

Wills launches listening tour at barbershop

BY PHIL CORSO

There are few places like the neighborhood barber shop, where regulars and visitors can be found sounding off about the issues of the day as they reshape their hairdos.

That is why City Councilman Ruben Wills (D-Jamaica) said he booked himself a tour of barber-shops throughout his southeast Queens district, with the first of four meetings Saturday at Bacchus Hair Studio in Richmond Hill.

The councilman sat all ears just feet away from the barber's chair. On their way out the door, customers snagged a seat and sounded off about what was buzzing through their community.

Jamaica resident Gavin Ramlall, 10, just finished having his hair trimmed when the councilman asked him to hash out his gripes.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" Wills asked.

Gavin said he wanted to see his nearby parks, including Baisley Pond Park, in better shape

Continued on Page 14

Swindlers fleece Flushing Asians

Victims turn over life savings in exchange for prayers to ward off evil spirits

BY JOE ANUTA

Con artists who promise to rid members of the Chinese community of evil spirits or illnesses by praying over sacks of

cash have instead stolen \$1.3 million citywide from unsuspecting victims over the last year — and about half of that money was taken within the 109th Precinct.

Cops arrested one woman

who allegedly scammed a Flushing victim out of \$61,000, but officers still want the public to be on high alert.

Inspector Brian Maguire and Capt. Tommy Ng, of the

109th, which covers Flushing, Queensboro Hill, College Point, Malba, Whitestone, Beechhurst and Bay Terrace, outlined the ongoing problem last week, which has wiped out many victims' life savings.

"This is having a devastating impact on families," Ng said, detailing the recent incident in which a 72-year-old woman put jewelry and \$61,000 in cash into a sack thinking it would be used in a prayer and returned to her. It was stolen instead, according to Ng.

The woman walked out of a doctor's office near the corner of Northern Boulevard and 147th Street between 11 a.m. and noon April 11 when she was approached by two other women in their 50s who struck up a conversation about the best doctors in the area, according to police.

While the two women were talking to the 72-year-old, a third woman approached and began discussing a famous doctor that has the power to miraculously heal diseases, police said.

"They make it seem like it's random," Maguire said.

Continued on Page 14

CELEBRATING THE START OF BASEBALL



Roman Alvero holds a flagpole with the American flag during the opening ceremony of the Bayside Little League, following the league's annual parade. **See coverage on Pages 9, 12.** Photo by Christina Santucci

Queens Republican Party divided by vicious infighting over scandal

BY JOE ANUTA

Republican leaders traded more barbs over the future of the Queens GOP Party this week in the wake of a wide-ranging bribery scandal.

Councilman Dan Halloran (R-Whitestone) and Queens Republican Party Vice Chairman

Continued on Page 14



Naheed Bahram, the New York program director for Women for Afghan Women, speaks to an audience at the Central Queens Y in Forest Hills.

Photo by Steve Mosco

Afghan woman fights for rights

BY STEVE MOSCO

Extreme acts of violence against humanity are often met with widespread shock and unmitigated disgust, but in fanatical circles extreme acts of violence against women are often met with hushed nods of approval from the male ruling elite.

It is a paradigm Naheed Bahram is trying to change. The New York program director of Women for Afghan Women came to the Central Queens Y in Forest Hills this week to discuss her organization and her struggle to secure the rights of Afghan women.

"Young women are forced into marriages with

men more than twice their age," said Bahram at the Y, at 67-09 108th St. "And the women in these marriages have no rights and nowhere to turn to when the abuse begins."

Bahram told a story of a 12-year-old Afghan girl who was forced to marry a 45-year-old man in Kabul.

Continued on Page 10



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Queens runners escape Boston race blasts

3

Borough marathoners describe their horror after bombings but vow to return for future competitions

BY JOE ANUTA, STEVE MOSCO AND CHRISTINA SANTUCCI

As the investigation into the Boston Marathon bombing moved forward, runners from Queens returned home and reflected on their chilling experiences.

Several Queens runners had finished the marathon Monday shortly before two explosions went off at the race's finish line in Copley Square, killing at least three people and injuring more than 180, the Boston Police Department said.

President Obama characterized the attack as an "act of terror" as the FBI and other law enforcement agencies began sifting through evidence at the scene in downtown Boston with the help of countless videos, photos and eyewitness accounts.

Long Island City resident Peter Macari, 27, had crossed the finish line about an hour before the blasts and was sitting down to eat lunch at a sports bar with family and friends when the television revealed the terrible news.

"You could definitely sense that something awful had happened," he said. "The tone of the restaurant changed immediately, and outside all you heard were sirens."

Macari then spent some tense moments calling and texting several friends running in the marathon and watching from the sidelines.

Fortunately, his entire crew was safe and accounted for.

An avid runner, Macari had run several marathons, but this was his first time at the Boston Marathon, which he called "the Super Bowl of marathons."

"I was so saddened by the fact that the marathon could be tainted by this act of violence," Macari said,

vowing to return to Boston for next year's marathon. "It might be difficult, but this is my sport. I'm not going to let this violent act get in the way of what a marathon should be."

Astoria residents Ben Hauck and Rob Gunther described hearing loud booming sounds and instinctively thinking of a truck ramming into a raised roadway.

"If you are ever on Astoria Boulevard near the truck route, a truck will hit a bump and there is a very loud sound. This sounded like an extra large truck hit something," Hauck said by phone from his hotel room in Boston the day of the attack.

Hauck, who was running the Boston race for the second time and has completed more than 10 marathons in total, said he heard only one of the two blasts but an unsettled feeling developed in his stomach. He glanced at several police officers on the street corner, and they also seemed alarmed by the noise.

