

## Zaro's Bakery reopens in Parkchester

BY BOB GUILIANO

Zaro's Family Bakery reopened amid fanfare on Wednesday, November 22, in Parkchester, where it was located from June 1959 until it closed in 2015.

The ceremony was attended by Zaro family members, along with Borough President Ruben Diaz, Jr. and Senator Ruben Diaz, Sr.

"We had a short hiatus and we're now back and thrilled to be back in the Bronx," said owner Stuart Zaro during the grand reopening festivities.

"Parkchester has been part of our makeup forever," Zaro said. "We opened a little bit yesterday and mostly today. We're very proud to have the borough president and his father to join us today to celebrate with us."

"We are here to announce that Zaro's is back in Parkchester, and we're here with Stuart Zaro and the whole Zaro family," said Diaz Jr.

"When they departed from this place a couple of years ago, I have to tell you it was one of the most emotional days for Bronxites and for this immediate community," Diaz Jr. said.

Both Diazs expressed thanks that Zaro's is back in Parkchester, on time for Thanksgiving.

"We have so much to be thankful for," Diaz Jr. said. "We are thankful for our families, I'm thankful for my dad, I'm thankful for good health in our family, I'm thankful that the Bronx gave me another term to serve for four years."

Diaz Jr. also spoke about gains in the Bronx on economic development, job creation, new businesses, and also "making sure that those who have been with us for many, many decades still have a home here."

*Continued on Page 4*

# BRONXITES SOUND OFF ON STATUES

## Columbus opinions aired

BY SARAH VALENZUELA

The fourth of five public hearings about New York City statues and plaques occurred on Monday, November 27 in the Bronx Borough Hall Rotunda.

The Mayoral Advisory Commission on City Art, Monuments

and Markers listened to testimony from both Bronx residents and residents from outside the borough.

While topics like statues and plaques to the veterans of the Confederacy during the Civil War were heavily discussed, the

main topic of testimony centered about the status of the Christopher Columbus statue in Columbus Circle in Manhattan.

"How would we rate a monument for George Washington, who was a slave owner," remarked Assemblyman Michael Bennedetto.

"We must take things in context. Christopher Columbus for instance was a great man in what he did; venturing forth in his discovery. That's what the Columbus statue celebrates. It certainly does not condone or celebrate his

*Continued on Page 4*



## Sharing Thanksgiving Cheer In Morris Park

The Morris Park Kiwanis and Villa Maria Academy's Axel Project students shared Thanksgiving cheer with the Morris Park community on Saturday, November 18. Girl Scout Troop 2151 member Vanessa Giangregorio showed off all of the bags the volunteers put together.

Photo by Laura Stone

## Lehman College begins Performing Arts Center renovation

BY PATRICK ROCCHIO

Lehman College kicked off major renovations of its performing arts center amid fanfare.

The college, part of the City University of New York, held a ceremonial groundbreaking on Tuesday, November 28 to mark the start of a \$15.4 million renovation and addition to the Lehman Center for the Performing Arts.

Lehman Center is the borough's answer to Lincoln Center in Manhattan, a concert and performance hall with 2,310 seats that over the next 18 months will see a major overhaul.

The scope of the work includes construction that will add an ad-

*Continued on Page 15*

# Boston Road project promises affordable/supportive housing

BY PATRICK ROCCHIO

A new building proposed by a social service agency promises to bring needed affordable housing units to the borough.

Social service provider Comunilife is planning to build on the success of its El Rio I housing development in West Farms by building a similar structure next door that mixes supportive housing for people with special needs and low income housing at 2064 Boston Road.

The new building, called El Rio II, will include 78-units in total, including 47 units of supportive housing and 31 units of low-income housing for people earning less than 60 percent of the Area Median Income, according to a Community Board 6 letter.

In the New York City Region, 60 percent of AMI in 2017 is \$40,080 for one person, according to the NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development's website.

El Rio II is expected to be 46,500 square feet and be completed in 2020, according to Comunilife officials.

All of the units will be studio apartments.

According to NYC Department of Buildings filings, the construction includes six stories, including living space, and a lounge, laundry room, and computer lab on the first floor.

"We are committed to creating afford-

able housing because of the great need that we have in the community for low-income housing," said Rosa Gil, president of Comunilife, adding "The issue of affordable housing in New York City is getting greater and greater."

The project would also create temporary and permanent jobs for community members, she said.

