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Your Neighborhood – Your News®
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LOCAL CLASSIFIEDS PAGE 14

CNG

MONTE, AECOM WORK $$ DEAL

BY PATRICK ROCCHIO

The financial instability of Yeshiva University, the institution that operates the Einstein College of Medicine, has been tentatively addressed.

The school's medical students, concerned about possible cuts to the graduate college and its research programs, rallied on the campus on Tuesday, February 3 to call for an agreement between Montefiore and AECOM due to Yeshiva University's ongoing budget crises.

At the time of the rally, the dean of the college of medicine, Dr. Allen Spiegel, announced that all parties were very close to a deal, but a statement released later in the day indicated a deal had been negotiated by AECOM, Yeshiva, and Montefiore jointly.

AECOM has been affiliated with Montefiore for more than 50 years.

The framework of the agreement, which will be subject to regulatory approval, appears to have been cemented.

It creates a joint entity of both Montefiore and the Manhattan-based Yeshiva, with Montefiore gradually assuming responsibility for the day-to-day operations and financial management of both Einstein's operations and its faculty, and Yeshiva remaining the degree-granting institution with an important role in educational aspects of the medical college.

"The Boards of Trustees of Montefiore Health System and

Continued on Page 4



Say It Ain't Snow...Again!!

Danny Popstu of Waterbury-Lasalle finished digging out of last week's snow on Sunday, February 1, to prepare for Monday's storm.

Photo by Laura Stone

Heastie named Assembly speaker

BY PATRICK ROCCHIO

The Bronx has its first New York State Assembly Speaker in Assemblyman Carl Heasite.

The north Bronx assemblyman, described by colleagues as a quiet and thoughtful man, was elected to the position on Tuesday, February 3.

The post is widely described as one of the three most powerful positions in state government, along with the senate president and the governor.

Heastie replaces former Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, who is facing federal criminal charges and relinquished the role after consulting with assembly members.

"I am proud of the vigorous debate and discussion among all of my colleagues that brought us to today," said Heastie a day before his election.

Heastie is also its first African-American leader. Heastie has been the chairman of Bronx Democratic Party since the Rainbow Coalition ousted longtime chairman Assemblyman Jose Rivera.

Other candidates gradually dropped out of the running in the days before his election. Among the other members who were running earlier on in the process were assemblymembers Keith Wright of Manhattan, Jospeh Lentol of Brooklyn, Catherine Nolan of Queens, and Joseph Morelle of the Rochester, NY region.

Colleagues in both the upper and lower chamber of the New York State Legislature - the senate and assembly - said that Heastie is low-key, and not flashy.

Assemblyman Michael Bene-

Continued on Page 4

Burke Ave. CVS plans to be rebuild

BY JAIME WILLIAMS

One local drugstore is rising from the ashes.

The Burke Avenue CVS where the roof collapsed almost a year ago is being rebuilt, CVS confirmed.

On February 19, 2014, the roof at the CVS caved in, followed by the side-walls. The handful of employees and customers in the store that day all got out of the building unharmed.

But the building could not be saved, and the Department of Buildings ordered that it be demolished immediately. The lot at the corner of White Plains Road has been vacant since.

Some locals had concerns at the time that the loss of the store would create a hardship for seniors trying to get their

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Bronx students are face of Verizon app

BY JAIME WILLIAMS

A group of Bronx students have become the face of Verizon's national campaign during Black History Month, designed to get minority students interested in science, technology, engineering and mathematics careers.

The six students are inspiring others after each achieved successes of their own—the team from Bronx Academy of Promise was a winner of Verizon's Innovative App Challenge in 2013.

While in 6th grade, the team created a mobile application to help students learn math skills. They used a Greek mythology theme to make the multilevel learning program more interesting and fun. The project was named the best in the state, and one of the top ten in the nation.

Now in 8th grade, the award-winning students have gained confidence and become leaders in their school, said principal Catherine Jackvony.

The challenge was introduced to the school by a teacher who found the contest online, and the school formed two teams of interested students who came in early, stayed late after school, and worked on weekends to complete the project.

The winning team—made up of King Lewis, Michael Bonnah, Rokia Sissoko, Jhony Flores, Samuel Owusu and Sherly Quezada—were some of the quietest kids in school, said Jackvony. But they came out of their shells while designing and creating the app.

"Watching them work together was very rewarding," she said.

Creating the app sparked a real interest in technology and design for some of the students, including Quezada. She is interested in pursuing more knowledge as she heads to a competitive boarding school in the fall.

"You can do a lot with it," she said about the subject.

Winning the challenge also gave the team the confidence to aim higher with their personal goals.

The experience helped Sissoko muster the courage to run for student council president, and win.

"I thought I could do more," she said.

Through the process of collaborating on the project, the team learned to trust their own ideas and speak up more. Before the project, Bonnah said he used to consider himself a follower.

"Now I'm a leader and younger kids look up to me," he said.

The success of the team has had an effect on other at Bronx Academy of Promise over the past two years.

"The students in the younger grades believe anything is possible," said Jackvony.

But the students hope that Verizon's 'Potential Of Us' campaign, which will appear on television, online and in print, will help other young students try to accomplish things they didn't previously think were possible.

"I hope the commercial will inspire people to do what me and my peers did," said Flores.

"The achievements made by the team of students from the Bronx Academy of Promise that won the Verizon Innovative App Challenge perfectly represents Verizon's 'Potential of Us' Black History Month national advertising campaign," said Andrew Testa, PR manager, Verizon Wireless, New York Metro Region. "This contest helped them to realize their passion and unleashed their potential for greatness. That's the essence of this campaign."

Videos of the students can be viewed at potentialofus.com.



A team of students from Bronx Academy of Promise who won the Verizon Innovative App Challenge in 2013 are the faces of a Verizon's national Black History Month campaign, entitled 'Potential of Us'. Back row (l to r): King Lewis, Michael Bonnah and Rokiatou Sissoko. Front row (l to r): Jhony Flores, Samuel Owusu and Sherly Quezada. Photo courtesy of Verizon

Civil rights photos at Bronx Music Heritage Center

BY JAIME WILLIAMS

Images of the Civil Rights Movement are currently on display at the Bronx Music Heritage Center, a cultural initiative of the Women's Housing and Economic Development Corp.

The exhibit, called 'The 60's: Decade of Change,' is a collection of photographer's Benedict J. Fernandez's work capturing social unrest at the time. The exhibit was curated by the Bronx Documentary Center.

