

**Residents cited for fallen trees owned by city**

BY PHIL CORSO

Homeowners affected by fallen city trees in the wake of Hurricane Sandy were irate when they learned the city Department of Buildings had placed violations on their homes.

After the superstorm swept through northeast Queens toppling trees and power lines, West Cunningham Park Civic Association board member Linda Gordon said she saw neighbors throughout her community, including residents of Fresh Meadows, Bayside Hills and Glen Oaks, be given violations because city trees had fallen on their buildings.

Meanwhile, Gordon said her neighbors were unable to remove those violations because residents are not permitted by law to handle city trees.

"I find that handing a distressed homeowner a violation is a very inept and harassing way to keep track of damages," Gordon said. "At the very least, there should be a different form given out explaining what the DOB is

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**Clinton tours Rockaway cleanup**

Former president's global initiative brings volunteers to battered peninsula

BY JOE ANUTA



Former President Bill Clinton hugs Liz Robbins, a longtime friend and volunteer with the Clinton Global Initiative, as he tours a cleanup site in a playground at Beach 30th Street in Far Rockaway. **See more photos on Page 14.**

Photo by Christina Santucci

A former president of the United States and hundreds of volunteers from the Clinton Global Initiative descended on the Rockaways Sunday to help dig out an unlucky park that has fallen victim to calamity twice since opening earlier this year.

Former President Bill Clinton strolled around the damaged boardwalk in Far Rockaway, where the surge from Superstorm Sandy bulldozed sand inland, covering the boardwalk area and practically burying Rockaway Park West, and shook hands with the volunteers.

"Thank you for the work you are doing," Clinton told several people as he walked through the site.

Many volunteers surrounded him for group photos.

Claire Weisz is a founding partner at WXY Architecture, which worked on portions of the park, and she was astounded by how much sand the storm had dumped on the play area.

"When I saw pictures,

*Continued on Page 16*

**Bayside votes to stop four Huang houses**

BY PHIL CORSO

In a unanimous vote, Community Board 11 came out against allowing a controversial developer to finish four homes under construction in Bayside.

At its Nov. 5 meeting, the board voted not to grant a variance to Tommy Huang, making

*Continued on Page 16*



Jaqi Cohen (l.-r.), Victoria Brown and Enrico Purita, of the New York Public Interest Research Group, show their opposition to the city's proposed fare hikes.

Photo by Joe Anuta

**Few voices at MTA fare hearing**

BY JOE ANUTA

The only hearing in Queens on the proposed fare hikes for public transportation was attended last Thursday by a handful of advocacy groups, a few angry commuters and only one elected official.

State Assemblyman

Edward Braunstein (D-Bayside) was one of only 21 speakers at the hearing at the Sheraton LaGuardia East Hotel in downtown Flushing, and the only lawmaker who spoke on behalf of his constituents.

Braunstein took exception to a portion of the Metropolitan Transporta-

tion Authority's four possible proposals, which all include a \$1 fee for purchasing a new MetroCard.

"The decision to charge an extra \$1 for new MetroCards purchased at [Long Island Rail Road] ticket machines defies logic," he said at the hearing.

*Continued on Page 16*

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# AG going after gas gougers

Schneiderman claims three Queens stations ripped off motorists

BY REBECCA HENELY

State Attorney General Eric Schneiderman said he would be cracking down on three Queens gas stations he accused of charging excessively high prices in the wake of Hurricane Sandy.

The stations — in Long Island City, Jackson Heights and College Point — were named among a list of 13 establishments throughout the state that allegedly charged \$4.74 or more in the days after the storm.

“Our office has zero tolerance for price gouging and we are taking action to send a message that ripping off New Yorkers is against the law,” Schneiderman said in a statement.

Queens motorists experienced much pain at the pump in the days and weeks after the deadly storm hit the Northeast Oct. 29-30. Stations without power and refinery damage led to gas shortages that resulted in most stations being out of commission. Hours-long lines persisted until the city announced even-odd day gas rationing Nov. 9.

Schneiderman said three gas stations in Queens took advantage of the situation at the cost of consumers. He said the Mobil station, at 40-40 Crescent St. in Long Island City, charged \$4.89 per gallon; the Shell station, at 70-18 Northern Blvd. in Jackson Heights, charged \$5.50 a gallon; and the Delta station, at 130-09 14th Ave. in College Point, charged \$5 a gallon.

The Mobil and the Shell stations did not respond to requests for comment.

A worker at the Delta who declined to give his name said the charges were bogus and that they had no complaints from customers



A worker at this Delta in College Point denied the station sold gas for \$5 in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy. Photo by Rebecca Henely

in the days after the storm. “We never sell \$5 gas here,” he said. “We never do that. We’re not crazy people like that.”

As of Monday, the city’s average gas price was \$4.007 per gallon, according to gasbuddy.com, an online pump price tracking site.

“These 13 retailers stand out from others in the high prices they have charged and in the size of their price increases,” Schneiderman said.

The attorney general added that the Mobil station had allegedly posted its price per gallon as \$3.89, but when a motorist drove up to the pump, the price was listed at \$4.89 if paid in cash or \$4.99 if paid by credit card. The incident was reported by a consumer who paid nevertheless because

he needed the gasoline.

Schneiderman said the stations had been issued notifications of intent to start enforcement against them.

The state’s price gouging law prohibits selling an item or a service for an “unconscionably excessive price” during an “abnormal disruption of the market,” the AG’s office said.

Schneiderman said the notices for the 13 stations are the first of a number of actions against gougers in the state. Not only gas, but essential items like food, water, generators, batteries and flashlights are covered under the law.