Currently, there is a structure at the site, built in 1902, and given its historical nature, elements from the original building will be retained for a museum-type display in the new building, said Ellen Kackman, Comunilife vice-president.

The current structure was a nursing home for elderly women and a place for unwed mothers and orphanage in days of yore.

Gil drew a parallel between the building's first uses and the planned uses for the new building, which in its supportive housing seeks to serve a group of people that are not always welcome in every community.

More recently, the existing building served as office space for Comunilife and office and programming space for the Bronx River Arts Center through June.

CB 6 greenlighted the project in 2015, and the board expressed its continued support in a letter dated Wednesday, November 29.

"Having witnessed Comunilife success-



The El Rio I (r) will be joined by a sister building El Rio II, at 2064 Boston Road, when the present structure is razed.  
Community News Group / Patrick Rocchio

fully develop, tenant and maintain a similar housing project in our community, the community board members have the utmost confidence Comunilife will continue to achieve equal success with El Rio II," stated the CB 6 letter.

According to the CB 6 letter, the special needs people that will be served in 47 supportive housing units at the El Rio II are "individuals living with HIV and AIDS."

Councilman Ritchie Torres is supportive of the plan.

"The 2064 Boston Road site has served the West Farms community for many years in various forms: as senior housing, a community center and a church," said Torres. "Now, Comunilife is choosing to bring the site back to its original use, as quality affordable and supportive housing, which I support."

According to Comunilife, funding for the \$24.5 million project is being provided by private equity and NYS Homes and Community Renewal.

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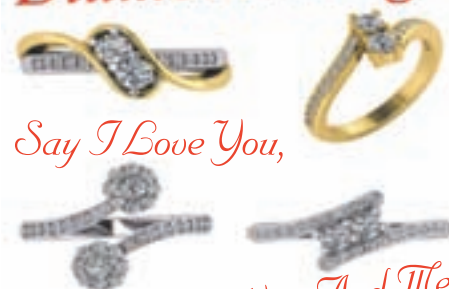
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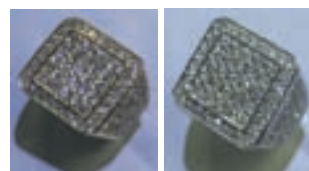


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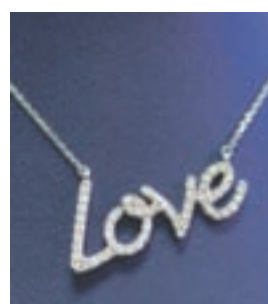
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# Bronxites sound off on statues; Columbus opinions aired



Several members of the Mayoral Commission of City Art, Monuments and Markers: (l-r) Audra Simpson, Harriet F. Senie, John Calvelli and Tom Finkelpearl. Community News Group/Sarah Valenzuela

from Page 1

treatment of Native Americans."

"In 1892...the statue was less an homage to a single man than a symbol of pride and a focus for Italian-American immigrants to celebrate their heritage as well as to show the patriotic minds for the United States of America," said Joanne Rubino, a Bronx resident and member of the Forum of Italian American Educators. "This commission has served to alienate many Italian-Americans. Many feel it is an attempt to discredit Italian-Americans, to rewrite history to suit modern day political agendas."

Some of the speakers were concerned that by removing the statue, the renaming of other Columbus-related markers would happen, as well, while others claimed removing the statues would be denying our history.

"I think the problem we currently face as a society regarding these monuments is that we are confusing two different issues," said Shannon Dingle, who has lived in the Bronx for 17 years. "If we take down

Columbus, where does it end? Do we rename Columbus Circle, Washington D.C., Columbus, Ohio?"

"There are certainly issues in our history that we have to deal with, but I feel that we do the opposite by hiding these things (removing the statues)," said another Bronxite and attorney, Sergio Villaverde.

Many who testified at the hearing shared the same sympathy while speaking in favor of the statue.

Others spoke against the statue because they claimed Columbus' discovery of the Americas was false and his actions were not representative of Italian people.

"Claims that Columbus discovered America aren't true as millions of people, my ancestors, already flourished here," said a member of the Onondaga Nation also present at the hearing. "Keeping the monuments of him up is a continued act of erasure to ensure that Americans will never be educated on our harsh, shared history."

Arnold Arnez, a member of the Quechua people,

an indigenous population from South America, insisted the Columbus statue be removed. In its place should stand a statue of the Lenape people, the native population who lived in modern-day New York City.

"What is a statue? It is not just what is past, but what is history lived out now," said Arnez. "Columbus can not truly represent Italy's rich history with his violent character."

