

Aug. 12, 2012

Your Neighborhood – Your News®



Teen indicted in shooting of diplomat's wife

BY REBECCA HENELY

A young Jamaica man who allegedly fired at some other teenagers earlier this year on a block not far from Long Island City High School and hit the wife of a Sudanese diplomat while her children were standing by has been indicted on attempted murder, the Queens district attorney's office said.

Miguel Mata, 19, of 90th Avenue and 139th Street, was arraigned last Thursday in front of Queens Supreme Court Judge Fernando Camacho, the DA said. His charges include second-degree attempted murder, assault, criminal possession of a weapon, reckless endangerment, assault and two counts of endangering the welfare of a child, the DA said.

The crimes could land him in prison for up to 25 years if he is found guilty, the DA said.

Mata's alleged victim was 31-year-old Mawahib Elbahi, who was shot in the shoulder in front of her apartment on 31st Drive

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Flushing driver loses \$3K in lot

Good Samaritan returns thousands to woman who dropped envelope in Whitestone

BY JOE ANUTA

A Flushing woman was shocked when she lost an envelope containing nearly \$3,000 last month, but she was even more surprised when it was returned to her without a dollar missing.

On July 16, Barbara Fitzpatrick, a 65-year-old retired teacher, went to the bank and withdrew \$2,900 and placed it into a white envelope. She was going to use the money to buy a new computer after running some errands.

But while she was walking through the parking lot of the Whitestone Pathmark near Ulmer Street and 31st Avenue, the envelope somehow wormed its way out of her pocket. She noticed the missing cash when she got back in her car to drive home before heading to Best Buy.

"I was thinking how do I replace this? I'm a retired teacher. I don't have this kind of money," Fitzpatrick said. "How could I be this careless? I was crazy to put that kind of money in my pocket."

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THE WAY OF THE WATER



Members of the DCH Dragons team compete under the sponsorship of Toyota during the 22nd annual Hong Kong Dragon Boat Festival that drew thousands to Flushing Meadows Corona Park. **See coverage on Pages 12.**

Photo by Christina Santucci

Northern Blvd. paving to be quick but bumpy

BY PHIL CORSO

It should not be a bumpy ride for long.

A milling and resurfacing project on Northern Boulevard between Bayside and Douglaston is expected to see a quick turnaround, Community Board 11 said.

"It is a standard milling and repaving job,"

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Malachi Samedy wows the crowd with percussion perfection at the Jamaica Arts and Music festival.

Photo by Steve Mosco

JAMS cranks up the beat

BY STEVE MOSCO

Thousands of revelers braved the heat and soaked up the fun as the cultural diversity of southeast Queens spilled out onto the streets at the 16th annual Jamaica Arts and Music Summer Festival Saturday.

The open-air street festival stretched along Jamaica Avenue between Parsons Boulevard and 169th Street and featured music, dance and a vast array of merchants selling everything from jewelry to deeply discounted CDs.

Thick plumes of smoke

rose from the festival as well, but this was no fire emergency — rather an enticing melange of diverse temptations like skewered meat, jerk chicken and chicharones. Cups of watermelon slices and freshly squeezed lemonade were

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS AT FREE SYNAGOGUE OF FLUSHING

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Queens Sikhs shocked by shooting rampage

BY KAREN FRANTZ

Mayor Michael Bloomberg assured the Sikh community in Queens Monday that the city would protect them after a deadly shooting at a Sikh temple in Oak Creek, Wis., killed six worshippers.

"No matter who you are, no matter where you're from, no matter what religion you profess, you have a right to be safe in your homes, in your places of worship and on the streets of New York City," Bloomberg said at the Sikh Cultural Society in Richmond Hill, where he and Police Commissioner Ray Kelly met with leaders of the Sikh community. "We have no intolerance for lawless violence."

Several other elected officials also spoke out or issued statements condemning the shooting and offering condolences to the Sikh community.

Sikhs in Queens reacted with shock and mourning in the wake of Sunday's mass shooting, which killed the uncle of a leader of the Sikh Cultural Society, the largest Sikh temple in New York.

"Nobody has the right to take away somebody's life," said Harpreet Singh Toor, a spokesman at the society, at 94-08 118th St.

"We condemn any kind of violence against our fellow human beings," he said, also speaking out against the shooting massacre at a movie theater in Aurora, Colo., just two weeks ago.

Mohan Singh Khatra, chairman of the Sikh Cultural Society, whose uncle, Suvez Khatra, was killed in the rampage, said he last spoke with his relative by telephone on the day he died about future plans to visit him in Wisconsin.

"I feel really bad because we never can see him again," said Khatra.



Harpreet Singh Toor, spokesman at the Sikh Cultural Society, with Mayor Michael Bloomberg (l.) and District Attorney Richard Brown.

Photo by Karen Frantz

His voice also broke when talking about a police officer originally from Brooklyn who was among those shot and was in critical condition.

Others in the Sikh community said they were heartbroken at violence against what they said was a peaceful and harmonious culture. The Sikhs' homeland is in the Punjab region straddling India and Pakistan.

The NYPD has ramped up security at Sikh temples throughout the city, although Kelly said there had been no specific threats made against the community.

Queens has one of the largest Sikh populations in the world, with about 15,000 individuals living in Richmond Hill and the surrounding neighborhoods.

He said the NYPD is also in communication with the FBI to learn of any direct threats to Sikhs here.

Some in the community were nervous after the Wisconsin shooting, with one man, Anshdeep Singh, saying he spoke with some parents who were reluctant to send their kids to a summer camp that is being organized.

Singh, who teaches martial arts at the cen-

ter, said he was not worried about his own safety, but he was fearful for his community, saying that bias against Sikhs had increased since Sept. 11, 2001.

"We've been targeted because of our distinct appearances," he said.

Sikh men wear turbans and grow their beards long similar to many Muslims, although they belong to separate religions.

He said he has felt discriminated against in school and in his workplace, and that he was not alone in feeling that way.

"Our community has been through a lot," he said.

Supreet Kaur, who works with the Sikh Coalition, the country's largest Sikh civil rights organization, echoed the sentiment, saying the organization has documented 900 acts of bias and discrimination against Sikhs in New York since 9/11.

"This bias has invaded all aspects of our lives," she said, saying it includes hate crimes, bullying in schools and corporate profiling.

She said the way to end violence against Sikhs and other minority groups is to take a hard look at why discrimination exists against minorities in the first place.

Ferreras wants workers to be paid for sick days

3

BY KAREN FRANTZ

Celina Alvarez used to work at the Taqueria El Idolo restaurant on Corona Avenue in Elmhurst as a cook, but in February she started to feel sick.

Alvarez, who moved to New York from Mexico two years ago, said she kept going to work because she did not have paid sick days.

A week later she ended up in the hospital and was released with a heart monitor and orders to rest for two weeks. She called her employer and told him what happened, but she said when she was well enough to return to work, the taqueria did not take her back.