Gunther had met up with his wife and parents and was walking near the finish line at the time of the blasts.

"We heard two booms, and my mom said, 'Is that an explosion?'" said Gunther, who shrugged off the noise. After returning to his hotel room, he saw news about the explosions on TV.

"We have been glued to our phones ever since," he said by phone on the ride back to New York.

Gunther, 28, who was running his seventh marathon, said he eerily thought while jammed into the packed staging area, "What if something bad were to happen?"

But both Astoria residents said the explosions would not keep them from running in future marathons.

Kew Gardens resident William Reilly, also known



Long Island City resident and runner Peter Macari crossed the finish line about an hour before two explosions rocked the Boston Marathon, and Astoria resident Ben Hauck (inset) had finished about 10 minutes prior to the bombing.

Photo courtesy Peter Macari-Inset by Deborah Lopez



Astoria resident Ben Hauck compared the sound of the explosion to that of a large truck hitting a bump on Astoria Boulevard.

Photo courtesy Ben Hauck

as Backward Bill, was uninjured in the blasts, according to a consulting company that had worked with him.

Reilly, who suffers from cerebral palsy, has competed in more than 28 marathons in his wheelchair, riding backward and

man.

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority said via its official Twitter feed it was beefing up the MTA police presence on Metro-North and Long Island railroad lines and confirmed that the NYPD was keeping a close watch on the city's subways.

City Councilman Peter Vallone (D-Astoria) said the bombings in Boston illustrated the need for more police officers in New York.

"We should never have allowed our police force to reach the staffing level it has now," he said. "We had 41,000 cops in 2001 and now we have under 35,000 and we are the safest big city, but we would be safer with more police officers."

Hauck and Gunther said many of their friends and family have been contacting them in the aftermath to make sure they were OK.

"I seemed to have the information before most of my friends had heard the news," Hauck wrote in an e-mail. "I texted, tweeted, e-mailed and did maybe a few phone calls."

Gunther updated his Facebook status to alert loved ones that he was safe.

"It's saddening and angering, it's attacking presumably innocent people," Hauck said.

Back home in Long Island City after hitching a ride with friends, Macari expressed sadness for the innocent people lost and maimed in the attack, while wondering what might have been had he crossed the finish line a little later.

"Just to think I ran by that very spot. I ran through that finish line," he said. "If the timing had been different, it could have been me."

Reach the newsroom by e-mail at timesledgernews@cnglocal.com or by phone at 718-260-4545.

Zoning still up in air for Willets Pt. project

BY JOE ANUTA

The 1.4-million-square-foot mall proposed for the parking lot of Citi Field called Willets West is more like the Wild West in terms of zoning regulations, Community Board 7 learned last week at a meeting where many details of the \$3 billion Willets Point redevelopment project were revealed.

A delegation from the city Economic Development Corp. also told board members that there is no contractual requirement for new ramps off the Van Wyck Expressway and that the Queens Development Group, composed of Sterling Equities and Related Cos., have a first shot at building the third phase of the project, which has not yet gone out to bid.

A partnership between Related and Sterling, the company whose principals also control the New York Mets, won a bid last year to develop part of a 62-acre project designed to transform the junk yards and auto shops of the Iron Triangle into a new mixed-use neighborhood.

The first phase includes replacing contaminated soil on the site before building a hotel and a strip of retail along 126th Street across from Citi Field. Then a temporary parking lot will be constructed in Willets Point to allow construction of the mall on the Mets' lot. Housing, more retail and a school are in the second phase. The city has not selected a company to build the third phase.

The partnership is seeking city approval to build the interim parking lot in Willets Point during construction of the mall. The developers also need the green light for a proposal to host community recreational activities on the lot when patrons of the Mets are not parking there.



A rendering shows the street-level view of what the first phases of the Willets Point redevelopment project will look like.

Image courtesy Michael Bloomberg

The plans then call for the lot to be torn down to accommodate the housing component.

"We want to talk about zoning controls because there are none," CB 7 Vice Chairman Chuck Apelian said at the meeting, referring to the mall site, which is mapped parkland.

The land is currently leased to the Mets, but converting its use to a mall would require a sublease involving the city Parks Department, the partnership and EDC.

The developers and the city said the zoning would be outlined in that sublease, and would closely resemble the commercial zoning outlined in the special Willets Point District.

"The density, use and square-footage will be controlled by the lease, so it is not a blank check by any stretch of the imagination," said Jesse Masyr, a land use attorney for the Queens Development Group.

But the CB 7 board had a problem: The lease will be drawn up by Parks and EDC, according to city representatives, not the City Planning Commission, which typically oversees zoning.

The board and members of a group opposed to the development also questioned EDC about ramps off the Van Wyck Expressway that are required to build the housing in the second phase.

According to the partnership's plan, those ramps are slated for construction by the city in 2021 and completion in 2024 and are estimated at \$50 million in today's dollars, but there is nothing in the contract stipulating they have to be built.

"We take the city at their word that there is a strong commitment to do this," said Glen Goldstein, president of Related Retail, echoing repeated statements by city officials that they are committed to building the ramps.

But another clause in the partnership's contract with the city states that the Queens Development Group has the option to fund construction of the ramps on its own at any time, Gerald Antonacci, of the opposition group Willets Point United, pointed out.

In a video released on his group's website, Antonacci predicted that housing would never get built, a claim the city denies.

If the developers follow through with the proposed plan, the Queens Development Group will get a crack at the last, roughly 40-acre phase of the project, which will feature more mixed-use buildings and possibly a convention center, although it was unclear exactly what sort of advantage the partnership would have.

"There is not a guaranteed right, but a limited right," said a member of the EDC.