State Assemblyman David Weprin (D-Little Neck) and state Sen. Eric Adams (D-Brooklyn) introduced legislation earlier this year ordering all gas stations to post a sign near

the pump with the phone number for the New York State Consumer Protection Board to be used by consumers if they believe they have been ripped off.

City Councilman Peter Vallone Jr. (D-Astoria) said he was calling upon the state to make gouging punishable by up to a year in prison.

“These gas stations, in particular, apparently see fines as the cost of doing business,” he said. “Anyone who would try to profit from another person’s pain during an emergency deserves to face jail time.”

Reach reporter Rebecca Henely by e-mail at [rhenedly@cnglocal.com](mailto:rhenedly@cnglocal.com) or by phone at 718-260-4564.

# FEMA nerve center set up in Forest Hills

BY STEVE MOSCO

The urgent need for federal help in the city following Hurricane Sandy has led to the creation of a federal disaster nerve center in a once bustling Forest Hills office building that used to house airline company JetBlue.

And now local businesses also are getting a boost.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency moved into a 200,000-square-foot space in the Forest Hills Tower, at 118-29 Queens Blvd., a spot once held by passenger carrier JetBlue. The building will serve as city headquarters for FEMA over the next several months and provides a short-term administrative solution in close proximity to airports and other transportation options.

There will be no on-site access to the general public because FEMA will use space on 10 full floors solely for administrative offices. This means lots of new customers for coffee shops, bagel stores and food marts on the block.

“Business was way down after JetBlue left the building,” said the owner of a convenience store three doors down from the Forest Hills Tower. “This is a

busy area, but the building was very good for my business.”

When JetBlue left Forest Hills for its new headquarters in Long Island City in April, Mini LLC, a small coffee shop in the building, took a big hit and lost many of its customers. The man working at the counter, who said his boss would not let him give his name, said FEMA employees were a welcomed sight and a boon to business.

Matt Davidov, owner of Hot Bialys & Bagels, a block away from the office building, said his shop used to be busy, thanks to JetBlue customers, who accounted for at least 30 percent of his business.

“It’s a temporary thing,” he said. “But it is still a good thing.”

Jason Muss, principal of Muss Development, the real estate company leasing the building, noted that the short-term lease with FEMA will not affect ongoing discussions for the space with other potential tenants, who understand the temporary nature of this unique and critical requirement.

“Throughout our company’s history, Muss Development has maintained a commitment to civic responsibility,” Muss said.



The former offices of JetBlue on Queens Boulevard now house temporary space for the Federal Emergency Management Agency following Hurricane Sandy. Photo by Steve Mosco

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# Lancman plans to run for seat in City Council

BY PHIL CORSO

After losing in a Democratic primary to U.S. Rep.-elect Grace Meng in June and declining to seek re-election in the state Assembly, Rory Lancman (D-Fresh Meadows) announced Monday he was shifting his focus to a run for the City Council.

"There's going to be a tremendous amount of turnover in city government in 2013 from the mayor on down," Lancman said. "The city is facing challenges economically and there is a real opportunity and need for people with experience and energy to try to help shape its direction in the next four to eight years."

Under the city's term limits law, members of the City Council are allowed to serve only eight years in succession before they must step down.

For six years Lancman, a lawyer, has represented the 25th Assembly District, which includes Flushing, Fresh Meadows, and Hillcrest. But come Dec. 18, Lancman said he will begin campaigning for the same area's 24th District seat to be vacated by term-limited City Councilman James Gennaro (D-Fresh Meadows).

"If elected, I would have some enormous advantages including experience. I know how to get bills through a very difficult legislative process. I know how to conduct oversight of government agencies. I know how to lead within a legislative body," Lancman said. "With so much turnover, there will be a premium on Council members with experience and who have the energy to get things done for the city."

Next month, Lancman will kick off his campaign for City Council in the company of U.S. Rep. Joseph Crowley (D-Jackson Heights), who is chairman of the Queens Democratic Party, among many other party leaders — a support system he did not have earlier this year when he ran and lost in a four-way Democratic primary to Meng.



State Assemblyman Rory Lancman says he will seek a spot in the City Council.

But looking back on the primary run, Lancman said he received plenty of support from voters within the 24th Council District surrounding Fresh Meadows and looked forward to taking his message of economic fairness, education reform and a focus on public safety back to the region.

Through his time in the Assembly, Lancman said he has remained an advocate of lowering classroom sizes in schools and pushing a fair tax code for groups, including co-op and condo owners, as well controlling the costs of housing and transportation.

"I plan on working on the same spectrum of issues and applying them to city government instead of state government," Lancman said. "The experiences I have had in Albany as an effective legislator will help me hit the ground running."

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# Southeast Queens clergy welcome Obama's re-election

5

## Ministers pledge support for the president as solid step toward Dem success in 2013 local elections

BY RICH BOCKMANN

Clergy leaders and community members took some time last week to savor the flavor of President Barack Obama's re-election.

Boxes of chocolate invited guests to celebrate the president's "sweet" victory last week as the members of Clergy United for Community Empowerment gathered for breakfast at the Robert Ross Johnson Family Life Center in St. Albans. The event was sponsored by U.S. Rep. Gregory Meeks (D-Jamaica), who was also to be saluted for his re-election, although the congressman had been called to Washington to address the current budget battle.

"Isn't this a great day to be anywhere? Especially here," asked the Rev. Henry

Simmons, of the St. Albans Congregational Church. "I'm elated about the president's re-election because I think it gives us, particularly as clergy persons and as elected officials and those who help organize our communities, a clearer sense of what we need, I think, to be about."

Simmons pointed out that despite the president's historic re-election, black communities still faced serious problems.

