

Gjonaj holds inaugural ceremony

BY PATRICK ROCCHIO

In a festive ceremony, the new councilman for its 13th District was inaugurated in an auditorium packed with family, friends and well wishers.

Councilman Mark Gjonaj, the city's first Albanian-American council member, had a community swearing-in ceremony at the Herbert H. Lehman Educational Campus on Sunday, January 21, with an array of community leaders and guest speakers.

These included international representatives from Albania, Montenegro and Kosovo who attended and offered messages of congratulations from their heads of state.

Gjonaj was sworn in earlier at a council function on Wednesday, January 3.

At Lehman, NY Civil Court Judge Llinet Rosado administered the oath, with his wife Roberta and two sons by his side.

The gala event gave the councilman a chance to address his constituents after his election and talk about some priorities in a speech immediately following the inauguration.

"God has been good to me and my family, this country has given me so much," said Gjonaj, adding public service has been a humbling and rewarding experience.

The councilman, a successful real estate broker, who was elected to the assembly in 2012 in the 80th District, pledged to stand up and address issues including the rising cost of living, opioid crisis, and virtual transportation 'deserts.'

"These and other challenges are real and serious. They require that we work together to meet them head on, but meet them

Continued on Page 4

BARTOW ANIMAL SHELTER ALL SET

Facility to open 2024 on Bartow Avenue

BY PATRICK ROCCHIO

The borough, which has been without a full-service animal shelter for years, will finally have a place for strays.

An announcement came on Tuesday, January 23 that Mayor

de Blasio's office, NYC Department of Health, several other city agencies and Animal Care Control Centers of NYC are proposing a new \$27.3 million animal shelter for a location on Bartow Avenue, across from Co-op City.

The proposed facility, which must go through the city's Uniform Land Use Review Procedure, including a local review of the plan before construction, will be located at a city-owned parcel at 2050 Bartow Avenue, presently

occupied by NYPD trailers.

It is slated to have 47,000 square feet and projected to open in 2024, with adoption, shelter facilities and veterinary services.

The facility would have space
Continued on Page 4



Lehman College & Mexico Agreement

Lehman College and eight of Mexico's top public universities signed an agreement to strengthen cooperation and promote mutual understanding on Thursday, January 18. Dr. Ygnacio Martinez-Laguna (l), Dr. Maria Regina Martinez Cases and Dr. Sergio Valdes Pasaron toasted to the historic occasion.

Photo by Miriam Quin

Bronx men arrested for Times Square hit and run

BY ROBERT WIRSING

Police have slammed the brakes on two Bronx men whose joyride through the Crossroads of the World left a police officer injured.

The NYPD's Regional Fugitive Task Force arrested Arfhy Santos, 20, of 3794 Valentine Avenue, and William Lopez, 24, of 1387 Jesup Avenue, on Wednesday, January 17 at 4 p.m. in Harlem for their alleged connection with an assault on a police officer on Saturday, January 13 at 11:40 p.m. in Times Square.

According to police, Midtown South Precinct police officer Ian Wallace was on foot Saturday when he tried to stop a black 2012

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Braven owners adjusting the adapter loaned to them by the Bronx Brewery.

Photo courtesy of Braven Brewing Company

Bronx Brewery comes to the aid of fellow NYC brewers

BY SARAH VALENZUELA

When a Brooklyn brewery learned that its contract brewer was closing, there was no time to 'cry in their beer', because the Bronx came to the rescue.

On Wednesday, January 10, around 5 p.m. the Old Saratoga Brewing Company informed Braven Brewing Company that it would be ceasing operations, and that the Brooklyn-based company had only 72 hours to remove nearly 12,000 gallons of stored beer and packaging materials.

Braven, which had a contract with Old Saratoga, had to act fast. It reached out to the New York City Brewers Guild, which led them to Bronx Brewery.

When the brewery sent out e-mails to fellow brewers in the region for help in getting its stock out of the plant, at least a dozen offered help within the first ten minutes, said Marshall Thompson, of Braven.

Eric Feldman and Thompson, the co-founders of Braven, had known the founders of the Bronx Brewery, Damian Brown and Chris Gallant, professionally for a number of years.

Eric remembered meeting Damian before the Bronx Brewery produced

its first can of suds.

Braven owners explained to the Bronx brewers that they needed a tanker to move its inventory from Saratoga to a new brewery.

Their established friendship paved the way for the transfer to flow smoothly, said Eric.

By Thursday, January 11, the Bronx Brewery was able to provide the advice and expertise Braven needed to tanker its beer from Old Saratoga to Ipswich Ale Brewery in Massachusetts.

"It's not like this was some massive grandiose gesture," said Brown. "I think we could have easily have said 'No, sorry' because we wanted a leg up and they're a competitor, but we felt it was the right thing to do."

