

Alliance fights expansion of BID to Corona

BY BILL PARRY

Opposition to the proposed expansion of the 82nd Street Partnership from Jackson Heights into Corona is gaining strength with the rise of the Roosevelt Avenue Community Alliance.

A grassroots coalition of small business owners and vendors, mostly Hispanic, formed RACA last fall in opposition to City Councilwoman Julissa Ferreras' (D-East Elmhurst) plan to extend the business improvement district from 81st Street to 114th Street along Roosevelt Avenue.

It would create one of the city's largest BIDs, incorporating retail hubs including Junction Boulevard, Corona Plaza and National Street.

A recent film screening of a documentary warning of the dangers of gentrification called "The Vanishing City" drew more than 80 people on a Saturday afternoon.

"The movie screening was a big success because people are

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Port Authority orders wage hike

Major airline carriers asked to raise hourly pay for JFK, LGA contract workers

BY BILL PARRY

A union leader who spearheaded the recent fight for better wages and working conditions for

airport workers is pleased that the head of the Port Authority has come out with his own call for higher wages.

Port Authority Executive Di-

rector Patrick Foye sent a letter Tuesday to the CEOs of several major airlines that operate out of Kennedy and LaGuardia demanding that workers making \$9 an

hour or less receive an immediate \$1-per-hour increase.

The order comes after two weeks of intensifying pressure after nearly a thousand sky caps, cleaners and security workers rallied and marched on Martin Luther King Jr. Day. A group of 32 lawmakers, union officials and members of the clergy were arrested during a civil disobedience that closed down the 94th Street Bridge leading into LaGuardia Airport.

Mayor Bill de Blasio followed up with a Jan. 21 vow to help get the workers a living wage, which was followed the next day by Gov. Andrew Cuomo's call for the Port Authority to find a short-term solution.

Hector Figueroa, president of Local 32BJ of the Service Employees International Union, said, "Pat Foye's letter is a promising step forward and marks the first real progress we have made in lifting thousands of contracted workers out of poverty."

In addition, Foye's letter called for the airlines to make Martin Luther King Jr. Day a paid holiday. The Port Authority had

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LUNAR NEW YEAR FESTIVITIES



Dancers from the New York Chinese Cultural Center perform for a crowd at the Queens Museum during a Lunar New Year celebration.

Photo by Christina Santucci

Elected officials question Queens Library spending

BY RICH BOCKMANN

Borough lawmakers are calling for an investigation — and even a reorganization — of the Queens Library after a news report detailed the library's spending under President Thomas Gal-

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A preservation group is launching a campaign to prevent Queens Hospital Center's T Building from being demolished.

Group vies to save T Building

BY RICH BOCKMANN

About a year after it floated a plan to convert an underused building on its Jamaica Hills campus into supportive housing, Queens Hospital Center is now considering tear-

ing down the T Building, though a group of preservationists wants to see the historic structure stay.

The hospital's plan last year to lease the 76-year-old former tuberculosis ward was met with sharp rebuke from neighborhood

residents and community leaders, who feared the building's tenants — people with low incomes, chronic conditions, mental disabilities and those living with HIV/AIDS — would be too close for comfort to nearby

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Boro carriage drivers fear for their jobs

Mayor's proposed ban on Central Park horse-drawn rides threatens Bayside residents' livelihoods

BY KELSEY DURHAM

For many Queens residents who work as carriage drivers in Central Park, the centuries-old business is more than just a job.

Steve Malone is the proud son of a Bayside couple who started a horse-drawn carriage business in 1964 and Malone, who now lives on Long Island, has been in the business himself for nearly 27 years. He is just one of hundreds of workers across New York fighting to save their jobs, threatened by a proposed ban on horse-drawn carriage rides in the park.

"It would be devastating," he said. "This is a business that's been in families for decades. Now they want to take it away."

A recent proposal put forth by Mayor Bill de Blasio seeks to put an end to the business that he believes is cruel to horses. Malone, who serves as spokesman for the Local 553 union rep-



A horse-drawn carriage rides down a street in Manhattan. Hundreds of drivers, including some in Queens, are fighting for their jobs after Mayor Bill de Blasio proposed a ban on carriage rides in Central Park.

resenting carriage drivers, said there are about 300 licensed workers across the city who depend on the carriage ride industry to make

their living.