"It's important for us to remember that ... 26 percent of African Americans and 37 percent of African-American children still live in poverty," he said. "There are over 900,000 black males in prison that the median income for an African American home has decreased since 2007 greater than any other ra-



The Rev. Ernestine Sanders invites the members of Clergy United for Community Empowerment to celebrate President Barack Obama's re-election.

Photo by Rich Bockmann

cial group because a lot of our wealth, so to speak, was tied up in real estate."

Simmons also noted that in 2009 44 percent of all new HIV cases in the country were among blacks. Clergy United's focus is on programs for the preven-

tion and intervention of HIV/AIDS, and its funding streams face serious cuts should the country go off the so-called fiscal cliff if Washington cannot agree to a deficit-reduction plan by Jan. 1.

"So while we celebrate,

we've got a lot of work to do and I think that our president is making it possible for us to do those things," Simmons said, "and we're also the only ones who can help, I think, really carry out his vision for this country. So I'm excited."

The Rev. Edward Davis, Clergy United's president, said he was impressed by how calculated the Obama campaign was.

Davis said that while the president's campaign was mostly unseen in New York, he often got calls for donations, and on Election Day his phone rang with the caller asking if he would remind one particular Ohioan who had not voted to head to the polls.

He said that with a bit of divine help the campaign's strategy was able to combat the racial overtones

of Republicans.

"God was on his side," he said. "God don't like ugly."

The group also took a look at local politics. Former city Comptroller Bill Thompson stopped by and discussed his run for mayor next year.

Lois Menyweather said it was important to use the Obama victory as motivation for next year's city-wide elections and beyond.

"Two years from now we're going to have to vote for Congress again. We do not need to sit home like we did in 2010 when we lost over 60 Congressional seats," she said. "President Obama cannot do his job because of the Congress and we need to take back the Congress."

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# Dad's plea may dog Meng

Lawmaker could feel political consequences after father admits to fraud

BY JOE ANUTA

Jimmy Meng's guilty plea to charges of soliciting and accepting an \$80,000 bribe may not make his daughter, state Assemblywoman Grace Meng (D-Flushing), vulnerable for re-election two years down the line, but it could bring undue scrutiny when she is sworn in as a congresswoman in January.

Former Assemblyman Jimmy Meng, who represented Flushing from 2005 and 2006, pleaded guilty to wire fraud Nov. 15 and faces a maximum of 20 years behind bars when he is sentenced March 12, according to Brooklyn federal court documents.

The 68-year-old admitted he took an \$80,000 bribe from an acquaintance and promised to use it to influence prosecutors in the Manhattan district attorney's office, according to the U.S. attorney's office in Brooklyn.

But the acquaintance, who the New York Post identified as businessman Eric Hu, began cooperating with federal investigators and even wore a wire to build evidence against Meng.

Hu was facing federal tax charges and approached Meng for help. The former assemblyman said he would give the \$80,000 to prosecu-



Jimmy Meng, the father of state Assemblywoman Grace Meng, faces sentencing next year after pleading guilty to fraud charges.

tors in the DA's office in order to soften the sentence Hu would receive, according to court documents.

On July 24, while federal agents watched, Meng accepted the kickback hidden inside of a fruit basket, court documents show.

"I am deeply saddened by the events surrounding my father the last several months. Today, he has taken full responsibility for his actions and I support his decision," said the assemblywoman, who once served as her father's campaign manager. "This has been a difficult time for our family and we continue to pray for guidance in the coming months. My family

hopes to continue to move past this chapter in their lives."

Meng did not attend the court session and was instead away in Washington learning the ropes after winning a congressional race in Queens earlier this month.

According to David Birdsell, dean of Baruch College's School of Public Affairs, it is a strategy aimed at separating the lawmaker from the deeds of her father.

And as long as Grace Meng herself is not implicated in any wrongdoing, Birdsell believes this is more of a personal tragedy for the assemblywoman in-

stead of a political liability.

"In the absence of any specific charges, I don't see this as a difficulty for her," he said. "Of course, opponents will try to dine out on this, but I don't think they're going to find much on the plate."

But a Democratic insider said that regardless of whether the assemblywoman is tied to her father's crimes, it will still bring scrutiny on her tenure in office and fund-raising.

"It puts Grace Meng under a microscope. Rightly or wrongly, every action she takes and every dollar she raises is going to be closely examined because she is playing in the big leagues now," the source said.

In court last week, U.S. Attorney Loretta Lynch took Jimmy Meng to task for not only accepting the bribe, but also for planning to keep the money for himself.

"Jimmy Meng sought to take advantage of his status as a power broker in the Flushing, Queens, community with only one design in mind — lining his own pockets. Meng dangled the promise of justice for sale, but his claims of special access to prosecutors were nothing more than lies designed to satisfy his greed," she said.

# Avella pledges again to shovel for seniors

BY PHIL CORSO

With a potentially snowy winter looming, one northeast Queens lawmaker has revamped recruiting efforts to staff a snow removal for seniors program in its sophomore season.

Last year, state Sen. Tony Avella (D-Bayside) launched the program, which paired volunteers with senior citizens in areas including Bayside, College Point, Douglaston, Little Neck and Whitestone, to expedite snow removal in the borough.

The senator's efforts came one year after a winter of heavy snowfall in 2010, from which community leaders argued snow removal was subpar, Avella said.

"Year after year seniors struggle to clear their sidewalks and remove the snow," Avella said. "Many seniors are unable to remove the smallest amount of snow and are completely trapped following the larger storms. Unfortunately, they are still responsible for the snow removal in front of their homes and often receive fines from the city for not clearing the snow from their sidewalks."

Though the program was not heavily tested in 2011, meteorological predictions have shown the upcoming winter season to be packed full of snow.