"In other words, I lost my job just because I got sick and couldn't go back to work right away," she said.

Alvarez told her story in front of the taqueria at a rally last week. She was joined by City Councilwoman Julissa Ferreras (D-Elmhurst), low-wage workers

and small business owners, who were speaking in support of a proposal that would protect New Yorkers' jobs if they need to take sick leave and require many businesses to offer paid sick days.

"We can no longer have New Yorkers lose their jobs based on the fact that they're sick," said Ferreras.

She is sponsoring the sick leave bill, which has garnered strong support in the Council. The proposal would require businesses with more than five employees to provide earned, paid sick days for their workers. Businesses with more than 20 employees would have to give nine days and businesses with less than 20 would provide five. Businesses with fewer than five employees would not have to provide paid sick days, but workers' jobs would be protected if they missed five days of work due to illness.

Hilary Klein, a lead organizer with Make the Road New York, an advocacy organization for low-wage workers, said when



Supporters of paid sick leave rally outside of an Elmhurst taqueria where one woman said she lost her job for being sick.

Photo by Karen Frantz

ill employees go to work, it makes it more likely that diseases will spread. But if workers are allowed to stay home when they are sick, it benefits everyone, she said.

Council Speaker Christine Quinn (D-Manhattan) has said she is not planning on bringing

the bill up for a vote anytime soon because she is worried about the impact it would have on local business.

"This is just not the right time to do it," she said at a meeting with small business owners at the Sly Fox Inn in Fresh Meadows

last week.

She said that although paid sick leave "is a laudable goal," she is concerned about the effect it would have on small business in a difficult economy.

The sick leave bill would cost an additional 1.5 percent to 1.8 percent of businesses' payrolls, an extra burden small businesses cannot afford, Quinn said.

She said the bill would "put people out of business and we're going to lose jobs at a time when we're seeing unemployment go up."

The Queens Chamber of Commerce also opposes the bill, saying most businesses that do not offer paid sick leave are in sectors that have low profit margins and have to hire replacement workers when employees miss work.

Most of these businesses have barter systems in place wherein employees can exchange shifts when they are sick, a system the government cannot effectively regulate, the chamber said in a letter sent to Quinn this year.

Astorian requesting old iPods for Alzheimer's patients

Association says listening to music can engage, unlock memories for late-stage dementia sufferers

BY REBECCA HENELY

An Astoria musician who has two parents with Alzheimer's disease is holding a citywide drive to collect iPods. Caregivers have used the MP3 players as therapeutic tools to spur the memories of those with dementia.

"There are iPods lying in drawers all around the country that people don't use because they want the latest and greatest," said Dave Roth, 45.

Roth's mother Nathalie and his father Milton were both diagnosed with the disease, which causes the degeneration of the mind over many years. Nathalie Roth was diagnosed almost five years ago and Milton Roth was diagnosed three years ago, although Dave Roth and his six elder brothers and sisters can

now recall signs that their parents were beginning to show symptoms from at least a decade ago.

"My dad's in early stages and my mom's in the later stages," Dave Roth said.

The Roths' youngest son, a Broadway pit musician, has been working closely with the Alzheimer's Association's New York City chapter's ambassador program for the last two years. Through the association, Dave Roth became aware of the documentary "Alive Inside."

The in-progress film shows the work of neurologist Dr. Oliver Sacks and social worker Dan Cohen, who found that exposing patients with Alzheimer's disease to music from their childhood can spur patients who barely moved or spoke to groove to the music and



Astorian Dave Roth (c.) is holding an iPod drive to help those with Alzheimer's disease, like his parents Milton (l.) and Nathalie.

Photo courtesy Dave Roth

sing.

"Using this personalized playlist for people with dementia ... really has a dramatic effect and really engages and connects people back with the music," said Jed Levine, executive

vice president of the association's New York chapter.

After seeing the film, Roth was eager to try it on his mother. Dave Roth said his mother can only speak four words on most days, but while listening to mu-

sic she is able to sing words that she has not used for years.

"It's extremely inspirational," Dave Roth said. "Obviously as a musician the outreach of music is not surprising to me."

Dave Roth then decided to create an iPod drive. The collection has been running since July 1 and ends Aug. 19, the same day as his parents' 60th wedding anniversary. Donated iPods can be sent to the Alzheimer's Association New York City Chapter, 360 Lexington Ave., 4th Floor, New York, NY 10017.

They will go to the non-profit group Music & Memory, which will distribute them and, with the help of staff members and volunteers, create personal playlists for patients in nursing homes and assisted living facilities.

"Whether it's The Beatles or whether it's Barbra Streisand or whether it's opera or hymns, it's music that's been specifically chosen because it reflects who that person is," Levine said.

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109th Pct. takes a bite out of iPhone larceny

BY JOE ANUTA

Technocrats in the 109th Precinct are taking a novel approach to fighting iThieves, the latest scourge terrorizing the neighborhood.

Officers set up a table along Main Street near Roosevelt Avenue Friday to register iPhone and iPad owners for a program that can track their devices should they fall into the wrong hands, which according to the precinct's commanding officer, Deputy Inspector Brian Maguire, happens frequently.

"At night around here, the iPhone is like a beacon for criminals," he said. "It's one of the biggest targets."

Unsuspecting victims often whip out their phones or tablets as soon as they emerge from the No. 7 train station downtown, trying to catch a signal as soon as it is available.

It presents a perfect opportunity for thieves, but with the registration program, police have an extra weapon on their side.

On Friday, Apple owners gave their information, including serial numbers, to the officers at the table, who then registered them with the technology company's application Find My iPhone.

If a phone or tablet is ever lost or stolen, the victim can approach any officer who also has an iPhone.

By calling up the app and typing in a password,



An officer explains to Annie Yu (l.) how the registration she just completed will allow police to track her iPhone in the event of a theft.

Photo by Joe Anuta

the program draws on the registration information and activates the GPS positioning system in the stolen device.

The app then gives officers a road map to where the phone is, and it is a road cops in the precinct have traveled before.

On June 27, a 15-year-old girl reported her iPhone stolen to police at the 109th Precinct. She had registered with the program and had called up the location of the phone on an iPad.

When officers followed the map to the location, they arrested 23-year-old Gabriel Bazan, who police said was in possession of an iPhone protected by a cat-shaped green protective case, complete with a set of ears.

"In the event a phone is lost or stolen, this will increase the chances that we

will recover it and make an arrest," Maguire said at the registration table, which was mobbed with people jostling for position.

According to Community Affairs Detective Kevin O'Donnell, the precinct had registered 127 people by the end of the session and plans were in the works to expand the program throughout the precinct, which covers Downtown Flushing, East Flushing, Queensboro Hill, College Point, Malba, Whitestone, Beechurst and Bay Terrace.

The iPhone is such a popular target because thieves can easily resell it on the street for cash, police said.

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

Mobile clinic offers free mammograms

The American-Italian Cancer Foundations' mobile clinic will be providing no-cost mammograms and clinical breast exams at locations across the borough throughout August.