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Environmentalist urges residents to join in history night 5

Dan Hendrick invites community to share Jamaica Bay stories and photos for documentary film

BY STEVE MOSCO

After decades of industrial waste polluting its waters and damage from scores of storms wreaking havoc on habitats, Jamaica Bay has quite the story to tell.

And one Queens environmentalist is enlisting the community to tell it.

Dan Hendrick, an environmentalist working on a documentary called "Jamaica Bay Lives!," invites the community to Jamaica Bay History Night Wednesday at the Queens Library at Broad Channel, at 16-26 Cross Bay Blvd., from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m.

Residents are encouraged to bring photos, home movies and their own personal stories to share with Hendrick, the library and their neighbors.

"So often we take our

own personal history for granted," said Hendrick. "We think of history being written by presidents and politicians, when in reality history is written by all of us."

Hendrick wants to examine that history for his film, but the night also kicks off an effort to document Jamaica Bay for Queens Memory Project, a collaboration of the Archives at Queens Library and Queens College Libraries' Department of Special Collections and Archives.

Queens Memory Project combines historical and contemporary photography, maps, news clippings and other documents with oral history interviews of current residents.

"Stories we hear and things we learn could be used for the film, but we also wish to share it with



Organizers of Jamaica Bay History Night want to see residents' historic photographs, like this one showing a tent city in Rockaway.
Photo courtesy Dan Hendrick

Queens Library and make it part of Queens' collective history," Hendrick said. "We are interested in a 360-degree view of Jamaica Bay from the biggest story to the smallest story."

Hendrick expects to hear many accounts of one of the biggest stories to ever hit Jamaica Bay: Hurricane Sandy. The filmmaker be-

gan shooting the documentary in August 2011, more than two years before the storm rushed ashore.

"Sandy changed the storyline," Hendrick said of the film, which he expects to wrap in early 2014. "We have an opportunity to ask what is going to happen with the bay. Given the fact that we are facing rising

sea levels, what happens to the people who live on the shore?"

Hendrick invites residents from up and down the shore — Rockaway, Broad Channel, Rosedale, Springfield Gardens, Howard Beach and beyond — to attend and share their stories. It is a free event and attendees are asked to regis-

ter by contacting Hendrick at jamaicabaylives@gmail.com or 917-207-8715.

The history night — and the film — will also target what could happen to the Jamaica Bay ecosystem. Next week's meeting comes on the heels of Gov. Andrew Cuomo's allocation of \$645,000 in state funds to help rebuild 28 acres of salt marshes — a fragile part of the bay that provides habitats for wildlife and protects the bay itself.

"These salt marshes are disappearing at a fast clip, up to 48 acres every year," said Hendrick. "They act as critical habitats for birds, shellfish and small fish. From the human standpoint, the marshes absorb rains and prevent erosion by helping to break up big waves before they reach the shore."



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NHL legend helps ill kids

Former Islander opens playroom at Cohen Children's Hospital

BY STEVE MOSCO

On his way to the National Hockey League's Hall of Fame, former New York Islander, New York Ranger and Buffalo Sabre Pat LaFontaine learned the value of taking time away from hits and shots on the ice to visit bedridden children at area hospitals.

LaFontaine followed the example of sports legends before him by spending time with sick children — and in the process forged a meaningful life after hockey.

The perennial NHL all-star founded the Companions in Courage Foundation near the end of his playing career in 1997. With the goal of raising funds to build interactive playrooms called Lion's Dens in hospitals throughout North America, LaFontaine said the nonprofit believes no child should ever have to go through the fight for life alone.

"These children and their parents go through so much," said LaFontaine at the opening of a Lion's Den at Cohen Children's Medical Center at North Shore-LIJ in New Hyde Park, L.I., last Friday. "To see smiles on their faces and to see their moms and dads have a little relief — it's worth all the work."

A child's smile is the



Hockey hall-of-famer Pat LaFontaine (r.) joins Cohen Children's Hospital Executive Director Kevin McGeachy and patients as Billie and George Ross cut the ribbon at the hospital's Lion's Den.

Photo by Steve Mosco

goal of these interactive playrooms, which use innovative communications tools to connect young patients to the outside world during their hospital stay.

In Lion's Dens, youngsters can video conference with children at other hospitals, play video games, watch movies and generally act their age all the while spending quality time with their parents and loved ones in a playful setting.

"Social settings really help children forget about their pain," said LaFontaine, who played his entire career in New York state and still makes Long Island his home. "It means so much to me to finally bring one of these rooms to Long Island."

Helping LaFontaine

bring this interactive escape to North Shore was the Billie & George Ross Foundation, a New York-based charity that provided the funding to support the enhancement of child health care.

"We have seen firsthand how these setups bring joy to children being treated in the hospitals," said George Ross. "We know this contributes to the healing process and we're thrilled to have this special room in a hospital that I support and respect."

Kevin McGeachy, executive director of Cohen Children's Medical Center, said these special rooms help to enrich the healing process at the hospital.

"We are a children's hospital — that is what we

do," he said. "This space will serve as a welcome respite for our pediatric patients from the stress of hospitalization and illness."

Assisting LaFontaine with the launch of the Lion's Den at North Shore were fellow former Islanders Bobby Nystrom, Benoit Hogue and Jean Potvin — three NHL competitors among many who share LaFontaine's belief that hockey players have more to give the world than dynamic wrist shots and crushing checks.

"Hockey was a stepping stone to get me to a place in my life where I can help these children," he said. "The courage and strength I see in these kids every day inspires me to continue my mission."

