

June 24, 2012

Your Neighborhood – Your News®



Van Bramer wants to quiet idling trains

BY REBECCA HENELY

City Councilman Jimmy Van Bramer (D-Sunnyside) and residents of the Murano and One Hunters Point condominiums on Borden Avenue in Long Island City Friday decried the idling trains from the rail yard across the street, saying the noise goes on for hours at a time.

“Silence the engines and allow people to live their lives,” Van Bramer said.

Since the condos on Borden Avenue between Vernon Boulevard and 5th Street opened around 2008, residents have complained about the noise from the idling diesel trains in the Long Island City railyard. During the protest, which was held near Borden Avenue and 5th Street, a persistent loud hum could be heard from the railyard.

The yard, which has been in operation for more than 100 years, serves as a repair and holding location and is the only Queens yard west of Woodside with diesel equipment.

Trains from the Long Is-
Continued on Page 16



GETTING AN EARFUL

Gucci, a five-month-old Yorkie puppy, noshes on an ear of corn at the Kissena Park Corridor.

Photo by Christina Santucci

Queens reacts with caution to Obama memo

Immigrants hope to avoid deportation

BY JOE ANUTA AND REBECCA HENELY

President Barack Obama praised a federal memo released Friday that is set to give undocumented young people in Queens hope for a normal life, but drew cautious optimism from the borough and criticism from the county’s only Republican congressman.

The memo instructs the U.S. Department of Homeland Security not to initiate deportation proceedings against certain students and military veterans, who could then apply for work authorization.

“Put yourself in their shoes. Imagine you’ve done everything

right your entire life — studied hard, worked hard, maybe even graduated at the top of your class — only to suddenly face the threat of deportation to a country that you know nothing about, with a language that you may not even speak,” Obama said in a speech at the White House last week.

The president hoped to lift the “shadow of deportation of these young people” with the stroke of his pen, but the news was received with skepticism by some in Queens, the nation’s most diverse county where 46 percent of the population is foreign-born.

A 19-year-old South Korean national, who did not want to be named for fear of exposing her

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Bayside playground reopens after blaze

BY PHIL CORSO

For 2-year-old Louis Finkel, it was a long nine months. But now that his treasured playground in Alley Pond Park has reopened, he could not help but smile.

“He kept looking toward the playground,” said grandmother Millie Finkel. “Now he’s

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Louis Finkel, 2, happily returns to Alley Pond Park in Oakland Gardens after months of waiting. The playground was closed after a suspicious fire in September.

Photo by Phil Corso

Man dies in Ozone Pk. crash

BY JOE ANUTA

A sanitation worker who had been on the job less than a year was killed after the car he was driving smashed into several parked vehicles and an electronics shop along Atlantic Avenue early Saturday morning.

Police believe Domin-

ick Bunch, 24, fled from an earlier fender bender in Brooklyn before his smashed-up 2010 Toyota was left near the corner of 88th Street, police said.

Residents in an apartment building near the corner said they awoke to a loud crash around 3 a.m., when police said the male driver

hit several parked cars and a livery cab before flipping his own vehicle, killing him and injuring a female passenger.

Bunch’s car first hit a tree and an SUV, sending it up on the sidewalk, according to neighbors.

“The only thing that
Continued on Page 16

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BY PHIL CORSO

From fryer to fuel, students at Dartmouth College rolled through Douglaston last week to show off their eco-friendly Big Green Bus converted to run on waste vegetable oil.

They joined with members of biofuel companies American By-Products and A&L Recycling, which donated more than 300 gallons of waste vegetable oil to keep the wheels turning through the group's drive across the country to engage public discussion on environmental responsibility.

"We are very excited to be a part of all this," said Kelly McGlinchey, one of the 11 students along for the ride. "It is an honor to see so many people show an interest in what we are doing."

The parking lot at Northern Boulevard's Alley Pond Environmental Center was filled last Thursday evening with sightseers, city officials and even representatives from the New York Mets to be a part of the Big Green Bus' only city stop.

The environmental sanctuary in Douglaston, at 228-06 Northern Blvd., helped reel the bus into Queens through Kelly McGlinchey's cousin and APEC Registrar Elizabeth McGlinchey.

"Alley Pond is very

proud and pleased to host these students as they move along in their journey," said Irene Scheid, executive director for the environmental center. "It is a brilliant illustration of what we have to hope for. If we teach an appreciation of the environment, hopefully the next generation will take better care of it than we did."

Borough President Helen Marshall sent along a proclamation declaring June 14 Alley Pond Environmental Center's Big Green Bus Day in Queens, while City Councilman Ruben Wills (D-Jamaica) presented APEC and the retrofitted bus with city citations.

"These guys are doing a great thing," said Todd Magee, co-owner of American By-Products. "They are showing the world how we can solve some of the country's biggest problems by reducing our dependency on foreign oil."

The bus was donated by Greyhound and transformed into a sustainable living space from recycled table tops to solar panels to provide electricity.

American By-Products buys discarded cooking oil from several area eateries throughout the city and converts it into the finished product. The group donated nearly 160 gallons to the bus last week.



Dartmouth College students suit up and refuel their Big Green Bus with donated waste vegetable oil during their stop at Alley Pond Environmental Center.
Photo by Phil Corso



Bayside Hills seventh-grader Arvind Mahankali (c.) receives a Council citation for placing third in the Scripps National Spelling Bee from City Councilmen Dan Halloran (l.) and Mark Weprin (r.).
Photo by Phil Corso

City citation spells success

Councilmen mark Bayside Hills boy's triumph at national bee

BY PHIL CORSO

For the rest of his life, Bayside Hills seventh-grader Arvind Mahankali said he would never forget the word "schwannoma" and neither would City Councilman Dan Halloran (R-Whitestone).

