

## Marano ends Council quest; endorses Gjonaj

BY PATRICK ROCCHIO

The Waterbury-LaSalle Community Association hosted a candidate's night at the First Lutheran Church of Throggs Neck for those seeking the 13th Councilmatic seat and were greeted by an unexpected bombshell announcement.

Six of eight candidates in the race to replace term-limited Councilman James Vacca were present on Tuesday, May 30.

One of the candidates, John Marano, prior to the start of the forum, announced his decision to withdraw from the race, thanking supporters, while not ruling out a future run.

Marano said that he was concerned about the influx of inexperienced candidates into the race, and said that he would support the candidate that he felt would be best for the district.

"I have what it takes to represent our district fairly, effectively and passionately," said Marano. "But at this juncture, I want to make sure the more qualified candidates do not cancel each out, which could bring a less experienced candidate into office."

He did not say who he would endorse at the time, but later shared with the Bronx Times that he was supporting Assemblyman Mark Gjonaj.

"I am going to endorse Mark Gjonaj. I think he has a good relationship with the elected officials and he is already involved in the process. He brings a lot to the table, including the knowledge of how to work with the other elected officials. I feel that he has a

*Continued on Page 4*

# MTA AVERTS A BRIDGEAGEDDON

## Benedetto, Gjonaj force corrective action

BY ARTHUR CUSANO

The three-week traffic nightmare on the Throgs Neck and Whitestone bridges appears to have subsided just in time for Memorial Day weekend, according to local leaders.

Traffic on the two bridges seemed to be flowing at normal levels during the three-day holiday, just 24 hours after local leaders demanded action from the MTA.

Before the meeting, traffic snarls on the two Bronx bridges to Queens left motorists stuck

in hours-long traffic jams as the work to install cashless tolling proceeded.

Assemblymen Michael Benedetto and Mark Gjonaj joined community leaders on the Pennyfield Avenue overpass just above I-295 on Thursday, May 25 to demand that the MTA take immediate action to alleviate the massive bridge traffic backups.

The elected officials fired off a letter to the MTA calling on the state-run agency that oversees

*Continued on Page 4*



## Remembering Our Heroes

The East Bronx History Forum and Van Nest Neighborhood Alliance hosted a Memorial Day Ceremony on Monday, May 29 at the Van Nest War Memorial. Helena Raptis Smith received an award honoring her late cousin, Angelo C. Raptis, Jr. for his service.

Photo by Miriam Quin

## Planned Co-op City park to utilize riverfront

BY ARTHUR CUSANO

Co-op City will be getting a new park, courtesy of the city and Riverbay Corporation.

The waterfront park was announced at a Thursday, May 25 event at the Bartow Center attended by Assemblyman Michael Benedetto, Councilman Andy King, Congressman Eliot Engel and, capping off City Hall's week in the borough, Mayor de Blasio.

The 1.4-acre park site was donated by Riverbay Corpo-

ration and will be located on a parcel running along the Hutchinson River.

The land is just south of the Co-op City Little League field, and will offer great views of nearby Pelham Bay Park.

Longtime Co-op City resident Eva Lazaar opened the presentation by recalling her time raising her daughters in the development and regularly visiting nearby parks.

"The parks give us a place to

*Continued on Page 11*

# Mayoral town hall held at Stevenson HS

BY PATRICK ROCCHIO

Mayor de Blasio visited Soundview and took questions from local residents at a town hall at the Adlai E. Stevenson campus.

As part of the mayor's 'City Hall in Your Borough' election-year strategy that saw de Blasio in the Bronx for a week with his commissioners, the town hall meeting was hosted by Councilwoman Annabel Palma on Wednesday, May 24.

The mayor fielded questions for a couple of hours on a wide variety of topics, and spoke about what he sees as his accomplishments.

The issues included better relations between the community and NYPD, curbing 'stop and frisk,' putting more police officers on the beat in the borough (including 84 from the most recent police academy class), reducing crime rates in 43rd and 45th precincts, increasing high school graduation rates and decreasing unemployment.

"The status quo was not



Mayor de Blasio and Councilwoman Annabel Palma during the forum. Photo by Silvio Pacifico

acceptable to so many people in the Bronx, and we had to change it," said de Blasio at one point in the meeting, before running through a list of his accomplishments as mayor.