Alliance yells mayday over trees near JFK

BY RICH BOCKMANN

Hundreds of trees are being considered for pruning or removal in Idlewild Park, raising concerns from one southeast Queens environmental group that the Port Authority is trying to push through a controversial plan to extend one of the runways at John F. Kennedy International Airport.

The Port Authority and the city Parks Department have tagged more than 700 trees that lie within two runway protection zones in the park.

"The Federal Aviation Administration's mandate that runway protection zones be free of obstructions currently required by the FAA in order to accommodate larger aircraft. But because the southern end of the runway juts into Jamaica Bay and

questioned just how much of a hazard the short trees are. "It's our contention that this is a ploy to move forward with their plans to get the project approved," she said. "They're talking about 722 trees and claiming almost 400 are current obstructions. Quite frankly, none of these trees are more than 40 feet high. If a plane is that low, then that plane is in serious trouble."

The Port Authority is currently working out a plan to alter runway 4L/22R in order to provide larger safety areas required by the FAA in order to accommodate larger aircraft. But because the southern end of the runway juts into Jamaica Bay and

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Continued on Page 14



A tree in Idlewild Park is tagged for removal.

Photo by Rich Bockmann

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First lady of Massachusetts, Diane Patrick (r.), speaks about domestic abuse at Queens College. The discussion was moderated by the founder of the school's Women and Work Program, Carmella Marrone (l.)

Photo by Karen Frantz

Mass. first lady talks about domestic abuse

BY KAREN FRANTZ

The first lady of Massachusetts, Diane Patrick, is naturally a private person. She jokingly told a group of Queens College students Monday that if she knew her husband, Gov. Deval Patrick, would have gubernatorial ambitions when she met him, she might not have married him.

But her role as a public figure has prompted her to speak out about an issue that runs deep for her: domestic abuse.

"As long as I'm in a visible role, I want to do what I can to make a difference in the world," she said.

Patrick was the victim of domestic violence during her first marriage to a man she said was much older and had misrepresented himself to her about various aspects of his background, such as the school he attended.

After the pair moved to Los Angeles and Patrick began law school there, she said little by little he began to become increasingly controlling as she discov-

ered his lies.

"He began to not let me drive," she said. "I couldn't have my friends over."

She said it escalated to the point where he had torn down her self-esteem and she had become isolated in their home.

And then the abuse became violent.

"I just resigned myself to living in that life," she said.

But she met Deval Patrick through a friend who was one of only two people who knew about the abuse.

She and the future Massachusetts governor developed a strong friendship and he helped her build back up her self-worth and find the strength to leave. After a while, the couple married.

"I didn't talk about [the abuse] for a long, long time," she said, saying it was not until Deval Patrick began his run for governor that she first began to publicly recount the story.

She said it is important to her to share her tale to help others who are in similar situations who may

be too scared or ashamed to reach out and get help, and to shed light on the fact that domestic abuse is not a problem confined to class.

"This doesn't discriminate," she said.

Patrick grew up in Brooklyn and studied early childhood education at Queens College. She taught elementary school for five years before the city bankruptcy in 1976-77 resulted in her being laid off, when she decided to go to law school.

She currently is a partner at Ropes & Gray LLP in Boston and has been named as one of the country's leading business lawyers and one of the most influential black women in business. Her husband has been governor since 2007.

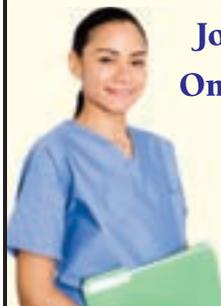
She joined Queens College for a Professionals on Campus presentation held in the college's Q Side Lounge in the Main Dining Hall. The audience included participants in the school's Women and Work Program and was moderated by the program's founder, Carmella Marrone.

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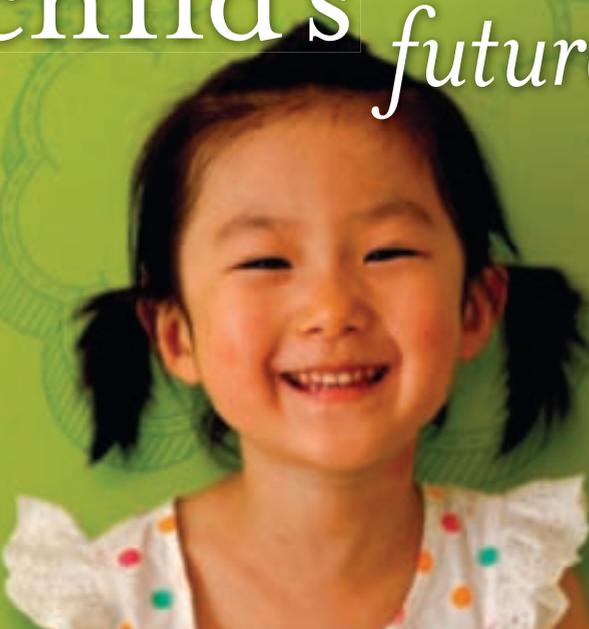
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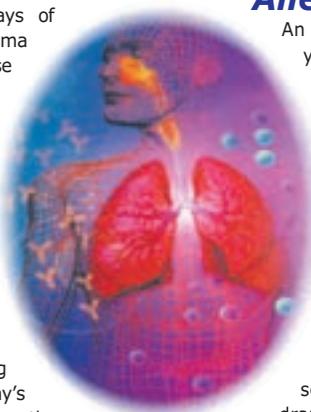


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Inspector Brian Maguire (front) discusses teamwork by police officers Herbin (back l.-r.) Tsang, Hamid, Sgt. Pilla and Capt. Tommy Ng that led to the arrest of an alleged iPhone thief. Photo by Joe Anuta

NYPD derails theft of iPhone on 7 train

BY JOE ANUTA

The tracking software on a stolen iPhone led officers from the 109th Precinct on a chase through Corona Monday and their target was the No. 7 train.