Damian had learned the process of tankering beer when the Bronx Brewery moved its production line from the Smaltz Brewing Company in Clifton Park, NY.

"From our standpoint it was just an understanding that this is a complex business and people have production sometimes scattered at one or more breweries that is out of their control," said Brown.

When the Bronx Brewery needed tankering services they forged a solid relationship with the Stolt-Nielsen Transportation Group, a firm they recommended to Eric and Marshall.

"There were a lot of challenges we had to face for this to go right, a lot of things for this to happen correctly," said Thompson.

After hiring the company, they learned they needed a specific adapter so the hose from the fermenting vessel could connect to the tanker truck, according to the Braven founders.

Luckily, the Bronx Brewery had those parts to spare as well.

"The hose we had would not connect. We would have had beer flowing all over the parking lot," said Feldman.

"I'm sure it was no big deal for [Bronx Brewery] but we wouldn't have been able to do all of the rest of it if it weren't for that piece. Something that may be minor to you, a small favor, can mean the world to someone else. That's really what it meant for us."

Saratoga Brewing Company's sudden closure occurred when its parent company ran into severe financial trouble.

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Animal shelter planned; facility to open in 2024 on Bartow Ave.

from Page 1

for up to 140 cats, 70 dogs, 30 rabbits and 20 other types of animals, and will also include ACC's administrative offices for the borough, according to those who attended the announcement in Manhattan.

The borough's animal advocate community greeted the news with euphoria, while some elected officials cautioned the need to gather community feedback to the proposal.

Dotti Poggi, a member of the Bronx Animal Shelter Endeavor, said she and others have been advocating for a borough animal shelter for 20 years and that she was thrilled.

"When we look at it in terms of our advocacy, we feel that this is way overdue," said Poggi.

Currently, she said, in the borough there is only a pet intake center in Fordham that does not have any veterinary services and can only house animals until they are transported to shelters operated by ACC in Staten Island, Brooklyn or Manhattan.

If an animal is sick or dying, the intake center takes no action, she said.

"This new shelter closes the gap in terms of the Bronx being underserved," said Donna DeChiaro, a BASE member.

A shelter can be a safe place to bring lost animals so that they stay close to home and be reunited with their owners, have veterinarians that can administer medication and give local community members a place to surrender their animals.

Additionally, the facility will have a 68-car parking lot, said Donna DeChiaro, a BASE member, a potentially useful attribute.

The parking lot could possibly be used for community based programs that operate out of vehicles, including programs where low-income pet owners can get free pet food and private spay neuter van can offer services, said Poggi.

"We are very happy to get the shelter and we want to form a citizens advisory board (when it opens)," said DeChiaro.

Bernadette Ferrara, an animal advocate in the east Bronx, said that the shelter is definitely needed, and could be "filled in a week."

She hopes it will be an

informational hub for pet owners and offer resources for animal rescuers like herself.

DeChiaro said that the city expects the ULURP process to be completed by the end of 2018.

According to Community Board 10, no official paperwork has been received as of press time.

A spokesman from the borough president's office said the borough's chief executive looks forward to working with the community during the ULURP process.

Not all are happy or supportive of the animal shelter plan in Co-op City.

The president of Co-op City's Riverbay Corporation's board, Linda Berk, expressed indifference to the proposal because the development is predominantly a dog-free community.

She stated that many Riverbay board members are not happy about the shelter coming to Bartow Avenue.

"We have proposed for years the use of the space as a community center," she said.

She added that if the animal shelter is built, Co-op City will have lost a valuable asset to meet community needs.

Councilman Andy King also noted in a statement that the Co-op City development does not allow animals, except for medical reasons.

"This brings about a lot of concerns among residents," said King. "This proposal needs to be brought before the community for full support and discussion on what's best for the neighborhood."

Gjonaj holds inaugural ceremony

from Page 1

we will," said Gjonaj to the crowd. "It starts with making sure the Bronx gets its fair share."

Gjonaj said he wanted to work for "common sense solutions" to ease traffic and make commutes easier for Bronxites, saying it is often easier for someone in Newark, NJ to commute to Wall Street than for his constituents to make the same commute.

He proposed expanding ferry service into the 13th District, putting a two percent cap on real estate tax increases and curbing "out of control" water and sewer rates.

The councilman's remark about investing to meet the needs of transit-starved communities at a time when investments are being made in a rail system linking Brooklyn and Queens and elsewhere, drew applause, as did his commitment to affordable housing.

In a strong articulation of the what the councilman termed an 'opioid crisis,' Gjonaj said that in the borough overdoses now claim more lives than car accidents, suicides and gun violence combined.

"We can no longer afford to be quiet in the face of this crisis. It is an epidemic that is hitting all of us, regardless of your background, your education, your success in life," Gjonaj said.