According to the Na-

tional Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Northeast saw only 24.7 inches of snowfall by the end of 2011 — the lowest recorded number since 2006, which recorded just over 18 inches.

But for this coming winter, the Farmers' Almanac predicted a snowier season.

"It's like Old Man Winter is cutting the country in half," said Peter Geiger, editor for the Farmers' Almanac. "The eastern half of the country will see plenty of cold and snow. The western half will experience relatively warm and dry conditions."

Geiger said the Farmers' Almanac has "red flagged" periods between Feb. 12 and Feb. 15 as well as March 20 and March 23 for major coastal storms along the Atlantic seaboard, packed with an extra punch of strong wind and heavy precipitation.



Bell Boulevard is blanketed with snow earlier this month.

Photo by Christina Santucci

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# Hundreds hold vigil in Sunnyside for gay activist

BY JOE ANUTA

More than 200 people solemnly marched through a commercial strip in Woodside Saturday evening to show solidarity after a longtime resident and gay rights activist was killed last month.

Lou Rispoli, an activist who lived with his partner of 32 years in the neighborhood, was beaten so brutally by two unknown assailants Oct. 20 that he died of his injuries five days later.

He was remembered Saturday as a stalwart of the neighborhood who stood up for the rights of others.

"I've been robbed of this amazing man, and friends have been robbed of an amazing soul," said Danyal Lawson, Rispoli's partner. The two were married at Queens Borough Hall the day same-sex marriage became legal in New

York state.

At the time, Rispoli said it felt like "the Berlin Wall falling down."

At about 2 a.m. on the day of his death, Rispoli was walking near the corner of 41st Street and 43rd Avenue when witnesses said two men he was talking with hit him in the head with a blunt object, according to the NYPD and City Councilman Jimmy Van Bramer (D-Sunnyside).

The attack put Rispoli in the hospital, where he eventually succumbed to his injuries.

Van Bramer decided to hold a candlelight march to show the neighborhood that violence would not be tolerated, he said.

The throngs of friends and neighborhood residents gathered at the corner of 51st Street and 43rd Avenue and marched down the commercial corridor as the sun set.

At the corner of 41st



Mark Horn, (l.) a friend of Lou Rispoli, comforts Rispoli's partner, Danyal Lawson, at a rally in memory of Rispoli, who was beaten to death in Sunnyside. Officials have been urging anyone with information about the attack to come forward. Photo by Christina Santucci

We will not forget and we will never stop fighting for justice.

Jimmy Van Bramer  
State Assemblyman

Street and 43rd Avenue, yards away from where Rispoli was attacked, Van Bramer stood on a small podium amid a sea of faces glowing in candlelight.

His office had brought a portable speaker, which pierced the silence on the block as he announced that the reward to information leading to the arrest of Rispoli had now reached \$25,000.

"We will not ever forget and we will never stop fighting for justice," he said. "We are Sunnyside

and Woodside. The people who killed Lou Rispoli are not."

Johnathon Dunn has lived in Sunnyside for 30 years and had never seen anything like the candlelight march.

"It was one of the most moving things I've ever witnessed in my community," he said.

Dunn did not know Rispoli personally, but nevertheless was handing out police fliers in front of a makeshift memorial, where others were placing their candles casting light on the site of the murder.

Those with information are asked to contact the NYPD's Crime Stoppers hotline at 1-800-577-TIPS. Information can also be sent via the Crime Stoppers website at [nypdcrimestoppers.com](http://nypdcrimestoppers.com) or by texting 274637 (CRIMES) and then entering TIP577.

## Relief volunteers collect medical data on storm victims

BY KAREN FRANTZ

In the dark stairwell of a powerless high-rise apartment in the Rockaways, three storm relief volunteers started the long climb up nine flights of stairs.

"At least it will be a good workout," said Jessica Hazard, a licensed social worker.

Hazard, along with James Martin and Caleb Porter, both homeless outreach workers, were in the storm-battered neighborhood

earlier this month making door-to-door checks on residents who had been without power for nearly two weeks to see if they needed medical help.

And as they found, volunteering in the Rockaways can present logistical challenges and sometimes unnerving dead-ends but also the rewards of gratitude from those they help.

The three work with

the Manhattan-based Goddard Riverside Community Center, which was coordinating relief efforts with the Yana Medical Center, a makeshift medical site organized by volunteers from Occupy Sandy, a grassroots disaster aid group.

They and several other volunteers were spending the day checking in on patients who had previously visited the Yana center to make sure they were still okay and to update their medical information.

Before they were sent out, Hazard, Martin, Porter and the other volunteers were given a brief lesson at the Yana site, on Rockaway Beach Boulevard and Beach 113th Street, on how to work with the patients.

"These folks have been forgotten about," Nastaran Mohit, a lead organizer at Yana, told them. "This is Katrina 2.0."

One volunteer asked



Volunteer Caleb Porter (r.) gathers medical information from Mary Liz (l.) about her relative during door-to-door checks in the Rockaways. Photo by Karen Frantz

what to do if they knocked on a door and received no answer but smelled something troubling.

"Listen, it's been a lot of time," Mohit said. "We're hoping for the best, but we don't know."

She told volunteers not to necessarily think the worst — it could just be a dead cat, she said —

but if they found anything disturbing they should immediately call back to the center.

The volunteers were given flashlights and forms and sent on their way.

Sometime later, Hazard, Martin and Porter had made the long climb up the stairs to check on their first patient, Theodore.

Porter knocked on the door.

"Hello? Outreach," called Porter.

Silence.

"He must not be home," Martin said.

"Hopefully," Porter responded, then knocked again.