Just after 12 p.m. Monday, a 30-year-old woman was talking on her white iPhone near the corner of 41st Avenue and Main Street in Flushing when a man came from behind and snatched the device, police said.

A witness, 40-year-old Lan Zhen Zou, began chasing after the 20-year-old suspect, but eventually returned to help the woman call police.

When officers arrived, they used Apple's Find My iPhone software to try to track the woman's phone, according to police.

They got nothing. But all of a sudden, the round dot that signified the stolen phone's location popped onto the screen of an officer's iPhone. It was moving quickly down Roosevelt Avenue, according to Capt. Tommy Ng, executive officer at the 109th Precinct, leading him to believe the suspect was riding on the No. 7 train with the stolen phone.

The officers jumped in their cars, taking the woman with them, and began chasing down the train, which had originated in Flushing, emerged from



A Flushing woman, who did not want to be identified, holds the phone recovered by 109th Precinct cops who chased down a No. 7 train.

Photo by Joe Anuta

the tunnel and was heading west above ground.

As the police, who included Officers Herbin, Tsang and Hamid and Sgt. Pilla, began to catch up to the subway, Ng called the NYPD's transit division and instructed them to hold the train at the corner of Junction Boulevard and Roosevelt Avenue in Corona, he said.

The engineer of the train pulled the first car into the station, where officers boarded and began combing the different cars, according to Ng.

Herbin recognized a man who had been previously arrested in Flushing, according to police. He called the stolen number, which allegedly rang in the man's pocket.

He was promptly arrested.

"The majority of the grand larceny crimes are driven by electronics," Ng

said. "Having the iPhone tracking software installed will assist the Police Department in finding the bad guy more quickly."

Last summer, the 109th set up a table along Main Street in Flushing to encourage residents to register their devices with the software.

"At night around here, the iPhone is like a beacon for criminals," Inspector Brian Maguire, commanding officer at the precinct, told TimesLedge Newspapers at the time. "It's one of the biggest targets."

Citywide, the NYPD began working with Apple earlier this year to try and track down stolen merchandise, according to a report in the New York Post.

"We're looking for ways to find individuals who have stolen Apple products and return the products to their original owners," NYPD spokesman Paul Browne told the Post. "It is being done to learn the pattern who is stealing."

In one case, a stolen iPad was tracked to the Dominican Republic, where an NYPD intelligence cop assigned to Santo Domingo helped get it back, the Post reported.

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

Bayside Little Leaguers begin another baseball season

Bell Boulevard parade marks a new beginning for young northeast Queens sluggers

BY PHIL CORSO

The road to this year's Little League season started on the Bell Boulevard pavement.

Ballplayers between 5 and 18 and their coaches, who make up 63 teams, marched through Bayside Saturday, marking the beginning of the league's 60th year before the season's first pitch.

The crowd gathered at 43rd Avenue and Bell before marching over to nearby Crocheron Park, where the league hosts most of its games. Business owners along the boulevard stopped as the Little Leaguers paraded by, shouting their team names and cheering.

League Commissioner Bob Reid corralled the teams before setting them off onto the route, often



Members of the Uno Chicago Grill team carry their banner along 35th Avenue in Bayside.

Photo by Christina Santucci

heard shouting at the players, "Are you ready to play baseball?"

Bayside Terrace's 9-year-old Brandon Kaplan sported the bright orange colors of his Cross Bay Diner team, ready for his fifth year in the league. The lefty pitcher and outfielder was drafted high by the league's team, his mother Jill said.

"It's always a really nice thing when we start a

new season," she said as her son posed with his team for photos. "This Little League pulls from everywhere."

Emmanuel Espinel, his season's 11-year-old shortstop and second baseman for the Sal Salamone Masonry team, said he was ready to see a lot of action in his fourth season playing ball. His dad, assistant Coach John Espinel, said they travel from Flushing to be part of Bayside's

brand of baseball.

"It's a great Little League here, and time well-spent with my son," John Espinel said. "Every year I get to see how much he progresses on the field."

Peter Hountas, 10, will be playing first and third base for the Rocco Brothers Construction team, he said, and spent the winter working on his batting stance to strengthen his swing. His little brother, 7-year-old

Thomas Hountas, stayed close to his brother as he readied himself for his third season in the league playing second base.

After the players completed the parade route and dug their cleats into the fresh dirt of the ball field, the crowds became silent in recognition of the December mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn. In honor of the teachers and students lost that day, Reid said a commemorative banner will hang on the Bayside fences throughout the 2013 season.

Community Board 11 Chairman Jerry Iannece was one of several officials to speak before the ceremonial first pitch and drew from his experiences on different levels of the league to inspire the young athletes.

"You're making us

so proud to be Baysiders," said Iannece, who worked with the league as a parent, coach, advocate and sponsor over the past 15 years. "I saw firsthand what we can do with these kids and make them productive members of our community. That's why Bayside Little League is going to win a national championship."

After brief remarks, Iannece and several elected officials, including U.S. Rep. Grace Meng (D-Flushing), state Sen. Tony Avella (D-Bayside), City Councilman Mark Weprin (D-Oakland Gardens), former Sen. Frank Padavan and former Bayside Little League players state Assemblyman Ed Braunstein (D-Bayside) and Austin Shafran, a candidate for Council, took to the mound to throw the season's first pitches.

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Security deposits for illegal flats stolen in Astoria

BY KAREN FRANTZ

A Queens landlord who allegedly converted a two-family home in Astoria into several illegal apartments and made off with tens of thousands of dollars in security deposits and advance rent from tenants was charged with several crimes, the Queens district attorney said last week.