Palma called the town hall with the mayor an "incredible success," adding that it filled Stevenson's gym with people.

"The town hall gave resi-

dents the opportunity to direct their questions to the commissioners of specific agencies or even Mayor de Blasio himself," said the councilwoman.

She added: "Residents offered insightful outlooks and posed questions, which concerned not only themselves, but many of their neighbors."

Many of his commissioners were present and also took public questions when asked by the mayor to elaborate on his response.

The crowd was concerned about housing, overdevelopment, Universal Pre-K and day care, after-school programs and school lunch, possible hospital cuts, hate crimes and speech, asthma, affordable housing for seniors and closing homeless cluster sites.

In some cases, the mayor referred the residents to commissioners or representatives from the appropriate city agencies after the meeting.

William Rivera, Community Board 9 district man-



Mohammed Mujumder, Community Board 9 first vice-chairman, asks a question.

Photo by Silvio Pacifico

ager, said that the community members who stayed to ask questions as the meeting went past 10 p.m. impressed him, as did the officials who stayed to listen.

"I thought it was going to be cut shorter," said Rivera, adding that he was pleasantly surprised and that in public

forums, he believes that the best questions are usually the ones that are the most specific.

He noted that in some cases, people asking questions were asked to speak to the representatives of city agencies on the side, and that CB 9 had several questions that were still in process of being answered.

"Most important, which we won't know (yet) is the follow up," said Rivera.

One attendee who asked a question, CB 10 member Bob Bieder, said he was still waiting days after the event for a response from the mayor's office on his query about the procedures for establishing 'community schools.'

Community schools, which have their facilities open to the surrounding neighborhood when school is not in session, exist elsewhere in the borough but he would like to bring them to the east Bronx.

Bieder said he ultimately reached out to Palma's office, and her staff is working on his request.

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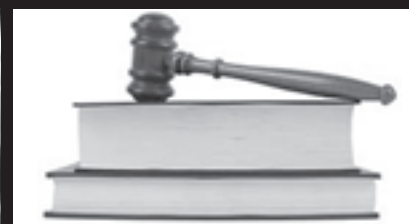


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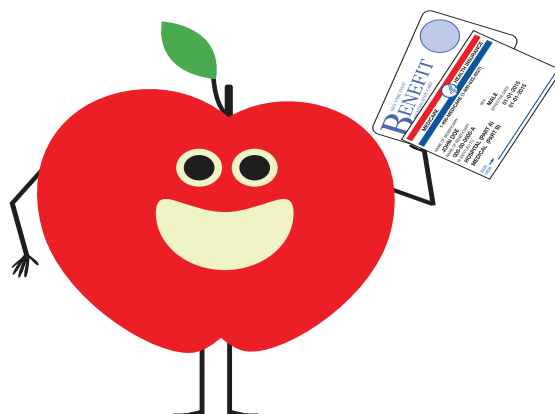
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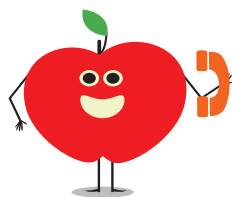
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Assemblyman Michael Benedetto calls the MTA to task Thursday afternoon above the I-295 entrance to the Throgs Neck bridge. Benedetto and fellow state assemblyman Mark Gjonaj (center) were joined by other local leaders in calling for a quick resolution to traffic problems on the bridge.

Arthur Cusano

## MTA averts Bridgeageddon; Benedetto, Gjonaj force corrective action

from Page 1

bridges and tunnels to take immediate action to alleviate the problems that also impacted the Bruckner Expressway and I-295, as well as the Hutchinson River Parkway and roads in Queens leading to the bridges.

The letter was also signed by Senator Jeff Klein and Queens electeds Assemblymen Edward Braunstein, Michael Simanowitz and Michael DenDeckker and Senator Tony Avella.

On Wednesday, May 31 Benedetto said the MTA had implemented several changes at the toll plazas that appeared to be working.

The MTA reopened toll lanes, and eliminated the hard left turn just after the tollbooths that was causing congestion on the Throgs Neck Bridge.