The services will be provided to women 40 and older with a New York City mailing address and who have not received a mammogram in the past 12 months.

The mobile clinic will be at the Joseph P. Addabbo Family Health Center in

Arverne (Aug. 3), the Corona Health Center (Aug. 4), the Shelter Rock Seventh-day Adventist Church in South Jamaica (Aug. 5), City Councilman James Sanders' (D-Jamaica) Far Rockaway office (Aug. 10), the Battalion Pentecostal Assembly in Arverne (Aug. 19) and Amazing Medical Services in Jamaica (Aug. 31).

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Jamaica HS stripped of resources: State DOE

BY RICH BOCKMANN

Critics of the city Department of Education's plan to phase out Jamaica High School say a recent state report confirms their worst fears that the city has abandoned the students at the embattled institution.

"This basically confirms what I and state education people have been saying about the school for a long time," said state Sen. Tony Avella (D-Bayside), who has previously criticized the DOE for failing to support the students at Jamaica High as it phases the school out.

"This is how you kill a school. You say it's a failing school and you take away its resources and it fails," he said.

Citing more than a decade of low graduation rates, the DOE voted in early 2011 to close the school, phasing out one grade each

year until 2014.

At the same time, the DOE voted to begin phasing in the Jamaica Gateway to the Sciences High School, which would share the building, at 167-01 Gothic Drive, with the existing Hillside Arts & Letters Academy, the High School for Community Leadership and Queens Collegiate School.

Advocates have said that while students at the other schools benefit from the best resources and support, the remaining students at Jamaica High have been left with less-than-adequate resources.

The state Education Department recently released a report on Jamaica High based on a February 2012 site visit. The report found students at the school were not being offered honors or advanced placement classes or calculus, chemistry, physics or SAT



Jamaica High School teachers say they have been forced to share their classrooms in just a few spaces inside the building, as shown in this photo from September 2011. The state Education Department recently released a report identifying programs lacking at the phase-out school. Photo courtesy James Eterno

preparation courses. It also cited concerns there was no certified special education teacher.

Included in the report was a response from the DOE dated May 21 addressing the issues. According to the department, Jamaica HS had instituted an optional period for English, math and social studies honor classes and planned to partner with Gateway high school next year to offer AP and honors classes.

The two schools were also in discussions to collaborate on SAT preparation, which Jamaica High began offering March 24, according to the DOE.

The DOE said Jamaica High created room in its budget for a special education teacher, but the administration could not find one it found suitable.

James Eterno, a social studies teacher at Jamaica High and its United Fed-

eration of Teachers chapter leader, said the DOE's responses were merely measures to placate critics and fell short of meaningful support for the approximately 700 students there last year.

"We're basically operating a skeleton crew with skeletal programs," he said. "That's not what they promised these kids."

Eterno said that as the phase-out process continues, Jamaica High loses more space and resources each year.

"They're trying to save dollars in a way that makes no sense at all," he said, adding that a recent court ruling blocking Mayor Michael Bloomberg's plan to close 24 struggling schools across the city gave him hope for the students at Jamaica High until the school is shuttered for good.



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Unions rally for car washers

E. Elmhurst biz owner accused of not paying workers owed wages

BY REBECCA HENELY

Immigrant rights advocates and union members from across the city joined employees of an East Elmhurst car wash last Thursday to demand better wages and working conditions.

The 70 protesters at Hi-Tek Car Wash & Lube, at 83-01 24th Ave., said owner Gary Pinkus pays his employees less than New York state minimum wage, requires employees to pay out-of-pocket for supplies to clean the cars and has cut their hours when the workers have complained.

“What they’re asking are very basic things,” said Ana Maria Archila, of the immigrant advocacy group Make the Road New York.

Other protesters came from her organization and chapters of the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union. They chanted and beat on snare drums or buckets for about an hour, requesting an audience with Pinkus. Archila said 23 of the business’ 28 employees signed a letter demanding better treatment, and two other employees were supportive but feared further retaliation.

“All we want to do is communicate,” said David Mertz of the union. “All we want to do is achieve justice.”



Laora Tapia (c.) decries the practices of an East Elmhurst car wash at a rally.

Photo by Yinghao Luo

Pinkus did not respond to requests for comment.

The protesters attempted multiple times to deliver the letter personally, but Pinkus declined to meet with them. Officers from the 115th Precinct occasionally rebuffed those at the rally and other times acted as go-betweens. The protesters eventually put the letter in the business’ mailbox.

Juan Antonio, 29, a Mexican native who has been working at the car wash for five years, said

through a Spanish translator that he is paid \$5.25 an hour — two dollars less than New York state minimum wage — and has to spend \$20 every two months to buy his own gloves and cleaner for the cars. He said that after the workers tried to organize a union a few months ago, their hours were cut.

“He knows very well that we already earn very little, and if we work less hours it’s almost impossible to survive,” Antonio said in a statement.

Mertz said both paying below minimum wage and the retaliation were illegal.

Make the Road and the union have protested against multiple car wash businesses throughout the city, which they say regularly engage in wage theft. Their WASH New York Campaign has earned the support of multiple Queens City Council members.

“We have an industry that is totally rogue, that breaks labor laws left and right,” Archila said.

LGA janitor sacked in toe suck case: City

BY REBECCA HENELY

A janitor contracted to work at LaGuardia Community College got the boot earlier this year after he tried to pay a high school student more than \$100 to suck on her toes, according to documents from the Department of Education’s special commissioner of investigation for the city school district’s office.

Harley Joseph, 29, was hired as a maintenance worker for the Long Island City institution through the commercial cleaning business, Perfect Building Maintenance. Documents from the special commissioner’s office said after allegedly making the bizarre request to a Middle College High School student in February, he was terminated the same day.

“The college acted quickly upon learning of the incident, and Perfect Building Maintenance responded by permanently removing the employee from the campus,” said LaGuardia spokeswoman Susan Lyddon in a statement. “Safeguarding our community is among the highest priorities at LaGuardia Community College.”

LaGuardia is at 31-10 Thomson Ave. in Long Island City and Middle College is at 31-01 Thomson

Ave. The victim had been taking some classes at the college.

Neither Perfect Building Maintenance nor Joseph responded to requests for comment.

Joseph had first approached the victim on her way to class in November, asking for her phone number and a lunch date, but the student refused, the commissioner’s office documents said. Joseph then made a pass at the same girl Feb. 10, the documents said.

As she was on the college’s patio, Joseph told her she had “nice feet” and offered her \$100, then \$200 to suck on her toes, the documents said. When the student said no, Joseph pulled out his wallet, saying he would give her as much money as she wanted, then said they could go to an ATM to get more money, the documents said.

Joseph had grabbed the girl’s wrist trying to get her to go with him, but the student said she was “not a prostitute” and broke free, the documents said. The janitor warned her not to tell anybody, but the student went to another school worker and filed a report with security, resulting in his termination, the documents said.