"This case sadly represents another instance in which an allegedly greedy landlord is accused of creating dangerous living conditions for tenants," DA Richard Brown said. "The defendant was ordered to vacate the premises last December, but allegedly ignored that order — endangering his tenants and first responders — and now must face the consequences of his actions."

According to Brown,

Hinyoung Limtung, 55, of Astoria, converted his building, at 31-70 Crescent St., into several apartments without a permit. In addition to the conversion, the building was in an unsafe condition, without a sprinkler system or a second exit on the first or second floor, the DA said.

City Department of Building inspectors issued a vacate order after they discovered the building had been converted into five apartments in December 2012, Brown said, but when DOB inspectors returned a few months later, they found the building was then converted into nine apartments and that several people were living in those units despite the vacate order.

Limtung also allegedly leased the apartments to eight people after the va-



DA Richard Brown says the landlord of a home in Astoria stole security deposits and advance rent payments from his tenants.
Photo by Karen Frantz

cate order had been issued, with some of those tenants forced to move out shortly after moving in and others not able to move in at all due

to the order, Brown said.

Four of the tenants had unknowingly signed leases for the same apartment at the same time — an apart-

ment that had no kitchen or bathroom, Brown said.

Limtung allegedly did not return any of the tenants' security deposits or

advance rent, which in one case was more than \$10,000 for an entire year, the DA said.

The landlord was charged with scheme to defraud, grand larceny and criminal possession of stolen property. He faces up to 15 years in prison if convicted.

The DA's office along with the DOB and the city Department of Investigation were involved in the investigation.

Buildings Commissioner Robert LiMandri said the arrest demonstrates the department's increasing pressure on property owners who illegally convert buildings.

Reach reporter Karen Frantz by e-mail at kfrantz@cnglocal.com or by phone at 718-260-4538.

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Afghan

Continued from Page 1

After years of physical abuse and the deprivation of her basic human rights, the girl tried to escape. After time spent on the run, she was eventually tracked down and stabbed 17 times — not by her husband or enemies, but by her father and brother.

"She was taken to a hospital in India and somehow survived," Bahram said. "There is a pervasive culture of female abuse in Afghanistan. I believe it is because many men are misinterpreting the Quran."

According to Bahram, a passage in the Quran depicting how a man should deal with marital strife has been misinterpreted as "with violence," while in fact it means "leave the situation."

And Bahram said the Islamic leadership in Muslim communities are often the worst offenders of violence against women — not because they physically engage in such acts, but because they do not practice

prevention.

She said the Prophet Muhammad taught to love and respect one's wife and that women in general deserve equal treatment to what men receive.

"Muhammad loved his wife. She was a businesswoman," said Bahram. "If you read the Quran, he had incredible respect for his wife. But the media and the government in Afghanistan are both very corrupt. They distort the meaning."

With offices in Fresh Meadows as well as Kabul, Afghanistan — in which the organization is kept safe from Taliban forces by American troops — the grassroots organization provides counseling to help women deal with abusive relationships, but also offers classes to teach them life skills many Afghan men believe to be forbidden for the fair sex.

Illiteracy is common in Afghan women and many husbands purposely keep their wives in the dark about finances, Bahram said.

"It is how the men consolidate power," she said. "It keeps the fear alive."

Fear was an everyday part of life for a young Bahram, who was born into a working-class family in Kabul while the Soviet war in Afghanistan was already under way. She lost her mother when she was 9 after a bomb hit her home, spurring her family's migration to Peshawar, Pakistan, in the late 1980s.

After graduating from high school and teaching English to Afghan women in refugee camps in Pakistan, Bahram moved to the United States in 2004. She graduated from Queens College in 2011 with a bachelor's degree in finance and economics.

It is a life that Bahram wants other Afghan women to experience, and while engaging the audience at the Forest Hills Y, Bahram reached her broader point of equality for all women — regardless of culture and religion.

"There are many similarities between persecuted women across the world," she said. "This is about humanity. We should all have the same view on human rights."

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Prep pitcher finds solace after close friend's death

BY JOSEPH STASZEWSKI

Dylan Lawrence can block everything out when he is on the pitcher's mound: the noise of the crowd, the pressure of the moment and, most importantly, the gut-wrenching pain left from holding dying friend Daniel Fernandez in his arms.

Lawrence, a junior pitcher at St. Francis Prep, was on the party bus bound for a Sweet 16 in New Jersey Aug. 31 when the 16-year-old Fernandez, his close friend and fellow SFP student, stuck his head out of an emergency hatch and hit it on the underside of an overpass. He died later that night from the severe injuries.

Lawrence and another friend reacted courageously in the moment and carried Fernandez off the bus in hopes he would be OK.

"Everyone was in shock," Lawrence said.

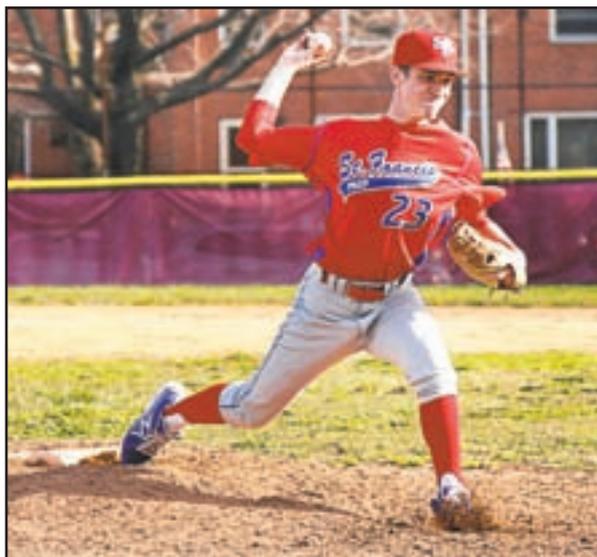
"Then everyone's instincts took over. We had to do what was right to get him out, hopefully save him."

