

Aug. 11, 2013

Your Neighborhood – Your News®

CNG

Electeds vow to keep tabs on sacred site

BY PHIL CORSO

City officials have vowed to keep a closer eye on the Olde Towne of Flushing Burial Ground after the leader of its conservancy spoke out against the area's neglect.

Parks Department crews have spent recent weeks cleaning up the sacred site, which Bay-side activist and Co-chairman of the Burial Ground Conservancy Mandingo Tshaka said was quickly slipping into a space of overgrown weeds and vegetation. Tshaka joined with elected officials and the 109th Precinct to revisit the area last Friday and mull over its condition as well as its oversight.

State Assemblyman Ed Braunstein (D-Bayside) visited the burial ground alongside representatives from the 109th Precinct and Parks Department as well as state Sen. Tony Avella (D-Bayside), state Assemblyman Ron Kim (D-Flushing), City Councilman Peter Koo (D-Flushing), Assemblywoman Nily Rozic (D-

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Queens scores sink on state tests

Student performance in boro plunges 40 percent from last year's results

BY RICH BOCKMANN

As educators have been warning for some time, third-through-eighth-graders' scores on the state's English and math

tests fell precipitously this year as New York implemented tougher standards, and Queens was no different. But while overall scores declined in the borough, data released by the state Department of

Education show Queens outperformed statewide averages.

The number of Queens students making the grade in English Language Arts fell about 41 percent from last year, with 31.9

percent of students in the borough testing at or above proficiency on their 2013 state tests. That was slightly better than the statewide average of 31.1 percent.

The math scores took an even sharper decline, with 37 percent of students testing at or above proficiency, down 46 percent from last year. The statewide average was 31 percent.

Educators from the federal level down to the local level have been warning for some time that scores would drop significantly this year as the new tests represented tougher standards under the Common Core curriculum, and said it did not make sense to compare scores year-to-year.

"The changes in scores from last year to this year are largely a reflection of the introduction of the new Common Core standards, state Education Commissioner John King said. "The changes in scores do not mean the schools have taught less or students have learned less."

King said no new districts and no new schools will be identified for intervention this year

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SHOWCASING THEIR FAITH



Dancers depicting Radha and Krishna perform for the crowd at Hindu Awareness Day at the Hindu Temple Society of America in Flushing. **See story on Page 2.**

Photo by Joe Anuta

Elderly man waits 26 minutes for ambulance in Ozone Park

BY BIANCA FORTIS

An elected official is investigating why it took 26 minutes for emergency personnel to respond to an injured elderly man.

Frank Dardani, the president of the Ozone Tudor Civic Association, said he was coming

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Vocalist Olivia Gilmore serenades the crowd at the Jamaica Arts & Music Summer Festival. Photo by Nat Valentine

Thousands throng JAMS fest

BY JOE ANUTA

Organizers of the 17th annual Jamaica Arts and Music Summer Festival spread the word through Facebook, Twitter and Yelp this year, which helped make the event bigger and better than ever.

The annual street festi-

val kicked off Friday night at Rufus King Park and was buzzing until Saturday evening along Jamaica Avenue between Parsons Boulevard and 169th Street.

"More people come each and every year," said Tyra Emerson, of Cultural Collaborative Jamaica, the nonprofit that puts on the

event, which TimesLedger Newspapers helped sponsor. "We really embraced social media this time."

The mammoth street fair and music stage serves several functions for the neighborhood, according to Emerson.