"There's no smell. I can't smell anything," Mar-

tin said.

The three looked at each other warily and reluctantly continued to the next apartment, where there was also no answer.

Eventually, the group got hold of a relative of Theodore's, Mary Liz, who lives in the same building and was listed as a second contact. She invited them in, apologizing for untidiness. "It looks like the hurricane hit in here," she said.

She explained that Theodore was out checking on his father, but was able to list off his medications for the volunteers.

She cheerfully chatted about her storm experience and rolled her eyes about what she said was a poor Federal Emergency Management Agency and Red Cross presence in the early aftermath of the storm.

But overall, she said, most people were helpful. And she thought what Hazard, Porter and Martin were doing was "so cool."

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# Agencies offer aid for small biz ravaged by Sandy

BY RICH BOCKMANN

Josie Scarpa spent the last two years investing in and building her Howard Beach salon, but when the waters from the canal took over Cross Bay Boulevard during Superstorm Sandy, she was left with thousands of dollars in damaged equipment and a lot of questions.

"We got into the business three days later and tried to salvage what we could," said Scarpa, who estimated she lost about \$250,000 in damaged tanning equipment at the VIP Salon & Spa. "Only the things that were up very high made it. All the tanning equipment was damaged from the saltwater."

Scarpa, who lives in Howard Beach, had significant damage to her home and her car. She also saw how the lives of her eight employees had been turned upside down.

"I was hit in all aspects," she said. "I have one girl, she just got married. She's got two pairs of underwear, the clothes on her

back and the wedding dress she was able to salvage."

In the days following the storm, Scarpa rented a chair at another salon so she could get by as she searched for answers as to how to get her own business back on its feet.

"At this point we have to rebuild," she said. "We're not quitters."

Scarpa joined a few dozen other resilient business owners Friday at Resorts World Casino in Ozone Park, where several elected officials had convened a meeting of city, state and federal agencies providing disaster relief to small businesses.

"It's a lot and we understand that, so our role is to coordinate and peel it back and make it accessible," said Kevin Alexander, of the Far Rockaway Development & Revitalization Corp.

As a first step, the panelists suggested business owners should register with the Federal Emergency Management Agency for a federal disaster assistance ID, as some city and state programs will



Mark Randle (l.), of the U.S. Small Business Administration, talks to salon owner Josie Scarpa about the different kinds of loans available to Sandy victims.

Photo by Rich Bockmann

require one.

Some of the assistance being offered includes loans from the city Small Business Services up to \$25,000 to help cover physical damages or even make up for lost business.

The state Department of Labor has a program that pays partial unemployment so employers

can save money by cutting back on their staff's hours without having to lay off employees, and another program that expedites unemployment payments to those who lost their jobs because of the storm.

The U.S. Small Business Administration also has several different loan programs available.

Acting District Director Walter Oden said the most important message for business owners was to fill out an application even if they did not think they needed a loan.

"They may be fine now, but you never know what may happen down the road," he said.

Nicola Campbell said she lost about \$40,000 worth of spoiled food and damaged equipment at her restaurant, the Chef Mom Grill and Bakery, in Cedarhurst, L.I.

As she prepared to fill out an application for an SBA loan, Campbell said one of the things she was proud of was that she was able to open her restaurant eight months ago with her personal savings and no debt.

"It's so hard," she said. "But where there's a will, there's a way."

Reach reporter Rich Bockmann by e-mail at [rbockmann@cnglocal.com](mailto:rbockmann@cnglocal.com) or by phone at 718-260-4574.

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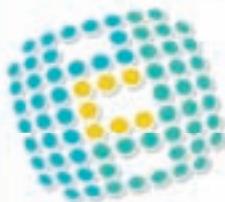
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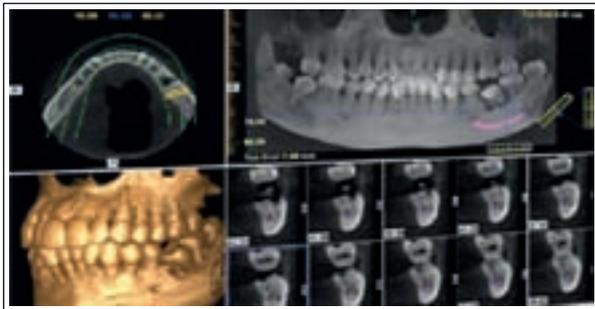
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# Surveyors take pulse of ruined Hamilton Beach

BY JOE ANUTA

Volunteers combed through the 450 houses that comprise Hamilton Beach Saturday to take inventory of what residents still needed in the aftermath of Superstorm Sandy, which inundated the sleepy island near John F. Kennedy International Airport with about 8 feet of water.

The surveyors fanned out from the West Hamilton Beach Volunteer Fire Department building, at the corner of 104th Street and Davenport Court, which acts as the center for the village, doling out supplies and goodwill to anyone who approached.

About 30 volunteers knocked on every door in the neighborhood to find out whose houses were vacant, which had electricity and gas and who was covered under flood insurance.

Doctors asked about residents' health and tended to anyone who needed care.

Dinah Gronda's family owned her home after her father paid off the mortgage decades ago, and the 34-year-old said she was not able to get flood insurance.

"It hit the entire house — the bedrooms, the kitchen," said Gronda, who was ripping out the waterlogged wall boards inside the one-story home built on top of a basement.

She and her family do not know what to do, since now they are relying only on the Fed-

## SUPERSTORM SANDY

eral Emergency Management Agency to fund the repairs, and she doubts it will be enough.