Community members suggested that additional text be added at the statue's base to explain the history of Christopher Columbus and the Native Americans he encountered.

During the meeting, Rubino also presented a petition with over 1,000 signatures from Senator Jeff Klein to the city's commission.

The petition included signatures from many Italian-American groups, as well as the signatures of Senator Klein and Assemblyman Mark Gjonaj.

The mayor's advisory committee conducted its final public hearing in Staten Island on Tuesday, November 28..



Borough President Diaz, Jr. (l) and Senator Diaz, Sr. (r) presented Stuart Zaro a hefty ceremonial check.

Photo by Edwin Soto

## Zaro's Family Bakery reopens in Parkchester amid fanfare

from Page 1

Michael Zaro announced that when customers came to Zaro's on its grand reopening the day before Thanksgiving, that 25 percent of the proceeds would be going to Puerto Rico relief efforts.

To commemorate the event, the Zaro family pledged to aid ongoing humanitarian efforts in Puerto Rico following the devastation caused by Hurricane Maria earlier this fall.

Zaro's new storefront, at 1309 Metropolitan Avenue, "has an indoor/outdoor feel

provided by new glass doors opening on the side," said Josh Birns, leasing director for the landlord, Olshan Properties, in a news release.

Birns added that the site is "just two spaces down from the original location, still steps from the (#6 Parkchester station). We're confident this will be another home run location for them."

Zaros previous location was on Hugh Grant Circle from 1959 to 2015. A Boston Market franchise leased its former space.

It originally opened in

1927 in the Bronx on the Edward L. Grant Highway.

It has six other locations in New York City and one in New Jersey.

"We're thrilled to be back in the old neighborhood and to see so many warm and familiar faces again," said Brian Zaro, executive vice president of Zaro's Family Bakery, in the release. "As we heat up the ovens once more, we do so (Wednesday) in aid of our friends and family in Puerto Rico who are dear to so many of our valued customers in Parkchester and throughout the city."



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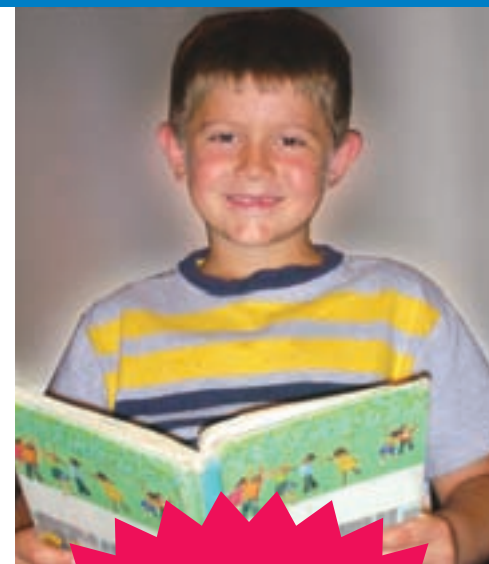
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# SPECIAL OLYMPICS NY HOSTS BRONX ZOO POLAR PLUNGE

Over 100 hardy, brave souls were 'freezing for a reason' at the Special Olympics New York's inaugural Polar Plunge on Sunday, November 19 at the Bronx Zoo's Grizzly Corner. The event raised funds for the 41,000 athletes of Special Olympics New York-NYC Region.



(l-r) Alison Hoffman, Julia Hoffman, Ava Milberg and Chiara Schumpf represented the Riverdale Country School at this year's polar plunge. Photo by Laura Stone



Alyssa (l) and Emily from Special Olympics Club at Fordham took the plunge.  
Photo by Laura Stone



Members of #teamBurson were ready to battle the bitter cold.  
Photo by Laura Stone



Jason Teitler (l), Burson-Marsteller Consumer and Brand Marketing managing director and Fan Experience chairman, chilled with polar bear Mike Fernandez, Burson-Marsteller U.S. CEO.  
Photo by Laura Stone



Polar bears Yuri (l) and Mike Fernandez welcomed everyone at the winter celebration.  
Photo by Laura Stone



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Charles J. Crimi Road, alongside Pelham Bay Park, is the planned location for the bus stop. The area is currently used as an MTA bus layover site.

Community News Group/Sarah Valenzuela

## Local bus access to Boston, MA can dramatically cut travel time

BY SARAH VALENZUELA

Buckle up Bronxites, you may soon be able to conveniently snag a bus ride all the way to Boston.