The collection of Fernandez's photographs illustrate an important chapter of American history, said Elena Martínez, artistic director of the Bronx Music Heritage Center.

"It's fitting for Black History Month," said Martínez.

The timing is also relevant to the renewed sense of activism that the country has seen this year, said Michael Kamber, founder of the center.

"This exhibit fits in perfectly," he said.

Fernandez, an Italian-Puerto Rican born and raised in East Harlem, was one of the most important photographers of the 60s, said Kamber, although over the years he has not received the same level of recognition as others.

"To me, he is one of the all-time greatest protest photographers," said Kamber.

Exhibit-goers can expect to encounter beautiful and powerful photographs that depict a wide range of moments in the sixties. While many of the photos depict the Civil Rights Movement of Martin Luther King, Jr., other show protests over the Vietnam War and other social events.

"They'll see one of the greatest chronicles of activism in our country's history," said Kamber.

The photos also range in tone, said Martínez, with some capturing intimate moments and others disturbing displays of racism.

"People get to see all sides of the story," she said.

Martínez said she hopes the exhibit is both educational and entertaining.

"I think it's important to see this history in an engaging and interesting way," said Martínez.

And even if many are well versed in the history of the Civil Rights Movement, Fernandez's photos will be new to them.

Most of the 38 photos have not been exhibited much in recent years, and some have never been seen before, said Kamber.

The free exhibit will be open on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays, from 2:30 to 7:30 p.m. through April 3 at the Bronx Music Heritage Center, 1303 Louis Niné Boulevard.



From 'The 60's: Decade of Change,' exhibit of Benedict J. Fernandez Photography presented by the Bronx Music Heritage Center. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. with his daughter Bonnie at Ebenezer Baptist Church. Atlanta, Georgia, February 1968.

© Benedict J. Fernandez



Solidarity march honoring Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. after his assassination. Memphis, Tennessee, April 6, 1968.

© Benedict J. Fernandez

SoBro wins grant from Competition THRIVE

BY STEVEN GOODSTEIN

The south Bronx is witnessing more positive development every day, and the city has taken notice.

On Tuesday, January 13, the NYC Economic Development Corporation announced the South Bronx Overall Economic Development Corporation as the winner of the third annual Competition To Help Reach Immigrant Ventures and Entrepreneurs (THRIVE), and as a result, SoBro was awarded $100,000.

The grand prize was given to SoBro just about six months after the organization received $25,000 of seed funding from NYCEDC for being one of the five finalists in the first round of Competition THRIVE back in July, along with the Business Outreach Center Network (BOC Network), the National Community Reinvestment Coalition (NCRC), the Urban Justice Center/Street Vendor Project and the Working World.

Competition THRIVE was started to challenge organizations to develop proposals that promote opportunities of growth for New York City's immigrant-entrepreneurial community.

SoBro will do just that - providing assistance and support to over 40 immigrant restaurant owners in the Bronx and upper Manhattan, as part of their newly launched program, the United Business Cooperative.

The idea of UBC originated last year, after small immigrant-owned food retailers in the Bronx discussed the challenges of complying with increasing government regulations for restaurants, along with the disproportionally high costs for deliveries and purchases of merchandise and produce when being compared to their competition with stronger bargaining power.

These occurring issues proved that retailers would benefit from collaborative marketing and training efforts, including technology upgrades, regulatory compliance assistance and workforce skill training.

"Immigrant entrepreneurs often face difficult and unique hurdles when trying to start and grow their businesses, and with programs like Competition THRIVE we are demonstrating our commitment to supporting the immigrant communities and businesses that are vital to a sustainably growing economy," said EDC spokesperson Christopher Carroll. "SoBro has an extremely strong track record of helping immigrant small businesses start, grow and flourish in the Bronx, and we look forward to watching them continue to provide economic opportunities and increased potential to all New Yorkers."

SoBro was both honored to be recognized by the EDC for their efforts.

"When we received both awards from EDC, it showed that the city put their trust in us to assist other businesses," said Donna Davis, director of resource development and communications for SoBro. help businesses."

UBC isn't the only project that SoBro is currently involved in. Last month, two of SoBro's partner organizations, No Longer Empty and Neighborhood Plaza Partnership, were honored at a Neighborhood Challenge Initiative for their creative and impacting economic development and revitalization projects in their communities. NPP was awarded $100,000 and NLE was granted $60,000.

Now $125,000 richer in funding over the past six months, SoBro will continue to work with businesses that need assistance with issues involving credit, office space and workshops.

Helping Bronx businesses and residents since 1972, the non-for-profit organization could not be happier that the city has recognized SoBro's dedication to their community.



(l-r) Three south Bronx restaurant owners with Jamila Diaz, assistant vice president of community development for SoBro, and Conor McCarthy, director of entrepreneurial development for SoBro before presenting their proposal to NYCEDC on Tuesday, January 13. Photo courtesy of SoBro

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Carl Heastie named to replace Silver

From Page 1

detto said that Heastie has slowly gained the respect of his colleagues in the years he has been in office.

Heastie was first elected in 2000, and represents the 83rd Assembly district, a slice of the north Bronx that including parts of Wakefield and Williamsbridge, Baychester and Easthchester.

"He is a a good listener; he hears what you have to say," said Benedetto, adding "I think he will have a nice, steady hand in the speakership."

Benedetto said that as the process of finding a new speaker unfolded, many of his colleagues got to know Heastie better and were impressed by him.

Senator Jeff Klein added that he sees Speaker Heastie as someone who is goal-oriented, and said he has always been impressed by his ability to bring people together and build coalitions. Heastie is sometimes viewed as being very serious, said Klein.

"He likes to listen to people and implement a game plan to get it done," said Klein, adding "he is someone who is very respectful to his colleagues, a good listener, and a straight-shooter."



Assemblyman Carl Heastie

Friend and former colleague in the assembly Borough President Ruben Diaz, Jr. noted the significance of electing Speaker Heastie during Black History Month.

"Speaker Heastie is the first African-American to hold this position, as well as the first-ever Bronx resident," said Diaz. "The impact of Speaker Heastie's trailblazing path to the speakership cannot be understated."

Diaz believes that Heastie will be a strong partner and a great advocate for the needs of New York City, the borough president stated.

The chair of the Bronx Assembly delegation, Assembly Jeff Dinowtiz, believes that skills Heastie honed as the chairman of the Bronx Democratic Party will serve him well in his new role.