He proposed increasing investment in treatment programs and a crackdown on those selling illegal drugs, as well as supporting drug prevention programs.

He also informed the crowd that he's been appointed chairman of the council's Committee on Small Business.

The councilman concluded by saying he believes he can make sure that we



Councilman Mark Gjonaj addressed the auditorium after his community inaugural on Sunday, January 21, speaking about concerns including small business, opioid addiction, transportation deserts and rising cost of living.

Photo by Laura Stone

leave behind a better Bronx and city for future generations.

An array of speakers, including several elected officials spoke of the councilman's previous accomplishments in the NYS Assembly and spoke of a strong work ethic during the inauguration's program.

Senator Jeff Klein said that he worked harder on Gjonaj's recent campaign for the Council then on any other, except maybe his own.

Klein said that Gjonaj's immigrant roots are something that we should be proud of, and that the councilman is someone who will get up each morning and fight for the residents of the 13th District.

Public Advocate Letitia James said that Gjonaj had shown his commitment to listening to women's issues and to tenants needing assistance, citing specific instances of his capacity to listen to their concerns.

Assemblyman Marcos Crespo, county leader for the Bronx Democratic party, said that during the campaign Gjonaj won a "dignified victory," and that he was someone who had the ability to represent his constituents while working with others who may hold different views.

"He is always moving and always doing, trying to find something that is going to help his constituents," said Assemblyman Michael Benedetto of Gjonaj's work in public life.

Benedetto added: "We are used to having exemplary representation...and Mark is going to continue that tradition."

Crespo added that Gjonaj was a successful businessman prior to entering public service, who didn't need to take on "the headaches of public life."

During the ceremony, a color guard presented colors from NYPD Post 1824 and Post 2436.

Students from Renaissance High School led the crowd in the Pledge of Allegiance and sang the National Anthem, and Jessica Raja sang the Albanian National Anthem.

More than a dozen young people from the Rozafati Dance Group performed traditional Albanian folk dancing for the crowd.

Among the dignitaries wishing the new councilman well were Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie, Deputy Borough President Marricka Scott-McFadden, Councilman Andy King, Assemblyman Luis Sepulveda, former Borough President Adolfo Carrion, Councilwoman Vanessa Gibson, Councilman Andrew Cohen, former Assemblyman Steve Kaufman, and Assemblyman Jeff Dinowitz.



Bronx Animal Shelter Endeavor members including (l-r) Marion Koenig, Donna DeChiaro and Dorothea Poggi celebrate outside the Bartow Avenue site on the day of the announcement, Tuesday, January 23. Photo courtesy of Dotti Poggi



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Arthur Ave., Westchester Sq. part of 'Six to Celebrate'

BY PATRICK ROCCHIO

The historical significance of two Bronx communities is being celebrated.

The Historic Districts Council named Arthur Avenue and Westchester Square as part of the Six to Celebrate 2018, an annual citywide list of historical preservation priorities for classic communities.

HDC honored the two communities by making them a part of the program after the business improvement districts in their respective areas, the Belmont BID and Westchester Square BID, applied for the distinction, said Kelly Carroll, HDC's director of advocacy and community outreach.

HDC will create brochures about the historical attributes of the communities and host two walking tours featuring points of interest, she said.

Communities for Six to Celebrate are selected on the basis of geographic diversity and the quality of the goals of the applicants, said Carroll, adding that having BIDs or some other coalition back the campaigns often mean they have a greater chance of success.

"Both were excellent candidates in terms of their histories of the



Arthur Avenue is being recognized by the Historic Districts Council 2018 Six to Celebrate.

Community News Group / Sarah Valenzuela

areas and their architecture," said Carroll of Westchester Square and Arthur Avenue.

In the Westchester Square's application, some of the goals of the BID's campaign are to bring consciousness of historical buildings that are currently in the background to the forefront and create more signage so that the ordinary passerby will have a greater understanding of the role the area played in the Revolutionary War.

Lisa Sorin, Westchester Square

BID executive director, said that the square was the scene of the Battle of Westchester Creek during the American Revolution, and also has the Huntington Free Library, St. Peter's Church, as well as a war memorial, former courthouse building, Owen Dolen Park and the site of the historical Ferris Mansion.

"This is about showcasing the history of Westchester Square which we are really excited about," said Sorin, adding that the BID has been looking to make the Square a destination for its historical roots for two years, and that this designation bolsters that effort.

"With this designation we are on the map as a historical place," said Sorin.

She added that being a part of Six to Celebrate 2018 indicates that there is enough of an historical story in the Square to rank it a truly historical place.

With Arthur Avenue, the BID's goals which HDC will assist with are creating an oral history project, developing a standardized tour highlighting the area's history and helping BID utilize zoning to maintain historical signage, said Carroll.