A bus line company called Catch-A-Ride is planning a route that will run through Brooklyn and the Bronx, to Boston, MA.

The idea for the bus route was conceived by Ryan Maldonado, the founder and owner of Catch-A-Ride, when he realized there were little to no options for intercity public transit in the outer boroughs.

"We have five boroughs...other options should exist," Maldonado said. "I saw the need and I just figured, why not fill that need."

The route follows the growing trend of other major transit lines that are establishing stations outside of city centers.

He explained the time-saving practicality of his transit plan for Boston-bound travellers: "(Imagine) you're leaving the Bronx to go one hour, two hours in the wrong direction on a train (to Penn Station). Then an hour later (the train you're on) is passing through the Bronx (again), on your way to Boston, when you could've been passed Hartford already."

The main difficulty

the community board perceived with this stop was whether it would worsen the congestion in the area.

There was some concern that the bus users would drive their cars to the area and then park their cars there for days or wait in a parked vehicle at the bus stop for the bus to arrive.

"The city can't stop interstate commerce, which is what this might be," remarked Matthew Cruz, the district manager of Community Board 10. "If this issue were to pose a problem and we find the operator is not adhering to some of the regulations, we of course will revisit this."

The company assured the community board that its riders are not likely to park in the area because most intercity bus users depend on public transportation to get to their pickup locations.

"We reiterated to them our first concern is the residents. We want to make sure no one is parking in our communities," Cruz continued.

The bus stop is expected to be located next to Pelham Bay Park along Charles J. Crimi Place. The area is home to many other bus stops and is located across from the #6

IRT Pelham Bay Park train station.

"We purposely picked a location that was a major transportation hub," Maldonado continued. "Obviously there are always going to be people who are going to be driven in, but we don't expect them to be the majority of our riders."

Catch-A-Ride does not have a firm launch date, though Maldonado hoped he would have the financing in place to be fully established and running sometime in 2018.

Through 2017, the company worked with MBT Worldwide of Tewksbury, MA and ran a few bus trips during the peak holiday travel period.

This trial service drew about 1,200 riders.

Additional trial service will be available during Christmas and New Years.

Tickets, as well as additional information about these schedules can be found on their website [catcharidebus.com](http://catcharidebus.com)

The company said it plans to offer complimentary water, wifi and electrical outlets.

The company also promised to make restroom stops along the route if the bus or van does not have a restroom on board.

# Monte to stop accepting UnitedHealthcare Medicare Advantage

BY SARAH VALENZUELA

If you have a Medicare Advantage plan with UnitedHealthcare, you may want to consider other options.

At least, that is what patients of the Montefiore Health System have been told.

As of December 31, 2017, Montefiore will no longer be able to accept United Medicare Advantage because UnitedHealthcare chose not to renew that contract with their organization.

"Once we became aware of this, we worked hard to alert our affected patients to make them aware of the situation," said Colleen M. Blye, executive vice president and chief financial officer of Montefiore Health System.

"Our patients are our top priority and it's important for them to know that Montefiore continues to accept most other national and regional Medicare Advantage plans."

Montefiore has been negotiating with UnitedHealthcare about renewing their commercial and Medicaid contracts, as well as their Institutional Special Needs Plan and Dual Special Needs Medicare Advantage Plans, according to Blye.

"We are taking active steps to make sure care to our Montefiore patients is



Colleen M. Blye, CFO and executive vice president of Montefiore Health System.

Photo courtesy of Montefiore Health System

not interrupted," Blye continued. "Montefiore's services may still be covered for United Medicare Advantage insured patients who have out-of-network benefits associated with their plans, and on an in-network basis after midnight on December 31, 2017, for certain patients engaged in an ongoing course of treatment."

Blye confirmed that both Montefiore and UnitedHealthcare have been focused on making sure members continue to have access to the care they need.

In addition, Senator Jeff

Klein has been working with Montefiore patients to make informed decisions about their health insurance options.

On Wednesday, November 15, Klein's office held a forum with representatives from nine other insurance providers for seniors during this transition between United and Montefiore.

The insurance providers included at this forum were Aetna, Affinity, Elderplan, Emblem Health, Empire Blue Cross Blue Shield, FidelisCare, Healthfirst, Silversneakers and WellCare.

Klein has continued to encourage others still affected by the change in coverage at Montefiore to contact his office.

"Should patients with United Medicare Advantage benefits choose to continue receiving in-network coverage for the high quality, continuity of care they expect from Montefiore, they can change plans during the annual election period which runs until December 7," Blye said.