Thousands descend on *Continued on Page 8*

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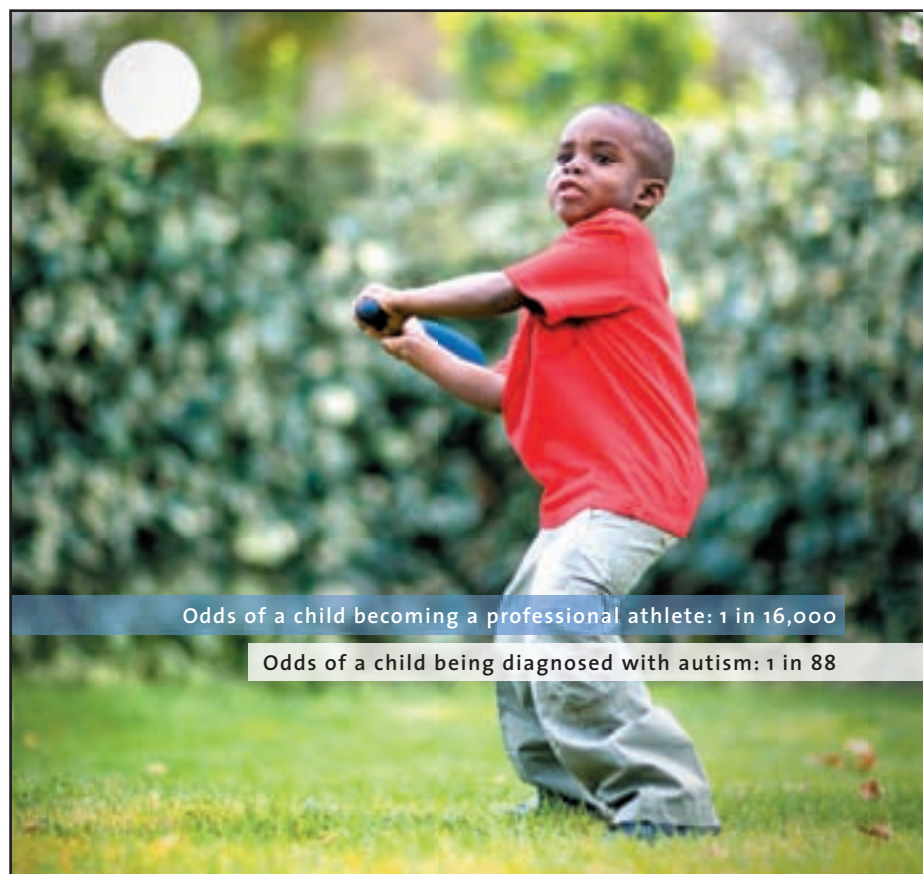
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Flushing Hindus hope to keep traditions alive

BY JOE ANUTA

Hindus in America face a challenge as traditions tends to fade in immigrant offspring, but a Flushing temple that offers instruction for children is hoping to push back against that trend and last weekend showed off the knowledge of some of its brightest students at Hindu Awareness Day.

"It's time now we give a chance to all youngsters to speak," said Dr. Uma Mysorekar, of the Hindu Temple Society of North America, headquartered at the corner of Bowne Street and Holly Avenue. "We want to make sure this is passed on adequately to the next generation."

On Saturday, the facility's auditorium was filled with eager parents and costumed children. Two young women sat side by side wearing elaborate hats topped with fake parrots. One sported a fake mustache.

Someone had attached traditional ankle bells to a few of the most fidgety youngsters, filling the air with a constant and faint jingling — as if any moment there would be a burst of festive celebration.

The program varied from the artistic to the academic. At one point intricately dressed dancers performed a routine depicting an ancient fable, while at another 17-year-old Gokul Iyer, who studied at the temple's school, gave a well-researched dissertation on the often-unsung contributions ancient Hindus made to math, science, medicine — even plastic surgery.

The young scholars repeatedly demonstrated how ancient traditions are still relevant in modern times and how the two can co-exist.

At one point during the performances, an orange-clad swami passed by the



Two young women sit in the crowd to watch their peers perform during Hindu Appreciation Day.
 Photo by Joe Anuta

front row. His draped robes and face paint would have made it hard to pinpoint when he existed throughout the many centuries of Hindu history — if it were not for the glowing smartphone he cradled between his clasped hands.

Anirudh Chandrashekar, an 18-year-old who was born in Southern India but grew up in Queens, said he notices the difference between how his parents experienced Hinduism and how he relates to the faith in America.

Even living in the diverse neighborhood of Flushing he had to seek out his religion instead of being constantly surrounded by it, which is why the temple played such a crucial role in his upbringing.

Chandrashekar, who speaks a Southern Indian dialect called Tamil, learned about culture, songs and prayers at the

temple school while also learning Sanskrit from his father. He plans to pass that information on to someone else.

"I feel it is our duty to teach as much as we can," he said.

The keynote speaker at the event was Sheetal Shah, senior director of the Hindu American Foundation, which advocates for Hindu awareness on a national level.

Her office is involved in many endeavors both locally and abroad, but mainly has been trying to bring a Hindu voice into mainstream discussions.

For example, her nonprofit has been trying to get Congress to extend a religious visa law, which allows priests to travel from countries like India and work in the United States, since no training facilities exist here.

Sale of old Trylon Theater rankles synagogue

3

BY BIANCA FORTIS

Controversy has erupted after the sale of a Rego Park commercial property containing a synagogue amid fears the house of worship will be evicted. The new landlords contend they want to preserve the synagogue and support its huge congregation.