She is one of the people who, after the survey, will be high on the list of people to receive help, according to Roger Gendron, president of the New Hamilton



Dinah Gronda points to the water line in her Hamilton Beach home. Photo by Christina Santucci

Beach Civic Association, who along with the office of state Sen. Joseph Addabbo Jr. (D-Howard Beach), created the survey.

Gendron had only become president of the civic in February, he said, and was a little daunted when he was thrust into the position of community leader.

"I don't know how it

all got started," he said Saturday, trying to recall how the building for the local volunteer fire department became the center of the community in the days following the storm.

When the 106th Precinct called the burly electrician and asked what he needed, he requested a car to patrol the neighborhood

and bring some sense of calm to the dark streets.

Next he procured a floodlight and it was initially placed in the parking lot of the volunteer fire department, though Gendron later patched the light's generator to power the fire house.

"It became a warming center," he said. "This was the place where people could go to feel safe."

And then, the donations from nearby nonprofits and companies started rolling in.

First it was the office of state Assemblyman Phil Goldfeder (D-Ozone Park), who provided 1,000 sandwiches. Then cooks at the Resorts World Casino, where Gendron works as an electrician, came with 70 trays of hot food.

"I didn't know what to say," Gendron recalled. "Every time something came in I would get teary-

eyed."

The Kiwanis Club of Glendale held several barbecues in the parking lot of the fire department, which by Saturday was also filled with warm clothes, cleaning supplies and volunteers willing to perform manual labor. The Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation, originally from Taiwan, handed out \$600 debit cards to residents who applied for them.

Gendron said the Red Cross and the Federal Emergency Management Agency were extremely helpful, but in the initial aftermath, when the larger agencies were still creeping into the area, it was the residents of Queens and the rest of New York who make the recovery happen.

"We took care of our own through this whole thing," he said.



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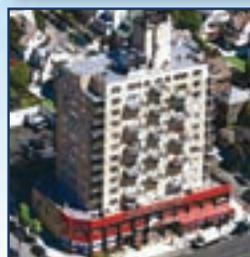
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Volunteers flocked to parks over the weekend to clean up after Hurricane Sandy. (Clockwise from top l.) Maria Paula of Whitestone collects debris near the Cross Island Parkway; dozens dig sand from a playground in Far Rockaway; former President Bill Clinton shakes hands with Lauren Caramicko in the Rockaways; Milana Kurchenko and Justin Donovan fill a wheelbarrel on Beach 30th Street; Jean Zissler from the Clinton Global Initiative shakes out a garbage bag onto the beach; Lisa Salbo and Devon Kiernan work as a team to fill garbage bags in Bayside; and Catherine Caur rakes leaves near Fort Totten.

Photos by Christina Santucci

## Restoring Queens Parks



# NE Queens civics decry new City Council districts

BY JOE ANUTA

The New York City Districting Commission released maps last week that could determine City Council boundaries for the next decade, although the public will not get to comment on what many in Queens see as serious flaws.

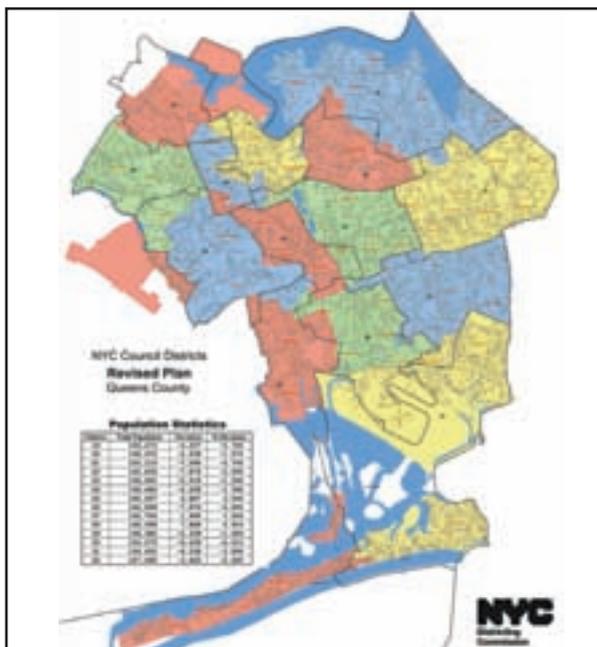
The Council has three weeks to object to the proposed district lines before they move on to the U.S. Department of Justice to be officially implemented. Every 10 years a commission of 15 people appointed by the mayor and each party in the Council get together to tweak the districts in response to population changes identified in the U.S. census.

But in Queens, civics and nonprofits took issue with many of the changes, though the head of the commission warned that redistricting is always contentious.

For example, Bayside is divided under the new maps after the commission kept Bayside Hills in City Councilman Mark Weprin's (D-Oakland Gardens) district and took a few more blocks from Councilman Dan Halloran's (R-Whitestone) district, according to Jerry Vattamala, a staff attorney for the Asian American Legal Defense Fund, a nonprofit which advocated for getter neighborhood representation.

Elsewhere in northeast Queens, Broadway-Flushing was divided between the more high-density district of Councilman Peter Koo (D-Flushing) and the more residential district of Halloran, irking civics like the Queens Civic Congress.

"I was shocked," said Richard Hellenbrecht, president of the civic, referring to his reaction when he first saw the maps. "We are all scratching our heads wondering what their rationale



Queens groups are not happy with the final City Council lines put out by the city Districting Commission.

Image courtesy Districting Commission

was for doing some of these things."

The Auburndale Neighborhood Association also took umbrage at the new lines and wanted more

of its neighborhood, made up of largely single-family homes, in Halloran's district.

The commission split Mitchell-Linden, a group

of co-ops just north of downtown Flushing, which wanted to be kept whole and in Koo's more urban district by putting part into Halloran's district.