For more information or for questions, patients can call the Montefiore customer service line at 855-226-3071 or the Medicare customer service line at 1-800-MEDICARE.



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Northeast Elite Rebels Football Club players, coaches, administrators and supporters.

Photo courtesy of Varahn Chamblee

## Northeast Elite Rebels, a second family for all

BY ROBERT WIRSING

A local football club is preparing its players for success on and off the field.

Ray Baxter, Northeast Elite Rebels head coach and offensive coordinator, reformed the Bronx Rebels, a youth football club, and transformed it into an adult football club.

He said it was a natural fit to bring the Elite back, formerly a college club team, but as a team for those who want to play on a disciplined team.

The Elite use football as a way to motivate college-age city men into advancing their education beyond high school.

"We also work off the field with players when we can, assisting with resume writing, obtaining job interviews or even mentorship," he said. "I've found myself talking to guys at two in the morning just because they needed someone to talk them down from a situation or needed advice."

The Rebels were formed in 1987 by five individuals who previously coached the Bronx Trojans, another youth group that played in the storied Buddy Young Football League in Harlem.

The team sported the Trojans' black and gold colors when they played at Williamsbridge Oval.

Over the years, the Reb-

els changed fields, coaches and their colors from maroon and gold to maroon and white.

From 2005 to 2011, the Rebels played at Evanders Childs High School in a partnership with the Take the Field program brokered by the New York Giants.

The team's motto and passion remains the same - Rebel Power - Rebel Pride - the power to overcome any challenge and take pride in the program and its players.

"We teach family, as once you are a Rebel you will always be a Rebel," explained Baxter.

Several Rebels have found success as scientists, accountants and family men.

Ari Nissim, Rebels player from 1993 to 1994, became a NY Jets director of Football Administration and is now a Roc Nation agent.

Baxter folded the program in 2011 and began coaching with Monroe College from 2012 to 2014, but left when his parents became ill.

Following his mother's passing in 2015, several young men who played for Baxter asked to restart the Rebels.

Baxter assembled a coaching staff and relaunched the program.

The Elite were once the original collegiate foot-

ball program in NYC and played against the University of Maine, University of Vermont and Eastern Connecticut University among others.

The team competes in the Triboro Football League against such teams as the Long Island Eagles, New York Crusaders and Brooklyn Bobcats.

Notable Elites include Collegiate Elite Team alumni offensive lineman Erol Brentou, defensive end Leroy Berbeck and defensive tackle Chris Whitaker; running backs Darryl Shuler; Trimmel Williams and Donnell Carter; receivers De Angelo Perry and Marcellus Smallwood; tight end/fullback David Miranda; strong safety Rashod McNulty; linebacker Kyle Justin and safety Jay Gomes.

Baxter would like to thank Charles Williams, defensive coordinator; Steve O'Bryant, offensive/defensive line coach; Shawn O'Connor, Special Teams-Strength and Conditioning trainer and Crystal Taylor, administrator for their help with the Elite.

Tryouts resume in late January.

For information, contact Baxter at (718) 450-0209 or rbj6265@gmail.com.

The Elite can be found on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/northeasteliterebels/](http://www.facebook.com/northeasteliterebels/).

## Holiday season events taking place around the borough

BY PATRICK ROCCHIO

The holiday season is being celebrated throughout the borough by many organizations.

From tree lightings in Throggs Neck and Westchester Square to toy giveaways and ongoing promotions at some 80 stores in the Fordham Road Business Improvement District, there will be a lot to do and experience in coming weeks.

In Throggs Neck, Assemblyman Michael Benedetto and the Throggs Neck Merchants Association are teaming up to bring the community its annual Christmas Tree Lighting and visit from Santa, who will be giving out toys, courtesy of the merchants, to the kids on Sunday, December 3 in an event beginning at 5 p.m. at Derosa O'Boyle Triangle.

After the tree is lit, Santa Claus is typically spirited to the location on a fire truck provided by Edgewater Park Volunteer Fire Department, and gives away gifts and takes pictures with the children.

Once again this year, the assemblyman said, the St. Benedict's Choir will entertain the children and their families.

"There is a rather festive atmosphere," said Benedetto. "It is a community affair bringing people together and everyone has warmth in his or her hearts."

"It is a great kickoff to the holiday season," said Bob Jaen, TNMA president, adding that the merchants will distribute over 1,000 toys.