Nahum Kaziev, the rabbi of Ohr-Natan, said that when the property was sold in December, the new landlords laid plans in place to demolish the synagogue, as well as other storefronts, and build a high-rise apartment building in their place.

"They just want to build a building to make money," he said. "It would be a luxury condo not even for the middle-class people that live here."

The Art Deco-style building in which the synagogue resides, located at 98-

81 Queens Blvd., was built for the 1939 World's Fair. It served as the Trylon Theater, a moviehouse, until it was shuttered in 1999, according to 1939worldsfair.com.

Kaziev said the origins of the synagogue trace back to more than 20 years ago, when members of the community, predominantly Bukharian Jewish immigrants, began to meet. They rented out different meeting places while the community continued to expand, he said.

In 2002, they took over the lease of the vacant theater with the intention of staying there for a long time.

He said they spent \$2.1 million to restore the building and moved in four years later.

Kaziev said the congregation has about 1,000 members and provides services, such as senior programs,



The Ohr Natan congregation in Rego Park took over the building that formerly housed the Trylon Theater. Members say they are being evicted, but the new landlords dispute their claims.

Photo by Bianca Fortis

kids programs and couples' counseling.

"Where are 1,000 people going to go?" he said. "You cannot destroy a com-

munity center just to make a few dollars."

Kaziev said members of the congregation, which includes Holocaust survi-

vors, World War II survivors and people who were persecuted by the KGB in the former Soviet republics, feel as though they are losing a home.

But the new landlords, under the name Trylon LLC, disputed the rabbi's claims.

One of the owners, who declined to give his name, said there are no specific plans in motion for the property just yet. He said there has been some discussion about turning the property into a high-rise building in the future, which was discussed with the tenants of the building, including the rabbi.

"We're developers," he said. "That's what we do. We have the right to do so under the zoning there."

He said if the high-rise were built, the landlords would help relocate the businesses temporarily during construction, and

then give them new space once the building is complete.

He said the landlords are concerned about all of their tenants, especially the synagogue, which they want to preserve.

"They are part of our community," he said. "We never once suggested that we would evict them or shut them down," he said.

He said the synagogue's lease is not up for a few more years. In the meantime, the developers are continuing to lease out some of the other empty storefronts in the building.

"Why would we continue to rent it out if we are going to demolish it tomorrow?" he said.

Reach reporter Bianca Fortis by email at bfortis@cnglocal.com or by phone at 718-260-4546.

Avella fights for changes to city property tax on homes

BY PHIL CORSO

A northeast Queens lawmaker took to the state Senate to fight ever-rising property taxes affecting homeowners whose properties have lost assessed value in his district and beyond.

State Sen. Tony Avella (D-Bayside) stood beside civic leaders and Bellerose residents Tuesday to promote his legislation that would temporarily bar the city from increasing property taxes on homeowners whose assessed property values decreased the previous year. The senator said the disparity was unjust and unnecessary and created a burden that everyday residents should not have to shoulder.

"I adamantly fought against property tax hikes during my tenure in the City Council, voting against two property tax



State Sen. Tony Avella (c.) calls for property tax reform.

Photo by Phil Corso

increases," Avella said. "Every year, property taxes are increased and more and more homeowners, especially seniors, are uncertain if they can afford to pay the property tax and keep a roof over their head at the same time."

Over recent years, property owners have seen their taxes continue to rise as a result of the housing

boom, said Avella, a candidate for borough president.

That all popped when the recession hit in 2008, sending property values downward despite property taxes continuing to go up.

"It makes no sense, no matter how they try to spin it or justify it," said Bob Friedrich, president of the Glen Oaks Village co-op in northeast Queens. "What

this is doing is pushing the middle class out of New York."

Friedrich was one of several civic leaders to join the senator at the Tuesday news conference.

"City statistics show that my own home since 2008 has decreased in value approximately \$200,000, yet my assessed value has increased \$4,000," said

Kim Cody, president of the Greater Whitestone Taxpayers Civic Association.

A city Finance Department spokesman said instances in which homes are worth less while tax values still go up were covered by state law because of mandated caps on assessment increases. Those state-mandated caps keep property tax rates from increasing more than 6 percent in one year or 20 percent over five years, well below what the market value would indicate, the spokesman said.

"While the cap provides a tremendous benefit to homeowners over the long run, there are times when the year-to-year impact of the cap appears to run counter to changes made by finance to market value," he said.