The commission had no shortage of input from groups in the area, and former state Sen. Frank Padavan, who represented parts of northeast Queens and is familiar with the neighborhoods, is on the commission and voted for the lines.

An objection from the Council is the only recourse left for groups who want changes made to the lines, according to Vattamala, who suggested the commission did many things right in the process, but ultimately attempted to insulate itself from criticism by making the most substantive alterations to the maps after the public comment period was over.

Carl Hum, executive director for the commission, said the body followed

the City Charter, a document which stipulates how the process should move forward, as best it could have.

"It was our interpretation of how the charter lays out this process," he said.

The commission held two rounds of public hearings in August and October, but did not release the most drastic changes to the maps until last Thursday.

The charter states the commission "shall make its plan available to the public for inspection and comment not less than one month before the first such public hearing."

And Vattamala thinks that while the commission may have technically followed the rules, it violated the spirit of the charter, since Hum could have had the second round of hearings after making changes more reflective of the final product.

## Bright Queens teens earn top regional science honors

BY PHIL CORSO

A little curiosity went a long way for two teens from Little Neck and Richmond Hill, who were honored as regional finalists in the nation's most prestigious high school science competition in Massachusetts earlier this month.

Both seniors at Stuyvesant High School in Manhattan, Jongyoon Lee, of Little Neck, and Amanpreet Kandola, of Richmond Hill, received the recognition from their original research out of more than 2,000 teens nationwide in the Siemens Competition in Math, Science & Technology.

The students joined with 13 others to compete for the highest science honor awarded to American high school students, according to the Siemens

Foundation.

"These students have invested time, energy and talent in tackling challenging scientific research at a young age," said Jeniffer Harper-Taylor, president of the Siemens Foundation. "The recognition they have won today demonstrates that engagement in STEM is an investment well worth making."

Both students presented their research to expert university judges at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge the weekend of Nov. 2. Though they did not advance to the national finals, a Siemens Foundation spokeswoman said their achievement comes as a tremendous honor.

Lee, 18, said he submitted mathematics research examining the bound on

the number of edges that guarantees cycles of a certain length — which could potentially help increase the efficiency of connections between computers and other networks. After traveling to the United States from South Korea at age 10, Lee said he hoped to major in mathematics and become a mathematician after high school.

"What appeals to me the most is the objectivity of science," Lee said. "Because of the experiences I have had on the school math team and from research classes, I thought it was a great opportunity to enter into the competition."

Lee said he was most excited to mingle with other high school students submitting Ph.D.-level research from all over the country.

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New York, NY

# Clinton

*Continued from Page 1*

I couldn't believe the amount of effort that would be involved. This is a huge amount of sand to move. It's like a beach," she said.

Weisz said she was glad to see her designs slowly be unearthed like an archeological dig.

"It's just gratifying that this can be cleaned up," she said.

It has been a rocky road getting the play area opened.

After advocating for a park in the area for at least a decade, resident and community leaders thought they were finally getting their wish in the spring.

The park was nearly ready to open March 20, when a vandal somehow hijacked a large construction vehicle nearby and rammed through a chain link fence, smashing much of the children's play equipment.

The damage totaled about \$100,000 and police eventually arrested Allan Swafford, 17, and charged

him with the crime, according to ABC News.

It took months for the city Parks Department and contractors to replace the damaged equipment, but Aug. 6 the mayor and community leaders again gathered to finally cut the ribbon on the play area.

The park stayed open for three months until calamity befell it once again.

Superstorm Sandy piled about 18 inches of sand in the play area, closing the facility a second time. Many of the volunteers cited the park's plight as the reason why they decided to come down.

"I was surprised, given the story," said Lilian Ajayi, who runs a Manhattan nonprofit called Global Connection for Woman. "They just built this park."

Ajayi's nonprofit is a member of the Clinton Global Initiative, which acts like an umbrella organization, calling its members to action. Ajayi brought a team with her to help dig out the slides and monkey bars that had become inundated with sand.

Justin Donovan, from

Maspeth, had an important connection that made him want to make the trek down to help out.

Donovan, as a 12-year-old, could not imagine what he would do if his park was partially buried in sand, since he uses it to play basketball when he needs to get out of the house.

"I'd be upset," he said. "There is not other playground in the neighborhood."

Donovan also got to spend some quality time with this grandfather, Pete, who not only drove his son down in a large tour bus, but brought more than 30 other people with him.

And while many of the other bus drivers bided their time inside their vehicles, Pete Donovan was out heaving sand into bucks and hauling away sections of spongy flooring that lined the playground — all with a broken foot encased in a black walking cast.

"This is where I grew up as a little kid," he said with a shrug. "And I had an opportunity to work with my grandson."

# Trees

*Continued from Page 1*

doing and who to contact for a prompt answer to questions."

According to the DOB, violations placed on homes must be fixed in accordance with the building code or else a financial penalty is implemented. Homeowners or contractors must first get building permits before repairs are made, the DOB said, to ensure that the repairs are made to the standards of the city building code.

Community Board 8 District Manager Marie Adam-Ovide said she had reached out to the Buildings Department after receiving several complaints from residents throughout the community and was told that Mayor Michael Bloomberg had building inspectors survey the borough to gather accurate assessments of the damages. CB 8 covers the Fresh Meadows area.

"The inspectors issue DOB violations and this alarmed the residents,"

Adam-Ovide said.

But because of an uproar from both city residents and elected officials, the Buildings Department moved to correct how it assessed Sandy's wrath, CB 8 said. According to a DOB spokesman, affected homeowners will now receive notices of deficiencies under the complaint, not a violation.