Over on Fordham Road, Santa Claus is coming to town at Bryan Park on Friday, December 1 from 6 to

9 p.m. for the 13th Annual Sparkling in the Heart of Fordham kick-off event.

Toys will be distributed

an invitation to the December 1 event having access to the discounts.

The Westchester Square

**T**here is a rather festive atmosphere. It is a community affair bringing people together and everyone has warmth in his or her hearts.

**Assemblyman Michael Benedetto**

At the annual Throggs Neck Christmas Tree Lighting he hosts with the Throggs Neck Merchants Association



to the first 600 children, and there will be music, performances by Fordham University's Gloria Dei Choir and entertainer Rhina Valentin, along with raffles and prizes.

There will be a lighting of a 20-foot tree in the park as well.

"It is packed every year," said Daniel Bernstein, Fordham Road BID deputy director, speaking of the December 1st extravaganza. "Last year we had 3,500 people."

The event kicks off a promotion that includes discounts at 80 merchants from December 1 to Sunday, December 17, said Daniel Bernstein, Fordham Road BID deputy director.

Participating stores along the borough's largest shopping strip are offering ten percent discounts, with shoppers who bring a BID newspaper advertisement, a MetroCard, a printout from the BID's website or

Business Improvement District will be hosting 'old St. Nick' at Williamsbridge Road and East Tremont Avenue during their fifth annual Holidays in the Square event on Friday, December 8.

Lisa Sorin, WSBID executive director, said that this year's event will include not only Santa, who will be giving out toys to children while supplies last in Owen Dolen Park, but also yuletide carolers visiting stores and stilt walkers entertaining crowds.

The event will kick off at 5 p.m. that evening, she said, adding hot chocolate and cider will be served.

At the Throggs Neck Shopping Center, children will have the opportunity to have their pictures taken with Santa Claus on Saturday, December 8 and Sunday, December 9 and on Saturday, December 16 and Sunday, December 17 between 2 and 7 p.m.



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# Five-story, 10-unit building to replace PB house

BY SARAH VALENZUELA

A building proposed for Pelham Bay may be a foreshadowing of the neighborhood's future.

On Friday, November 17 an application was filed for the construction of a five-story building at 1730 Edison Avenue, a block primarily comprised of single- and two-family homes.

Though the full building plan is not known at this time, community residents are concerned the property may cause more congestion within the already densely populated area.

"This block is really homey and cozy and it's really family oriented so I don't know if bringing a building with five stories, how that would change the dynamics of the block," said 46-year-old Ernesto Llorente, who lives on the block.

The building would replace a modest 1920s two-story wood-frame house that currently occupies the site and, if implemented, would be the tallest structure on the block.



The property sits next to a 1-family home on the right as well as a smaller two-story multi-family building on the left.

Community News Group/Sarah Valenzuela

"I don't see how they're going to do that (build a 5-story building)," the property's next door neighbor remarked. "I still don't see how they're going to build a five-story apartment build-

ing between (those) two houses."

Even though the parcel is several hundred feet from Westchester Avenue and the #6 IRT Buhre Avenue train station, Pelham Bay resi-

dents are concerned about the impact it will have on the already scarce street parking situation.

Other local developers have built on Buhre Avenue and Middletown Road recently without providing off street parking for the new tenants.

The assumption has been that people who live close to train lines do not own vehicles and mostly rely on public transportation and cabs.

"For Pelham Bay, the zoning that we have already in place is not really working for the needs of the community," said Michele Torrioni, who has lived in the community her entire life and now at 50-years-old, she is the president of the Pelham Bay Taxpayers Association.

"The first thing people

talk about when you go to any civic meeting is there's nowhere to park a car. When are we going to start down-zoning our area?" she concluded.

District manager Matthew Cruz of Community Board 10 said he received notification of the building application from a NYC Department of Buildings email on Monday, November 20.

"This is another property Pelham Bay will see that doesn't fit the character of the current community," Cruz said. "Over the long term, if this is the way the (housing) market is moving, we look forward to working with our new council member to ensure that we can protect the character of Pelham Bay."

A community facility

is proposed for the ground floor in the application for the project, according to public data retrieved from DOB.

Floors 2 through 5. will have two apartments each. There was no mention of on-site parking.

When the Bronx Times Reporter contacted Kurv Architecture, the company designing the building, he did not offer any further details.

DOB is still reviewing the application.

The new owners of the property have also chosen not to comment as the project is still in the planning phase, according to the architect.