Some 15 percent to 20 percent of those people, he said, live near Bayside and would be left without any-

thing to fall back on if their jobs were lost.

"We have 68 carriages and those carriages represent 68 small businesses,"

he said. "It's not a game. We're talking about people's livelihoods. We have a very good, legal business that's been in place for 155 years and it has no reason to be replaced."

State Sen. Tony Avella (D-Bayside) has been one of the strongest proponents of the legislation, dating back to his time in the City Council when he proposed a ban of his own in 2009. Avella cited several concerns with the business, such as overworked horses and owners not following regulations.

He also said there is a "serious safety issue" involved with having the horses so close to Manhattan's busy streets.

"Why do we allow them in Midtown traffic anymore?" Avella said. "It's sort of crazy. The two don't mix. There's a reason horse and buggies don't exist anymore."

Malone said the Council overwhelmingly passed a resolution in 2012 approv-

ing additions to the more than 140 pages of regulations meant to protect the horses.

According to the regulations, horses are not allowed to work in temperatures above 89 degrees or below 18 degrees. A section of Central Park's website dedicated to horse carriage tours also notes that animals have been known to be taken back to stables in snow or other inclement weather.

The newest rules passed in 2012 added vacation time for animals, increased stall size at stables and called for more vaccination and healthcare. Malone dismissed the idea that rules are not followed by drivers, but Avella argued that the city agencies in charge of overseeing the industry don't enforce regulations and said it has led to safety concerns and businesses illegally overcharging customers.

Lancman gets public safety role but no chairmanship

BY RICH BOCKMANN

City Councilman Rory Lancman (D-Hillcrest) came up empty-handed when the Council speaker was doling out committee chairmanships last week, but the Queens Democratic Party loyalist did get a seat on all three public safety committees, a vantage point he said puts him in a unique position to ensure the city's safety.

Lancman, the former state assemblyman who backed Councilman Dan Garodnick (D-Manhattan) in the race to helm the Council, said only Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito (D-Manhattan) knows why he was not given a chairmanship, and his lack of title will not hold him back.

"For me it's not a big deal," he said. "I don't need to hold a gavel for the sake of holding a gavel."

When it came to handing out committee assignments, Mark-Viverito appointed Lancman as a sitting member on the Public Safety, Fire and Criminal Justice and Juvenile Justice committees, making him the only lawmaker to sit on all three.

"I'm coming at it holistically. These three committees cover all the public safety issues the city of New York confronts," he said. "You get to see the whole public-safety panorama from where you sit."

For the committee on juvenile justice, Lancman said one of the top priorities will be to take a hard



New City Councilman Rory Lancman sits on all three public safety committees.

look at Close to Home, the Cuomo administration ini-

tiative that brought low-security youth offenders who were sent upstate back to the city to be closer to family and support services.

"It's a big issue in communities of color that young men and women — mostly young men of color — find themselves in the criminal justice system upstate — far, far away," he said. "The perception was that it was as much to create jobs upstate than to afford sound criminal justice purposes. Close to Home is fraught with lots of other political issues."

Lancman said that a year or two after its implementation the program needs to be evaluated to see if it has had the desired effect, noting that being close to home may also bring an

offender closer to the elements that lead to criminal activity in the first place.

A lawyer by profession, Lancman served three terms in the state Assembly.

One of the tasks of the Fire and Criminal Justice Committee is to oversee the city's criminal courts, and Lancman said one thing he would like to focus on is the effectiveness of restraining orders issued in domestic violence cases.

"Sometimes that order of protection is not worth the paper it's printed on," he said, adding he has had conversations with the Queens district attorney's office about the feasibility of requiring those with orders of protection against them to wear GPS-tracking

bracelets in order to track their movements.

On Public Safety, Lancman said the Council, the mayor and the courts have basically had their say on stop-and-frisk, and now the task is moving the Police Department forward while keeping the city safe.

"That's behind us, and now the challenge is to make sure the Police Department can keep us safe and do so in a constitutional way and not fall back and be able to break some of the bad habits that developed over the last couple of years," he said.