But Avella said it was still up to the city to put a moratorium on any property tax increases for home-

owners who have only seen their property values decline as they recover from the recession. The senator recalled previous votes when he served as member of the City Council fighting against property tax hikes for city homeowners.

He was even the subject of praise in 2003 when the Queens Civic Congress recognized Avella for fighting an 18.5 percent tax increase despite Mayor Michael Bloomberg's efforts to balance the year's budget.

"These taxes are often increasing despite the market value decreasing because the property's assessed value is 'catching up' from tax increases from previous years," Avella said. "To pile on even more property tax increases is outrageous and unfair to property owners."

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Wills gets two guns off streets of SE Qns.

BY RICH BOCKMANN

As a southeast Queens community still reeling from a senseless murder earlier this summer prepared to rally against crime, two more handguns were taken off the streets.

City Councilman Ruben Wills (D-Jamaica) delivered two firearms to South Jamaica's 113th Precinct Tuesday evening that he said a constituent had brought into his office, no questions asked.

"I didn't ask any questions about how he got it," Wills said. "You don't want to ask questions. Once you do that, people don't want to bring them to you."

Just before the 113th's celebration of National Night Out Against Crime got underway at nearby Baisley Pond Park, Wills walked into the station house and handed over a cardboard box containing an Iver Johnson revolver and a Star automatic pistol.

"Thanks so much for bringing these in," Deputy Inspector Milt Marmara said as Officer Tom Masi checked the firearms to make sure they were not loaded. "Unfortunately, guns like these are all too common."

Wills said the constituent called his office not long after Borough President Helen Marshall sponsored



Deputy Inspector Milt Marmara (l.) of the 113th Precinct looks over a revolver City Councilman Ruben Wills turned in on behalf of a constituent.

Photo by Rich Bockmann

a gun buyback event to honor the memory of D'aja Robinson, the 14-year-old girl who was killed May 18 when a gunman opened fire on the bus she was riding.

Kevin McClinton, 21, of Rosedale, was later arrested and charged with her murder.

The June 29 buyback netted nearly 30 firearms.

Wills said the constituent missed the buyback, but under the city's Cash for Guns program, anyone can receive \$100 for surrendering a gun at the local precinct. The councilman waited while the 113th processed two \$100 vouchers, which he said he planned to deliver to the community member.

On the heels of last

summer, when it seemed as if every week there was a violent shooting that grabbed headlines, D'aja's murder appeared to portend another violent season, but it has not played out that way.

According to the NYPD's crime statistics through the end of July, shooting incidents were down 50 percent for the year, from 36 to 18, and the number of shooting victims had fallen 53 percent.

Murders, in one of the most heavily affected precincts in the city, were down about 71 percent from year to year. By the last week of June 2012, there had already been 14 murders in the 113th, compared with only four so far this year.

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Flushing tofu competition shows diversity of veggie staple

Crowd crams into Taipei Economic and Cultural center to watch chefs slice up soy specialties

BY JOE ANUTA

It was a battle of the bean curds.

About 100 people packed a Flushing basement Saturday to watch an annual cooking competition in which a panel of judges noshed on platters including tofu lime pie, tofu sticky rice balls and a dish translated as “100 birds facing the phoenix” — an actual phoenix, carved out of a carrot, was perched on one side of the plate.

But it was I. I. Chu's dish of tofu in green sauce that took home first prize.

“Tofu is a well-known, healthy dish in Chinese culture,” said Greg Tai, of Health Plus, an area insurance provider that helped sponsor the second annual tofu cooking contest, where area culinary types whipped up a variety of dishes to promote healthy eating. Spectators were treated to lifestyle tips and lunch — tofu, of course.



Cookbook author Angela Chang (I.) digs into tofu lime pie she will later judge at an annual cooking contest.

Photo by Joe Anuta

James Chang, director of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office, on 41st Road, where the competition was held, spoke at length about the beneficial side effects of

soy products. Downing a glass of soy milk before bed, for instance, can lead to a better night's sleep, he said.

Much of the medicinal lore surrounding tofu cannot be pinpointed through science, said Gene He, who has a Ph.D. in food science and now owns a company that produces the stuff.

As with any health claims, the benefits are fiercely debated, but He said tofu is a healthy alternative to other proteins like meat and dairy products, since the soy product does not have any cholesterol and tiny amounts of saturated fat.