Gordon said so many of her neighbors in northeast Queens would see city workers pull up to their homes, surrounded by fallen trees after the storm, and receive "failure to maintain" violations instead of assistance in removing the city trees. In response, members of the West Cunningham Park civic joined with other local groups, including the Bayside Hills civic and Glen Oaks Village to call on the Buildings Department to re-evaluate its practices.

"For now, I'd like to think all these 'failure to maintain' violations were a bureaucratic blunder," said Michael Feiner, president of the Bayside Hills Civic Association. "Only time will tell if our government

will learn to restore disaster damage more quickly and logically."

State Sens. Tony Avella (D-Bayside) and Jose Peralta (D-East Elmhurst) and City Councilman Mark Weprin (D-Oakland Gardens) wrote letters to Bloomberg with hopes of having the violations rescinded.

In a letter addressed to Queens Parks Commissioner Dorothy Lewandowski, Peralta brought attention to the more than 8,000 city trees that had fallen after the storm, with more than half attributed to Queens. The senator called on both the city Parks and Buildings departments to work to alleviate the most vulnerable residents before winter arrives.

"The city should be helping people, not giving them a violation that threatens them with criminal prosecution while going through one of the worst natural disasters this city has ever seen," Avella said. "Such conduct by a city agency issuing violations rather than assisting in recovery is truly offensive."

# MTA

*Continued from Page 1*

When LIRR riders purchase a ticket, they have the option to get a MetroCard, a choice that commuters from Braunstein's district in northeast Queens use frequently, he said. The machines do not, however, allow riders to refill their MetroCards.

"The only conclusion that can be reached is that the authority is seeking to raise revenue by charging some riders more than others," he said.

In October, the MTA released a set of four proposals to hike fares, each one tweaking either the base fare, the cost of an unlimited card or the rate of discount for purchasing more than \$10 on a MetroCard.

The current base fare is \$2.25, or effectively \$2.10 with the bonus discount, while the current cost for a 30-day unlimited card is

\$104. A seven-day card currently costs \$29, according to the MTA.

At last Thursday's hearing, where most of the more than 100 chairs in the large room were empty, there seemed to be few concerned citizens.

Christine Lee is a freelance designer from Forest Hills who has to take the subway and bus often. She told the board that a fare increase would be another financial burden that would be difficult to bear.

Advocacy organizations like the Straphangers Campaign also testified at the hearing, with representative Jason Chin-Fatt reading off testimonials describing hardships from various riders the campaign had collected.

The campaign and its staff attorney Gene Russianoff have blasted the MTA for hiking fares four times in five years, and have called on Albany and the city to pump more money into the authority. Ac-

ording to the campaign, about 53 percent of the MTA's operating costs are covered by fares, the highest percentage in the nation and more than double that of both Los Angeles and Philadelphia.

In addition, the Straphangers referred to alternative revenue-generating proposals, such as tweaking the tolls on bridges around the city, to get more revenue from the passages that see the most traffic.

Some who testified seemed as if they just wanted someone to vent to. A man known as Mr. X who attends many of the MTA's hearings spent several minutes verbally berating many of the board members, while others complained of drivers who were not helpful and unpleasant trips they had made by using public transportation.

Reach reporter Joe Anuta by e-mail at [januta@cnglocal.com](mailto:januta@cnglocal.com) or by phone at 718-260-4566.

# Huang

*Continued from Page 1*

it more difficult for him to complete properties under construction at 39-39 223rd St. and 39-01, 39-15 and 39-19 Mia Drive near the Cross Island Parkway in Bayside.

In the board's unanimous vote, members cited the developer's lengthy track record of complaints and violations, which dated as far back as 2004 and stemmed from accusations of unsafe working conditions, according to the city Department of Buildings.

Huang did not return calls seeking comment.

The community board's East Flushing/North Bayside Committee, chaired by Christine Haider, advised against approving the variance, citing violations at the property. According to the DOB, the property at 39-39 223rd St., which includes a 22,859-square-foot zoning lot in Bayside, has received

93 complaints and 46 different violations to date.

The variance still must go through both Borough President Helen Marshall's office and the city Board of Standards and Appeals, but will do so with a recommendation from CB 11 not to approve it, District Manager Susan Seinfeld said.

Huang has long been considered a notorious developer in the borough after he was convicted in 1999 of causing an oil spill in the basement of the landmarked RKO Keith's Theatre in Flushing, which he bought in 1986.

State Sen. Tony Avella (D-Bayside) has been one of several community leaders who have spoken out against Huang's projects in the borough and said the developer has become infamous for consistently violating building and zoning codes.

The senator held a news conference earlier this year calling on the DOB to think twice before

issuing any more building permits to Huang.

"Mr. Huang's unsafe construction practices date back almost 20 years and his projects continue to receive numerous violations for 'work contrary to approved plans,' 'work without a permit,' 'failure to maintain the property,' among many others which often have resulted in destruction of adjoining properties and danger to public safety," Avella said.

Based on Huang's initial variance application, the Bayside properties were built in accordance with a stipulation from the DOB that the development would be considered a through lot, which requires a road to be built on the other side. The community board's unanimous vote rejected a variance that would have allowed the developer not to comply with backyard requirements typical for projects of that size.

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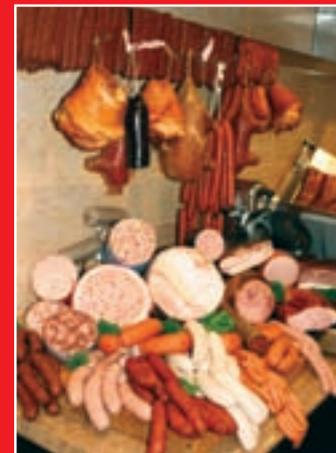
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