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

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Design Commission signs off on plans for plaza in Glendale

BY SARINA TRANGLE

Pedestrians may soon have a haven in Glendale.

The City Design Commission approved final design plans Monday for a pedestrian plaza near Glendale Memorial Triangle. The project calls for closing 70th Street to cars between Cooper and Myrtle avenues while expanding and enhancing the commemorative park.

The project emerged from the Ridgewood Local Development Corp.'s 2009 application to the city Department of Transportation's Plaza Program, where the city partners with nonprofits to plan the transformation and maintenance of social public spaces.

The city Department of Design and Construction said it could now begin preparing a bid for the construction work. DDC anticipates the project will last 18 months, but did not give a cost estimate for the bid.

Construction workers will use scorched or tinted concrete to delineate where the plaza begins and ends and install benches, an old-fashioned drinking fountain and light poles, according to Theodore Renz, executive director of the Ridgewood LDC.

He said a ring of circular granite blocks would surround the bronze monu-



The city plans to transform the Glendale Memorial Triangle into a pedestrian plaza. Photo by Sarina Trangle

ment, which was created in 1921 to honor Glendale residents who died in World War I.

The project also includes planting trees and greenery in the park and adding moveable chairs and tables to the plaza during the day, Renz said.

Community Board 5 Chairman Vincent Arcuri Jr. said he was particularly excited about a stand that will elevate trees during future Christmas tree lighting ceremonies. He said the current setup leads to evergreens eclipsing the monument.

"It's similar to what they do at the Rockefeller Center, but not as large," Arcuri said. "We're hoping it becomes the real center of Glendale."

Renz said the business community has largely been pleased with the 71st Avenue Triangle currently fashioned into a pedestrian plaza.

The Myrtle Avenue Queens Business Improvement District successfully applied to enlist the area in the Plaza Program in 2011. At that point, a new component of the city initiative allowed applicants to temporarily block cars from pedestrian plazas while the permanent plans are hammered out.

Renz said the 71st Avenue Triangle, which reserves 71st Avenue between Stephen Street and Myrtle Avenue for pedestrians, has been cordoned off since September 2012 and spruced up with amenities.

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Feds back tracking devices after Avonte's death

BY CHRISTINA SANTUCCI

Federal officials plan to start paying for voluntary tracking devices for autistic children who escape their caregivers following 14-year-old Avonte Oquendo's disappearance from a Long Island City school that ended in his death.

The announcement was made by Attorney General Eric Holder at a congressional hearing Wednesday morning, a federal lawmaker said.

U.S. Sen. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) had proposed a tracking program in November and the senator unveiled a \$10 million bill Sunday to fund the devices and expand support services for children with developmental disorders.

A spokesman for Schumer said he was planning to continue with his proposed legislation to sup-



Mourners including Avonte's mother, Vanessa Fontaine (c.), walk out of the Church of Saint Joseph.

Photo by Christina Santucci

plement the Department of Justice's decision, which will immediately clear the way for existing grant funds to fund the tracking devices.

Schumer's bill is dubbed "Avonte's Law."

Avonte was last seen Oct. 4 running out of the Riverview School, a public school for special-needs

children in Long Island City. DNA testing confirmed last week that the remains found along the rocky shoreline at Powell's Cove in College Point were

Avonte's.

During a funeral mass in Greenwich Village Saturday morning, Avonte was remembered as a courageous child for dealing with his autism.

"This morning we are grateful to God for Avonte Oquendo, for his life, for his courage and for the acts of goodness and kindness that his life and his tragic disappearance evoked among us," retired Cardinal Edward Egan, the former archbishop of New York, told hundreds of mourners who attended the packed public service at the Church of Saint Joseph.

The line to enter the funeral wrapped around the block as attendees waited to be let inside.

"People who don't even know Avonte have just poured out," said Rose Ortiz, a cousin of Avonte's father, Daniel Oquendo. "[The family] cannot be-

lieve so many people have come out. They are so grateful."

Among them was Yonkers resident Jan Watts, who hung posters around schools in her neighborhood during the three-month-long citywide manhunt by family members, law enforcement and volunteers.