Mahankali, who placed third for the second year in a row last month in the Scripps National Spelling Bee, was eliminated from the contest when he could not spell the word that describes a tumor of the peripheral nerve. Coincidentally, Halloran said he was still recovering from brain surgery to remove a benign schwannoma near the left side of his head.

"It is a very ironic situation," Halloran said.

"Luckily, it worked out for the both of us in the end."

Halloran joined Councilman Mark Weprin (D-Oakland Gardens) Monday to present the spelling guru with a Council citation for being named a finalist.

"We are all very proud of Arvind. His accomplishment was amazing," Halloran said. "It took tremendous hours of preparation and it is a testament to the hard work of both Arvind and his parents."

The seventh-grader at MS 74 Nathaniel Hawthorne, at 61-15 Oceania St. in Oakland Gardens, said he practiced with his parents for two hours every weekday and six hours a day every weekend in the weeks leading up to the event.

"This is an accomplishment that impresses everyone," Weprin said. "Arvind has made New York City very proud."

Principal Anthony Armstrong did not stop smiling throughout the presentation.

"Arvind brought spelling into fashion," Armstrong joked.

And even though he ended in third place for the second year in a row, Mahankali said he still planned on returning to the competition next year. He said he would continue studying the dictionary with his parents, and hopefully master the entire book.

"I feel very privileged to be honored in this way and I'm happy that New York City is happy because

of what I did," Mahankali said. "I could not have done this without my parents."

Mahankali's father, Srinivas Mahankali, said he was thankful for both his son's effort and the school's support in helping to bolster the bee finalist. He said his son heard about the spelling bee while watching television and wanted to be a part of it ever since.

"We are so elated as a family to be recognized for Arvind's work," Srinivas Mahankali said. "He always displayed a lot of fondness towards words."

Reach reporter Phil Corso by e-mail at pcorso@cnglocal.com or by phone at 718-260-4573.

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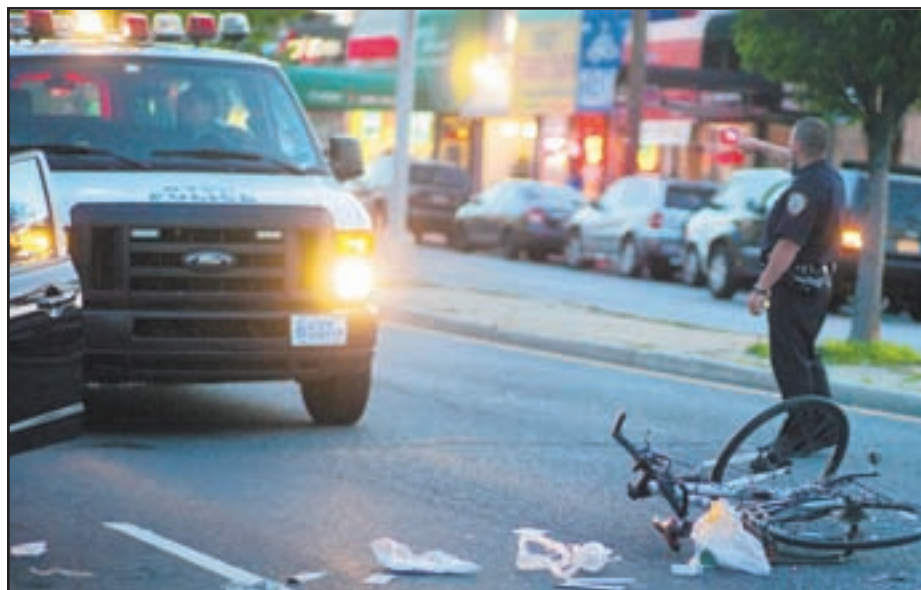
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Fresh Meadows accident claims life of circus man



Police investigate a fatal accident in Fresh Meadows, where a bicyclist was killed after he struck a car door.

Photo by Ken Maldonado

BY JOE ANUTA

A circus company is mourning the loss of a worker who died in a Fresh Meadows bicycle accident Saturday evening, according to police.

Just after 8 p.m. in front of 178-02 Union Tnpk., a 39-year-old man was riding eastbound past a row of parked cars when the driver of one of the vehicles opened the car door.

The cyclist, whose name has not been released, collided with the door and was found with severe trauma to the head and neck, according to the NYPD.

The man was an electrician for Big Apple Circus, which had set up shop in Cunningham Park May 22, according to Tom Larson, general manager of the circus. The show was set to move on the day after the man was killed.

"He was a respected and valued member of our circus community," Larson

said. "We are less strong without him."

The man had been with the circus for eight years, according to a spokesman, and the last show in Flush-

The driver who opened the door stayed on the scene and no criminality was suspected, according to the NYPD.

ing was dedicated to him.

"He was a very liked, respected and valued employee," said Joel Dein. "It's very much a shock to everybody."

The man was transported to Elmhurst General Hospital, where he was pronounced dead, police said.

Employees of the Sly Fox Inn across the street said the man was bleeding profusely as he lay in the street, and the man might have cut his neck from an impact with his own handlebars or the car door, although cops could not confirm.

The driver who opened the door stayed on the scene and no criminality was suspected, according to police.

Emergency workers who arrived on the scene found a substantial pool of blood next to the man's bike, about 10 feet in front of where the car door was opened.

Nearby workers in a cell-phone store were shocked to hear of the accident, but said that the four-lane road is often a dangerous venue because of speeding cars.

Reach reporter Joe Anuta by e-mail at januta@cnglocal.com or by phone at 718-260-4566.