In addition, the tofu-production process introduces calcium, which fills a crucial hole in the diets of many Asians, who do not drink milk or eat cheese, he said.

Amy Chen was one of the 12 amateur chefs who responded to a call for entries a few weeks ago.

The Long Islander originally hails from Taiwan, widely considered a hotbed of innovative

cuisine.

“I was thinking for two or three weeks of how it was going to look and taste,” said Amy Chen, who did not cook her completely original dish for the first time un-



An edible phoenix gazes out over the tofu dish that bears its name.

Photo by Joe Anuta

til the day of the competition.

Instead, Chen paced the aisles of markets, dreamed of spices and assembled the ingredients in her head, finally revealing what she would whip up to her husband the night before the big day.

She settled on two types of

tofu: one thinly sliced and slightly wrinkly version that absorbed a flavorful marinade before Chen sauteed it with vegetables, and also deep-fried hunks of stuffed tofu with noodles and other goodies.

Chen's cerebral approach stood in stark contrast to some of the other entrants'.

She gestured to her friend, an older woman sitting behind her: “Her family was eating tofu for two weeks!”

Chen had entered the competition the year before, but found her dish was not visually up to snuff.

The panel of judges, which included tofu cookbook author Angela Chang and City Councilman Peter Koo (D-Flushing), carefully considered each platter for presentation, smell, taste and creativity.

“Tastes a little bland,” Koo said of one elaborately prepared creation before scribbling his verdict down on a clipboard.

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6 Tree kills Flushing woman

Young pregnant wife on Kissena Park bench crushed by old oak

BY JOE ANUTA

The family of a 30-year-old pregnant woman killed by a falling tree Sunday was making funeral arrangements in the wake of her untimely death.

"Right now, we're just trying to investigate to find out what happened, how something like this could occur," Anthony Como, a friend of the family, said Monday outside of the victim's Parsons Boulevard apartment.

Ying Yi Li was sitting on a bench near Kissena Park's picturesque lake at about 6:25 p.m. when the trunk of a 50-foot oak broke off about 8 feet from the ground and crushed her, police and the city Parks Department said. She was six months pregnant.

"The incident involving a falling tree Sunday in Kissena Park was a tragic accident and our thoughts and prayers are with the victim's family," said Parks spokesman Arthur Pincus, who vowed to look into the incident.

Li had been married to Aleksandar Dikov, a member of the U.S. Army Reserves about 10 years her junior, for a little more than a year, according to Como. The happy couple met at the Flushing YMCA and lived with Dikov's parents.

On Sunday, Dikov paid



Aleksandar Dikov poses with his wife Ying Yi Li, who was killed while six months pregnant by a falling tree.

an emotional visit to the accident site where, dressed in his military uniform, he laid down some flowers.

Days later, Li's father arrived in Queens from China to help with the funeral arrangements.

"Oh, my God, I can't believe that happened," said neighbor Christina Leib when informed of the tragedy. "They were always

together."

Arborist Carsten Glaeser, also vice president of the Kissena Park Civic Association, said the stump appeared to be about 60 percent rotten.

He, along with state Sen. Tony Avella (D-Bay-side) and a nonprofit called New York City Park Advocates, called for an end to the mayor's Million Trees

Program, which seeks to plant more greenery around the city. They suggested that the money for the program should instead be spent on maintaining existing foliage.

"A top-to-bottom review is needed of how trees in highly used parkland are managed," Glaeser said. "I

The couple had been married for just over a year.

think the Parks model is complaint-driven."

As an example, Glaeser said the day after the Kissena Park death a huge limb fell onto a walking path near the site of the accident.

"If it fell and hit me on the head, there would be serious health implications," he said.

Monitoring trees is not a simple task, said the arborist, who specializes in assessing trees in urban environments.

Glaeser said it would be difficult to eyeball a tree like the 70-year-old oak and determine if it was rotten, but inspectors could have looked for clues like decayed matter on the trunk that might have led to more serious investigations.

College Point calls for new PS 29 head

BY JOE ANUTA

Parents, teachers and a state lawmaker called for the ouster of a College Point elementary school principal last week.

A rally was held Aug. 1 outside PS 29, near the corner of 23rd Avenue and 126th Street, where Jennifer Jones-Rogers has overseen the pre-kindergarten through fifth-grade institution for the past three years.

"I'm here because of the disgraceful actions of Principal Jennifer Jones-Rogers," Avella said. "I'm calling for the removal of this principal."