Frank Franz, Belmont BID executive committee member and trea-



The Huntington Free Library is a part of the historical flair of Westchester Square that is recognized in its being part of the Six to Celebrate 2018.

Community News Group / Patrick Rocchio

surer, said that the BID would like to develop its own tour to counter misinformation often disseminated by tour bus directors that come to the community.

"(HDC) is going to help us develop a tour and do a couple of

tours," said Franz, adding that they hope to develop a program that has tours of Arthur Avenue with docents.

To learn more about the Six to Celebrate 2018, visit <http://hdc.org/program-events/six-to-celebrate>.

CCCA gets state to end pushy real estate tactics

BY PATRICK ROCCHIO

Residents of an east Bronx community who are tired of pushy real estate tactics can now register for relief.

The Country Club Civic Association is urging homeowners in its community and part of Spencer Estate to visit the NYS Department of State website or call the agency to request a form if they no longer wish to receive real estate solicitations.

Bruckner Boulevard, Griswold and Layton avenues and Eastchester Bay, a DOS spokeswoman and Michael McNerney, Country Club Civic Association president said, incorporate the zone, and homeowners living within have been eligible to enroll since October of last year.

Enforcement began on Monday, January 1, said McNerney.

The DOS spokeswoman stated in an e-mail that as of last week the "department has not yet received any con-

sumer complaints or issued any fines."

McNerney is urging all to sign up for the protection from "repeated and intense solicitations" to sell their property after the CCCA fought vigorously to collect evidence of mail and phone assaults and testified at public hearings.

"This is the time for us to start educating people to let them know that we have this cease and desist order in play and that its imperative for them to sign up," said McNerney, adding "The Country Club Civic Association worked extremely hard over the past few years to get this back in our community."

Many homeowners wrongly assume that they are already covered and enrolled from previous sign-ups, he said.

He said it is also important to get the word out to local real estate agencies that the order is in effect for five years, and they could be sub-

jecting themselves to hefty fines if they solicit a registered homeowner.

"Obviously (the real estate industry) did not want to see this happen, but ultimately we were victorious," said the civic leader, who said as more people sign up he expects an abatement in the solicitations, which are either hand delivered or through the mail.

McNerney said that while he knows other nearby communities would like a similar zone for their communities, including Waterbury-Lafayette and Throggs Neck, the communities mentioned are he only areas in the borough covered by this order.

He wants it to be a success so that in five years, when the order expires, the group can reapply.

McNerney said that Senator Jeff Klein's office was especially helpful to the civic association as they went through the process of establishing the zone.

The senator said he is proud that after working with the CCCA and the state, that Country Club and part of Spencer Estate were declared a cease and desist zone.

"The next step is for residents to enroll in the Department of State issued cease and desist list, which my office can assist with," said Klein. "Without doing so, residents will continue to receive unwanted real estate solicitations."

Klein's office will be sending a mailer to residents in the affected area, and constituents can reach his office at (718) 822-2049.

McNerney will be discussing the matter at the next CCCA meeting on Wednesday, January 24 and by word-of-mouth and door-to-door.

Maps of the zones and additional information are available at <http://www.dos.ny.gov/licensing/ceaseanddesist/index.html>, according to DOS.



Homeowners in the circled zone encompassing Country Club and part of Spencer Estate can now register with the NYS Department of State if they no longer want to receive real estate solicitations.

Photo courtesy of NYS Department of State

Councilman Mark Gjonaj's Inaugural Ceremony

Recently elected Councilman Mark Gjonaj was officially sworn-in at his Inaugural Ceremony on Sunday, January 21 at Lehman High School. Local elected officials, community and law enforcement leaders, students and Albanian ambassadors congratulated Gjonaj and his family during the special occasion. Gjonaj, a Morris Park native, is the first Albanian-American to serve in the City Council.



Councilman Gjonaj (c) arrived to the prestigious ceremony with his family. Photo by Laura Stone



Judge Llinet Rosado (r) swore in Gjonaj (l) as his wife Roberta and their sons Nicholas (2nd from l) and Joseph proudly watched. Photo by Laura Stone



Gjonaj (c) received congratulations from (l-r) Consulate General of Kosova in NY Teuta Sahatqija, Judge Rosado, Assemblyman Michael Benedetto, Deputy Bronx Borough President Marricka Scott-McFadden, Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie, Senator Jeff Klein, Councilman Andy King and Albanian ambassadors Besiana Kadare and Floretta Faber. Photo by Laura Stone



Student volunteers from all the schools within the Lehman High School campus including Renaissance High School for Muscial Theater and Technology, Pelham Lab High School, Schuylerville Prep, Bronx River High School and Westchester Square Academy. Photo by Laura Stone



The Rozafati Dance Group gave a crowd pleasing performance at the Inaugural Ceremony. Photo by Laura Stone



