based employment.

"When they transition back to land, it makes them so much more marketable," she said. "If you can run a power plant on ship, you can run it on land."

A number of graduates who do not go to sea or accept engineering positions work in the shipping industry, just on land in the import/export or marine insurance fields," she said.

Before a student would become a part of the school community, they would have to show a real interest in the maritime engineering field, said Reina.

"If they come here saying 'I want to do political science or liberal arts,' it is completely the wrong school," she said.



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WLCA, SCA plan P.S. 14 construction meet

BY PATRICK ROCCHIO

The community continues to thirst for more information regarding the expansion at P.S. 14.

Waterbury LaSalle Community Association's Freedom of Information Law, FOIL, request for School Construction Authority inter-agency correspondence was rejected recently, association board members said.

But despite the denial, it also appears that the WLCA may now have regular meetings, possibly quarterly, with SCA officials.

The meetings' purpose would be to brief key WLCA members on construction of the 344-seat school addition and relay any work-related community concerns to SCA, according to Senator Jeff Klein's office.

They meetings could also include invited NYC Department of Education personnel, according to Klein's office, and may take place during the school day to accommodate their schedules.

Two WLCA board members met with SCA officials on Thursday, January 26, and the senator's office is working on scheduling another

meeting in late May once the building's footprints are complete, said members of Klein's team.

"We remain committed to facilitating routine meetings between the entire P.S. 14 community with the express intention of promoting communication and transparency throughout the construction process," said Klein in a statement.

Such meetings are all the more important once the foundations are completed and more construction workers and materials are on site, said members of the senator's office.

A SCA official, Michael Mirisola, indicated in a statement that more meetings are indeed in the offing.

"We value community feedback and will continue to engage in meaningful discussions with community members," the statement read. "We look forward to attending future meetings that are organized by the senator's office."

In a separate development, Mary Jane Musano, a WLCA board member, said a FOIL request for documents related to the decision making pro-



Construction on the P.S. 14 annex site continues to hum along. Community News Group / Patrick Rocchio

cess for the siting more classroom seats P.S. 14 was denied.

"It was rejected on the grounds that what we were requesting was inter-agency communication," said Musano of the request, which al-

lows the public access to certain government documents.

The rejection of the FOIL made her suspicious, the activist said.

Kristin O'Neill, assistant director of the Depart-

ment of State's Committee on Open Government, said that a FOIL request could legally be turned down for inter-agency communications.

"There is a provision of the Freedom of Information Law that allows agencies to withhold intra- and inter-agency communications with certain exceptions," said O'Neill.

Emails concerning the deliberative process where ideas are being shared aren't required for release, she said.

However, if they contain statistical or factual tabulations of data, instructions to staff that affect the public or final agency policy or determinations, under the state's FOIL law, they must be released, she said.

The WLCA said its FOIL effort was for the purpose of obtaining SCA correspondence that identified potential issues: environmental or construction-related.

Among the issues WLCA addressed were a possible underground oil tank in the schoolyard that may be disrupted during construction, replacement of mature trees that were removed and traffic concerns, said Musano.

TN Bridge Open Road Tolling causes delays

from Page 1

to reach their destination while the work continues.

Once construction is completed, the former tolling lanes will become 'gantries' under which vehicles will pass without stopping.

Cameras will be installed on the gantries and take a picture of each vehicle's license plate as it passes underneath the new structure.

If a driver has an EZ-Pass tag, the toll will be charged to their account immediately.

If a driver does not have an EZ-Pass tag, a bill will be sent to the vehicle owner's residence within 30 days.

Included in the initiative are the the RFK, Verrazano-Narrow, and Rockaway bridges which begin open road tolling on Sunday, April 30.

The Hugh L. Carey Tunnel and the Queens Midtown Tunnel have had cashless tolling since Janu-

ary.

According to Governor Cuomo, open road tolling is expected to streamline commutes and reduce inconvenience when using bridges and tunnels.

The method is expected to save commuters 21 hours of drive time per year, one million gallons in gas annually and \$2.3 million in gas per year.

Even though motorists no longer have to stop at tolls, that doesn't mean they have a free pass to forget to pay tolls.

If motorists do not pay their tolls in a timely manner, the first fine is \$50.

If motorists continues to forego payment late fees can accrue to as much as \$100.

In the case of commercial vehicles, registrations will be suspended if unpaid tolls exceed \$200.

Also, if a driver passes through a toll with a suspended registration, cameras will capture the li-



Construction has started at the Throgs Neck Bridge as the Metropolitan Transit Authority gets set to introduce its new Open Road Tolling initiative in the fall. Photo by Robert Christie

cence plate, immediately alert the state trooper on site and that officer will pull over the driver.

In addition to the tolls, there

will also be beautification upgrades at each of the new tolling stations under the governor's 'New York Crossings Project.'

Each of the stations will receive LED lighting, LED message boards and artwork made from chainmail fabric.

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