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Mayor shines light on Willets Point revamp plans

BY JOE ANUTA

The mayor ended weeks of speculation about the city's plans for Willets Point last Thursday by unveiling a tweaked vision of the development in which Citi Field would be flanked on both sides by retail and housing, but opponents derided the announcement as a land grab by the owners of the New York Mets.

"It includes everything we were looking for in the first phase, exactly as envisioned and approved by the community and City Council back in 2008," Mayor Michael Bloomberg said at the Queens Chamber of Commerce breakfast.

After sending out a request for proposals, the city decided on the plan submitted by a partnership between Related Cos., a Manhattan development firm, and Sterling Equities, which happens to be owned by Saul Katz and Fred Wilpon, who also own the



The proposal for Willets Point includes a 1-million-square-foot retail and entertainment center that would replace a parking lot the city currently leases to the New York Mets.
Rendering courtesy Mayor Michael Bloomberg

Amazin's.

The plan for Phase 1 includes a familiar proposal of transforming the auto body shops along 126th Street to the east of the stadium into a 30,000-square-foot shopping center and 200-room hotel.

But the proposal also now calls for Willets West, a 1-million-square-foot retail and entertainment center that will take the place of a parking lot the city currently leases to the Mets.

"Does it include everything on everyone's wish-list and on the timeline they were hoping for? No," Bloomberg said, alluding to criticism from the Council that the affordable housing component of the project has been pushed back to around 2025, behind retail and hotel components.

The city Economic Development Corp. countered that making the area enticing through retail and entertainment developments

will pave the way for housing and could eventually catch the eye of a developer looking to put a convention center or casino in the Iron Triangle.

But members of Willets Point United, a group of property and business owners opposed to the redevelopment project, blasted the city for giving away the land to the developers.

"It gives Willets Point property to the developers, free of charge — property

which 410 million taxpayer dollars have been budgeted to acquire, and which is actually worth hundreds of millions of dollars," said Willets Point United members in an open letter.

The group contends that the giveaway is contrary to what was told to the Council in 2008.

The fate of the project was up in the air for weeks after the city abruptly announced in May it would drop its bid to condemn

property through eminent domain. Reports leaked out to the media, but the city remained mum until Bloomberg's early morning announcement.

The EDC has not ruled out using eminent domain for the project and said it has acquired 95 percent of the property through negotiations.

Reach reporter Joe Anuta by e-mail at januta@cnglocal.com.

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Student loans deconstructed

Meeks calls on Congress to keep interest rates from doubling

BY RICH BOCKMANN

With interest rates on federal subsidized student loans set to double at the end of the month if Congress does not act, U.S. Rep. Gregory Meeks (D-Jamaica) convened a panel of experts at York College last week to inform borrowers of their options.

In 2007, Meeks voted for the College Cost Reduction and Access Act, which, among other things, reduced rates on federal loans over several years to the current rate of 3.4 percent. Meeks said House Republicans are willing to extend the bill, but they are trying to pay for it by cutting health care services to women.

Wills also voted for the Dodd-Frank Act, which created the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. Rohit Chopra said one of the things the bureau has done is create oversight of the private student loan market. Prior to the act, when borrowers with federal loans had difficulty repaying or disputes over billing errors, they could go to the Department of Education for help.

But if a borrower had a dispute with a private lender, he or she would have to research the lending institution's charter to see which federal or state



U.S. Rep. Gregory Meeks (r.) and a panel of higher-education experts talk about student loans at York College.
Photo by Rich Bockmann

agency regulated it.

The bureau is also looking to roll out a financial aid shopping sheet, which would be a one-stop shop to find out how much debt one would incur to attend a particular higher-education institution and how much it would eventually cost to repay.

"It's so that there's no sticker shock when the bills start to come," he said.

York College junior Ronald Appleberry, 24, said he already has about \$7,000 in federal student loans, and he is planning to take out more to finish his edu-

cation. The broadcasting major said he was looking for information on how to start paying his loans back while in school and was willing to share tips of his own.

"The first time I bought a Macbook, I paid about \$1,300 for it. I didn't know there was this program where students can buy Macbooks and get like 40 percent off," he said.

Appleberry said he only learned of the program when he took in his Macbook to be repaired.

"Why is it that the guy at the computer repair

shop is telling me this and not someone in a budgeting program at college?" he asked.

Rockaways resident Denise Hill said she attended the meeting to find out information about funding higher education for her daughter, who will graduate from the Bronx High School of Science this year.

James Copeland, from the U.S. Department of Education, reminded her that loans are for students and that it was her daughter's responsibility to fund her own education.

Stop and frisk works in SE Queens: Flake

BY RICH BOCKMANN

The Rev. Floyd Flake, the influential pastor of the Greater Allen A.M.E. Cathedral, recently said that while he believes the NYPD's controversial stop-and-frisk program should be open to scrutiny, overall it has been effective in reducing crime in southeast Queens.

"I think stop-and-frisk is an important element in trying to stop crime in the community," he told Errol Louis, host of "Inside City Hall" on NY1. "On the other hand, I would suggest that there are reasons to continually evaluate it, see what the outproduct is and see whether or not it's doing what its intentions are."

He added, "To a large degree, I think it is doing that, but to some degree there are innocent people who are in the streets, they are not carrying guns, they are not criminals and sometimes they are caught up in it."

The 103rd Precinct, which covers downtown Jamaica just north of the former congressman's cathedral, ranked eighth among city precincts last year in the number of stop-and-frisks, with nearly 88 percent of those stopped found to be innocent, according to NYPD figures released by the New York Civil Liber-

ties Union.