Councilman Gjonaj (c) arrived to the prestigious ceremony with his family. Photo by Laura Stone



Councilman King (l) met with Aleksander Nilaj, Albanian American Open Hand Association president, prior to Gjonaj's swearing-in ceremony. Photo by Laura Stone



The 45th Precinct's captain Carlos Ghonz (l), commanding officer and Community Affairs police officer John Souhrada (r) wished Gjonaj well in his future Council career. Photo by Laura Stone

AOH DIVISION 4 INSTALLATION CEREMONY

The officers of the Ancient Order of Hibernian's Bronx Division 4 were installed at a dinner ceremony at the Wicked Wolf Restaurant on Thursday, January 11. The ceremony for the organization, which celebrates Irish heritage, was conducted by Robert Nolan, the organization's county president. Attendees were treated to Irish flute music by Andrew McCarrick and songs by Friendly Sons of St. Patrick's tenor Jim O'Farrell. Anyone interested in joining the organization may contact AOH Division 4 by emailing its president Jack McCarrick at jacksligo@hotmail.com.



(l-r) Michael Curtin, sentinel; Michael Early, marshal; James O' Farrell, treasurer; Robert Nolan, Bronx County AOH president; Jack McCarrick, AOH Division 4 president; John Ward, vice president; Larry Marley, financial secretary. Not Pictured: Peter Tarsnane, sentinel; John Timoney, standing committee and Michael Kelleher, secretary.

Photo courtesy of Jack McCarrick



HAVANA EXPRESS OPENS AT THROGGS NECK SHOPPING CENTER

The Bronx Chamber of Commerce welcomed Havana Café Express to the Throggs Neck Shopping Center with a grand opening ribbon-cutting ceremony on Thursday, January 18.

(l-r) Nunzio Del Greco, Bronx Chamber president; Assemblyman Michael Benedetto; Nathalia Fernandez, Governor Cuomo's Bronx Regional representative; Joseph Kelleher, Bronx Chamber chairman; Phill Cardone, Bronx Chamber Events, Communications and Grants director; Kevin Alicea; Troy Perez, Havana Café Express owner; Lenny Caro and Ruben were ready to cut the ribbon.

Photo by Aracelis Batista

COMMUNITY, COATS & COCOA WITH SENATOR BAILEY

As temperatures continue to drop this winter season, Senator Jamaal Bailey hosted a coat giveaway event on Thursday, January 18 at his district office on 959 E. 233rd Street.



David (l) received a brand new winter coat from Senator Bailey.

Photo by Silvio Pacifico



CASA HOSTS JAZZ EXPERIENCE CONCERT

Casa Restaurant and Lounge and Esoteric Multimedia Productions co-hosted an exciting Bronx Jazz Experience featuring the Brandon Sanders Band and renowned vocalist Vivian Sessoms on Tuesday, January 16. The evening's soundtrack ranged from classic jazz to jazz renditions of contemporary R&B.

Casa owner Sam Beltron (c) celebrated with Esoteric Multimedia Productions' Audell Scarlet (l) and Kevin Brown.

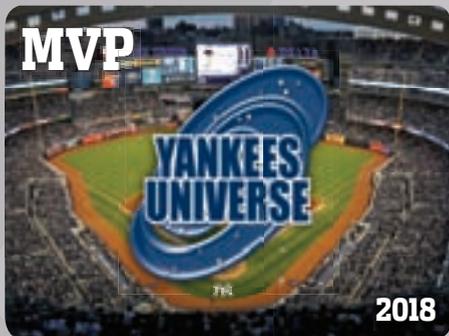
Photo by Aracelis Batista

Guests enjoyed the evening's soundtrack provided by the Brandon Sanders Band featuring vocalist Vivian Sessoms.

Photo by Aracelis Batista

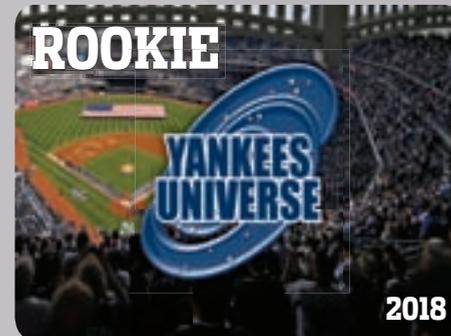


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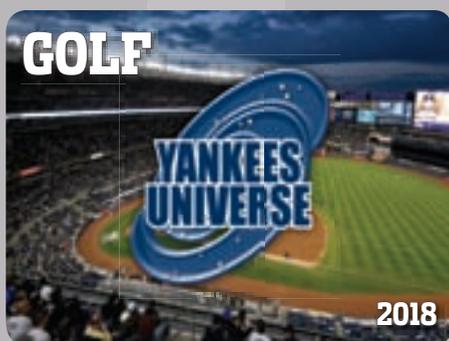
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Deceased Prospect Ave. fire hero to receive street naming

BY SARAH VALENZUELA

A hero who perished in the Prospect Avenue fire will soon be memorialized with a street naming.