"They had divers search the East River. They individually and meticulously inspected 486 subway stations because they knew Avonte's interest in trains," Egan said.

During that time, Avonte's relatives remained optimistic he was alive.

"When he was lost, they never lost hope until his remains were found," Egan said during the service, where he was joined by clergy from Our Lady of the Angelus in Rego Park, where the teen lived.

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Traffic islands must go: CB7

Community leader blasts College Pt. Blvd. partitions for creating chaos

BY ALEX ROBINSON

The construction of traffic islands on College Point Boulevard has created a number of traffic problems and an increase in accidents since it started, community leaders say.

The long rectangular curbs that serve as partitions for pedestrians trying to cross busy roads have caused headaches for drivers, said Community Board 7 District Manager Marilyn Bitterman.

"It's a total traffic nightmare over there," she said at a district service cabinet meeting last week.

When the traffic islands were first built in October, they lacked the proper signs and markings to warn drivers of their presence, Bitterman said.

"If you're putting in a center island, put it in and put the proper signage and markings at one island and then move onto your second one," she said about the project, which has been drawn out over the last four months.

A police source said accidents in the area with the new traffic islands skyrocketed by 400 percent after they were first put in.

The city Department of Design and Construction, the agency in charge of the traffic islands' construction, installed yellow



Community leaders say traffic islands on College Point Boulevard have been causing problems.

Photo by Alex Robinson

bollards and white plastic delineators around the partitions in the end of November so that drivers would see them.

A spokesman for DDC said the project is expected to be finished in the spring or as soon as the weather allows for the road to be paved and marked. The project's contractors cannot pave the road while it has snow on it, he said. DDC believes the traffic islands will make the street safer for pedestrians and

motorists.

City Department of Transportation officials said they were confident traffic problems would be alleviated once the project is complete.

Bitterman, however, was not convinced. The community board's leadership has been against the traffic islands since they were first proposed. CB 7 Chairman Gene Kelty and the community board's Transportation Committee were both vehemently op-

posed to the construction of the islands because of traffic concerns.

"They've been creating all sorts of problems," said Bitterman, who added she will be writing a letter to Mayor Bill de Blasio to express her frustrations about the project. She said she has tried to schedule multiple meetings with the project's contractors but they have never shown up.

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Dist. 26's gifted kids can keep slots in JHS

BY KELSEY DURHAM

made as a public announcement."

The city Department of Education has agreed to satisfy a request from parents in District 26 that will prevent students from losing their spots in the Gifted and Talented programs.

An unofficial agreement was announced Tuesday by the DOE to call off the city's plan to force students in the coveted G&T programs to reapply for their spots upon entering middle school.

Instead, G&T students moving from elementary school into junior high will be grandfathered into the program, a decision that parents see as a victory for their children.

"We're really happy," said Jeanneatte Segal, president of the Community Education Council for District 26. "This agreement will really seal the deal once it's

Before the potential change was announced in late 2013, students who had already entered the programs as early as kindergarten were allowed to continue in them until they reached high school without having to reapply for a seat each year.

Segal said the change was intended to make the system more uniform with the rest of the city and make it more competitive for students to enter the program in higher grades.

"I can understand their point of view, but it wasn't fair for the parents," she said. "People moved here and bought homes here to be closer to these programs, and to all of a sudden change it and have it not be what we were promised was a slap in the face."



Former New York City Schools Chancellor Dennis Walcott smiles as students at PS 203 in Oakland Gardens perform a rendition of "We Love You, Chancellor." PS 203 is one of dozens of schools in District 26 that will be allowed to grandfather students into Gifted and Talented programs.

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Parents resist DOE plan to bus PS 11 kids

BY BILL PARRY

When the city Department of Education announced plans for a new annex at Woodside's PS 11, the news was well-received, but with construction set to begin in June a new problem has arisen: What will they do with the children?

To build the 850-seat extension, the city School Construction Authority must first demolish a temporary mini-building, displacing 200 students. The main building, at 54-25 Skillman Ave., operates at 132 percent of capacity, so that is not an option.

The DOE plans to bus the 200 kindergartners 3.2 miles away to PS 171 in Astoria for a year until the construction of PS 339, in Sunnyside, is complete.