An application to demolish the current structure has not been filed yet.



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# Annual 49th Precinct Holiday Food Drive kicks off

BY PATRICK ROCCHIO

An annual tradition that's been feeding the needy for 13 years is back this holiday season.

The 49th Precinct Holiday Food Drive is now underway, with the precinct urging all community members to drop off non-perishable items and canned food at their station at 2121 Eastchester Road from now until Wednesday, December 20.

The following day, the food will be collected, brought together with items collected at area schools and by local organizations, and taken by cops and volunteers to the Bronx Jewish Community Council's food pantry in Pelham Parkway.

Additional food will be sent to St. Lucy's Church, which has a small pantry on Bronxwood Avenue.

All the food collected will stay in the 49th Precinct and Community Board 11 service area, said the drive's coordinator, Joe Thompson, 49th Precinct Community Council president.

"I would like to see people come to the precinct and drop food off," said Thompson, adding "A couple of cans of beans are not going to make that much difference to one family, but put it together with all the other donations and we can feed needy families in our community."

Thompson said that he expects 17,000 pounds to be

collected this year, adding that the need continues to grow every year.

He said that there are many toy drives before Christmas, but not many food drives after Thanksgiving.

"We have to realize that the same people who are hungry at Thanksgiving are hungry at Christmas," he said, adding "It is great when a family can sit down to a nice Christmas Eve dinner."

Community Affairs cops detective Jay Sturdivant and police officer David Lepore urged the public to stop by the station to drop off non-perishable food.

"Assisting with this annual food drive always gives me great pleasure to

know that some families in need will be able to have a decent meal," said Sturdivant.

Lepore said that the precinct is looking forward to another successful food drive for the 2017 holiday season.

"Each year the amount of food collected grows as does the participation from the community as a whole," said Lepore. "We hope to again collect even more food this year and have already been contacted by local schools whose students are eager to help the precinct on the day of the collection."

Thompson said that schools and organizations participating in the drive are P.S. 83, P.S. 108, P.S.

105, Van Nest Academy, the Councilwoman Madeline Provenzano Educational Campus and Cub Scout Pack #162.

Typically, in the case of the schools, each classroom collects food for two to three weeks and then it's brought to the food pantry by volunteers and police officers.

Cub Scout Pack #162 has spent an afternoon during the drive outside of Big Deal Supermarket collecting food from customers in previous years.

Additionally, Thompson said that in previous years local businesses like Maestro's, F&J Pine and Kings Harbor as well as some individuals have donated turkeys to the precinct's



"I would like to see people come to the precinct and drop food off." - Joe Thompson, 49th Precinct Community Council president on the precinct's annual food drive for its community.

drive.

"They are part of our close knit little family," said Thompson of the turkey donors.

All donated turkeys are given to local senior centers for distribution to the elderly, he said.

# Mall At Bay Plaza Welcomes The Holiday Season

Bronxites' spirits were merry and bright for this year's holiday season. The holiday season opened in the Bronx with a marching band, the lighting of a 25-foot Christmas tree and a visit from Jolly Old St. Nick at the Mall at Bay Plaza's inaugural Tree Lighting Ceremony on Friday, November 17.



1) Councilman King (l) and Brian Melford, City Council special assistant, celebrated the beginning of the holiday season.

2) King (l) and Maranda Ashkar, Mall at Bay Plaza director of mall management and marketing, lit the massive Christmas tree.

3) Pete Nagasar, assistant director of security at Bay Plaza, wished everyone a happy holiday.

4) King had a holly jolly time celebrating the holidays with residents.

5) (l-r) Councilman King, Mrs. Claus, Santa Claus and Senator Jamaal Bailey wished Bronxites of all ages a happy holiday season.

6) The Mall at Bay Plaza's Inaugural Tree Lighting Ceremony begins.



6

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## FIRE AT SAM'S SHOE SERVICE AND REPAIR



Firefighters responded to a 1-alarm fire at Sam's Shoe Service and Repair on 2143 Cruger Avenue on Friday, November 24 at 11:45 a.m. No injuries were reported in this ongoing investigation.