Private first class Emmanuel Mensah is credited with repeatedly entering the burning building to help trapped tenants escape the life-threatening flames and smoke.

He was born in Ghana and came to the United States just five years ago.

"When he was a little boy, his dream was to come to America after his mother passed away," said his father, Kwabena Mensah, at a press update about relief efforts on Monday, January 22.

Emmanuel joined the Army against his father's desire for him to stay in school.

"I visited my mom, who is now deceased, in Atlanta when he called me and said 'Dad I'm stationed in Virginia.' I had no words, so I wished him good luck."

Emmanuel had returned to the Bronx for the first time since he left for boot camp in Virginia when he contacted his father.

"He wasn't living with me, he was in the building next door. He

called me and said I had to come see him in his apartment. On my way there, people were shouting 'Fire! Fire! Fire!,'" recalled Mensah of that night.

Emmanuel's first reaction was to save the residents of the building on that fateful winter night.

"I rushed to the place and I saw him by the window. He was rescuing his roommate and his roommate's kids."

Kwabena Mensah helped bring the kids to the safety of his own apartment.

"I ask my friend 'where's Emmanuel' and he said he went back in," said Mensah. "After, I was told he was rescuing people, going back and forth."

"I wish I could have seen him to stop him but I had no chance. I realized I wouldn't have my son again," the distraught dad said.

The fire, which started on the first floor by a 3-year-old playing with the burners on a stove, spread up the staircase to the rest of the building and claimed 13 lives, including Emmanuel's on Thursday, December 28.

There were others who tried to help fellow neighbors escape the blaze, but were stopped by the

flames.

"Kwabena came to us for help with funeral services for his son," said Father Jonathan Morris of Our Lady of Mount Carmel church.

"A few people came to the church last night and said 'there were three [individuals] trying to save people and two of [them] realized it was going to be too tough. Emmanuel told us it doesn't matter if it's too tough, there's still people who need my help,'" the pastor recounted.

According to city officials, Mensah died from smoke inhalation and was found inside the building.

"[Emmanuel] was somebody who knew there was danger and went beyond the call of duty. Your son is a hero," said Fr. Morris to Kwabena Mensah.

"That's what he was. He was determined. That's why he joined the Army, to do what is right," Mensah responded.

Since the fire, members of the community, including Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church, Catholic Charities and the office of Councilman Ritchie Torres have raised about \$300,000 for the victims.



Private Emmanuel Mensah's father, Kwabena (l), and Fr. Jonathan Morris flank a photo of Private Emmanuel Mensah, outside Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church during the press conference.

Photo by Silvio Pacifico

Torres promised to introduce legislation in the City Council to rename East 187th street and Prospect Avenue for Private Emmanuel Mensah.

"The purpose of recording history is to never forget and we will

record the name of your son so that his heroism in our darkest moment not be forgotten and is memorialized forever in the identity and history of our neighborhood," the councilman told Emmanuel's dad.

Student's piece published in renowned 'The Cathedra'

BY SARAH VALENZUELA

As far as student success goes, one student in the south Bronx has captivated a wider audience than he thought he ever would at his age.

Seventeen-year-old Jhon de la Cruz came to the United States from Dominican Republic when he was 9 years old. He's lived in three different states and changed high schools twice.

Family members, peers, and teachers alike have always noticed Jhon's determination for academic and social excellence.

De la Cruz is president of his school's Latino Society, a member of the Student Government, and worked as an intern at the Student Conservation Association, as a volunteer English teacher in the Dominican Republic, and for the Fast Track Program at Goldman Sachs, just to name a few of his accomplishments.

Now a senior at the Cardinal Hayes High School, the teen is turning heads in the Catholic community, being one of three students ever to have their work published in *The Cathedra*, a prestigious publication produced

by St. Patrick's Cathedral and distributed to the faith community.

"At the time I was very overwhelmed because I was doing early decision college applications," said de la Cruz. "So I was like 'oh man now I have this other thing to do so this is going to be a lot of work.'"

The essay published in *The Cathedra* titled 'Our Lady of Guadalupe: Symbol of Love and Faith' focused on Our Lady of Guadalupe, a well-known religious figure for Catholics in Latin America.

Submissions for *The Cathedra* were opened to Catholic high schools throughout the city by invitation.

"There were two topics I remember, one was about St. Patrick Hayes or Cardinal Hayes himself, I can't remember exactly, but the other one was about Our Lady of Guadalupe," recalled de la Cruz.

"My parents came to mind when I had to choose and it had major connection with me, but I didn't expect so much from [writing] it."

Since the piece was published, de la Cruz said he has received



Jhon de la Cruz is one of three students to ever have their work published in *The Cathedra*.