The MTA also spaced out the lane changes wider to further eliminate bottlenecks, he said.

"Those changes were all

that was needed," he said.

Benedetto said that while he was happy the complaints were resolved, he was frustrated that the MTA waited weeks to correct the situation.

Benedetto also said that he and the other electeds warned that if traffic congestion surges again, the MTA would have to stagger the work on the bridges instead of doing them all at once.

The MTA could also halt toll collection altogether on the bridge, he said, but that was unlikely due to the revenue loss, they said.

Gjonaj said during the Thursday event that even though his district does not include the bridges, his district had been being impacted by the MTA project.

Pelham Parkway and the Hutchinson River Parkway were being affected by the bridge backups, he said.

Gjonaj also complained that excessive ticketing by dozens of state troopers has exacerbated the problem.

"Instead of being out there helping to move the traffic, they are contributing to the traffic and creating this hostile travelling environment," the assemblyman said.

The MTA insists the work, when done, will move traffic over the bridges much quicker.

The Throgs Neck and Whitestone bridges, as well as the RFK Bridge are all being prepared for cashless tolling, which allows vehicles without an EZ Pass to cross the bridge without stopping to pay a toll.

Drivers without the EZ Pass receive a bill in the mail at a later date from the MTA using information provided by the car's license plate.

Throggs Neck Homeowner's Association President Lynn Gerbino said that recent problems with bridge traffic clogging local streets has abated, but said the community would be keeping an eye on the MTA until the project is completed.

## Marano ends year-long City Council quest; endorses Mark Gjonaj

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good reputation in the Assembly. I feel that he can get more results for our community," Marano said.

At the forum, candidates took questions, including those submitted from the WLCA and two from the audience.

Taking part were Republican candidate John Cerini and Democratic candidates Gjonaj, John Doyle, Alex Gomez and Victor Ortiz.

One candidate, Mohammad Abuhaikal, could not participate because he was celebrating Ramadan, but another, Marjorie Velasquez-Lynch, who had committed to the forum, was an unexpected no-show.

Mary Jane Musano, WLCA co-president, said that the forum was a chance to hear from candidates in a way she hoped was more about is-

sues and less about politics.

"I think this is a time for our residents to be educated," said Musano. "I want them to have the chance to meet the candidates in person."

The most pressing community issues are overdevelopment and the expansion of P.S. 14 that most of the community thought was excessive, said Scott Barnard, WLCA board member.

"I hope that the people (at the forum) are able to decide on a viable candidate," he said.

Andrew Chircio, WLCA co-president, urged potential voters to choose the person they feel would best represent their interests regardless of party affiliation.

The WLCA board submitted their members' questions concerning zoning abuses that they believe leads to overdevelopment; methods to ob-

tain more police officers for the 45th Precinct; and the construction of a new Pelham Bay school.

There were additional questions about the Small Business Survival Act, proposed legislation that would curb abuses on small business leases, and about creating a borough animal shelter.

Cerini expressed his disappointment in Marano's departure from the race.

"There was a time when I thought it was going to be (John Marano) against me in the general election...and it would come down to a good community-minded person winning the election," said Cerini.

The candidates gave Marano a standing ovation before he departed.

A spokesman for Velasquez-Lynch said the candidate shrugged off the forum to attend another meeting.



13th Council District candidates answered questions from the public. (l-r) John Cerini, John Doyle, Assemblyman Mark Gjonaj, Alex Gomez and Victor Ortiz.

Walter Pofeldt

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# Kalief Browder honored with street co-naming

BY STEVEN GOODSTEIN

Kalief Browder may be gone - but his legacy will live on forever.

On Thursday, May 25, Councilman Ritchie Torres, Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito and other

**T**his street co-naming will not only honor Kalief - it will stand as a moral inspiration for the rest of us.

**Ritchie Torres**  
Councilman

elected officials, as well as the family and friends of Kalief Browder, gathered for the street co-naming ceremony of 'Kalief Browder Way' at East 181st Street and Prospect Avenue.

The street co-naming of Kalief Browder Way was held to honor the life of a young individual who took

his own life following a wrongful accusal and a several years in prison.