"As chair of the Bronx Democratic Party, Carl has proven to be a fair, inclusive, and effective leader who understands that working collaboratively is more important than claiming credit," said Dinowitz. "I have no doubt that he will have a similarly effective approach as leader of our Democratic conference and Speaker of the Assembly."

A Heastie spokesman said the assemblyman would step down from his post as Bronx Democratic County chairman. As of press time, a source familiar with borough politics said a successor to Heastie in the Bronx chair's role has not been chosen.



Assemblyman Carl Heastie (l) and Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr, when Diaz was an assemblyman, in Albany

Photo courtesy of Borough President Diaz's office



Einstein Medical College students (l-r) Dayle Hodge, Richard Piszczatowski, Ruth Howe, Alyssa Casill, Kim Hammond and Angelo Landriscina were at the student rally outside the Block Pavilion in support of an Einstein and Montefiore merger.

Photo by Silvio Pacifico

Monte, AECOM work $$ deal

From Page 1

Yeshiva University announced today that they have agreed on the principal terms of an agreement with respect to the Albert Einstein College of Medicine," read the statement. "While subject to final documentation and regulatory approval, the parties are proud to continue their long-standing relationship as part of Einstein's future as a top-tier medical school and research institution."

The statement continued: "The agreement deepens the bonds between Montefiore and Einstein, further integrates the institutions' faculty, students, and staff, and aligns operations to best advance science and medicine."

Word of the negotiations was made public in May 2014, but now the framework has been accepted. Final details should be forthcoming, according to the statement.

The news does not come soon enough for the students, with more than 100 rallying in front of 1301 Morris Park Avenue calling for a closer partnership that they believe would shore up the AECOMs finances and protect staffing, operations, and basic science research at the facility.

"We were excited to see the turnout by the students," said one of the rally's speakers, second year Ph.D. student Alyssa Casill.

"It is not specifically clear what would happen, but we knew that the graduate division would be taking some kind of hit," explained one of the student leaders, second year Ph.D. Kim Hammond, who spoke at the rally. She said that the news of a tentative deal gave her hope.

Important for many in the local community, jobs which might have otherwise been cut, may now remain.

"Einstein itself is a huge economic driver for the Bronx," said student Dayle Hodge, president of the AECOM MD-Ph.D. student council. "There are a lot of people employed here."

Medical student Angelo Landriscina said he was more hopeful after hearing the news of a tentative agreement, adding that since a medical teaching colleges prestige is determined by how much research is going on, cuts to faculty and science research would decease the prestige of his degree (if finances caused cutbacks).

"Basic science is very important to advancing one's career as a physician," he said.

The less financing, the less staff and faculty, and the less research and prestige, he explained.

Yeshiva's budget debt reached $150 million last year.

CNG Community News Group

CEO: Les Goodstein

PRESIDENT & PUBLISHER: Jennifer Goodstein

General Phone: (718) 260-4595
By Mail: Bronx Times Reporter
3604 B E. Tremont Avenue
Bronx, NY 10465

NEWS
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Bronx neighbors

PROFILE

BY PATRICK ROCCHIO

The Locus Point Civic Association has a new leader.

Joseph Donovan, 51, who grew up in the tight-knit Locust Point community and now lives there with his family, has been elected as the new president of its civic association.

Donovan, a retired New York City Firefighter, returned to his roots, moving back to the community a year and a half ago from County Longford, Ireland, where he ran a bed and breakfast with his wife Suzanne in what was once a castle.

Shortly after returning, he volunteered at the civic association, and was rapidly made a board member. He is now taking over the mantle of president from Al Belifiore, who will remain on the board.



Joseph Donovan

"There seems to be a lot of momentum right now," said Donovan of the civic, adding that it has come back to life after a period of dormancy following Superstorm Sandy, which walloped the seaside community.

Among his goals are improvements to the LPCA building on Tierney Place, fighting over-development, and looking into how to go about obtaining a permit to reopen the beach behind the civic's building.

Inside the civic building, he is planning on pursuing improvements with his board to upgrade the kitchen, with the installation of some commercial-grade or high-quality cooking equipment, and also renovating the building's bathrooms.

He is also helping to coordinate a community-wide effort to express the hamlet's deep opposition to a proposed zoning variance for a developer on Longstreet Avenue. The developer is claiming hardship, and asking the community's blessing to build 5 two-family homes with a zoning variance.

"If it is something that needs the neighborhood's blessing, I just don't see it happening," said Donovan about the proposed Longstreet Avenue zoning variance.

He added that while the community does not like to see anyone, including the developer, lose money on investments, this sometimes is unavoidable.

"This is the major concern of our neighborhood." said Donovan. "They feel that (the houses built with the variance) would be a detriment for our community just from the stand point of overdevelopment."

He said the reopening the beach would be a fantastic goal for the community to have. Renewing the permit has run into red tape for environmental reasons, but Donovan added that he swims regularly near where the beach is located, and the water there has never been cleaner in his opinion.

Among Donovan's other goals are reviving the annual Locust Point Labor Day parade, holding recreation events with neighboring civic associations, and offering more opportunities for building a sense of community within Locust Point.

Being active in the LPCA is a family trait, said Donovan, with his mother serving as an organization secretary for years. Donovan is also a member of the Locust Point Yacht Club.

He is excited to be living with his wife and three children in Locust Point once again.

"We found Heaven on the water in the Bronx," he said.





Vacca derides St. Theresa's perimeter tree plantings



The Parks Department forestry unit planted these trees recently. They directly abut the property of St. Theresa School in Pelham Bay on St. Theresa Avenue near Mayflower Avenue, away from the curb.
Photo courtesy of Councilman Vacca's office

BY PATRICK ROCCHIO

Two recently planted street trees have a local elected official squaring off with the Parks Department.

St. Theresa School's principal reached out to Councilman James Vacca after a couple of street trees were planted along the perimeter of their fence, instead of at the curb, on St. Theresa Avenue between Pilgrim and Mayflower avenues.

While they are rare, multiple sources said that street trees are sometimes planted along the property line adjacent to the sidewalk, instead of at the curb, when sidewalks are wide enough.

"It is quite ridiculous," said Josephine Fanelli, school principal, who added that she has no problem with trees being planted, but that she can see no 'rhyme or reason' as to why the trees were planted where they were.

The principal said she believes that eventually the tree roots could grow under the school's gate. At that point, dealing with any ramifications would become the school's responsibility.