The office opened an

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Halloran to Meng: Make donor collectors public



City Councilman Dan Halloran (l.) is calling on state Assemblywoman Grace Meng to release the names of bundlers who raised money for her congressional run.

BY JOE ANUTA

The Republican candidate in the congressional race based around Flushing is calling on his Democratic opponent to release the names of people who collected her campaign donations in the wake of the arrest of former state Assemblyman Jimmy Meng.

City Councilman Dan Halloran (R-Whitestone) issued a statement Monday calling on Assemblywoman Grace Meng (D-Flushing) to release the name of bundlers, a disclosure that is not required by law in a congressional election.

"If Grace Meng isn't ready to disclose her finances, how can she be ready to represent us in Congress?" said Steven Stites, Halloran's campaign spokesman. "Her campaign coffers are flush with special interest money. The people deserve to know who helped her raise that money. New Yorkers can't help but wonder what Grace Meng has to hide."

At a recent Republican event, Halloran said Jimmy Meng had bundled about 25 percent of his daughter's campaign donations, ac-

cording to a video posted on the political blog of The New York Observer.

Jimmy Meng was arrested July 24 and charged with wire fraud in connection with accepting \$80,000 in bribe money from an informer for the FBI. The former Flushing assemblyman had allegedly taken the money in exchange for peddling what prosecutors contend was non-existent influence in the Manhattan district attorney's office.

But his daughter's campaign painted the request as a cheap shot by Halloran, who as of the last campaign finance disclosure was running with a significantly smaller war chest than his Democratic opponent.

"Simply saying something doesn't make it so — an important lesson most elementary school students learn, but one Councilman Halloran cannot seem to grasp. Assemblywoman Meng's congressional primary was a huge effort, active across the entire district and in all neighborhoods and communities," said Austin Finan, Grace Meng's campaign spokesman. "No one person, other

than Grace, played an out-sized role then or now."

Meng's camp has not officially released the identities of the bundlers and how much money each has gathered from other donors, and Halloran's spokesman declined to comment on where the councilman came up with the 25 percent figure.

Supporters of Meng are hosting a \$100-per-ticket dinner event in Manhattan later this month, where the host committee pays \$500 a pop and the host \$1,000. Halloran's camp declined to comment on any upcoming fund-raisers.

Amid the back and forth over the bundlers, Meng picked up the endorsement of the Working Families Party, and

"I'm proud and grateful to have the support of the Working Families Party," she said in a statement. "The [party] has long stood up for the same values I believe in — a fair, livable income, affordable housing and protecting the middle class at all costs."

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



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JHS 8 in South Jamaica placed on dangerous list

BY RICH BOCKMANN

The state Education Department in June retroactively placed South Jamaica's Richard S. Grossley JHS 8 on its list of persistently dangerous schools for the 2011-12 school year.

Should the school remain on the list next year, parents will be able to transfer their children to other schools as the city attempts to bring down the rate of violent incidents.

The federal No Child Left Behind Act requires states to compile lists of dangerous schools each year, leaving it up to each state to define the criteria.

In New York, schools are placed on the list if they document approximately six violent incidents for every 100 students over a period of two years. Serious incidents can include robbery; assault; possessing, using or threatening to use a weapon; reckless endangerment; arson; kidnapping; sexual offenses; and homicide.

In August 2011, the state identified 14 persistently dangerous schools across the state for the 2011-12 school year, none of them in Queens.

The NYSED said there were errors between the city and state that took some time to verify and correct, and in June it retroactively added three city schools, including JHS 8, to the 2011-12 list.



The state Education Department in June retroactively placed JHS 8, in South Jamaica, on its list of persistently dangerous schools for the 2011-12 school year.

roactively added three city schools, including JHS 8, to the 2011-12 list.

The city Department of Education said it plans to notify parents of the designation as well as their options after the state releases its 2012-13 list in August.

"Parents at the three schools will have the option to transfer their children through our process for No Child Left Behind. This is done throughout the enrollment office," a department representative said.

Each school will receive a \$100,000 grant to help implement a plan to improve school safety.

According to the NYSED website, successful schools have created safer environments by developing and equitably enforcing a conduct code, developing safety and response plans and conducting drills to increase preparedness for serious incidents and analyzing incident data in order to recognize when intervention is necessary.

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Long Island Tomahawks youth football returns to Queens

Lifelong Bellerose coach joins with dedicated alumni to bring unique brand of play back to area

BY PHIL CORSO

The fullbacks, halfbacks and quarterbacks seem to be making a comeback.

A group of northeast Queens football coaches said they were working to bring youth football back to the young and aspiring players in Little Neck, Queens Village and Fresh Meadows.

After almost 10 years, the Long Island Tomahawks youth football organization is returning and recruiting players for the upcoming season, the group said.

And according to the coaches working to revive the team, they are not doing this to look back but instead to blitz ahead.

"We don't want to just relive our glory days," said Steve Digilio, the Tomahawks' coach and organiz-

er. "We are just trying to give back to the kids."

The Long Island Tomahawks, initially established in the 1950s, became defunct as the group approached the early '90s and participation dwindled. With a motto of "Never die easy," Digilio and some Tomahawks alumni orchestrated the team's first comeback in 2003, which also fizzled out by the following year.

"It takes a lot to get something going and to keep it going," Digilio said.

But what makes this comeback different, Digilio said, was experience and dedication to bring a special skills set of football to Queens' kids. In an area where youth football is scarcely available with the only other youth football leagues in Jamaica, Bay-side and Ridgewood, Digilio said the Long Island Toma-



The peewee team for the Long Island Tomahawks youth football group poses for a photo.

Photo courtesy Long Island Tomahawks

hawks offer a unique level of discipline in its coaching approach.

Often, Digilio said, the coaches would join in on the training and be battling alongside the players during workouts in the team's previous revival in 2003.

"Our kids are always learning," Digilio said. "It

isn't about how big and how fast and how strong you might play. It's about how smart you are on the field."

Helping Digilio bring back the Tomahawks are former players and participants Tyrone Stith and Wayne Deleston. Stith, who also works with the Youth Sports Network covering

local community leagues, wrote on the Tomahawks' online guest book soliciting interest in reviving the team.

"I am constantly asked about the hole in youth football in Queens Village," Stith said. "There is a need for a youth football organization in the Queens Vil-

lage, Hollis and Bellerose area."

The Long Island Tomahawks' current home field is at Alley Pond Park in Bellerose and the organization is currently working to form teams for the fall season from ages 8 to 17. Interested athletes can call 646-465-3743 for more information or email litomahawks@yahoo.com.

Digilio, who has been coaching youth football for almost 40 years, said he was thrilled at the prospect of bringing Tomahawks-style play back to Queens, adding that teaching was a key part of his being.

"I teach kids. It is what God has given me the opportunity to do and it is a passion for me," Digilio said. "It is a way to keep them off the streets and a way to get them set up for high school football."