Browder, who grew up on Prospect Avenue and attended the now-defunct public school New Day Academy, was walking home from a party at night with a friend on 186th Street and Arthur Avenue in May 2010, when they were stopped by the police. The police had stopped them in response to a 911 call regarding an unrelated incident involving a stolen backpack.

Police then placed Kalief and his friend under arrest and took them to the 48th Precinct. They were then taken to Bronx County Criminal Court, where Browder was charged with robbery, grand larceny and assault. Kalief's friend was excused from the case by the presiding judge.

Kalief was later charged with second-degree robbery and his bail was set at \$3,000. When his family was unable to pay the set amount, he was sent to Rikers Island, where he spent three years, mostly in solitary confinement. At one point, he was in solitary confinement for nearly a year and half straight.

While he was in prison,



Councilman Ritchie Torres (l) and members of Kalief Browder's family held ceremonial street signs named in Browder's honor.

Photo by Silvio Pacifico

Browder tried to commit suicide multiple times - including attempting to hang himself using a noose he made out of his bedsheets and slit his wrists using a piece of a broken metal bucket he would use to wash his clothes. Additionally, he was beaten by correctional officers as well as inmates.

When Browder's case was re-

viewed in March 2013, the judge offered him a plea agreement - which would have given Kalief the ability to go home by pleading guilty to two misdemeanors. He refused the plea bargain and maintained his innocence.

In May 2013, just after turning 20 years old, Kalief was released without being convicted of

a crime.

Despite earning a GED and enrolling in Bronx Community College following his release, the damage had been done and his mental health had deteriorated. Two years after he was released, Kalief committed suicide at age 22 - on June 6, 2015, by hanging himself from his bedsheets at his home.

"This street co-naming will not only honor Kalief - it will stand as a moral inspiration for the rest of us," said Councilman Torres. "Those who knew Kalief are better people for having known him and those of us who knew of him and his scenario are better for having been awakened and inspired by his struggle for justice."

"Since Kalief's unfortunately and timely death, our family has dealt with a loss that not only affects us but also everyone who took heart to his story," said Akeem Browder, Kalief's brother. "Now, we can look up and see 'Kalief Browder Way' and think of the legacy he left for us to continue."

The date of the street co-naming would have marked Kalief's 24th birthday.

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The vacant lot at 1920 Amethyst Street is the planned location for the Bronx Muslim Center's new mosque. Community Board 11 approved the project at its May meeting.

Arthur Cusano

## CB 11 OK's Amethyst Street Mosque plan

BY ARTHUR CUSANO

The plan to build a new mosque on Amethyst Street to replace the existing Bronx Muslim Center on Rhinelander Avenue has been approved by Community Board 11.

Board members voted overwhelmingly to support the project at the Thursday, May 25 full board meeting.

CB 11 Land Use Committee chairperson Joe McManus recommended the full board approve the project at 1912-1920 Amethyst Street after the committee unanimously approved the project at its May 10 meeting.

The application will now be forwarded to the NYC Board of Standards and Appeals where zoning variances must be approved, said CB 11 district manager Jeremy Werneke.

The new facility is aimed at alleviating overcrowding at the popular mosque at 702 Rhinelander, said the attorney representing Bronx Muslim Center in the application, Michael Nacmias of Brooklyn.

The current mosque holds roughly 150 worshippers, but the congregation has approximately 800 members, more than the mosque can accommodate.

The applicant submitted final blueprints at the May 10 meeting confirming the bulk of the planned structure's footprint was within the zoning code, according to meeting minutes.

They also submitted a survey of their congregants that confirmed that most lived within walking distance of the planned mosque.

Concerns voiced by board members and local community organizations, such as the lack of parking and overcrowding at the current mosque, had been adequately evaluated, McManus said.

"Every BSA or ULERP we get has parking as an issue," McManus explained. "I don't remember one that hasn't been."

Van Nest Neighborhood Alliance president Bernadette Ferrara told fellow board members her organization and the Morris Park Association held a town hall meeting with mosque leaders earlier in the year where concerns were discussed.

She said the mosque was a positive presence in the neighborhood and that several mosque members have become regular attendees of VNNA meetings, she said.