It's been a tough road back for Lawrence, one of the Terriers' top starters. He had trouble focusing weeks after Fernandez's death. He watched his grades slip and attended therapy sessions for two months. His biggest escape was baseball and pitching for the Bayside Yankees in the fall and the Terriers this spring.

"The doctor said to him, 'When you are on the mound, are you focused?'" his mother Laura said. "He said, 'Absolutely.'"

Lawrence said things are different on the mound. He has to be in total control of his emotions and his pitches if he wants to succeed.

"I can't hear anything," said Lawrence, a Middle Village native. "It's all concentrated toward the



St. Francis Preparatory pitcher Dylan Lawrence prepares to release the ball during a game against McClancy. Photo by Yinghao Luo

catcher and the hitter."

He put that poise on display in SFP's 2-1 win over host Monsignor McClancy April 15. Lawrence, in his second start of the year, tossed a complete game three-hitter, allowing just one earned run, strik-

ing out five and walking two.

The gritty righty, who has interest from Boston College, Stanford, Rhode Island and Kansas, among others, stranded runners in four different innings, including two in the seventh.

He mixed his mid-80s sinking fastball with a strong slider and curve.

"He has a great competitive spirit," St. Francis Prep Coach Brother Robert Kent said. "He concentrates when it gets tough."

The emotions surrounding Fernandez's death were brought to the forefront again just a few weeks ago for the sixth-month anniversary March 31. Lawrence handled it better than expected as he was one of the few kids who went over to hug Fernandez's parents during mass at the school. It was a positive sign.

"It was hard to help him," Laura Lawrence said. "It affected all of us very, very much. It's hard to help someone when you feel the pain, too, but I think he is going to be all right."

Her son grew close to Fernandez, a Woodside native, starting as freshmen. They would often ride the

Q88 bus together. Lawrence described his friend as a happy kid who made everything fun. He tries keeping that spirit alive, but also learned from the events on the party bus.

"I'm more cautious and safe, always thinking things out, making the best decision, what's smart," he said.

Lawrence and the baseball team have already decided they will keep Fernandez's memory with them this season. They say his name during their pregame prayer. Kent said they don't talk about Fernandez, but his memory is always with his players.

The team, especially Lawrence, wants to win the CHSAA city title with him in mind to further help the healing.

"We would do it for Dan," Lawrence said. "It would be great. We all think we can do it."

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Play Ball

The Bayside, College Point, Jamaica Estates Briarwood Holliswood and WORKS Little Leagues began their seasons Saturday with parades. (Clockwise from top l.) Players place their hats over their hearts for the "Star Spangled Banner" at the Ulmer Avenue fields; Frankie Scullin cheers as he marches along 35th Avenue in Bayside; members of the Jackson Hole team hold hands on Bell Boulevard; youngsters from the Tigers team hold the banner before the festivities in Woodhaven; Little Leaguers lead the contingent in College Point; Franciny Tagle (second l.) of Woodhaven shows off her pearly whites at PS 90; Cyrus Borres, 6, plays catch to warm up in Cunningham Park; and New York Mets team up with the Philadelphia Phillies before the start of their JEBLL game. Photos by Steven Malecki and Christina Santucci



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Con game

Continued from Page 1

In order to be healed by the doctor, the 72-year-old was told to put the money in a bag.

Police arrested a 58-year-old woman named Feng Luan Qin last Friday after the victim spotted her in a Flushing mall and called the authorities. According to Ng, the woman admitted to another incident in the borough.

The scenario is familiar to police who patrol Flushing. About \$500,000 in cash — not counting jewelry — has been taken in schemes like this one over the last year.

Sometimes the women purport to be able to ward off evil spirits, other times

they promise phony medical miracles, according to Ng and Maguire, but in every case they require large sums of cash and jewelry. After getting the goods in a bag, they return a bag filled with useless items and tell the victim not to open it for 30 days, according to Maguire.

The San Francisco Police Department has been working with a host of agencies including the NYPD, and said cops in Hong Kong have fought this problem for a decade, according to a police spokesman.

Hong Kong police believe the scam originates from a Chinese province called Maoming, according to Officer Gordon Shyy.

In October, the NYPD arrested three women who had allegedly been carrying out the scam in Flush-

ing, but after making bail, two of them fled the country, Maguire said.

Ng and Maguire said many of the scammers operate as part of a nationwide ring, and said any elderly members of immigrant communities should be especially wary of anyone offering help on the street. They should be on alert if that help is conditional on collecting mountains of cash from home, another practice that Maguire said is contributing to the problem.

“You shouldn’t have tens of thousands of dollars under your mattress,” he said.

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

Barber

Continued from Page 1

so he could have a clean and safe place to play after school.

The 10-year-old said he hopes to one day become a lawyer and liked being able to speak with an elected official face-to-face in a forum as laid back as his barbershop.

“It feels like you have someone on your side,” Ramlall said. “He helped me understand how government works.”

When it was his turn to speak, Gavin’s father, Vic Ramlall, asked the councilman how he could address his concerns with the police precincts in southern Queens, including the 102nd, when it comes to following up with police reports. Afterward Wills directed him toward the possibility of attending community council meetings, which Ramlall said he knew nothing about.

“You’re right. We need to do better making sure we advertise government meetings,” Wills said. “My office will look into arranging a newsletter or mass mailing to let people know.”