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Malcolm Smith eyes GOP run for mayor

BY RICH BOCKMANN

The head of the Queens GOP said Tuesday he had not spoken to Democratic state Sen. Malcolm Smith about a possible run for mayor as a Republican, but he did give his prospects a slim chance.

“Whenever we run candidates for Assembly, Senate, Congress ... we always ask the question, ‘Is there anything in your past that might embarrass you and the Republican Party?’” said Queens Republican Party Chairman Phil Ragusa. “I don’t think he can pass that test.”

Smith did not return a request for comment.

Ragusa was referring to several controversial undertakings Smith has been implicated in over the years. Smith recently denied having been involved in any wrongdoing in, but admitted he had done a poor job in setting the record straight.

The political website City & State last week published an in-depth article in which Smith addressed allegations he had used political favoritism in the Aqueduct Entertainment Group’s bid to build the Aqueduct Racino and minimized his involvement in two nonprofits that had been the subjects of official investigations.

Smith has not been charged in any of the investigations and no criminal wrongdoing on his part has

been found, but he told City & State that he had failed to repudiate negative stories in the press.

“That’s a fault I clearly have learned not to do in the future,” he told City & State. “Absolutely not to do. Somebody writes something, you gotta call ‘em right back up or put a statement out or something. Can’t just let it sit.”

Several articles have appeared lately alluding to Smith’s interest in a mayoral run on the GOP line, but Ragusa said he and the other four county GOP heads had not heard from the senator until after those articles were published.

The Democratic Party field for mayor is crowded with City Council Speaker Christine Quinn (D-Manhattan), former City Comptroller Bill Thompson, Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer and City Comptroller John Liu all eyeing runs.

In order to run as a Republican, Smith would need at least three of the party’s five county chairs to endorse him.

Ragusa said he would be more inclined to support Republicans such as NYPD Commissioner Ray Kelly or Manhattan businessman John Catsimatidis before Smith.

“I don’t know. I think with the field out there, I would rather run a Republican” who is registered with the party, he said.



State Sen. Malcolm Smith, a Democrat, is considering a run for mayor as a Republican. Photo by Christina Santucci

Q tops in best subway survey

Transit group gives honor to Queens line for first time; C rated as worst

BY PHILIP NEWMAN

The Q line offers the best service in the subway system, including fewer delays, clean cars and a good chance of getting a seat during rush hour, according to the Straphangers Campaign’s 15th annual State of the Subways report.

The designation of worst subway line went to the C train, with its many 1960s-era cars, high breakdown record and long waits.

It was the first time the Q had ranked No. 1 since 2001, while the C has been rated last for four years in a row.

“Riders on the Q have much more reliable cars, frequent service, subway car cleanliness and car announcements,” said Gene Russianoff, attorney for the Straphangers, the transit activist agency.

The C line performed as the worst or next to the worst subway line in the system on four measures: amount of scheduled service, delays caused by mechanical breakdowns, subway car cleanliness and announcements.

But the C performed above average in the system on regularity of service and on the chance of getting a seat at rush hour.

“The people who regularly ride the C train should be up in arms about the quality of their service,” Russianoff said.

The Q runs between Coney Island-Stillwell Avenue in Brooklyn and Astoria-Ditmars Boulevard in Queens. The C operates from East New York in Brooklyn to Washington Heights in Manhattan.

BEST to WORST: 2012 STRAPHANGERS CAMPAIGN METROCARD RATINGS	
Q	\$1.60
7	\$1.55
J/Z	\$1.55
1	\$1.50
L	\$1.45
6	\$1.45
E	\$1.40
F	\$1.40
M	\$1.25
R	\$1.20
N	\$1.20
3	\$1.20
D	\$1.20
2	\$1.15
B	\$1.15
A	\$1.15
4	\$1.15
5	\$1.10
C	85¢

The Q, which runs between Coney Island-Stillwell Avenue in Brooklyn and Astoria-Ditmars Boulevard in Queens, is the best in the city, according to the annual State of the Subways report. Chart courtesy the Straphangers

The complete report card, from best to worst, was Q, No. 7, J/Z, No. 1, L, No. 6, E, F, M, R, N, No. 3, D, No. 2, B, A, Nos. 4 and 5 and C.

The Straphangers said the No. 4 had the clearest, easy-to-understand train announcements. The E had the fewest breakdowns, the cleanest was the No. 1 and the best for getting a seat was the R.

Commenting on the survey, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority said, “While we appreciate the positive results of the Straphangers’ latest survey, those results do not tell the full story.”



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UNICEF joins Ridgewood Y to teach youth about diversity 11

Partners raise awareness of what makes city unique at summer day camp to promote multiculturalism

BY STEVE MOSCO

Children are constantly learning — unfortunately, sometimes they learn to discriminate.

That is why the Ridgewood YMCA, at 69-02 64th St., partnered with UNICEF to bring hands-on learning enrichment programs to Summer Day Camps, aiming to expand the participants' young horizons and help them understand that diversity is a concept they should embrace.

UNICEF, a global organization founded in 1946 to provide children with relief and promote their rights, teamed up with Ridgewood Y's summer learning objectives to create a unique four-week program for the Y's day camp youngsters. The camp's theme this year, "I Love New York,"

celebrates diversity and raises the children's awareness of the many different people who make the city a special place.

Cornie McGinnis, the youth and family director at the Y, said programs like the Y's partnership with UNICEF fosters multiculturalism in the community and on a global level.

"Teaching diversity to children at a young age reinforces the concepts of integrity, respect, responsibility and caring, which are all core values of the YMCA," she said.

Katia Stefanatou, a UNICEF Global Citizenship Fellow, said building global competency needs to start at a young age.

"It seems that children are taught to discriminate from the moment they are born, so we come in and try



Two youngsters from the Ridgewood YMCA participate in "Global-Bingo," an exercise meant to teach children about diversity.

Photo by Steve Mosco

to help them see that diversity is part of what makes the world such a great place," she said.

To help illustrate the connections to different cultures, Stefanatou showed the children slides

featuring children from different countries dressed in traditional clothing. She then asked the youngsters to share their own traditions and encouraged them to ask questions.

Stefanatou said the

lack of cultural understanding is what can lead to bullying in classrooms and other settings. The UNICEF representative came to the United States from Greece four years ago and she said her experience coming from another country inspired her to help young children recognize and appreciate diversity in themselves and others.

"As a double citizen, I see the inequities in the world and feel a responsibility to help others," she said. "We are all different in many ways, but we can coexist peacefully."

Peaceful co-existence is the driving force behind the teachings of the Ridgewood Y, according to volunteers. Jenna Caver, a young volunteer who worked her way up from a counselor in training, said the Y aims

to teach the children something new every day — the trick is to make learning fun and not just another school lesson.

"It's the summertime, so we don't want them to feel like they never left school," she said. "We always try to keep things fun and interactive."

This hands-on approach to learning includes math taught with blocks and English taught with giant, cut-out letters. This type of academic enrichment helps children grow creatively and artistically while fostering imagination and originality, according to volunteers.