Parents are outraged



PS 11 in Woodside finally gets the annex everyone has wanted, but now there are logistics problems.

Photo by Bill Parry

at the plan, so elected officials sent a joint letter to city Schools Chancellor Carmen Fariña urging the DOE to reconsider busing students to the other side of District 30.

The officials wrote of their shared concern with "the psychological effects on the incoming kindergarten class since they could potentially attend three different schools in three

consecutive years."

U.S. Rep. Joe Crowley (D-Jackson Heights) said, "While the expansion of PS 11 in Woodside is a necessary investment in our children's education, we need

to ensure that construction is as least disruptive as possible to our families. I urge the DOE to work with the parents in our community on finding a suitable location for the children that is closer to home."

State Assemblywoman Margaret Markey (D-Ridgewood) added, "There must be a better alternate location for these kindergartners. A 3-mile ride during rush hour is no way for children to begin their first year in school."

City Councilman Jimmy Van Bramer (D-Sunnyside) believes he has the answer right in his backyard.

PS 313, currently under construction at 45-46 42nd St., will be ready to open in September. When the DOE opens a new school it's policy is to fill the school one year at a time, it does

not fill it with students. In fact, plans are for only kindergarten the first year, leaving plenty of room for the displaced students from PS 11.

"I'm hopeful that they will keep the children close to home and the option of sending them to PS 313 is very much under consideration," Van Bramer said. "There will certainly be enough space at PS 313."

The potential solution may also benefit students at IS 125, at 46-02 47th Ave., who will be in the same situation when construction begins on their annex this summer.

Ultimately, the decision will be made by the city Panel for Educational Policy, which has delayed the process for two months because of the change in the city's administration.

Queens pols aim to ban gamblers under age 21

BY SARINA TRANGLE

After bills to raise the gambling age to 21 stalled in state Legislature committees last year, Ozone Park lawmakers hope the measures' odds will shake out better this session.

State Sen. Joseph Addabbo Jr. (D-Howard Beach) and state Assemblyman Phillip Goldfeder (D-Rockaway Beach) introduced bills in January that would prohibit anyone under 21 from gambling in New York, noting concerns about the Resorts World racino in South Ozone Park.

Addabbo said that in the last session the Racing, Gaming and Wagering Committee was preoccupied with the recently passed referendum to authorize up to seven full-scale casinos in New York. He said now that there will be more casinos to regulate, he wants to convince colleagues that gambling poses a danger for 18- to-20-year-olds currently

allowed in racetrack casinos, often called racinos.

"I am optimistic that we can pass it. It has no real price tag. It doesn't cost the state any money. There's no real fiscal impact," Addabbo said. "The bottom line is, why not?"

Goldfeder's bill has attracted three co-sponsors — Assemblymen Tom Abinanti (D-Greenburgh), Steven Cymbrowitz (D-Brooklyn) and Michael Miller (D-Woodhaven) — and moved to the Committee on Racing and Wagering. Sen. Liz Krueger (D-Manhattan) has signed on as a co-sponsor of Addabbo's bill, which is in the Racing, Gaming and Wagering Committee.

Because altering the gambling age would require an amendment to the state constitution, it would require both the Assembly and State to twice approve the legislation and then voters' approval via a ballot referendum.

Goldfeder said he was



State Sen. Joseph Addabbo Jr. and state Assemblyman Phillip Goldfeder seek to raise the legal gambling age to 21.

concerned by the prevalence of younger gamblers at Resorts World, which he said can make it difficult for the racino to prevent underage drinking.

Addabbo said Resorts World has had issues with

underage gamblers and its proximity to John Adams High School is distressing.

Both lawmakers emphasized that other major gambling establishments like Atlantic City are not

open to those under 21.

"The gambling addition, once it is an addition, knows no boundaries, certainly not age," Addabbo said. "There's a big difference between 18 and 21 in terms of maturity."

A memo attached to the Assembly bill notes that 10 percent of adolescents in New York — about 140,000 people — have experienced problem gambling, according to the New York State Council on Problem Gambling. The organization estimates that 18-to-21-year-olds are three times more likely to have gambling problems.