"In southeast Queens it is not really what I would call a top-shelf issue," Flake told Louis when he was asked how his congregation felt about the practice.

"I don't think we have as many crimes and



THE REV. FLOYD FLAKE

as many murders, but we have many more than we need," he said, "and so you have a population of people that want the best possible police surveillance and involvement and engagement."

Floyd added he did not believe that Mayor Michael Bloomberg's administration was going "over the top" in its efforts to combat crime as Mayor Rudy Giuliani's had.

"But I think this administration has tried to ... maintain some control," he

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8 USTA's plan for fixing stadiums shocks community

CB 7 chides tennis group for withholding intent to demolish Armstrong facility, grandstand at meet

BY JOE ANUTA

The United States Tennis Association revealed plans for a massive overhaul of its Flushing facilities, surprising the members of the community who are usually kept abreast of major developments in the area.

The renovations will run in the hundreds of millions of dollars and will enable an extra 100,000 people to attend the association's annual US Open in Flushing Meadows Corona Park, which currently draws about 700,000 spectators.

"The US Open is one of the city's greatest sporting events, and it generates more than \$750 million a year in economic activity," said Mayor Michael Bloomberg, who announced the renovations last week at

a breakfast meeting. "The city recognizes the crucial need to improve the USTA facility and supports this vision, so that the center remains a top-ranked tennis venue capable of hosting the US Open and thereby allowing the tournament to remain in New York City for many decades."

The vision for upgrading the facilities includes the demolition of the Louis Armstrong Stadium, which currently seats 10,000 people. It would be replaced with a new stadium holding 15,000, according to the USTA.

The Grandstand, which currently seats 6,000 people and, like the Louis Armstrong Stadium was built as part of the 1964 World's Fair, would also be demolished. A new 8,000 capacity stadium would be



Mayor Michael Bloomberg (l.) discusses a massive overhaul of the tennis facility in Flushing Meadows Corona Park.

Photo by Christina Santucci

built on a different location within the USTA's footprint, the association said.

The USTA also hopes to add new tournament courts and bleachers, along with two new parking gar-

ages.

"Our goal remains to ensure that the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center remains a world-class facility," said Jon Vegosen, chairman of

the board and president of the USTA.

But members of Community Board 7 groused that the USTA gave a presentation at its monthly board meeting just four days before Bloomberg's announcement and said nothing of the enormous project.

"I was kind of taken aback," said Gene Kelty, chairman of CB 7. "For them to say 'by the way, we're doing this and we want your support,' that is not a good starting point."

Kelty lauded the USTA's work in bringing jobs to the community and the extensive outreach it provides along with public tennis courts and park maintenance.

But the surprise renovations came on the heels of another area of conten-

tion between the board and the association.

At the CB 7 meeting June 11, Kelty took the USTA to task for hosting auditions in Harlem for singers hoping to belt out the national anthem at this year's US Open.

"You're a Queens-based organization. I want to see it in Queens. That's where it should be," Kelty said, calling the tryouts scheduled to take place at the Apollo Theater unacceptable.

Kelty cited several venues in the borough that could host the tryouts, including the newly renovated Colden Auditorium at Queens College, Flushing Town Hall or Queens Theater in the Park.



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Patrizia's Italian eatery replaces Valentino's on Green in Bayside

BY PHIL CORSO

A Bayside restaurant known for its classy approach to dining has changed hands and its name in exchange for a more affordable alternative.

According to a spokesman from the city Parks Department, Valentino's on the Green has closed for good, handing the keys over to brothers Giacomo and Gennaro Alaio earlier this month and changing the eatery's name to Patrizia's of Bayside.

The Parks-owned restaurant held its official opening June 12 at 201-10 Cross Island Pkwy. and features an entirely revamped Italian-style menu.

Gennaro Alaio said what sets the new eatery

apart from its previous incarnation is a more moderately priced approach to Italian cuisine. And in addition to the bigger portions of food and extreme focus on quality, the part-owner said he was excited to bring the Patrizia's name to Bayside.

The Alaio brothers said the restaurant is now under a 17-year lease.

Gennaro Alaio said he and his brother's reputation spans extends far beyond Queens as they also operate restaurants in Brooklyn, the Bronx, and Stamford, Conn.

"People should feel comfortable coming to a place like Patrizia's because we have a reputation and are already established," Alaio said. "We are trying to gain a presence in

every borough and we saw Bayside as a great opportunity for us."

According to the new owners, the restaurant's first week was extremely busy, with more than 1,000 dinners served without the help of advertising.

Parks said the new establishment's moderate pricing should draw more customers and attract a greater demographic.

Patrizia's of Bayside will be open Tuesdays through Sundays for dinner hours only. Alaio added that Patrizia's would still honor old Valentino's gift certificates and reservations.

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Sizzler in Forest Hills will pay Liza Friedlander (inset) after a court ruled in favor of the transgender woman following a 2010 assault.
Inset courtesy Lambda Legal

Court orders Sizzler to pay assault victim 2010 hate attack nets woman \$25,000

BY STEVE MOSCO

A Forest Hills Sizzler has been ordered to pay \$25,000 to a transgender woman after a court ruled that staff and diners had attacked her because of her sexual orientation during an incident in September 2010.

Liza Friedlander alleged that the restaurant's manager, Edgar Orellana, accused her of not paying for her meal and began verbally abusing her. According to the suit filed in Queens civil court, the manager eventually knocked her down with a shove to the chest and began kicking her and yelling anti-gay epithets.

The suit further alleged that the manager's actions incited other diners to verbally abuse Friedlander.