The alliance has written a recommendation in favor of the project, Ferrara said,

but also listed the conditions that must be addressed, most notably the parking and crowding issues.

"On Fridays when they have their prayer, the parking is just awful," Ferrara said. "You have people double and triple parking, and you just can't do that regardless of what house of worship you are. These are things that, if you don't want animosity, you need to be a good neighbor."

CB 11 vice chair and Morris Park Association president Al D'Angelo said his association was okay with the project, and were also confident that the community's voiced concerns would be heeded.

"I think it's a good idea," D'Angelo said. "They needed more space. It was a problem where they were, and it will alleviate the parking problem on Rhinelander (Avenue)."

Nacmias said the application process was moving along in an efficient manner and did not anticipate any obstacles as the project proceeded.

He anticipated the project would likely get approved by the BSA in a few months.

He also said his clients were taking community and board concerns to heart.

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# ‘Unruly customers’ force postal station closure

BY STEVEN GOODSTEIN

One question lingers regarding a Bronx post office - how can customer service be improved?

On multiple occasions in the past month, the U.S. Post Office Esplanade Station, located at 2488 Williamsbridge Road, has provided poor customer service, sometimes no service at all, residents claim.

The poor service involves customers being forced to wait outside indefinitely during employee lunch breaks - and, most recently, the closure of the entire station for the latter part of the day.

An Allerton resident said she waited outside the locked station for nearly an hour as the lone postal employee took a lunch break, finally giving up because she had to return to work.

“Lunch breaks need to be properly designated at this location - and employees need to be up front with the time frame,” the resident said. “Why can’t they (the employees) just put up a sign that indicates what time they’ll be back?”



U.S. Post Office Esplanade Station, closed early on Friday, May 12, as customers waited outside.  
Community News Group / Steven Goodstein

On Friday, May 12, the office was again closed at lunchtime.

Upwards of ten customers were milling around outside the station waiting for the postal employee to return from lunch that particular day, the woman recalled.

After waiting patiently outside for over an hour, the customers began to grow restless.

Getting fidgety, some customers

began tapping on the post office front windows when they noticed an employee moving about inside.

The employee then changed the ‘Out-To-Lunch’ sign to a ‘Closed-For-Safety-Reasons’ sign.

According to the resident, the USPS employee later told her that the sign was put up in response to the “unruly crowd” of waiting customers that were “banging on

the glass door”.

“The customers weren’t banging on the door - they were tapping on it because they knew that an employee was inside and they wanted to get the person’s attention, even though the (Out-To-Lunch) sign was in the door window,” the Allerton resident recalled.

“We couldn’t get a response, a time frame - nothing. Collectively, we all felt that we were being treated with no respect.”

According to the USPS, some finance stations, although not all, can be a one- or two-person operation, making it difficult for an employee to manage customer flow when the other employee takes a lunch break.

“We need to make sure we (USPS) stay on top of these scenarios to make sure this happens less frequently - especially at (finance) stations, where (staffing is) limited,” said Xavier Hernandez, NYC’s corporate communications spokesperson for USPS.

According to the USPS, the finance station consists of one full-

time person assigned to the office, along with a second employee who rotates among various stations.

The incident on May 12, according to the USPS, occurred when the regular office clerk was on leave and only one other employee was working at the location.

The USPS’s collective bargaining agreement requires a one-hour lunch break for full-time employees.

According to the USPS, the pool clerk puts up signage to notify the public that a lunch break is being taken, and records that the lunch break occurred as scheduled.

The USPS was unable to confirm the ‘unsafe conditions’ on May 12, which apparently caused the employee to close the office for the balance of the day.

They also could not confirm that the office was closed longer than the scheduled lunch break.

Business hours for the Esplanade Station are Mondays through Fridays from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

## TATS CRU, FX paint mural to fallen EMT

BY PATRICK ROCCHIO

World-class aerosol artists painted a tribute to an FDNY Emergency Medical Technician who died performing her duties in Soundview.

**T**he TATS CRU and FX Crew are artists from our district who are supportive of the great things happening in our district and tragedies through art.

**William Rivera**  
Community Board 9

Soundview after a career criminal stole her ambulance and dragged her behind the vehicle.