She added that she feels there is "a double standard" because the city decides to plant street trees, but property owners sometimes get left with the headaches they create.

The saplings were planted along a fence that encloses a three-foot grassy area that separates the school's gym from the sidewalk, she said.

That grassy landscaped area makes the location ideal for the new tree roots to take hold, helping the overall health and longevity of the trees, read a Parks Department statement.

"We took special care in the design of these planting sites and all plantings are done in accordance with citywide tree planting regulations," read a Parks Department statement.

"Locations against lawns, such as those along St. Theresa Avenue in front of the school, increase available rooting space, water absorption and protect the trees from opening car doors, other vehicular damage, and excessive road salt."

The Parks Department added that utility wires located near the planting sites on St. Theresa Avenue are communication and data lines, and do not pose any safety hazard resulting from branch interference.



Councilman James Vacca's chief of staff Michael Rivadeneyra and Councilman Vacca stand next to one of the trees planted away from the curb on St. Theresa Avenue.
Photo courtesy of Councilman Vacca's office

"The electric lines for the school are marked as being below ground and careful site selection was used to ensure these lines were avoided when tree planting occurred," the statement concluded.

Vacca believes that planting the trees next to the property line impedes pedestrian traffic and sets a precedent he is not fond of because any homeowner could find a street tree right next to their fence.

"The city is planting these trees all over the place, but trees are always planted at the curb," said Vacca, adding that this is the case 99.9% of the time.

The councilman said he is asking the Parks Department to reconsider the tree plantings.

This type of planting may be uncommon, but it is not without precedent.

A similar situation can be found at Boston Market, located at 3371 E. Tremont Avenue, where some trees were also planted along the property line, not at the curb.



Senator Jeff Klein poses with the Bronx H.I.R.E. Security Guard Training Course graduates at Olinville Arms Inc. on Wednesday, February 4.
Photo courtesy of Senator Jeff Klein's office

Klein's H.I.R.E. graduates readied as security guards

BY STEVEN GOODSTEIN

Employees are usually hired after they graduate. In this case, the graduation follows a hire.

On Wednesday, February 4, Senator Jeff Klein honored graduates of the first Bronx H.I.R.E. (Help Identify Real Employment) Security Guard Training Course at Olinville Arms Inc. on 3356 White Plains Road.

At the ceremony, Klein announced that all of the graduates would have the opportunity to immediately interview with Griffin Security Services Inc., who is currently looking to fill more than 150 open security guard positions.

"Griffin Security Services is proud to partner with Senator Klein's office to connect hardworking, job-ready individuals with employment opportunities like this one," said Shaunte Sullivan, human resources manager at Griffin Security Services Inc. "By leveraging resources through public and private, big and small partnerships, we are moving our residents and our businesses forward."

Bronx H.I.R.E. intends to focus on skills training, development assistance and job placements for its candidates. Through the dynamic jobs program, Klein and the Bronx Chamber of Commerce provided training to the local community at no cost.

As a result of this preparation, participants in the pre-assignment training completed the three-day course and are now licensed and ready for employment.

"We are thankful for Senator Klein's funding, which invests in the Bronx workforce," said Michelle Dolgow Cristofaro, H.I.R.E. administrator and Bronx Chamber of Commerce chief-of staff. "Today is a great example of how Bronx H.I.R.E. provides our future employees with the necessary skill sets and certifications for the present day workplace."

> I want to congratulate the fine men and women who graduated with their security guard license today, and I look forward to working together to connect them with good-paying jobs in the community.
>
> **Jeff Klein**
> Senator

It is clear that Klein and the Bronx Chamber of Commerce share the same vision - to improve the borough's overall employment statistics.

"The Bronx consistently has one of the highest unemployment rates in the state and with this dynamic program, we are working hard to change that," said Klein. "This program works to ensure that each and every job seeker has the chance at real employment, and the opportunity to hone their skills through certificate programs, one-on-one training and more."

"I want to congratulate the fine men and women who graduated with their security guard license today, and I look forward to working together to connect them with good-paying jobs in the community."

To learn more or to enroll in Bronx H.I.R.E., go to www.bronxchamber.org.

‘Tax preparer’ arrested during tax season

BY STEVEN GOODSTEIN

Tax season is upon us, and because of a recent arrest, this might be the appropriate time to remind our readers to be mindful of who prepares their taxes taxes.

On Monday, January 26, Attorney General Eric T. Schneiderman and New York State Department of Taxation and Finance Commissioner Thomas H. Mattox announced the arrest of 48-year old Bronx resident Raul Kelley on three alleged felony charges, including tax fraud, filing a false personal income tax return and trying to steal tax refunds, resulting from his business as a tax preparer.

More specifically, Kelley, who allegedly filed at least two false returns, was arrested for criminal tax fraud in the fourth degree, offering a false instrument for filing in the first degree and attempted grand larceny in the third degree, all class E felonies.

The investigation further reveals that Kelley, who was believed to have operated a business and worked on tax returns from his home address on 1019 E. 222nd Street, had been hired to prepare personal income tax returns for two taxpayers and file it with New York State, despite not being registered as a tax preparer with the state.



Raul Kelley , 48, of the Bronx was recently arrested on three alleged felony charges, including tax fraud, filing a false personal income tax return and trying to steal tax refunds.

Photo courtesy of the New York State Department of Taxation and Finance

According to the complaint, Kelley allegedly grossly inflated the two taxpayers’ job expenses in 2012 from $1,500 to over $97,000, resulting in the tax return claiming a refund of almost $4,500, an amount the taxpayers were not entitled.

Residents need to be careful when choosing the individual to prepare their tax returns.

“We recommend that taxpayers should ask questions about qualifications, cost, signing returns as well as refunds regarding the filing of tax returns to avoid being victims,” said Cary B. Ziter, public information spokesperson for the New York State Department of Taxation and Finance.

“Is the tax preparer registered with the IRS and NY Tax Department? How many years of experience do they have? What kind of recent professional education courses have they taken? These are all qualification questions that the tax preparer should be asked prior to filing one’s taxes.”

Ziter’s additional advice also included asking to see a ‘fee schedule’, making sure the cost will be based on services provided, not the amount of the refund, and explained that a refund should never get deposited into a preparer’s bank account, the taxpayer should ask to receive a direct deposit and if they don’t have a bank account, they should obtain a debit card.

“Many people have the tendency to go to a local person to have their taxes filed,” said Richard Ernst, Deputy Commissioner and Attorney for the New York State Department of Taxation and Finance.