"I felt like I understood what it must have felt like to be a black person in the 1950s and be told you can't drink from a water fountain or ride the bus," said Friedlander, who said the incident pushed her to move out of Forest Hills and into Manhattan. "It started with one person and that person

was the catalyst to all of these ignorant mentalities. It was the scariest situation I've ever been in."

According to Friedlander, the manager's actions set off a "frenzy of hateful chants," including patrons calling her a "he/she freak" and a "dyke." Many demanded she leave the restaurant and one patron threatened her with sexual assault.

Orellana said at the time that Friedlander instigated the incident and that he retreated to his office to call the police. The manager could not be reached for comment.

The restaurant's principal owner, Waroge Met Ltd., could not be reached for comment.

Natalie Chin, attorney for Lambda Legal, which represented Friedlander, said the victory was less about money and more about holding the perpetrators responsible.

"Liza Friedlander experienced violence, discrimination and degradation at this restaurant because she did not conform to the stereotypes of how a woman should look," Chin said. "The result sends a strong message: Violent

and discriminatory behavior motivated by bias against lesbians, gay men, bisexuals or transgender people will not be tolerated. Businesses are not exempt from treating LGBT people with dignity and respect."

Chin said the judgment ruled in her client's favor mainly because state and city human rights laws are robust and routinely protect against discrimination cases such as this.

She also said her client is happy to put the incident behind her.

"If this would have (gone) to trial, it would have dragged on for years," she said. "This wasn't about making millions of dollars — it was about demonstrating that businesses cannot discriminate and get away with it."

While she did fear for her life, Friedlander said the incident did turn into a positive experience in her life.

"I feel like pursuing the case was worth the effort in the end," she said. "It's not OK for this to happen and you can stand up for yourself and your voice can be heard if you persevere."

QCC praises Padavan for providing historic documents

Former veteran state senator donated boxes of his legislative archives to Bayside college's library

BY PHIL CORSO

Anyone walking into the library at Queensborough Community College Monday was met immediately with a piece of his history.

Crucial documents, photos and other artifacts were encased in glass to celebrate the donation of former state Sen. Frank Padavan's legislative archives to the college.

The college honored the former senator's 38-year career with a dedication ceremony Monday inside its library, at 222-05 56th Ave. in Bayside, in the company of friends, family members and elected officials.

"He is history for many people. But for us, he is a very special partner," said Diane B. Call, interim president of the college. "He

achieved incredible things on behalf of the people of New York state."

Call said Padavan was always a crucial advocate for the college throughout his years in government. One of his many collaborations, she said, was when he helped expand the college's prized Holocaust Resource Center from just a portion of the library to its own building at the front of the campus.

Padavan, who served District 11 from 1972-2010, donated boxes upon boxes of legislative documents, Senate bills, photographs and other memorabilia to the QCC library archives. The memorabilia was organized through two different rooms decorated with evidence of the senator's career with photos along the wall and filing cabinets filled with documents.



City Councilmen Mark Weprin (l.) and Dan Halloran (c.) celebrate the historic archives of former state Sen. Frank Padavan being donated to Queensborough Community College.

Photo by Phil Corso

"My garage is only so big," Padavan joked. "It is truly amazing how the college catalogued all of the information. I can tell you my office never looked like that."

The ceremony included appearances from members of Padavan's office while he was a senator, family members and City Councilmen Dan Halloran (R-Whitestone) and Mark

Weprin (D-Oakland Gardens).

Padavan said he was hopeful that by dedicating all of his historical artifacts to the college, students looking to learn more about the state's legislative past could have a unique looking glass into the senator's career.

The dedication included a photo gallery with images of Padavan alongside President Ronald Reagan, U.S. Sen. Alfonse D'Amato and Mayor David N. Dinkins, to name only some of the many public figures involved. The photos played in a slideshow as the dedication ceremony went on.

"Frank Padavan gave our students a very valuable resource," said professor Jeanne Galvin, the QCC chief librarian. "I like students to be able to look at primary sources and now

they can take a good look at history."

Galvin said that although anyone could get information from a book, Padavan's donation allows for a unique and historical perspective on the many legislative battles the senator dealt with throughout his years in office.

Padavan echoed the same message in his address to the crowd, adding that there was also credit due for the several legislators he worked with while in the Senate.

"I'm grateful to say the least," Padavan said. "Now, a student might be researching key points of history and it will all be there to look at."

Reach reporter Phil Corso by e-mail at pcorso@cnglocal.com or by phone at 718-260-4573.

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Jax Hts making peace with plaza

BY REBECCA HENELY

Ever since 37th Road between 73rd and 74th streets was closed and the bus routes that went down it were moved last fall to create a plaza, detractors have complained that the redesign has driven away business and new park has gone unused.

Yet the warmer months have brought people to the plaza. On recent trips to the spot, TimesLedger Newspapers has observed many people sitting at the tables talking or resting on large stones. Sometimes all the seats had been taken by those enjoying the controversial plaza.

"It's wonderful for us," said Sonam Phuntso, a Sunnyside resident who was at the plaza last week. "It gives us a good place to sit and talk about everything under the sun."

The plaza was built after the city Department of Transportation held an extensive study of Jackson Heights to address trans-



Borough residents are enjoying the Jackson Heights Pedestrian Plaza, but some stores, such as the closing Jessi Emporium, are still struggling.

Photo by Rebecca Henely

portation issues. In response to what the department found and heard from residents, the DOT closed the block on 37th Road to create open space and moved the Q47 and Q49 bus lines to 75th Street.

Soon after the closure, merchants said profits from their

businesses fell by 50 percent or more.

The plaza also has been the scene of some violent incidents.