Throughout the two-hour listening period, Wills fielded questions and referred handfuls of resi-



City Councilman Ruben Wills (r.) jokingly shaves the chin of state Sen. James Sanders in a Richmond Hill barbershop.

Photo by Phil Corso

dents to different government agencies and offices to have their concerns addressed. The councilman heard issues on topics, including overdevelopment, traffic patterns and stop-and-frisk.

State Sen. James Sanders (D-Jamaica) also made an appearance to throw his verbal support behind different proposals and suggestions, such as exploring ways to change bus traffic surrounding Resorts World in Jamaica.

Wills said he hoped to see his barbershop listening tour encourage constituents to realize that government works as a two-way street, whereas he is

willing to listen as long as voters are willing to act.

“We don’t have to get along or agree,” Wills said. “We just have to agree enough to get the work done.”

The councilman will host three more listening tours this month, including April 20 at The Playaz Den of Jamaica from noon to 2 p.m., April 27 at Pro-Grez Barbershop in South Ozone Park from noon to 2 p.m. and the same day at Butter Cutters of Jamaica from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m.

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

GOP

Continued from Page 1

Vince Tabone were both charged with participating in a bribery scheme to get state Sen. Malcolm Smith (D-Hollis) on the GOP mayoral ballot earlier this month by federal prosecutors.

The Queens party has been in turmoil ever since, with an insurgent faction including Councilman Eric Ulrich (R-Ozone Park) calling for the ouster of the current leader, Phil Ragusa.

In an unrelated incident, Ulrich also attracted attention within the party for allocating discretionary funds to a charity run by a GOP district leader.

GOP mayoral candidate John Catsimatidis, a grocery store magnate, came to the Ragusa’s defense in a note distributed last weekend, saying he and state Republican Party Chairman Ed Cox had agreed “management by revolution is not the way of the GOP.”

Catsimatidis, whose daughter is married to Cox’s son, singled out Ulrich in the missive.

“Councilman Ulrich’s activities, his name-calling and twisting of the truth, are disgraceful and are symptomatic of someone who lacks the maturity and experience to lead,” he said in a statement.

But the councilman fired back yet again Wednesday, telling TimesLedger Newspapers Catsimatidis was “a buffoon.”

“He has no shot at ever being elected mayor,”



City Councilman Eric Ulrich stands with Donna Caltabiano, a GOP district leader who also runs a charity partially funded by Ulrich.

Ulrich said. “I don’t really take what comes out of his mouth seriously.”

The councilman also had strong words for former state Sens. Serph Maltese and Frank Padavan, whose signatures were included in a separate letter supporting Ragusa and alluding to Ulrich’s attacks.

“They are not relevant,” Ulrich said. “If they want to help the healing process, I’m all for that. If they are going to pen letters attacking me, maybe it’s best they are not in office.”

Ulrich also caused rumbles in the party after again funding a senior center run by a Republican district leader.

In 2011, Ulrich gave \$5,000 to the Forest Park Senior Center run by Donna Caltabiano, a district leader in state Assemblyman Michael Miller’s (D-Woodhaven) district. But that number jumped to \$55,000 in 2012 and 2013.

District leaders vote to endorse candidates and elect party leaders.

Ulrich insisted that the donation had nothing to do with politics, but rather

the senior center does not get state or federal grants and instead relies on discretionary funding. State dollars had dried up in 2010 and the borough president cut her funding a year later, which is why he made up the difference, the councilman said.

“I had to keep it open. It came down to me and the borough president,” Ulrich said, pointing out that Caltabiano had never voted to elect anyone from Ulrich’s faction to party leadership positions as a district leader.

Council members get a set dollar amount to fund projects for the aging. In 2013, it was about \$108,000. The senior center received the most cash out of those in Ulrich’s district, with most centers getting \$5,000.

For Caltabiano, the money was a vital resource, since her center gets limited funding, and she defended Ulrich’s reputation as an upstanding councilman.

She said she had never voted for anyone from Ulrich’s faction but was not fond of the opposing side either.

“I’ve separated myself from all of them. I really believe there should be a change,” she said. “Phil is a nice guy, but I don’t think he was effective at all.”

Caltabiano’s comments echo the sentiments of numerous GOP party members fed up with infighting.

“We need to clean everybody out of there,” she said.

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

Trees

Continued from Page 6

abuts its federally protected wildlife refuge, the Port Authority is proposing to construct 728 feet of new runway at the northern end of the runway near Idlewild.

In May 2012, the Port Authority released its draft environmental assessment on the proposal and solicited public com-

ment by placing a notice in Newsday, but the 30-day period ended with no comments submitted.

Brown and the alliance caused a stir and accused the agency of trying to discourage the public by posting the notice in the Long Island paper, and the Port Authority reopened the comment period during an October meeting in Springfield Gardens.

The Port Authority needs approval from the FAA on the environmen-

tal assessment to move forward with the project.

A Parks Department spokesman said many of the trees tagged in Idlewild are invasive species, and all trees removed will be replaced by native species that have a terminal, mature height below the FAA’s restrictions.

Reach reporter Rich Bockmann by e-mail at rbockmann@cnglocal.com or by phone at 718-260-4574.

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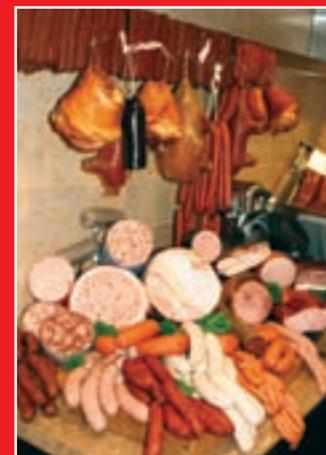
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