Community News Group/Sarah Valenzuela

much praise from his family and the school community.

"One morning I came into school and I spoke with our principal's secretary, Ms. Espinosa and the first thing she said was 'Thank you for writing the article and for getting it published,'" de la Cruz explained. "She was telling me how important it was to her and the influence it had on her and people around her."

De la Cruz's parents were especially happy and supportive of his recent accomplishment.

"I had one of the original copies and I took it back home and I gave it to my mom and she was like I finally got what I deserved."

Through all his accomplishments, de la Cruz wants fellow Bronxites and Latinos to always strive for excellence and find someone who supports you.

"It may seem hard to accomplish most top things such as getting into top tier schools, as I'm trying to. Such as getting an article published in a magazine of this caliber," said de la Cruz. "Those are very hard things but it's worth trying and giving things a chance because there are so many things I wouldn't have been able to do if I told myself, 'I can't do this.'"



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BP DIAZ HOSTS MLK INTERFAITH SERVICE

Borough President Ruben Diaz, Jr. had a busy Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day on Monday, January 15. He began the day hosting the borough's annual Interfaith Service at Trinity Baptist Church, which served as the event's co-sponsor, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Dr. King's death and honor the slain civil rights leader's message of peace and unity. The borough president also attended an afternoon service honoring Dr. King at Union Grove Missionary Baptist Church and St. Mary's Episcopal Church's Dr. King celebration in Brooklyn.



Congressman Hakeem Jeffries (l) awarded Diaz The Excellence in Leadership Award at a Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day event at St. Mary's Episcopal Church in Brooklyn.

Photo courtesy of Borough President Ruben Diaz, Jr.'s Office

KING HOSTS OPEN HOUSE, COAT GIVEAWAY

Councilman Andy King welcomed everyone to his annual Open House and Winter Coat Giveaway on Monday, January 15 at his district office on 940 E. Gun Hill Road. The event commemorated the birthday of slain civil rights leaders Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.



Councilman King (l) helped Mary Smith try on a coat she likes.

Photo by Silvio Pacifico

CARDINAL HAYES STUDENTS AT RESCUE MISSION

Several Cardinal Hayes High School students celebrated Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day on Monday, January 15 by serving 300 meals to homeless men and women at the New York City Rescue Mission. The traditional southern meals were cooked by Bronxite and longtime friend of Br. Sherlog, Gloria Williams, who has done so for the past 23 years.



(l-r) Cardinal Hayes' Mamadou Diallo, deacon Radcliffe, Benjamin Santos and Ryan Napoleon lent a helping hand to local homeless men and women.

Photo courtesy of Cardinal Hayes High School

LEHMAN COLLEGE, MEXICAN UNIVERSITIES SIGN AGREEMENT

Lehman College entered into agreements with eight of Mexico's top public universities to strengthen cooperation and promote mutual understanding at a historic signing ceremony on Thursday, January 18. These agreements may lead to student and faculty exchange opportunities and bilateral research projects.



(l-r) Dr. Gustavo Vega, Dr. Ygnacio Martinez-Laguna, Dr. Sergio Valdes Pasaron, Dr. Guadalupe Valencia Garcia, Dr. Maria Regina Martinez Cases and Jose Luis Cruz were excited to sign the historical agreement. Photo by Miriam Quin

Dr. Ygnacio Martinez-Laguna (l), Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla vice-rector for Research and Graduate Studies and Dr. Jose Luis Cruz, Lehman College president signed the agreement.

Photo by Miriam Quin

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10th anniversary of WCS 5K Run has added new features

BY SARAH VALENZUELA

Runners and animal lovers alike, your time to shine in the Bronx is soon approaching!

The 10th anniversary of the Wildlife Conservation Society's Run for the Wild 5K and Family Fun Run is set to take off on Saturday, April 28.

"The first year we sort of just crossed our fingers and hoped for about 1,500 people and we had 3,500 people come," recalled Rachel Libretti, the director of Partnerships and Event Marketing, who has helped coordinate this run since day one.

"We knew at that point we hit a sweet spot in New York. This year our goal is for about 5,500 participants, though at our highest we had about 6,200," continued Libretti.

The WCS tries to keep the number of participants near 6,000 to make sure the race is enjoyable and educational for everyone.

With registration for the race now open online, runners are encouraged to sign up fast because last year's run sold out, according to the WCS event website.

"People are still fascinated with the idea that they're running on Bronx Zoo property before operating hours. And there's something kind of magical about that."

This year's race funds and donations will go towards supporting the big cats. The five species WCS focuses on are lions, tigers, snow leopards, jaguars and cheetahs, according to Libretti.

"Through the years we have featured a specific animal or species. The last couple of years we had a 'choose your own animal,'" she said.