“When searching for a tax preparer, it is important to check their background, experience and prior training before letting them file your taxes. It is also important to choose somebody who is trustworthy, because they will be the person you will have to trust with the most private information, such as your social security number.”

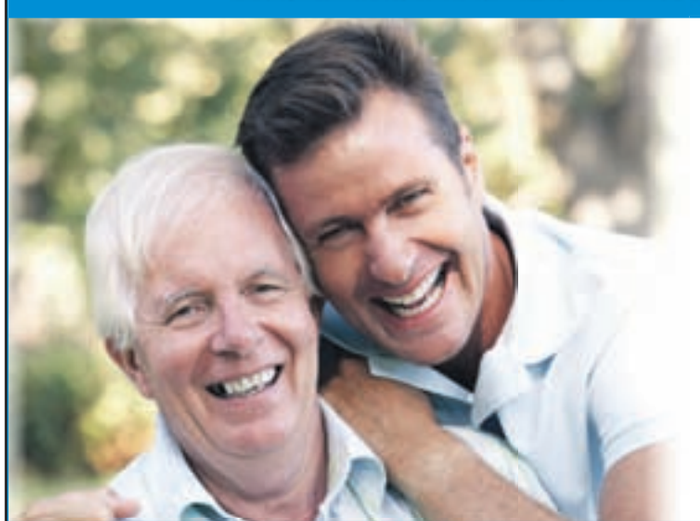
Ernst added that 70% percent of New York residents filed their taxes using services of a tax return preparer last year.

He offerd the following advice to avoid false or fraudulent tax preparers: use e-filing (online filing), which is faster, free, and minimizes errors by 20%, as well as asks tax preparers to provide their PIN number from the IRS and their NYPRIN number from New York State; and tax preparers should only sign the tax return after returns have been filed, never before and never blank, stating that any false returns will be blamed on the taxpayer, not the preparer.

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LIBERTY DEMS CELEBRATE NEW YEAR



The Liberty Democratic Association held an event celebrating the new year at Janel Tower on Sunday, January 25. Among the attendees were elected officials and members of the club, which covers the 80th Assembly District.

(Above) Enjoying the festive day are (back, l-r) Luisa Benedetto, 80th Assembly district leader Andrea Siegel, Michael Rivadeneyra, Councilman Ritchie Torres, Richard Fedderman, State Committeeman Joe McManus, (front, l-r) Dr. Charles Gorelick, Zena Twyman, president of Liberty Democrat Association and Monica Major. Photo by Laura Stone



Attendees Patricia Thompson(l) and Nora Feury enjoy the event. Photo by Laura Stone

BRONXWORKS HELPS PREVENT DROPOUTS

BronxWorks, an organization providing social services and programming, held a kick-off event for an new initiative to improve attendance and prevent dropouts at P.S. 42 on Friday, January 30. As part of the new Community Schools Strategy financed by a $290,000 grant, BronxWorks will assist both students and teachers to prevent excessive absenteeism. CSS is an outgrowth of the United Way's Attendance Improvement Dropout Prevention program. According to BronxWorks, about 45 schools need help in the Claremont area.



Eileen Towey gives Jason Richardson information at the after school and weekend swimming programs at BronxWorks. Photo by Silvio Pacifico



Amanda Platania of Clowns.com face-paints Sylvia Lopez at the BronxWorks kickoff at P.S. 42. Photo by Silvio Pacifico

FIAME CELEBRATES THE EPIPHANY

The Forum of Italian American Educators held a celebration of the Epiphany, also known as Three Kings Day, at Fratelli's Restaurant on Sunday, January 4. The event is held annually, not only to celebrate the Epiphany, but also to introduce individuals who will be honored at FIAME's upcoming dinner dance. The organization's dinner dance will be held on Friday, April 17. The honorees are Angela Ceparano, Linda Ruffino, Silvia D'Arco, Melanie Blasucci Marino, Dr, James Montesano Nyack, Gerald Cattaro, Julie Falco Porras, Tina Cortese and Chris Allesandro.



Among the people at the celebration are pictured honorees Angela Ceparano, principal, St . Simon Stock; Linda Ruffino, secretary, J.H.S. 144; Silvia D'Arco, assistant principal and Italian teacher, St. Raymond's Elementary; and Melanie Blasucci Marino, educational administrator, C.F.N. 532. Photo courtesy of FIAME



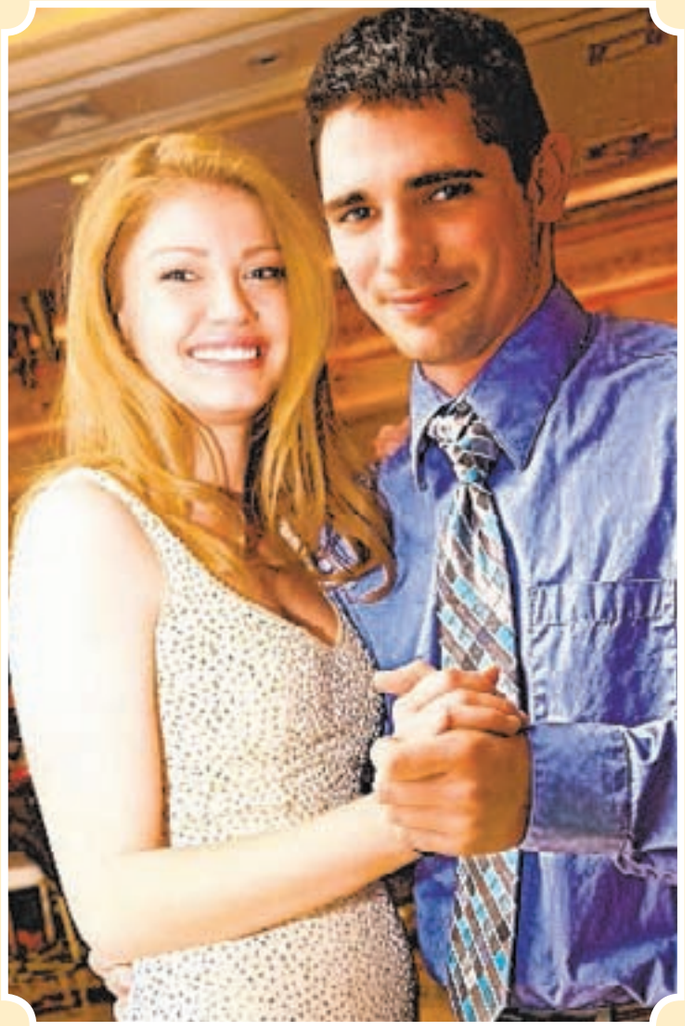
The FIAME executive board, including organization president Mary Ann Ventrelli-Gorman, enjoying the festivities. Photo courtesy of FIAME

PRESCHOOLERS ATTEND OLYMPICS

Preschool Children at the New York Institute for Special Education participated in their 12th annual winter-themed Olympics on Thursday, January 29. The goal of the yearly event is to have developmentally-delayed children from 3 to 5 years in age improve gross motor skills like strength, balance and coordination. Each class created their own flag to participate under in the just-for-fun event. Among the activities were Olympics-like games, including ice-skating, winter bowling, hockey, and snow ball fights with crumpled paper.