It also challenges the youngsters to interact with one another and this, according to Caver, helps build the appreciation for diversity.

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Hong Kong Dragon Boat Festival

Thousands of people flocked to Flushing Meadows Corona Park for the 22nd annual Hong Kong Dragon Boat Festival last weekend. (Clockwise from top) Participants fill Meadow Lake; a member of Shaolin Temple Overseas kung fu school takes the stage; the DCH Dragons team races for the finish line; David He (c.) ties up the kites belonging to his sons Johnson (l.), 7, and Jason, 4; Tony Lau (r.) from Goldman Sachs escapes after teammates dump a cooler of water on him; Flushing residents Jasmine and Jacob Kui take a break from the heat; and Alan Lee from United East Athletic Association sports a superhero's mask.

Photos by Christina Santucci



Court case against Stavisky dropped by Messer 13

BY JOE ANUTA

John Messer announced Tuesday that he was dropping a Queens Supreme Court case that alleged his Democratic primary opponent, state Sen. Toby Stavisky (D-Whitestone), got on the ballot through fraudulent means.

The suit sought to invalidate Stavisky's nomination to the ballot for a variety of reasons outlined in a lengthy legal brief. In particular, the forged signature of a dead woman was found among the 7,000 collected on behalf of the Queens Democratic Party, which is backing Stavisky.

Messer's lawyers argued that the petition was so rife with fraud and forged signatures that the entire thing should have been thrown out and the city

Board of Elections should have prohibited Stavisky's name from appearing on the ballot.

That would have let Messer run unopposed in the race for the seat, which is based in Flushing, but extends east through Fresh Meadows and Bayside and west through Forest Hills and Elmhurst.

"Though Sen. Stavisky is a named party to the lawsuit, and under subpoena required to appear and testify, her appearance was not mandated or directed

by the court," Messer's team said in a statement. "Given this material legal development, Mr. Messer voluntarily withdrew the case."

But Stavisky's camp contended that the Oakland Gardens businessman and lawyer never had a case to begin with.



John Messer (l.) has dropped his lawsuit, which sought to remove state Sen. Toby Stavisky off the ballot.

"This whole exercise was a waste of the court's time and taxpayer money. Queens' voters will not forget Messer's shameful attempt at disenfranchising voters and intimidating opponents," said Pat McKenna, Stavisky's campaign manager, "Queens Democrats are quickly learning

that former Republican Messer can't be trusted."

Stavisky's campaign had previously said that more than 130 people gathered signatures to get a whole host of candidates backed by the Queens Democratic Party onto the ballot, not just Stavisky, and that they could not realisti-

cally check up on every person collecting signatures.

They also contended that even if every signature identified by Messer in his legal brief were invalidated, Stavisky would still have many times the number needed to get onto the ballot.

Messer's camp had

collected more than 50 affidavits signed by people who claimed never to have given their John Hancock in support of the longtime lawmaker. But according to Democratic sources, those affidavits were not admissible in court. Instead, the actual people would have had to testify in court, a point not lost on Messer.

"It became clear that to subpoena all 1,000 innocent community residents to prove this case would cause great hardship to many innocent citizens, which is why we decided to let the voters decide the fate of Sen. Stavisky," Messer's campaign said in a statement.

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

Police bust racino robbery suspect after prints match

BY STEVE MOSCO

Millions of gamblers walked into Resorts World Casino to try their luck last month, but one high roller will likely end up behind bars.

The South Ozone Park casino announced the facility drew more than 1 million people in July alone, generating \$59.8 million in revenue for the month. But ahead of those numbers, a man accused of a daring daylight robbery at the casino in June was nabbed in Pennsylvania last week, according to a report from the Queens district attorney's office.

District Attorney Richard Brown said Aug. 1 that Kevin Lides, 23, was busted for the alleged crime after fingerprints on a note handed to a teller at the casino matched that of Lides. The suspect was taken into custody July 31 in Monroe County, Pa., for extradition

to New York.

"The defendant is accused of brazenly walking into a crowded casino on a Friday afternoon and demanding money," said Brown. "The odds of getting away with such an alleged crime were stacked against him, and his long-overdue arrest proves the old adage you can run, but you cannot hide."

Brown said the suspect, from Briarwood, is charged with first-degree robbery and second-degree grand larceny. If convicted, he faces up to 25 years in prison, according to the district attorney's office.

According to a police report, Lides allegedly approached the second-floor cashier's cage at Resorts World on the afternoon of June 29 and handed a female teller a note demanding money and stating she would be killed if she did not comply. Lides allegedly told the teller he had a



Cops say Kevin Lides was busted in Pennsylvania after a \$63,000 heist at Resorts World.

Photo courtesy NYPD

gun and reached under his shirt, cops said.

Lides allegedly walked away with \$63,000, according to cops.

Brown said the Pocono Mountain Regional Police Department, the Monroe County district attorney and the U.S. Marshals Service's Regional Fugitive Task Force were instrumental in the suspect's apprehension.

Resorts World spokesman Stefan Friedman said the casino's surveillance system facilitated the suspect's arrest.

"This arrest proves that our surveillance system is working. Through close collaboration with the NYPD and the information revealed on our state-of-the-art, on-site surveillance technology, we were able to assist the police in apprehending the suspect," he said. "Our first priority has always been the safety of our guests, and though

we are extremely proud of our outstanding record, we are constantly refining our efforts to ensure 100 percent security."

And if the casino's staggering July numbers are any indication, its security system will continue to be heavily tested.

"With more than a million people coming through our doors in July, it's clear that New Yorkers and tourists alike are aware that they no longer have to get on a highway or airplane to have a wonderful, world-class gaming experience right here in Queens — minutes, not hours away," said Michael Speller, president of Resorts World. "We look forward to working with the state in the coming months to determine how we can further maximize tax revenue to the state, particularly to the state's education fund."

14 New Jax Hts school to cut crowding by 400 seats

BY REBECCA HENELY

It required years of advocating and the sacrifice of a mansion, but government and school officials were glad to break ground on a new intermediate school in Jackson Heights Tuesday.

"This is a wonderful thing that's happening here in this neighborhood," said City Councilman Daniel Dromm (D-Jackson Heights).

The new school, once known as the IS 230 Annex but now will be called IS 297, will rise at 33-35 74th St. The 36,200-square-foot school, a roughly \$23 million construction project, will have the capacity for 400 students in Grades 6 through 8. Construction began in May and the school is expected to open for the September 2014 school year.

It will be four floors and will include 12 general classrooms, one special education classroom, two science labs, a reading resource room, a science prep room, a music classroom, an art classroom, an exercise room, a library, a cafeteria and administrative offices.

IS 297 is at the same intersection as PS 230. The lot on the northwest side of the intersection will be turned into a playground for both schools, Dromm said.

A mansion that was once a physician's home formerly stood at the site. Jeff Guyton, co-president of Community Education Council District 30, said it was a shame to raze the beautiful house, even though it had fallen into disrepair. He said he would ride past the house multiple times a week on his bike as it was being dismantled.