Kerri Lyon, a spokeswoman for Resorts World, would not say whether the business supported the bills, but said the racino would implement any changes approved by the state. About 2 percent of Resorts World's clientele is under 21, according to Lyon.

The Business Council

of New York State, which helped start a political action committee to promote the casino expansion referendum, did not return calls for comment.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo, Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver (D-Manhattan) and Senate Co-Majority Leaders Dean Skelos (R-Rockville Centre) and Jeffrey Klein (D-Bronx) did not respond to requests for comment before deadline.

Addabbo said he had introduced a second bill that would classify security guards at Resorts World as "peace officers" so they were authorized to arrest people, rather than detaining them while police officers from the 106th Precinct drove to the racino.

"Right now, they have to take a patrol off the streets of our neighborhood, which should be there patrolling for our residents," Addabbo said. "They are tied up for hours at Resorts World."

Raca

Continued from Page 1

seeking the truth about the long-term effects of the BID," organizer Tania Mattos said. "As an immigrant activist and Jackson Heights resident of 26 years, I am strongly opposed to the BID because it will raise the rents. Our communities deserve clean, safe streets but not at the price of being kicked out of our homes."

The 30-year-old Bolivian native has been involved in immigration reform, the Dream Act and organizing Louisiana restaurant workers, but is now immersed in RACA, she says, "because business owners are the backbone of the movement but they are so busy they depend on us to represent them."

The owner of Franky Fashions, at 94-17 Roosevelt Ave., Frank Rafalian, said, "The BID is tricky. When they have meetings, they do it on days and hours



Organizers of the Roosevelt Avenue Civic Association tout the grass roots movement's growth. Photo Courtesy RACA

that they know we can't attend because we're running our shops."

He added that the additional expense of membership fees could cripple his enterprise.

"I'm told it could cost \$2,000 a year. My real estate tax has gone up \$12,000 in the last few years. Doesn't this pay for sanitation and graffiti removal? At the end of the day they're just paving the way for corpo-

rate chains to come in and change the Hispanic small business identity of Jackson Heights and Corona," Rafalian said.

Ferreras defended her vision for the business stretch.

"The proposal for the Jackson Heights-Corona Business Improvement District was formed to combat many of the existing problems my constituents experience on a

daily basis, such as crime, litter, poor lighting and safety along Roosevelt Avenue," she said. "While I have always welcomed all members of our community to share their input on this proposal, it has come to our attention that there are several vocal opponents who continue to have misconceptions."

Seth Taylor, executive director of the 82nd Street Partnership, claims the lines of communication have included RACA in the process.

"We've invited them to meet with us on several occasions. We're always willing to meet with them and with anyone who has questions about the proposed expansion," he said.

Mattos believes Taylor is a large part of the problem.

"Seth is a very difficult person to talk to. His e-mails are aggressive in our opinion and we don't feel he's come into this neighborhood respecting us," she said.

Wages

Continued from Page 1

ignored a petition that was presented to them in January, signed by 2,000 workers requesting the paid holiday and that is what led to the protest Jan. 13.

"We are glad Mr. Foye and the Port Authority have responded to the workers' call for Martin Luther King Day to be a paid holiday and will be raising their wages to \$10.10 an hour as an initial first step," Figueroa said. "We have gotten to this point due to the courage of the contracted airport workers and their willingness to take action -- including being arrested for civil disobedience at LaGuardia Airport on MLK Day."

Meanwhile, Shareeka Elliott, a cleaner who works at Kennedy and a single mother of two, was the personal guest of U.S. Sen. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) at Tuesday night's State of the Union address. The senator invited Elliott after learn-

ing that she makes just \$8 an hour working the 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. shift before taking her daughters to school. Elliott was impressed with her first trip to Washington, D.C.

After meeting Schumer, Elliott said, "I hope to hear the president touch base on the struggles myself and my fellow airport workers are going through as far as the minimum wage."

President Barack Obama did just that, calling for an across-the-board increase in the minimum wage to \$10.10 from \$7.25.

"In the coming weeks, I will issue an executive order requiring federal contractors to pay their federally funded employees a fair wage of at least \$10.10 an hour," Obama said.

He added that to reach millions more, Congress would have to act.

"Say yes, give America a raise," he said.