There were a host of activities to keep the NYSIE preschoolers engaged, active, and having fun. Photo courtesy of NYSIE



Jenny Wyebasch and Jared Ansul made use of the dance floor.
Photo by Laura Stone



TN Benevolent Association board members (l-r:) Matt O'Brien, Karin O'Connor, Sheila Haney and Chris Dalton.
Photo by Laura Stone

TNBA hosts annual dinner dance

The Throggs Neck Benevolent Association hosted their annual dinner dance on Saturday, January 24. Friends and family gathered to dance the night away at Marina del Rey.







(Above) Local residents (i-r) Jim McSherry, Bridgett Byrne and Peg McSherry enjoyed the event.
Photo by Laura Stone

(Top left) Four friends from Silver Beach enjoyed a night out together: (l-r) Megan Langguth, Jennifer Wiehler, Andrea Tierney and Jackie Curry.
Photo by Laura Stone

(Left) (l-r) Loree Galioto, Michael Bernard, boxing champion Iran Barkley and Vito Messina joined the party.
Photo by Laura Stone

New stop sign approved for Otis Ave.

BY PATRICK ROCCHIO

A busy street corner will soon see a new 'stop' sign to help pedestrians.

Motorists approaching the corner of Otis and Edison avenues westbound, just outside St. Benedict's Church and near its school, willnow have to make a full stop, said Councilman James Vacca.

After a number of attempts to convince appropriate city agencies that greater traffic controls at the intersection were needed, Vacca said he was able to advocate for the city Department of Transportation to install what he contends is a badly needed third 'stop' sign.

That sign should bring all traffic to a halt at the intersection, which has one way traffic on Otis Avenue and two-way traffic on Edison Avenue.



A new 'Stop' sign will be placed near St. Bendict's Church on Otis Avenue at the intersection of Edison Avenue.



A new 'Stop' sign will soon be placed on Otis Avenue at Edison Avenue.

"Right now it is a location where you especially have to be careful," said the councilman. "I think making everyone stop at this location makes absolute sense."

Vacca said that he has been looking for something additional in the way of stop signs at the corner for several years.

"I have had this complaint for several years, we put it in (for consideration) constantly," said Vacca of the his requests. "

The councilman said that the city Department of Transportation should have the new signs installed within a month, and Vacca indicated the change cannot come soon enough.

"Right now, even though there are stop signs on Edison Avenue, people there often assume that Otis Avenue is stopping, but Otis Avenue is not stopping," he said. "Because it is a major crosswalk, in my opinion, for school and church, I think having clarity and making everyone stop is what we saw for it from the beginning."

Fr. Stephen Norton, pastor of St. Benedict's Church, said the intersection is an important one for both the church and school, and that this was a change that both parishioners and school parents have wanted.

"There is a light at Logan and Otis avenues, and once you hit that light, (drivers tend) to try to get all the way to East Tremont Avenue without any slowdown at Edison Avenue," said Fr. Norton, adding that "there are cars at the intersection that are just kind of leaning on the horn and going straight through."

The intersection is dangerous for people coming to church, but can be especially hazardous to young schoolchildren, said Fr. Norton.

"There have been accidents," Fr. Norton added.

'Enhanced' recess benefits underserved students

BY JAIME WILLIAMS

One nonprofit organization is redefining recess.

Asphalt Green is changing the way kids in underserved Bronx schools play through its Recess Enhancement Program.

The program, which hosted a 'Rock N Recess' event at co-located P.S. 443 and 457 on Friday, January 30, brings trained coaches to schools to get kids exercising during recess with games.

"The goal is for recess to be an active, safe and fun time for kids," said REP manager Ben Gologor.

Started in 2001, REP serves more than 28,000 kids across the city in 61 schools, about 9,900 of them young Bronxites.

Two trained coaches visit the schools twice a week, and periodically host the Rock 'N Recess events with additional coaches.

They lead the kids in active games wherever the school has free space—not only in the gym but in auditoriums and hallways.

"My main goal is how am I going to get these kids to move today, whether it's indoors or outdoors?" said coach Ashley Freeman. "We make sure they're getting the exercise they need, so when they go back to the classroom they're focused."

Getting the kids moving is especially important, and more challenging, during the winter months, said Gologor.

"They're very creative with space," said Pamela Lee, principal of P.S. 443. "They think outside the box, and we need that."

The supervised games teach the students how to play safely and cooperatively, said Lee, and she believes the program has helped decrease the behavioral incidents that tend to pop up near the end of the week.

Recess can be a challenging part of the school day for kids, said Gologor, when certain conflicts and bullying start.

"That's where you see a lot of problems that transfer to the classroom," said Gologor.

The curriculum of 150 games REP uses is designed to include every kid and ensure equal participation. The kids never pick teams themselves or get 'out' of the games.



A Recess Enhancement Program coach from Asphalt Green gets second and third graders from P.S. 443 moving during its Rock N Recess event. Community News Group / Jaime Williams

The program continues to have an influence even when coaches aren't on site.

REP offers professional development for school staff and aides, to encourage them to engage with the kids during recess and help get the games started.

That extra support has been valuable to the staff at P.S. 457, said principal Lisette Febus.

"Our school aids enjoy lunch and recess more than before," she said.

And the kids enjoy it more too.

"They love it when the Asphalt Green coaches come in," said Febus. "They look forward to every Tuesday and Thursday."

These multiple benefits are all part of REP's goal to help students at schools where resources are stretched thin, said Gologor.

"It helps them physically," he said about enhanced recess. "But it helps them mentally and emotionally as well."