Queens Supreme Court Judge Thomas Raffaele, who had spoken out against the plaza, was allegedly assaulted by a police officer at the plaza earlier this

month. Raffaele thought the officer was unduly hurting a suspect in the course of an arrest. A shot was fired in an unrelated incident in the plaza some time later.

Yet Shazia Kausar, owner of the cafe Bombay Chat, said despite the incidents the public's overall view of the plaza is better.

"Before it was very bad," Kausar said. "Now people are coming out more because it is the summertime."

Woodside resident Tsering Dhondup said the plaza had become a meeting place for him and his friends.

"When people don't have a holiday, they come here and discuss with different people," Dhondup said.

Yet some store owners are still struggling.

Pinki Khan, an employee of sari store Jessi Emporium said the business was not going well and the owner, who lives in Long Island, was planning to close.

Agha Saleh, who owns an

Internet cafe, said the plaza has brought out homeless people. Many homeless people sleep in the plaza at night, but he said the shop owners should give the plaza about a year or a year and a half to figure out if the park is a benefit as well as act in partnership with the elected officials and law enforcement.

"We cannot say it is a wonderful thing at this moment," Saleh said. "It is still in progress."

Kazi Fouzia, an organizer for Desis Rising Up and Moving, said she was not comfortable with the complaints about the homeless and that it would be unfair to say they should not have a place to sit.

But she said the pedestrian plaza was a nice park for the neighborhood.

"People love this area," she said.

Reach reporter Rebecca Henely by e-mail at rehenely@cnglocal.com or by phone at 718-260-4564.

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Mayor picks Padavan to sit on city's redistricting panel

BY RICH BOCKMANN

Three Queens residents have been appointed to the commission that will redraw New York's City Council lines ahead of the 2013 elections.

The NYC Districting Commission consists of 15 members appointed by the mayor and the Council. The commission will use U.S. Census Bureau data to evaluate each of the city's 51 districts and, after holding public hearings, will submit its final plan to the Council.

Former state Sen. Frank Padavan is one of seven appointees chosen by Mayor Michael Bloomberg.

"We expect to have our first meeting within the next few weeks," said Padavan, a Republican who spent 28 years in the Sen-

ate. During that time, he served as that body's second in command as well as chairman of the Committees on Cities and Mental Hygiene and Addiction Control. Padavan lives in Jamaica Estates.

Council Democrats, who as the majority party were allotted five appointees, chose Forest Hills resident Linda Lin, a senior attorney with Liberty International Underwriters. Council Speaker Christine Quinn's (D-Manhattan) website lists Lin as the president of the Asian American Bar Association of New York, though that organization lists her as the immediate past president.

"Linda has been following the redistricting issue closely and is well-informed about the impact

that properly drawn district lines will have on the civic engagement of under-represented populations, including the Asian-American community," said AA-BANY President Jean Lee. "With the explosive growth of the Asian-American population in New York City over the past decade, we hope that the City Council Districting Commission will draw lines taking into account this significant demographic shift."

Council Republicans chose former member Thomas Ognibene as one of their three appointees. Ognibene served as the Council's minority leader and chaired the Committee on Veteran's Affairs. He also served as a member of the Finance, Housing and Buildings, General Welfare and Aging committees.

Resorts World tops all in slot machine money



Slot machine gamers visiting Resorts World Casino helped the company earn more revenue in May than any other casino in the country.

BY STEVE MOSCO

The casino generating the most money for its state is not in Las Vegas or Atlantic City — it is in Queens.

Resorts World Casino New York City in South Ozone Park has surpassed the Vegas Strip, Pennsylvania, Atlantic City, Connecticut and all other gaming locales to become the single largest tax-generating gaming property in the country, according to figures released by the casino.

The gaming giant generated gross gaming revenues of \$57.5 million in May — outpacing second place Mohegan Sun in Connecticut at \$55.4 million. And that is not only good news for Resorts World, it is also great news for state education since more than \$40 million — or 70 percent — of the casino's monthly gaming revenues go to education, the horse racing industry and other state entities.

According to a representative of the casino, the \$40 million distributed by Resorts World to the state is more than all 41 Las Vegas Strip casinos combined — which contributed \$30 million to Nevada. The 12 casinos in Atlantic City

paid \$18.3 million to New Jersey, while Mohegan Sun and Foxwoods Resort Casinos together generated \$28 million for Connecticut in May.

“Resorts World’s model has maximized gaming revenue for New York state in a manner that has not been replicated by any other facility in the nation,” said Michael Speller, president of Resorts World Casino New York City. “We are proud of the incredible revenue Resorts World has generated to support the education of New York’s students and the more than 3,000 jobs we have created for hard-working New Yorkers.

Speller went on to say that these new numbers should be an indication of just how much money could be generated if a constitutional amendment was added to allow table gaming in the state.

“This is a partnership that works, and as the state considers a referendum to permit table games, it should ensure that the current high tax base is not eroded,” he said. “Resorts World looks forward to pursuing additional opportunities in the future to generate even more revenue and

create thousands more jobs for New York.”

State Assemblyman J. Gary Pretlow (D-Yonkers), chairman of the Assembly Racing and Wagering Committee, cautioned that if there are changes to the state’s gambling laws, education must continue to receive its fair share.

“As New York state proceeds down the path of full legalized gaming, it is crucial that taxpayers and students not get shortchanged in the process,” said Pretlow. “As evidenced by Resorts World’s May figures, the state’s education system greatly benefits from our current gaming structure. Any changes to that structure must ensure that students get more, not less, of the revenue that gaming brings to the state.”

To date, in just eight months of operation Resorts World Casino New York City has sent more than \$252 million in taxes to the state, with more than \$162 million earmarked for education.