The crowd had a laundry list of grievances against the educator: she forced teachers out of their jobs, crammed children into special education classes without the consent

of parents, wasted money on contracts and overtime and dismantled the computer lab and library.

The city Department of Education said it would investigate the claims, while the principal union's executive vice director disputed the claims and had a more forceful response.

"This is a typical case of a handful of disgruntled people — and a politician who is looking to further his constituent base in an election season — ganging up on an effective school leader," said Mark Cannizzaro, of the Council of School Supervisors and Administrators.

A key indicator of dissatisfaction is the 25 out of 45 teachers who have left over the last three years, former and current educators contend.



Lukas Chavez, 9, joins teachers and parents in protesting the reign of PS 29 Principal Jennifer Jones Rogers. Photo by Carol Alvarado

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An elderly man waited 25 minutes for an ambulance to arrive after he fell and sustained a head injury. Residents say the Lindenwood Volunteer Ambulance Corps. is just a few blocks away. "Vollies," however, are not part of the city's 911 system.

Photo by Carol Alvarado

Ambulance

Continued from Page 1

home from work July 30 when he saw his 87-year-old neighbor sitting in his car surrounded by family and other residents.

The man had fallen on the sidewalk on 133rd Street near 86th Street while walking to his car and sustained a head injury. There was blood on the street, and the man was still bleeding from the head as Dardani approached him.

The witnesses had already called 911. But when no ambulance had arrived after 15 minutes, Dardani called again.

Five minutes later, an ambulance from Woodside showed up. Dardani said an EMT asked if the neighborhood was having problems with emergency response since they had come from so far. Another five minutes later, an ambulance from Corona arrived on the scene.

The incident raised further questions about the city's 911 system, which has suffered repeated failures within the last few months.

State Sen. Joseph Addabbo (D-Howard Beach) said he was looking into the incident to see if the system had failed yet again, causing the long wait time.

But Frank Dwyer, an FDNY spokesman, said the 911 system was actually functioning just fine that day.

The 25-minute delay was a result of high call volume, traffic congestion and the fact that all calls must be prioritized.

"Obviously each call is important to the person calling," he said. "And they're important to us, too."

A victim who went into cardiac arrest, for example, is a high-priority call, he said. In this case, however, the elderly man had a non-critical injury and was stabilized, he said.

Jams

Continued from Page 1

the commercial corridor for the day-long event, which brings an economic boost along with the crowds. But those shoppers are also exposed to the rich supply of performers coming out of the neighborhood, according to numerous performers.

"Jamaica has always been known and always will be known for good artists," said DJ Tam Jams, who spun between bands at the festival's main stage. "It is important to cultivate that talent and put it on display. This is our next crop of stars."

Local acts like South Side Band regaled dancers, including a man with a pipe who struts his stuff each year, to R&B and blues sounds.

Groups of children between the ages of 5 and 8 showed off their musical skills as part of a program run by The African Poetry Theatre, which gives music lessons, according to Emerson.

One of the more unique acts was performed several feet in the air.

Jason Edwards originally hails from Trinidad and Tobago, where stilt-walking performances are a common sight at the island's vibrant carnival celebrations each year.

"It brings joy to people as part



Members of the Afrikan Poetry Theatre youth drummers entertain visitors to the festival.

Photo by Nat Valentine

of the culture, but it also gets kids off of the streets," he said of his Queens-based company Kaisokah Moko Jumbies U.S.A.

Elsewhere along the avenue, the smell of grilled meats and corn hung constantly in the air as other merchants hawked jewelry and paintings.

Another act called the All R Nuttin Family brought their Caribbean-inspired sound to southeast Queens. The Connecticut five-piece rap outfit

is originally from the island of Jamaica, and members use their microphones to preach positive messages to the masses.

"It's been a wonderful chance for outsiders to come and see what they are doing in Queens," said member Danny Peecees.

Several politicians, including the two scandal-scarred hopefuls running in citywide races — Anthony Weiner and Eliot Spitzer — pressed the flesh along the busy avenue.

Scores

Continued from Page 1

based on the new test results.

Northeast Queens' District 26 topped the borough with 55.95 percent proficiency in English and 66.6 percent in math.

District 25, which covers Flushing and Whitestone, followed with 40.75 percent proficiency in English and 51.82 percent in math.

District 30, which includes Astoria and Long Island City, had a

30.78percent proficiency rate in English and a 35.4percent rate in math.

The western Queens district had one of the single best-performing schools in Queens.