A mural of the late great Big Pun, located on East 163rd Street and Rogers Place, was completed by the TATS CRU in 2011, commemorating the life and career of the artist.

Community News Group / Steven Goodstein

Big Pun still revered after 15 years

BY STEVEN GOODSTEIN

Years after his death, Bronx residents and hip hop fans still remember Big Pun and continue to celebrate his legacy.

This coming Saturday, February 7, marks the 15-year anniversary of Big Pun's passing, and for many, it's a time to reflect on the shortened but illustrious life of the late rap legend.

Big Pun, who was born Christopher Lee Rios on November 10, 1971 to parents of Puerto Rican decent, was born and raised in Longwood.

In his early years, as a child, Pun witnessed many sad occurances, including his mother's drug abuse and his father's death. He also suffered constant abuse from his step-father, and eventually dropped out of high school.

This led to him leaving home at age 15, forcing him to live in abandoned buildings for much of the remainder of his adolescence.

In the early to mid 1990s, Pun began writing lyrics and collaborating with different Bronx hip hop artists, including Fat Joe.

Eventually, Pun released his debut album, 'Capital Punishment' in 1998, which sold more than one million copies in the United States and resulted in him being the first Latino artist in hip hop history to go platinum. The album was also nominated for Best Rap Album at the 1999 Grammy Awards.

Pun had a unique writing and rhyming technique, combining wordy phrases with quick deliveries while still talking about real life situations, such as competition, fame and relationships.

According to his fans and supporters, nobody was a match for him when it came to lyricism.

"He was the realest, wordiest and most talented artist in hip hop during his time and even afterwards - he was incredibly gifted and he touched on every music aspect," said website editor and dedicated fan Divino Denegro, who has also written articles on Big Pun for hip hop magazine The Source in the past.

Despite his music success, Pun struggled with his weight for most of his life, excluding adolescence.

In 1999, weighing in at over 600 pounds, Pun took part in a weight-loss program at Duke University were he lost 80 pounds. He eventually quit the program before completing it, however, and returned to New York where he gained more weight than he lost back.

On February 7, 2000, while temporarily boarding with his family in a White Plains hotel during a home renovation, Pun suffered a fatal heart attack and respiratory failure, and was pronounced dead shortly after at just 28 years old.

"It's unfortunate that his career and his life ended so abruptly," said Denegro. "People always talk about him being the first Latino hip hop artist to sell one million copies, but in reality, he was so much more, and his career continues to inspire and influence others."

One could have predicted that Big Pun's legacy would live on even after he passed away.

The Big Pun mural, which was painted by professional muralist group TATS CRU, was painted over another Big Pun mural in 2011, a tradition that the group aims to take part in annually for his anniversary.

"Minus baseball, he was the modern day Roberto Clemente for the Puerto Rican community," Hector 'Nicer' Nazario of TATS CRU said. "He was a caring, funny, genuine individual who always made time for everybody, and painting these murals is how we pay him back."

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REGEIS CARE RESIDENT TURNS 103

Sara Fisher, a resident at Regeis Care Center, celebrated her 103rd birthday at the center on Thursday, January 29. The party also celebrated other residents with January birthdays.



Sara Fisher and her niece, Valerie Hunt, surrounded by staff and residents of Regis Care Center, celebrate her 103rd birthday. Photo by Silvio Pacifico

SUNY MARITIME STUDENTS GRADUATE

The State University of New York Maritime College at Fort Schuyler held a graduation ceremony on Friday, January 30.



A class of Privateers graduate. Photo by Walter Pofeldt

COUNCILMAN TORRES READS AT NCBH

Councilman Ritchie Torres participated in North Central Bronx Hospital's 'Reach Out and Read' on Wednesday, January 21. Torres read three books to about 30 young people and their parents as part of the event. The program was organized and sponsored by both Reach Out and Read of Greater New York and NCBH's Outpatient Pediatrics Department.



Councilman Richie Torres reads a picture book to the children

BCDC HOSTS ANNUAL PARTY

The Bronx County Democratic Committee hosted its annual party at Michelangelo's on Thursday, January 29. The event was attended by Borough President Ruben Diaz, Jr. as well as Democratic Committee chairman Carl Heastie, among others.



Above (l-r) Senator Ruben Diaz, Assemblyman and Bronx County Democratic Committee chairman Carl Heastie and Borough President Ruben Diaz, Jr. were present at the Bronx County Democratic Committee annual party on Thursday, January 29. Photo by Edwin Soto



(l-r) Borough President Ruben Diaz, Jr., Assemblyman and Bronx County Democratic Committee chairman Carl Heastie and Assemblyman Marcos Crespo at the Bronx County Democratic Committee annual party. Photo by Edwin Soto

BP DIAZ HOSTS ED CONFAB

Borough President Ruben Diaz, Jr. and his Education and Youth Services Department hosted a meet and greet with the borough's elected officials and public school superintendents to discuss capital funding, programs, parental involvement, ways to collaborate and other issues at his office on Friday, January 30. Attendees at the event included Senator Gustavo Rivera, senior superintendent for Office of School Support Laura Feijoo, council members Annabel Palma, Vanessa Gibson, Andy King, Andrew Cohen, assembly members Michael Benedetto, Marcos Crespo, Victor Pichardo and Latoya Joyner, as well as superintendents and their representatives from Bronx districts.



(l-r) Borough President Ruben Diaz, Jr., Yolanda Torres, Dr. Karen Ames, Leticia Rodriguez-Rosario, Melodie Mashel, Maria Lopez, Rafaela Espinal Pacheco and senior superintendent Laura Feijoo hosted a meet and greet at BP Diaz's office.. Photo courtesy of BP Diaz's office

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Board opposes medical building on Arnow lot

BY JAIME WILLIAMS

Some local residents are opposing a proposed medical building in Morris Park.

Community Board 11 recently voted to send a letter of objection to the Bureau of Standards and Appeals regarding a special permit application for 1604 Williamsbridge Road.

The builder, Sal Maurice of Maurice Realty, presented his plan for a 4,700 square foot, 3-story medical building at the corner of Pierce Avenue to the board's Land Use Committee in December.

The committee, and later the full board, opposed the plan for the residential-zoned lot because of lack of parking and concerns about congestion in the neighborhood, among other things.

The property is the site of the former historic Arnow Mansion, which was torn down in 2005 right before the down-zoning in the neighborhood took effect. As the developer raced against the clock to start building on the property, a stop-work order was put in place.