"This year we've resurfaced one of our [own] programs and tying it to our global programs."

While this race is non competitive, it's been used as a platform for WCS to fundraise, build a new au-



Rachel Libretti, WCS Director of Partnerships and Event Marketing. Photo by Silvio Pacifico

dience of wildlife lovers and gain new advocates and partners, according to Libretti.

For the milestone run, there are many new aspects of the event being planned.

While still in the planning stage, organizers said in staying with the theme, they may encourage participants to come dressed in their best cheetah print.

Among the new additions for this year, organizers said they may include face painters to make participants look like their favorite cat.

"Even if it's your house cat," she joked.

Libretti also said they are thinking of adding a catwalk to 'strut your stuff' after the race.

"The message we have with or without the run is you are in a borough with a leading conservation organization and a place that opens its gates to Bronx culture and its people. I think that there's

a pride factor," the Bronx native said.

The race starts at the zoo's Bronx River entrance and will take participants around the perimeter of the property, and then into the zoo at some points.

"Based on past runs, it's a challenging course," continued Libretti, referring to the property's hilly topography.

"But it's nothing you can't do," she said.

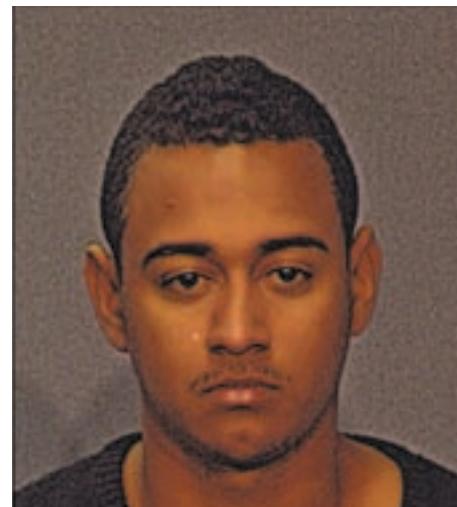
Whether you run, walk, or jog, participants will zip past the Asia, African Plains and Congo exhibits, to name a few.

While not all the animals will be out during the race, you may get to see some giraffes, zebras or sea lions.

"It's just a lot of fun," said Libretti.

The event also includes post-race activities like a rock climbing wall and a relaxing stop at its beer garden.

For more information, visit the WCS website.



Bronxites Arfhy Santos (l) and William Lopez have been arrested following a hit and run involving a police officer on Saturday, January 13 in Times Square. Photo courtesy of NYPD

Bronx men arrested for Times Square hit and run

from Page 1

Mercedes-Benz C63 that was performing burnouts near 234 W. 42nd Street.

The four-year NYPD veteran stopped the car in front of a crosswalk, but the driver tried to go around Wallace, causing him to place his hands on the hood.

Police stated Santos was driving and intentionally struck Wallace with the vehicle while attempting to escape.

The car knocked Wallace to the ground as it traveled westbound from 42nd Street to 8th Avenue.

Wallace suffered non-life threatening injuries to his legs and back and was transported to Mount Sinai Hospital in stable condition.

The car, which is registered to Lopez, had sustained damage to its passenger side after Santos struck several unoccupied parked vehicles while escaping.

Santos made a wide right turn onto 42nd Street and struck several vehicles as he avoided hitting a truck.

Santos has been charged with attempted murder, assault, reckless driving and reckless endangerment.

His passenger Lopez has charges of reckless endangerment and reckless driving pending from a prior incident.

On Friday, January 12 at 2 a.m., Lopez allegedly drove his Mercedes onto a sidewalk at West 207th Street in Inwood to evade police while narrowly missing terrified pedestrians.

Santos has priors for criminal possession of a controlled substance, criminal possession of stolen property and reckless endangerment.

Lopez has additional priors for obstructing government administration, possession of a forged instrument and assault.

Law enforcement recovered Lopez's Mercedes which is outfitted with an illegal device that conceals the rear license plate with the press of a button.

Police stated the suspects are members of a

Bronx car club, but did not divulge its name due to the ongoing investigation.

"As a community board we do not condone such acts of violence or negative use of force against those who try to protect the community," said Adaline Walker Santiago, Community Board 7 chairwoman. "Police are public figures who have sworn to protect others and they shouldn't have to suffer against those with ill intentions."

The NYPD credited the Midtown South Detective Squad, Manhattan South Homicide Squad and the Auto Crime Division's thorough investigation for helping them apprehend Santos and Lopez.

Social media platforms YouTube, which uploaded the now viral video of the Times Square hit and run, and Twitter, which shared the suspects' photos, were credited for assisting in the quick apprehension of the duo.



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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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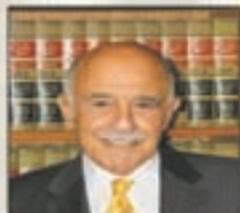
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