Former Councilwoman Helen Sears addresses the crowd before the groundbreaking.

Photo by Yinghao Luo

"I'm always a little sorry to see these big, old houses come down," he said.

Nevertheless, Guyton said the new school was a necessity. District 30 — which includes Astoria, Long Island City, East Elmhurst, most of Jackson

Heights, a large section of Woodside and a part of Corona — is one of the most packed in the city

"This is the epicenter of our overcrowding," he said.

Lorraine Grillo, president of the city School Con-

struction Authority, said Dromm and others were adamant that another school location needed to be found in the built-up community.

"District 30 is very, very special to me," Grillo said. "It's where I grew up. It's where my children

grew up."

State Sen. Jose Peralta (D-East Elmhurst) said it was crucial that the community create more schools in the district.

"Unless there's a seat for every child, it's a game of musical chairs ... someone is always left standing," he said.

State Sen. Toby Stavisky (D-Whitestone) came to the groundbreaking because she will represent parts of District 30 if re-elected.

"People move into a community because of schools," she said. "We have an obligation to provide a seat for every child."

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

Parks group tries to put brakes on JFK runway plan

BY RICH BOCKMANN

The public comment period on a proposal to extend a runway at John F. Kennedy International Airport closer to Idlewild Park closed two months ago, and one open-space group is calling on the Port Authority of New York & New Jersey to halt its plans until its voice is heard.

In order to conform with a congressional mandate, the Port Authority is planning to provide larger safety areas on each end of the 4L-22R runway, which runs in a southwest-northeast direction from Jamaica Bay inland.

The southern end of runway 4L abuts the federally protected lands of the Gateway National Recreation Area, so in order to provide it with the required 1,000-foot safety area, the

plan calls for extending the opposite end of the 22R runway 728 feet toward Brookville and Springfield Gardens on the other side of Idlewild Park.

"That extension is bringing the runway that much closer to a residential community," said Barbara Brown, chairwoman of Eastern Queens Alliance, a group formed to preserve the parks around JFK. "We have a number of concerns about the airport in general, such as noise level and air pollution."

The 22R end of the runway is primarily used for departures and the Port Authority is looking to relocate the infrastructure at that end in preparation for the work by the end of 2013, according to its draft plan.

The Port Authority published notice of a 30-day public-comment period on



Eastern Queens Alliance Chairwoman Barbara Brown is calling on the Port Authority to reopen the public comment period on its plan to alter one of the runways at John F. Kennedy International Airport.

the plan in Newsday May 14.

Brown said she thought the notice was inadequate.

"Our most immediate concern is that no one was notified. They're obligated to get comments from the communities most affected," she said. "That hasn't been done."

A spokesman for the Port Authority, however, said the "timing of the comment period and public notice was in accordance with FAA requirements."

Brown said she contacted U.S. Rep. Gregory Meeks' (D-Jamaica) office requesting that he take action to have the public comment period reopened.

"In the meantime," she said, "we're asking for a moratorium on further progress until such time that the community weighs in."

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Missing

Continued from Page 1

She stopped back at Mar-Pat Liquors where she had earlier purchased a bottle of wine. The owner checked security camera footage that showed the white envelope peeking out of her pocket. She drove around the parking lot to no avail. Little did she know that just after the envelope fell to the pavement, a man named Nino Lercara was leaving a nearby shop with some newspapers in his arm.

As the 64-year-old retired mason was walking back to his car, he noticed the envelope on the ground and picked it up without thinking, placing it on top of the newspapers he then stacked in the passenger seat.

Curious, he took a peek inside the package on the way home and could not believe what he saw.

“When I opened the envelope, I pulled off on the

side. I saw 20s,” he said. “It was \$2,900.”

He immediately called his wife of 43 years, Nina, who told a stunned Lercara to turn around and see if he could locate the owner of the envelope.

“I wouldn’t have slept that night if I would have kept the money,” said Lercara, who was born in Sicily but moved to America on his 10th birthday.

And with a twist of the steering wheel, Lercara also turned the tables for Fitzpatrick.

He pulled into the parking lot just as Marco Vukosa, an employee of the liquor store, was on his hands and knees looking in the lot. Fitzpatrick had given up hope and was slowly driving away, giving the ground a final scan.

When Lercara learned that she had lost something, he told Vukosa to chase her down.

“Me, being the 300-pound guy I am, took off down the block,” Vukosa said.

Fitzpatrick could not

believe her eyes when she returned to the parking lot and saw Lercara waving the envelope in the air.

“He’s a hero. He is just an amazing guy,” she said. “I was in shock for a few days. I tried to give him money but he wouldn’t accept it.”

Lercara refused cash several times before Fitzpatrick convinced him to give some money to his grandchildren, but the retired Sicilian refused a dime from himself.

He chalks up his honesty to his mother, who took care of Lercara and his nine siblings while working at a factory in Manhattan.

“For me, it comes naturally,” he said.

For now Fitzpatrick, still in disbelief about the incident, decided to give her old computer a little more time.

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

Paving

Continued from Page 1

said Susan Seinfeld, the CB 11 district manager. “They will be doing the work mostly at night because of all the activity on Northern Boulevard.”

The long-awaited repaving of the patchy strip of road from 223rd Street to Douglaston Parkway started late last week and should be finished within six weeks, Seinfeld said. Because the work is on such a busy piece of road connecting Bayside to Douglaston and Little Neck, Seinfeld said the city Department of Transportation would be working at night to expedite the project.

“It needs it so badly,” Seinfeld said. “It really is terrible.”

The top layer of the stretch of road near the Alley Pond Environmental Center was ripped away last week in a quick milling process, making way for a rapid resurfacing. A

DOT spokesman said workers should begin resurfacing the road by the end of this week to minimize the amount of time northeast Queens drivers will be subject to the uncomfortable bumps of a road undergoing milling.

“The milling process is noisy and may cause discomfort in the affected neighborhood for several days,” the DOT said on its website. “Although the DOT takes steps to minimize the inconvenience, milling requires trucks, special machinery and portable lights. To minimize disruption, machinery is fitted with noise reduction equipment and crews attempt to keep noise to a minimum.”

Seinfeld said typical DOT milling projects do not complete roads repaving until weeks later, but because of the heavy traffic volume on Northern Boulevard, area drivers should not have to suffer for an extended period.

“They can’t let these kinds of projects go for too long because riding over

the milling is terrible,” Seinfeld said. “It is such a busy road. They should not be working on it for that long.”

The DOT already repaved stretches of road on Northern Boulevard in 2011 closer to Bell Boulevard, but did not go much further because of a large sewer project at the nearby Alley Creek, Seinfeld said. The current roadwork, she said, is the DOT’s effort to finish the job.

CB 11 Chairman Jerry Iannece said the road desperately needed the servicing as it was filled with potholes because of the high volume of traffic throughout the day. Iannece has been a vocal advocate of Northern Boulevard’s repaving and asked the DOT to complete the work last year.