PS 122 in Astoria had more than 90 percent of sixth-, seventh- and eighth-graders testing at or above proficiency in both subjects.

In central Queens, District 28, which covers Forest Hills and stretches to Jamaica, had similar English (30.35 percent) and math (33.51 percent) proficiency rates.

Students in District 24, which includes Ridgewood and Middle Vil-

lage, tested at rates of 28.98 percent in English and 34.35 percent in math.

District 27 in South Ozone Park followed with 27.01 percent of students testing proficient in English and 30.4 percent in math.

At the bottom, District 29 in southeast Queens had the lowest English (21.65 percent) and math (20.16 percent) proficiency rates in the borough.

Aside from their overall scores, some schools showed they were better in adapting to the new standards than were others.

Burial

Continued from Page 1

Fresh Meadows) and others to discuss who could help and how.

A Braunstein spokesman said the sacred area was not previously in his district, but now falls in a somewhat ambiguous spot where several other elected officials' district lines meet. The district boundaries for the state Assembly and Senate were redrawn last year as part of a process that oc-



Crews work to clean up overgrown weeds and vegetation at the burial ground in Flushing.

Photo by Phil Corso

curs every 10 years.

Nonetheless, the spokesman said Braunstein and the other elected officials would be working

with Community Board 7 to map out future projects to make the burial ground more recognizable and pay proper tribute to the dead.

Those plans, however, will take some time and funding, he cautioned.

"There are no specifics. We're just discussing what we can do," the spokesman said. "We do agree that there could be some changes to make it a little more clear that it is a burial ground."

Braunstein's spokesman also said the 109th Precinct promised to continue to check up on the site to reduce any instances of vandalism or misconduct.

The Olde Towne of Flushing Burial Ground

is the final resting place for more than 1,000 people, most of whom were African Americans or native Americans buried there between 1840 and 1898, Tshaka said. The city Parks Department took ownership of the property in 1914 when it was renamed Martins Field and turned into a playground.

But after Tshaka teamed up with then-Councilman John Liu and Borough President Helen Marshall, he was able to relocate the playground to the north side of the site and celebrate the official recog-

nition of the burial ground in a 2006 ceremony.

The Bayside activist has since been advocating for the burial ground to look less like a park and more like the sacred site that it is, calling on the Parks Department to restore headstones that the city had removed in years past despite funding being set aside for new ones. His message was heard loud and clear when he met with officials at the site last Friday, officials said.

Rockaway Beach restoration project to begin ⁹

BY BIANCA FORTIS

The first phase of a Rockaway Beach sand replenishment project will begin this week, officials said.

U.S. Sen. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) announced Sunday that the dredge and pumping equipment for the project arrived in New York last week.

The \$10 million project, funded by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, will pump 600,000 cubic yards of sand into the beach to restore the shoreline to pre-Hurricane Sandy levels. Large sections of the boardwalk were destroyed.

Construction will take place along Beach 89th to Beach 149th streets.

Later in the summer, the contract for the second phase of the project will be awarded, which will place more than 3 million cubic yards of sand along Beach

19th to Beach 149th streets, officials said.

"Soon Rockaway's beaches will be well on their way to being rebuilt and protected against future storms," Schumer said in a statement. "This project, and the contract to be awarded later this summer, will fortify the beaches and make them less vulnerable to future storms and flooding."

Both phases comprise the Rockaway Beach Protection Project. The project was included in the Sandy Relief Bill passed by Congress and signed by President Obama in January.

"The beaches in Rockaway are crucial for the safety and longterm recovery of our community and economy, especially after the severe damage caused by Superstorm Sandy," state Assemblyman Philip Goldfeder (D-Rockaway Beach) said. "For months,



Hurricane Sandy ravaged the Rockaways last year. The city and state are working on different projects, including building sand dunes, to better protect the shoreline.

"We have rallied, screamed and petitioned to demand more sand for our beaches, and finally, with help of Sen. Schumer, Friends of Rockaway Beach and local residents, our voices were finally heard and we can ensure the future and safety of our community."

The city is also working to install TrapBags,

sand-filled geotextile structures, along the shoreline to provide flood protection. Each TrapBag is 100 feet long and weighs 189,000 pounds, Zachary Feder, a spokesman for the city Parks Department, said.

When the pieces are joined together, they become a monolithic barrier.

Feder said the Trap-

Bags will be covered in sand by the Army Corps project, making the installation the core of a sand dune.

The TrapBags will run from Beach 55th to Beach 149th streets.