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NEW YORK POST

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Galante

Continued from Page 1

ante.

Galante earned a salary of \$391,549 last year, according to the website seethroughny.com, and under his watch the library has undergone a \$38 million expansion at the central library in Jamaica that included what one news report described as a private smoking area for Galante.

Galante was also reported to have said he was “paying \$35 an hour to janitors to mop floors” before cutting costs through an outside vendor, a remark that rankled City Councilman Jimmy Van Bramer (D-Sunnyside).

“Over the last two days, I have read reports and statements about the Queens Library that cause me great concern,” said Van Bramer, the Council’s majority leader and chairman of the Committee on Cultural Affairs and Libraries. “And I am deeply offended by comments made by President and CEO Tom

Galante about the library’s hardworking and dedicated janitorial staff.”

The library is a non-profit that operates independently of the city, but receives the majority of its funding through taxpayer dollars. In 2007 Queens had the largest circulation of any library in the country, but it has since dropped to No. 6 on the list, according to the Public Library Association.

Van Bramer, who worked at the library for 11 years before being elected to public office, said his stepfather was a public school janitor who “mopped floors so that me and my siblings might have a better life.”

“Janitors at the Queens Library serve an important and vital role in keeping libraries clean and safe, and they deserve respect from their boss and need to make a living wage so they, too, can raise their families,” Van Bramer added as he called for an oversight hearing on the library and its operations.

The library said it would provide the Council

with testimony explaining its operations, and Galante issued an apology for what he called his “insensitive” remarks.

“I am deeply appreciative and proud of the work done by the hardworking employees of Queens Library at all levels of the organization and especially our custodial team who keep our libraries safe, clean and running smoothly day after day,” he said. “They do a great job serving thousands of people every day.”

Gabriel Taussig, chairman of the library’s board of trustees, said Galante’s compensation is “not more and not less” than the average for non-profit CEOs in the city.

The head of the Brooklyn Public Library made \$250,000 last year and the former CEO of the New York Public Library made \$711,114 in 2011, the most recent year for which seethroughny.com has a record.

This is not the first hit of bad publicity for the Queens Library, which has

been in a battle with its union, Local 1321, over outsourcing.

The library has for the last several years been contracting out janitorial services instead of filling more than 100 staff jobs lost to attrition.

Councilman Eric Ulrich (R-Ozone Park) called on the city comptroller to audit the library, and said he would like to look into the possibility of combining the Big Apple’s three independent, nonprofit library systems.

“The city can hardly afford the annual operating costs of running three separate library systems, let alone foot the bill for expensive salaries, extravagant renovations and other wasteful spending,” he said. “I believe that one central citywide library system would save millions of dollars annually by reducing the bureaucracy and streamlining library services throughout the five boroughs.”

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T Building

Continued from Page 1

schools.

Queens Hospital eventually dropped the plan and now is looking at a number of options for a back office — including demolition.

The Queens Preservation Council, however, is up in arms over the prospect of losing the building designed by John Russell Pope, architect of Washington, D.C.’s Jefferson Memorial and the National Gallery of Art.

“Not only is this handsome building an outstanding work by a master architect, but its history embodies our city’s and our country’s response to urgent public health care needs during the Great Depression,” preservation chairman Mitchell Grubler wrote.

When it opened in 1937, the Triboro Hospital for Tuberculosis, as

it was known then, was a leader in the fight against the “white plague,” which had infected an estimated 4,000 people and claimed the lives of nearly 550 people in Queens the year before.

The 10-story, Art Moderne-style building faces south with large windows and open balconies designed to afford patients the maximum amount of fresh air and sunlight, Grubler said.

When the state razed four other buildings that were considered eligible for the National Register of Historic Places in 1998, it included a binding covenant to preserve the T Building, and Grubler said the preservation council is now mounting a campaign to have it protected.

Richard Hellenbrecht, president of the Queens Civic Congress, said he has heard both sides of the argument and said each has a valid point.

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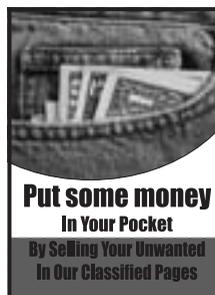
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