Reach reporter Steve Mosco by e-mail at smosco@cnglocal.com or by phone at 718-260-4546.

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Fort Totten Day

The Friends of Fort Totten Parks' hosted Family Fun Day Saturday. (Clockwise from top l.) Logan Garcia, 4, from Whitestone takes a tour of Engine 306's firetruck; Paul Nhan, 7, plays Connect Four; Melissa Cen, Rachel Ng, Nikki Ng and Elaine Chen check out the view from atop the soccer goals; Jasmine Ramsaywack, 5, (r.) races against her brother Brandon, 8 (l.); Nina, a one-year-old pitbull mix, is up for adoption at Central Veterinary Associates. She was hit by a car and has been with the vet for the past four months; and Kerri Smith, 10, holds bulldog pup Thomas.

Photo by Christina Santucci



Jax Hts film explores killing that led to Queens Pride 15

BY REBECCA HENELY

Jackson Heights native Richard Shpuntoff said while his evolving documentary is named after murder victim Julio Rivera, the film is not so much about the crime as the change it inspired in Jackson Heights.

Rivera, a gay Latino man living and working in Jackson Heights, was beaten to death by three men July 2, 1990, in the playground of PS 69 on 37th Avenue.

While Rivera was not the only gay man killed in the then-closeted community, Shpuntoff said what happened to Rivera galvanized Jackson Heights like never before, inspiring the establishment of the Queens Pride Parade and creating a more welcoming environment for LGBT residents that eventually led to the elections of openly gay City Councilmen Daniel Dromm (D-Jackson Heights) and Jimmy Van Bramer (D-Sunnyside).

"It was like the civil rights movement was hap-

pening again in the place I grew up," Shpuntoff said.

The film, "Julio of Jackson Heights," is not yet finished — only 37 minutes of the projected 90-minute documentary have been spliced together — but Shpuntoff has held four screenings.

The first was at the 20th Queens Pride Parade earlier this month and the last was at the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center in Manhattan's West Village June 13.

"Julio" contains footage from the Pride Parade, which Shpuntoff has photographed and filmed every year since it started, as well as interviews with Rivera's family, LGBT activists, law enforcement and elected officials, who tell the story of the crime and the movement.

"It's sort of like the Stonewall Riots of Queens," said Paul Menard, director of cultural programming for the center.

Menard said the center, which had helped the Jackson Heights commu-



Director Richard Shpuntoff discusses his film "Julio of Jackson Heights," about the growth of the Pride Parade and the pro-LGBT movement in Queens.
Photo by Rebecca Henely

nity in the wake of the murder, hosted the screening because the film illustrates why the LGBT community

needs to be visible, and how that visibility has helped prevent attacks like the one that killed Rivera.

"I think it's incredibly important to remember the real meaning behind pride and Pride Month," he said.

Jon Winkleman, a Sunnyside resident who was active with the organization Queer Nation at the time of Rivera's murder, said getting anyone to pay attention to his murder nearly two years ago made activists feel like they were "banging their heads against brick walls."

He said the communi-

ty has changed much since then.

"It's really one of the best places for an LGBT person to live today," Winkleman said.

Shpuntoff is still raising money to finish his film. Those interested in helping can donate at indiegogo.com and search for "Julio of Jackson Heights" or by visiting Shpuntoff's website at julioofjacksonheights.com.

Reach reporter Rebecca Henely by e-mail at rheleny@cnglocal.com or by phone at 718-260-4564.

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Trains

Continued from Page 1

land Rail Road's Montauk, Oyster Bay, Port Jefferson and Greenpoint lines end their morning runs at Borden Avenue and are stored there until the afternoon rush hour. Diesel trains can take two hours to power up and the Federal Railroad Administration requires a physical inspection of a train's brake system if it is shut down for four hours or more.

Salvatore Arena, spokesman for the LIRR, said in a statement the railroad has made efforts to address the community's complaints. He said LIRR's senior vice president of operations created a working group in 2009.

Some solutions the working group came up with to minimize the noise were changing equipment schedules, switching to electric power only on trains that use both diesel and electric power, moving idling trains as far away from Borden Avenue as possible and powering down one locomotive on dual-engine trains.

"We remain sensitive to quality-of-life issues for those living near the yard

and will continue to address their concerns," Arena said. "But, we must remember, they live next to an active rail yard in operation for more than 100 years, a station that services 10,000 customers every day and a transit center that plays a crucial role in the service we provide to our 80,000 daily customers."

Despite the changes, residents said the noise is still unbearable. While the trains do not idle 24 hours or on weekends, some residents said the idling can start as early as 6:45 a.m.

"You can't really talk on the phone during the day," said resident Amanda Miller.

Miller also said the air smells of diesel at times throughout the day and that she was worried about any health risks.

Van Bramer said while it is true that the railyard predates the condos, the LIRR needs to change how it operates as the community continues to become residential instead of industrial and as the nearby Hunters Point South development is built out and IS/HS 404 opens and enrolls students.

"These buildings are not going anywhere," he said. "They're here forever."

pated in the Father's Day silent march down Fifth Avenue protesting stop-and-frisk and said he believes criticism of the policy, especially from elected officials, was having an impact on the mayor.

Speaking at a Brooklyn church the day of the march, Bloomberg said Police Commissioner Ray Kelly's practices have made the city safe.

"We believe that when it comes to making stops — to borrow a phrase from President Clinton — the practice should be mended, not ended," he said. "That work has already begun, and Commissioner Kelly has said that he fully expects the number of stops to decline in the months ahead."

Immigration

Continued from Page 1

illegal status, has been living in America since she was 7.