Photo by Edwin Soto

## FIRE AT SAM'S SHOE SERVICE AND REPAIR



Four St. Catharine Academy students are recovering after a science experiment went wrong. School president Sr. Patricia Wolf said a teacher was performing a demonstration in chemistry lab using a flame and alcohol during first period on Wednesday, November 28 at 8:45 a.m. when the flame grew bigger than expected and singed four students' faces like a sunburn. The sophomores were taken to Jacobi Medical Center with minor burns and at least one student suffered respiratory injuries. They are expected to make a full recovery. A hazmat crew responded to the scene and determined there was no contamination and danger to other students. The victims' families were immediately notified and all other families received a text alert within a hour of the incident. The school remained opened and classes resumed during fourth period. School officials said the teacher involved has been with the school for three years, has a lot of experience in the chemistry lab and is distraught over the accident.

Photo by Edwin Soto

## Lehman College Begins Performing Arts Center Renovation

from Page 1

ditional 5,600 square feet of space that includes a box office encased in a glass façade, as well as new rest rooms and administrative offices.

The renovations also include modifications to the existing lobby, as well as bringing the 37-year-old building up to Americans with Disability Act standards.

Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr., a Lehman College graduate who allocated \$850,000 to the project, said at the ceremonial groundbreaking that he was thankful for the affordable education that he received at the college and said that the work that Lehman does is important in spreading the word about the borough.

"When you look at arts – music, song and dance – that is part of the DNA as who we are as the 'Boogie Down Bronx,'" said Diaz in his remarks. "To be able to fund this is the easy part

because you are an institution that is an ambassador that everything that we represent as a borough."

The borough president said that Lehman Center for the Performing Arts provides an affordable amenity to Bronxites and to people from beyond the borough's borders.

He added that the center is able to highlight a myriad of music including hip-hop, salsa, doo-wop and choral music.

Eva Bornstein, Lehman Center executive director, said the renovations, which she hopes will also include new seating, would make the concert-going experience even more memorable.

"We want to enhance their experience while going to the concerts," said Bornstein of concertgoers. "A performing arts center is a gathering of a community, so you want to make it as pleasant and memorable for them as you possibly can."



(l-r) Judith Bergtraum, CUNY vice chancellor for facilities planning, construction and management; Eva Bornstein, Lehman Center for the Performing Arts executive director; James Milliken, CUNY chancellor; José Luis Cruz, Lehman College president; Borough President Ruben Diaz, Jr; Assemblyman José Rivera; Assemblyman Jeff Dinowitz and Councilman Andrew Cohen raise a shovel during the ceremonial groundbreaking.

Photo courtesy of Lehman Studios

José Luis Cruz, Lehman College's president, said that first and foremost, one goal is to make the building more accessible in terms of ADA compliance.

The new enhanced space should include a more welcoming lobby that can better accommodate intermission crowds, said Cruz, adding that 150,000

people use the center every year.

"For years the space has served as a venue for some of the world's best known performing artists," said Cruz. "I am thrilled that one of the borough's greatest treasures will undergo this important makeover and thank all who have provided funding for this project."

A mixture of sources including the governor's and borough president's offices, and the Bronx Delegation of the NYC City Council and NYS legislature provided funding.

Elected officials attending the ceremony included Diaz, Assemblyman Jeff Dinowitz, Assemblyman José Rivera and Councilman Andrew Cohen.

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# TOP DRIVER DISTRACTIONS

## Using mobile phones

Leading the list of the top distractions behind the wheel are mobile phones. Phones now do more than just place calls, and drivers often cannot pull away from their phones, even when driving. According to the California Department of Motor Vehicles, studies have shown that driving performance is lowered and the level of distraction is higher for drivers who are heavily engaged in cell

phone conversations. The use of a hands-free device does not lower distraction levels. The percentage of vehicle crashes and near-crashes attributed to dialing is nearly identical to the number associated with talking or listening.

## Daydreaming

Many people will admit to daydreaming behind the wheel or looking at a person or object outside of the car for too long. Per-

haps they're checking out a house in a new neighborhood or thought they saw someone they knew on the street corner. It can be easy to veer into the direction your eyes are focused, causing an accident. In addition to trying to stay focused on the road, some drivers prefer the help of lane departure warning systems.

## Eating

Those who haven't quite mastered walking and

chewing gum at the same time may want to avoid eating while driving. The majority of foods require a person's hands to be taken off of the wheel and their eyes to be diverted from the road. Reaching in the back seat to share some French fries with the kids is also distracting.

Try to eat meals before getting in the car. For those who must snack while en route, take a moment to pull over at

a rest area and spend 10 minutes snacking there before resuming the trip.

## Reading

Glancing at an advertisement, updating a Facebook status or reading a book are all activities that should be avoided when driving. Even pouring over a traffic map or consulting the digital display of a GPS system can be distracting.

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