The mural dedicated to Arroyo includes a large image of her in her EMT uniform, a depiction of Station 26 in the Morrisania, known as the ‘Tin House,’ and includes inscriptions like “forever in our hearts.”

The mural is part of a larger one dedicated to the community in 2015 at Morrison and Westchester avenues, and Arroyo is placed in that mural next to U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor.

William Rivera, Community Board 9 district manager, said that the board donated paint for the mural, and that it was a fitting tribute to the EMT who gave her life in service to her community.

“The TATS CRU and FX Crew are artists from our district who are supportive of the great things happening in our district and tragedies through art,” said Rivera. “They go all over the world representing the Bronx...and it is great that they sometimes come back to where they came from and do this community artwork for free.”

Rivera said that he was in touch with Arroyo’s cousin, who



A view of the mural dedicated to EMT Yadira Arroyo.

Photo courtesy of Joe Conzo

said the FDNY EMS members who knew her or worked with her were appreciative of the mural effort.

“They are looking forward to thanking the artists personally,” he said.

Wilfredo “Bio” Feliciano, one of TATS CRU founding members who worked on the mural dedication, said that the artwork took five to six hours to paint, from

roughly 11:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

A colleague of Arroyo’s from the FDNY’s EMS unit provided the artists with a pencil sketch of Arroyo, and working off of that, as well as photos, it was created, he said.

Generally speaking, memorial walls are some of the more intimate work that TATS CRU does within the community, he said.

“You are dealing with actual

people who lived and were loved in the community,” said Feliciano, adding “It is different from painting a regular mural for us.”

Even though the artists may not have personally known Arroyo, seeing the pain and the aftermath of painting memorials to fallen community members is something that can be an emotional experience, he said.

Alfredo Oyague, FX Crew founder, said the group picked the larger mural that depicts community icons to paint this latest update because it was a section that had depicted Afrika Bambaataa.

Bambaataa, a rapper who helped found the Universal Zulu Nation, was originally painted on the wall in 2015, because of his roots in Soundview, according to a previous Bronx Times story.

But since then allegations against Bambaataa involving sexual abuse has emerged.

The location was experiencing vandalism, said both Oyague and Feliciano.

Oyague said that putting Arroyo in the larger mural was a fitting tribute to a woman who paid the ultimate price in an effort to save lives as an EMT.



# Fischer House brings vet housing to Kingsbridge VA

BY ARTHUR CUSANO

As many Americans prepared to celebrate Memorial Day, the faculty at James J. Peters VA Medical Center in Kingsbridge spent the morning of Thursday, May 25, paying tribute to America's military with the groundbreaking for a new veteran facility.

Two 16-unit residential buildings will be erected on hospital grounds courtesy of the Fischer House Foundation.

The foundation has made a name for itself creating transitional housing for veterans and their families at VA facilities across the country, but Fischer House CEO Kenneth Fischer said this project - the first in the city - was special, since he grew up in nearby Riverdale.

"Being a native son of the Bronx, I'd be lying if I said this one didn't mean a little more to me and my family," Fischer told the patriotic crowd gathered under a large tent as rain fell hard across the borough.

The new facilities will open up the hospital's services to veterans outside the city, he explained.

"These two Fischer houses



An artist's rendering of two buildings planned for the James J. Peters VA hospital in Kingsbridge. The two buildings will house 36 veteran families getting care at the facility at a time.

Fischer House Foundation

will now serve not just veterans from the metropolitan area, but veterans from as far away as New England, can get the care the Peters VA should be better known for," Fischer said. "The work that goes on here is so special."

The two buildings provide a free home away from home for families of veterans receiving treatment at the hospital.

The facilities are estimated to cost approximately \$14 million, and are slated to open in 2018.

The Fischer House program was started in 1990 by Fischer's father, Zachary Fischer, a New York developer.

The organization has provided around seven million days of free lodging to more than 300,000 military families, saving vets and

their families more than \$360 million in travel expenses.

Delta Airlines, a long-time contributor to the program, donated \$1 million to the Bronx project.

The project will create a home-away-from-home for families receiving medical care, said James J. Peters hospital director Dr. Erik Langhoff.

"Thank you for your many sac-

rifices that you and your families have made on behalf of this country," Langhoff said.