She was brought to Flushing by her mother and has nearly no memories of her home country, which she has never visited. She speaks English better than Korean and never thought she was different from other children until she entered high school.

"I was limited. There was a lot of things I couldn't do that other kids could," she said.

She could not get a job nor a driver's license. Financial aid for college was out of the question. And the threat of deportation constantly hung over her head.

"It's just something that you can't forget about. You might for a moment, but it always comes back," she said.

The deal is not a path to citizenship nor an amnesty program and would only apply to illegal immigrants who came to the country before they were 16 and are under 30, have been here for at least five years, have no criminal record and are currently a student, high school graduate or a military veteran, according to the federal memo.

Ana Maria Archila, co-executive director of the immigration advocacy group Make the Road New

York, said the memo would be life-changing for the young people the organization serves.

"I think we feel like we have an ally in the White House. Someone who will stick his head out for what's just, for what's humane," Archila said.

Richmond Hill resident Wilian Mejia, 18, who is originally from Honduras and has been working with Make the Road to pass the Dream Act, which would grant permanent residency to some undocumented youth, said the order will give him the freedom he does not feel he has now.

"Now I don't feel scared," Mejia said. "It's just the beginning, but it's something."

Rishi Singh, a 26-year-old Richmond Hill resident and Trinidad native who is a member of Desis Rising Up, graduated as the valedictorian from his high school but his status has left him stuck in academia rather than being able to find a job. Singh said the passage of the order is bittersweet as it provides some relief for him but not necessarily for his family.

He said he also fears repercussions if he has to register with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the next president reverses the memo.

Singh's uncertainty was echoed elsewhere in the borough since applicants will have to submit to background checks and give their finger-

prints to the federal government to participate.

The MinKwon Center for Community Action in Flushing applauded the president's measure at a news conference Tuesday but highlighted the fact that the actual process — what forms and information will be required to participate — will not be decided for another 60 days.

But U.S. Rep. Bob Turner (R-Middle Village) said the measure will establish an incentive for more illegal immigration and should be left to Congress, which has the power to pass comprehensive reform.

"The president has chosen to ignore the law and reverse his policy from just last year," Turner said in a statement. "He has also created many more logistical and security issues for law enforcement officials across the country."

Turner cited the fact that Obama said several times last year that he would not use an executive order to pass immigration reform.

But many of the borough's Latino elected officials praised Obama's executive order, although they said it was not enough and that the Dream Act was still needed.

"For many undocumented immigrants, America is the only country they know. In their hearts and minds they are American," said state Sen. Jose Peralta (D-East Elmhurst). "Sadly, Republicans either can't, or choose not to, understand this."

Playground

Continued from Page 1

having an absolute ball. He loves the park."

Northeast Queens leaders and representatives from the city Parks Department celebrated the Oakland Gardens playground's return after a suspicious fire gutted the spot in September.

"We are very happy to see the playground finally reopened," said City Councilman Mark Weprin (D-Oakland Gardens). "We were heart-

broken to see so many kids try and use the park while it was closed down."

The playground's equipment was replaced with help from \$175,000 in funding through a mayoral requirements contract, Parks said. Work to revive the playground started in April.

"All things considered, to get the playground reopened by the summer time is phenomenal," said Northeast Queens Parks Administrator Janice Melnick. "We are all excited."

The playground initially closed Sept. 28 when firefighters responded

to a call of a small fire just after 1 a.m. The heat from the flames eventually became so intense that it warped and twisted the steel beams of the playground equipment's structure.

By the time firefighters had extinguished the flames, a large piece of equipment had been destroyed and an adjacent plastic roof had melted, Parks said.

Portions of the playground unaffected by the flames remained erect while an entirely new portion was built alongside it. The fresh additions include new slides and tree-themed pathways.

Though the cause of the fire was still unknown after eight months, Weprin said it was likely an act of vandalism involving area teenagers.

"We have a feeling it was young people," Weprin said. "We don't know for sure, but we know the playground became a real fireball."

Weprin and Melnick joined with Queens Parks Commissioner Dorothy Lewandowski, Community Board 11 Chairman Jerry Iannece and 111th Precinct Commanding Officer Jason Huerta to celebrate the playground's reopening as area kids and parents laughed and played all around them.

Frisk

Continued from Page 6

said.

Leroy Gadsden, president of the Jamaica branch of the NAACP, said he appreciated everything Flake had done for the community and said he thought the conversation should focus on illegal stop-and-frisks that target minorities.

"I don't think people really understand what we mean when we say 'illegal stop-and-frisks,'" he said. "They're so tired of crime in their communities they're willing to accept any antidote for the cure. This thing the NYPD is doing is not an antidote for the cure."

Gadsden partici-

Ozone crash

Continued from Page 1

saved the car from hitting our house was the tree," said resident Carmen Parretta.

Bunch then hit another SUV so hard that it also jumped onto the sidewalk and slammed into the front of an electronics store, Stereo Upgrade.

"We can't open the front gate," said Keith Cutolo, a friend of the owner. "And we won't know the extent of the damage until we can."

Cutolo said the parked car dented the metal pull-down gate and may have compromised a structural beam in the store.

After slamming into the parked SUV, the Toyota hit a light post and flipped over, Cutolo said.

Police and firefighters arrived and pronounced the Bunch dead at the scene.

The rookie sanitation worker had been in an earlier crash in Brooklyn at the corner of Atlantic Avenue and Crescent Street, according to the NYPD, exactly 1 mile from the accident site. He fled the scene eastbound on Atlantic Avenue, po-

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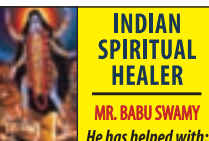
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