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

Diplomat’s wife

Continued from Page 1

near 21st Street April 20, the DA said. Mata is accused of firing his gun at a group of teenagers and hitting Elbahi, who was holding her infant son and was next to her 3-year-old daughter, the DA said. The incident occurred around 7:25 p.m., the DA said. After being wounded, Elbahi was taken to Elmhurst Hospital Center, at 79-01 Broadway.

District Attorney Richard Brown called the shooting a “glaring example of

mindless gun-related violence.”

“This was a shocking incident in which a woman with an infant in her arms and a toddler by her side was almost killed outside her home,” Brown said. “Fortunately, she survived her terrifying ordeal.”

The incident occurred a few blocks from Long Island City High School, at 14-30 Broadway.

Mata was arrested the same day and since then has been held on a \$100,000 bail, the DA said. He was

ordered to return to court Sept. 17, the DA said.

State Sen. Michael Gianaris (D-Astoria), who represents the district where the shooting occurred, recently introduced a package of bills to strengthen the state’s gun control laws. His office said shootings have increased citywide by 12 percent from the start of 2012 through early July compared to the same time last year.

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

JAMS

Continued from Page 1

also on hand to take the edge off.

“I feel every year it stretches another block or so,” said David Fallweg, who has been bringing family members to the festival for the past decade. “It’s a great place to spend a Saturday. Shopping, eating and dancing. It’s a lot of fun every year.”

This year close to 400 vendors set up shop in the August heat, each one offering their own unique collection of wares. Children stared in awe at the toy vendors, while wives nudged husbands at the jewelry tents.

“My wife is in the zone right now,” laughed Fallweg, whose wife Christine was busy digging through baskets of rings and bracelets. “I just want some of that lemonade over there.”

The festival kicked off Friday night with JAMS Under the Stars, at Rufus King Park at Jamaica Avenue and 153rd Street. It featured musicians such as Robbie Nova, an R&B artist from Queens, and spoken-word performer Casel Lee, also known as The Verbal Artisan.

There was also a “Soul Train” tribute Friday night as well as a tribute to popular musicians who recently died, including Whitney Houston, Heavy D and Gil Scott-Heron.

One of the performers from Friday night, 6-year-old Haitian prodigy Malachi, also performed during Saturday’s festivities, wowing the crowd with his skilled drum technique.

“This is the best festival ever,” said Malachi from the stage, whose proficiency behind the drum kit was belied by his mischievous smile and playful nature off stage.

Some youngsters were

there only looking for fun — and some at great heights.

Lucinda Renwick, 8, hung from the top of a rock-climbing wall, while her mother, Tabitha Lopez, cheered her on from down below.

“Last year she was too small to climb. I promised her we’d come back and there she is, way up there,” said Lopez, who is from Hollis.

When she finally reached the ground, Renwick could not believe what she had just done.

“It’s way too high up there!” she screamed. “It was scary!”

With that, Lopez high-fived her daughter and asked her what she wanted to do next.

“They just love it here,” she said. “Every year they want to keep coming back.”

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

CWNY launches support group

The Center for the Women of New York is accepting registration for a new session of its women’s support group.

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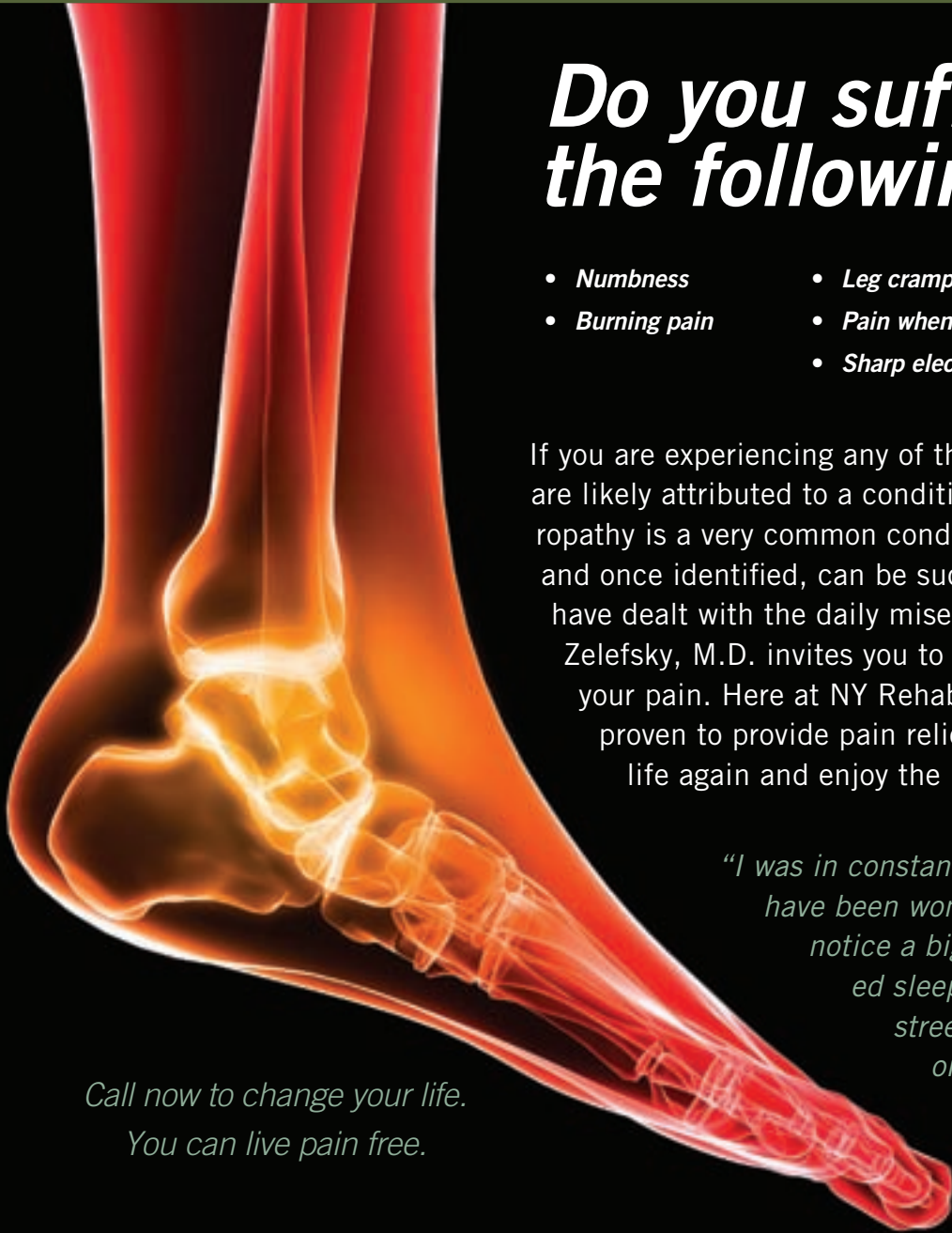
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