Holding the event on the eve of Memorial Day was especially fitting, he noted.

"The service and sacrifice of our fallen warriors and the care and support for those who return from war are forever linked through the American spirit," Langhoff said. "And through VAs everywhere, who care for those who have gone into battle."

Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr. said veterans were a priority as the borough was seeing a renaissance, and recalled a fateful veteran's breakfast in which keynote speaker Ken Fischer told him the Bronx would get its first Fischer Houses.

He thanked Fischer for doing what he called God's work, and asked those on hand to remember the real reason for the upcoming holiday.

"Don't just make this about barbecues and hamburgers and hot dogs or beer," Diaz said. "There's a reason we are able to celebrate this weekend, and every other weekend this summer season."

## Fair @ the Square set for Saturday, June 17th

BY ROBERT WIRSING

This year's Fair @ the Square is filled to the brim with excitement!

The ninth annual Fair @ the Square is set for Saturday, June 17 from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m., rain or shine, along East Tremont and Lane avenues between Westchester Avenue and Silver Street.

The free event presented by the Westchester Square Business Improvement District and Image Marketing promotes Westchester Square's diverse and thriving community.

According to Lisa Sorin, WSBID executive director, over 5,000 people are expected to attend the celebration featuring live musical performances, family fun, vendors, food, jewelry crafting, beauty products, coupons and raffles, donated books from the Huntington Free Library and Metro Optics vision screenings.

Yasmin Cruz, Image Marketing event planner, said WSBID will debut its new mascot influenced by the Square's rich Revolutionary Era history.

Sorin noted WSBID is the first BID to have a mascot.

NYC Small Business Service, WSBID

and Image Marketing are implementing 'Passport to the Past,' in which participants visit several stores in the neighborhood's historic business district.

This encourages everyone to learn about the Square's history while promoting local businesses.

Participating stores include 777 Gourmet Deli on 2708 E. Tremont Avenue, Tremont Lotto & Hookah on 2710 E. Tremont Avenue, Ljubo Pizza on 15 Westchester Square, Pawn Brokers on 2712 E. Tremont Avenue, Atax on 1442 Williamsbridge Road, 1-800 Fix on 21 Westchester Square, Alex Furniture on 76 Westchester Square, NY Bronx Brick Oven on 123 Westchester Avenue, National Diner on 135 Westchester Square, William's Deli on 122 Westchester Square, Pink Princess Nails on 1422 Williamsbridge Road and Metro Optics on 25 Westchester Square.

A mural created by artist Damien Mitchell will be unveiled at 2610 E. Tremont Avenue during the fair.

Mitchell's mural depicts black and white Victorian homes juxtaposed with a vibrant 1930s street cart.

The multicultural festival features an all-day concert series co-hosted by Artie Rodriguez of the Diamante Show and Elvis impersonator Gene DiNapoli.

Additional activities include a FDNY Smoke House, an antique MTA bus, face painting, a trackless train going around Owen Dolen Park, a 38-foot-long obstacle course, inflatable attractions and arts and crafts.

The extravaganza features live performances by freestyle artists George Lamond and Cynthia, ReignJah Band, Just Nuts Party Band, G-String, Johnny Mambo and Friends featuring Pepito Gomez, Da Funk Factory, Kenny Supreme, Troubled Empire, guest deejays DJ Lexs and DJ Kool Bob Skl and the Elite Dance Stars.

"Fair @ the Square is a signature showcase event that has grown along with the BID and with this event, we want to show that Westchester Square has so much to offer everyone," said Sorin.

Sorin would like to thank the organizations, elected officials, sponsors, performers and WSBID board of directors for their help in making 2017's Fair @ the



"Fair @ the Square is a signature showcase event that has grown along with the BID and with this event, we want to show that Westchester Square has so much to offer everyone," - Lisa Sorin, Westchester Business Improvement District executive director.

File Photo

Square possible.

The Westchester Square Merchants Association, in partnership with the Bronx Council on the Arts and NYC Department of Parks and Recreation, invites everyone to attend this year's festival.

For additional information, contact Image Marketing at (718) 395-1932.



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# Sisters, Servants of Mary: “Please, no more trees!”