A developer wants to put a medical building at the corner of Pierce Avenue and Williamsbridge Road.
Photo by Silvio Pacifico

Although proposals for a medical building on the corner lot have come up before, the property has remained vacant.

The lot was recently sold to Maurice from Joseph Quintessenza, who also attended the presentation to the Land Use Committee.

Part of the reason the community board opposed the project is because the new owner knew the lot was zoned for residential development when he purchased it, said Land Use Committee chair Joe McManus.

"And now they're asking for 'relief' because they can't make money on it," said McManus.

But the big concern about the proposal was the lack of parking. The building would have only two parking spots on site, and parking in the neighborhood is already extremely difficult.

"It was parking, parking, parking," McManus said about the committees response to the proposal.

They were also concerned about adding to traffic congestion in the area, where there are already numerous medical facilities and hospitals.

Additionally, in front of the building is a bus stop, which would make it difficult for ambulettes or Access-a-Ride to drop off at the location, said McManus.

The builder doesn't see parking as an issue, said Maurice's partner, Vivian Locascio of Locascio Realty.

She said two family homes also add cars to the neighborhood, and she expects many employees will take public transportation. In that way, the bus stop in front of the building is a plus.

"People today take buses," said Locascio.

Concerns were also raised about the building's future tenants, said McManus.

"Once it becomes a commercial building, they could do anything," he said. "We rezoned that to be residential."

But Maurice only has plans for a traditional nine to five medical building, said Locascio.

"Were not going to put drug rehabilitation or a methadone center there," she said.

The community board is there to protect the neighborhood, said McManus, and the developer does not want to offer concessions—such as parking - that would make the plan more palatable for the community.

Locascio said the developer is in fact trying to better the community, and that he plans to live next door to monitor the property.

CVS rebuild on Burke

From Page 1

prescriptions from the next closest CVS on Allerton Avenue, said Father Richard Gorman, chairman of Community Board 12. But he hasn't heard of any issues, which he feels is because of the numerous other drug stores nearby.

"There are so many of these in the area," he said.

Over the course of the year, the community's concern shifted to what would be done with the empty property.

"I always have concerns about vacant lots," said Gorman. "You don't know what you're going to get."

Gorman was happy to hear that permits have been filed with the DOB to rebuild the CVS.

"I'm glad it's going back to the status quo," he said.

And although Gorman said he'd like to have a more diverse range of businesses in the neighborhood with a proliferation of drug stores, he feels another pharmacy is much better than a motel or other seedy establishments.

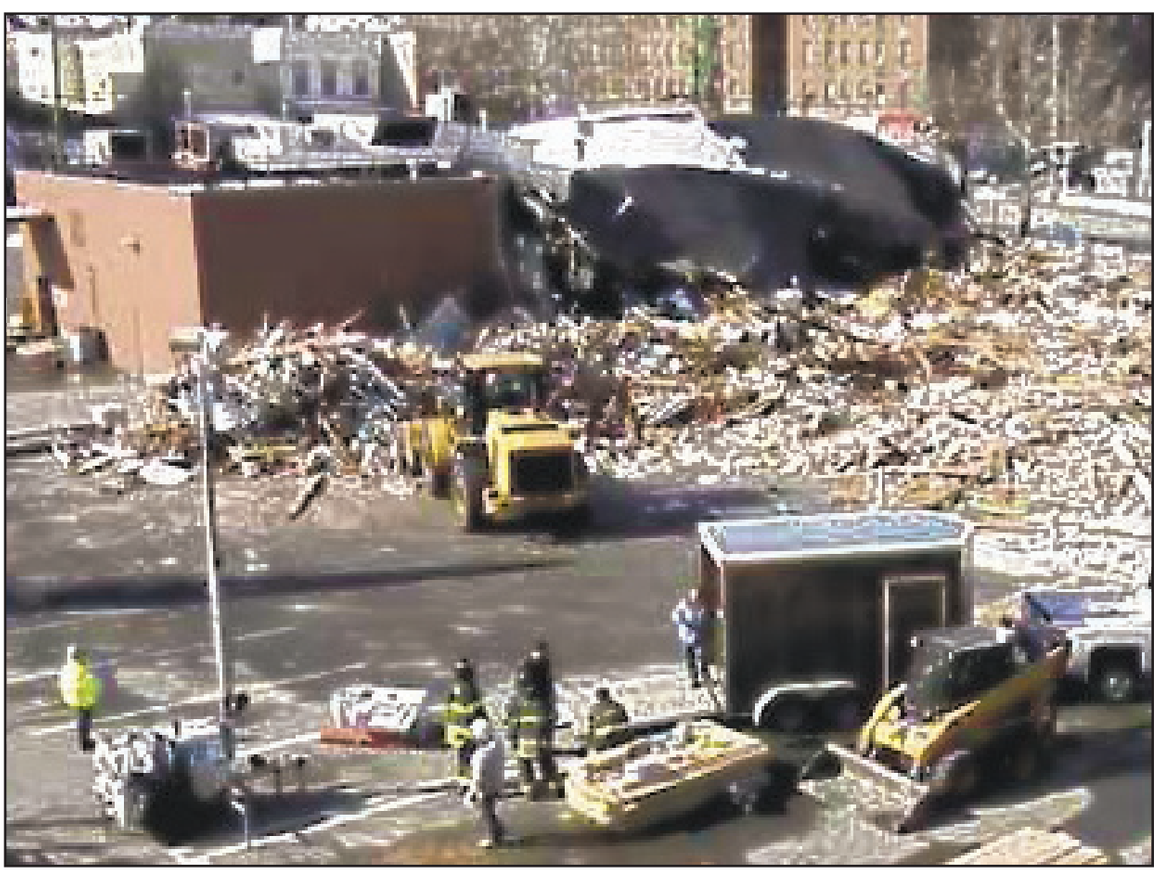
"I'd rather see drug stores than any type of nefarious use," said Gorman.

According to a spokesman from CVS, the plans are for the building to be completed and open for business this summer.

Hopefully the new building will fare better than the last.

The reason for the collapse was a failure of the roof's bow trusses from the weight of snow on the roof, according to documents from the DOB.

The department had issued a weather advisory warning on the day of the collapse, cautioning people that melting snow that collects on roofs can threaten the structural integrity of a building, and that weak,



The CVS at Burke Avenue and White Plains Road was demolished after the roof collapsed in February 2014. CVS is rebuilding and plans to reopen the location this summer.
File Photo

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