Not only are government agencies working to protect the beach, but locals are, too.

On Saturday, Barefoot Wine and the Surfrider Foundation will join together for a beach restoration and cleanup project. Blaine Rueber, a spokesman for Barefoot Wine, said volunteers will be using old Christmas trees to create sand dunes. The trees were provided by the city, and volunteers will lay them across the beach. Rueber said over time the trees will collect sand and become natural barriers to help protect the shoreline.

This is the fourth time the two groups have organized volunteers to help

clean up Rockaway. Last year there were more than 200 participants, he said.

The restoration project will be held from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Volunteers should meet at the 44th Street A train stop.

Afterward, there will be a celebration featuring Barefoot Wine, surf-inspired fare and a live musical performance by rock artist Ryan Star, a Long Island native. It will be held at 183 Beach 96th St.

Rueber said there will be complimentary shuttles to the Rockaway Peninsula from Manhattan. To RSVP to volunteer, visit beachrescue2013.com. To RSVP for a shuttle bus, e-mail Rueber at brueber@hunterpr.com.

Reach reporter Bianca Fortis by email at bfortis@cnglocal.com or by phone at 718-260-4546.

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Source: Scarborough 2011 (1)





St. Mary's hosts program where patients strut their stuff

Children, some in wheelchairs, perform in 'Dancing with the Stars'-style show at Bayside facility

BY LISA AUTZ

The children at St. Mary's Healthcare System for Children in Bayside were all smiles last Thursday as they showed off their dance moves with dancer Val Chmerkovskiy from the reality competition show "Dancing with the Stars."

The children performed adaptive and wheelchair dancing for the audience while Chmerkovskiy, along with Z100's radio hosts Garret and Danielle Monaro, scored their routines just like in the hit dance show competition.

Battling some of the most complex and life-limiting medical conditions, these children had the crowd in awe dancing inside St. Mary's' music therapy room in the newly renovated rehabilitation wing.

St. Mary's Healthcare

System for Children is the city's only post-acute rehabilitation hospital for children. More than 100 children ranging in age from 25 weeks to 18 years have a home at the hospital, at 29-01 216th St.

The facility attempts to serve all aspects of the healing process by providing intensive medical care, rehabilitation and education — at home and in the community. The new state-of-the-art Patient Pavilion center opened in October and creates a colorful environment with recreational therapies for children to play, socialize and regain their independence.

"We use art, music, yoga ... untraditional means for our rehabilitation activities," said Leslie Johnson, director of communications and marketing at St. Mary's.

With the help of care-



"Dancing with the Stars" cast member Val Chmerkovskiy dips youngster Shania.
Photo by Carol Alvarado

givers, staff members and Diane Discepolo, of the Roll Call Wheelchair Dance organization, 25 children performed dance numbers that they had been practicing since March.

"You cannot be unhappy and dance," claims Discepolo, the New Jersey-based dancing instructor and co-founder of Roll Call

Wheelchair Dance, who travels to St. Mary's every Thursday to what she calls the best hour of her week.

Wheelchair dancing works with the abilities of each child while egos and disabilities are left at the door, according to Discepolo, who explains the group's motto as "face to face, hand to hand, heart to heart."

The nonprofit was created by Discepolo, along with her friend John Nyemchek, and was inspired by a series of people in her life who became wheelchair-bound through disease and tragic accidents. The group serves the New York City area, northern New Jersey and southwestern Connecticut with programs that bring the joy of dance to children and adults with all movement and developmental disorders.

While working with Sofia, 6, a patient at St. Mary's who is confined to a wheelchair and has limited mobility in her arms, Discepolo discovered the young girl's own unique dance abilities. Together they developed a routine that had Sofia shaking her shoulders and bobbing her head all over the dance floor, giving even Chmerkovskiy a lesson on wheel-

chair dancing.

"To spend only three hours of my day and bring this for the kids ... there is nothing like it," said Chmerkovskiy, who was introduced to St. Mary's with the help of Clear Channel Media and Entertainment's Z100 team. "It helps bring more awareness to these children so they can continue to thrive."

Recognizing the healing power of music, St. Mary's and Clear Channel teamed up five years ago to create a music therapy environment.

"It gives the kids the opportunity to express themselves and be in front of an audience," said Vivian Figueroa, vice president at St. Mary's, who called up Roll Call Wheelchair Dancing after watching their segment on the TV show "20/20" in January.



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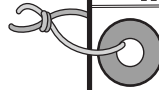
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