BY STEVEN GOODSTEIN

A Bronx convent says, “please - no more trees!”

Religious organization Sisters, Servants of Mary, located at 3305 Country Club Road, is currently fighting the city’s plan to plant five new trees in the sidewalk area directly in front of their property.

This may not seem like a big issue - but the Sisters, Servants of Mary parcel already has eight trees, along with other large bushes and shrubs, not far from the front property line.

Each tree plot would require the removal of two concrete slabs, measuring out to about eight feet by three feet.

Potential tree pits are already marked in white paint.

According to the convent, the tree plantings would crowd the area and require more maintenance by the Sisters, Servants of Mary to keep the sidewalks clean when the trees drop its leaves.

“Planting these trees would be a liability - especially for an organization that does not charge for their services or receive financial aid from the city, state or church,” said Cathy Praino, president of the auxiliary for the Sisters, Servants of Mary, who received a call from Mother Superior last month regarding the plan, after Mother Superior had seen tree plot

markings.

“These women do not have the money to pay a service to cleanup after the trees - and since they are all older women, they would be unable to take care of it themselves.”

Praino, who worked for the NYC Parks Department for nearly 30 years, said that since the beginning of May, she has reached out to her park contacts, including NYC Parks first deputy commissioner Liam Kavanaugh as well as Mayor de Blasio’s office, yielding a minimal response and scant replies.

Sisters, Servants of Mary cared for Praino’s mother at her home before she passed away in the early 1980s.

“It is not going to look good if five more trees are planted on the sidewalk. They should plant them somewhere else,” said Sister Ema of Sisters, Servants of Mary. “We understand that the sidewalk is not our property, and we don’t want to give off the impression that we don’t think trees are a good addition to a neighborhood, but it is going to be way too crowded if those trees are planted.

According to the Parks Department, the agency reviewed the location and has already determined that the location is unsuitable for new trees due to the lush shrubbery and trees that already exist on



Sisters, Servants of Mary already has eight trees and numerous large bushes and shrubs on its property, very close to its property line.

Community News Group / Steven Goodstein

the convent property.

Sisters, Servants of Mary is a Spanish order of nurses that has cared for the sick, dying and elderly in their own homes since 1931.

The organization depends solely on donations that are raised from various events they host, including luncheons, golf outings and plant sales, among others.

## Planned Co-op City park to utilize riverfront

from Page 1

breathe and children a place to thrive,” Lazaar said. “Parks are the places that helped make Co-op City a neighborhood, a community - parks help civilize us.”

The mayor used the event to discuss the importance of public parks in the city and the work to expedite parks projects over the past three years.

“Knowing that beautiful waterfront was there looking out over Pelham Bay Park, but wasn’t accessible the way it should be, that’s frustrating, right?” de Blasio said.

The mayor, who was joined by NYC Parks and Recreation Commissioner Mitchell Silver, said that the park idea was brought up at a recent meeting with Co-op City leaders.

He said the city was able to work with Riverbay to get the project up and running quickly.

The elected officials on hand said they appreciated that effort.



Assemblyman Michael Bendetto and Councilman Andy King were among local leaders who joined Mayor de Blasio in announcing a new park for Co-op City on Thursday, May 25.

Arthur Cusano

King, dressed in a bright green suit, said Co-op City was going green with a new park that will give residents access to the placid waterfront.

“We won’t be doing any fishing over here, but we’ll have an opportunity to let our thoughts drift off into the waters or take a stroll on

a Sunday afternoon,” King said.

Benedetto recalled seeing a rendering of a waterfront park in Co-op City’s manage-

ment office much like the one being announced. That park rendering included a waterfront walkway.

He credited Riverbay and the mayor with taking the action to finally make the park a reality.

“You made a dream come true, so thank you,” he said.

Benedetto said the NYC Parks Department would likely seek input from the community on what they want in the new park, a process he said would likely take several months at best.

Engel, who lived in Co-op City for 26 years, recalled his time as a resident and the impact of the 45,000-resident private development in getting him elected.

He thanked the mayor for making the park a reality, as well as the Riverbay board members.

“They don’t get paid, they’re volunteers,” Engel said. “They run (for the board) because they care about the community.”





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