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QUEENS Weekly

LOCAL CLASSIFIEDS
PAGE 11

Oct. 18, 2015

Your Neighborhood - Your News®

CNG

Election fines levied against carriage group

BY TOM MOMBERG

The city Campaign Finance Board hit a political consultant group with fines for helping an anti-horse-drawn carriage group orchestrate campaign contributions to Council candidates in 2013 in excess of legal limits.

The illegal coordination between the consultant, The Advance Group, and an independent spender, the anti-carriage group, was investigated by the CFB and state Attorney General Eric Schneiderman.

The CFB ruled Oct. 8 it would fine The Advance Group \$15,000 and fine the state an additional \$10,800.

"New York voters deserve

Continued on Page 8

7 riders skeptical of MTA deal

FREE FOR ALL



PS1, the cutting-edge branch of MoMA in Long Island City, is going free for the next year. With no admission charge for New York residents, the place was packed on its first day Sunday.

By Michael Shain

Straphangers hope for better service

BY BILL PARRY

Forgive the riders of the No. 7 subway line for not celebrating the news of Gov. Andrew Cuomo and Mayor Bill de Blasio's agreement to fund the MTA capital program last weekend. They were too busy dealing with delays, skipped stops, packed trains and crowded platforms, all exacerbated by crowds heading to the Mets play-off games at Citi Field.

The social media group, 7 Train Blues, was more concerned about the MTA's announcement that it will shut down service on two weekends next month due to ongoing work on three major improvement projects.

Continued on Page 8

Gantry is wrong choice for ferry landing: Nolan

BY BILL PARRY

A lawmaker from western Queens has reservations about the city's plan to place a ferry landing at Gantry Plaza State Park.

State Assemblywoman Catherine Nolan (D-Ridgewood) fired off a letter to Maria Torres

Continued on Page 10



Brooklyn Cupcake will now be available in Glendale, Queens

Photo by Michael Shain

Sweet treats come to Glendale

BY GABRIEL ROM

Queens residents can indulge their sweet tooth at a new cupcake shop in Glendale.

Brooklyn Cupcake celebrated the grand opening of its newest Queens location last week at the Shops

at Atlas Park, located at 80-00 Cooper Ave.

The independently owned, family-run business was founded in Brooklyn, by sisters Carmen Rodriguez and Gina Madera and their cousin, Michele Caballero. After being laid off from her job during the

recession in 2009, Rodriguez decided to turn her love of baking into her new career. Rodriguez' family members donated funds to help launch Brooklyn Cupcake. She raised a total of \$85,000 with \$40,000 coming from Rodriguez' mother.

Continued on Page 10

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Former Councilman Ognibene dies at 72

BY GABRIEL ROM

Former Council Minority Leader Thomas Ognibene, a Queens Republican giant who mixed a strong conservative vision with practicality and brought the interests of the central section of the borough to a city-wide platform, died Tuesday at the age of 72 following a battle with aggressive spinal cancer.

Ognibene was first elected to the Council in 1991 representing the southwest Queens neighborhoods that cover Middle Village, Glendale, Ridgewood and Woodhaven.

Ognibene exhibited a knack for political horse-trading and quickly rose to the position of Council minority leader in 1994, holding the position until 2001 when he left office because of term limits. Carrying a strong belief in the importance of civic associations, Ognibene helped build the Juniper Valley Civic Association into one of the most powerful in the state.

"Where could a civic get access to the mayor and deputy mayor before Tom?" asked Bob Holden, president of Juniper Valley. "He had such influence because he was well respected by both parties."

At 6-foot-3, Ognibene cut a physically imposing figure and quickly earned respect in the Council from across the political aisle, enjoying friendly relationships with city Democrats, including former City Council Speaker Peter Vallone Sr. and former Queens Congressman Anthony Weiner.

"He was a great credit to the GOP and to the city of New York," Vallone said. "He knew that being a party member meant that first you're loyal to your city and your country. We both agreed on that, we were able to do tremendous



Queens Republican stalwart Tom Ognibene, a former City Council member and candidate for mayor, is remembered for his wit and big personality.

things against all odds. I loved the man and I loved what he stood for."

Much of Ognibene's tenure in the Council served as a bulwark for one of the city's most conservative enclaves against then-Mayor David Dinkins' progressive politics. Ognibene strongly opposed Dinkins' taxation plan as well as a variety of socially liberal policies that came from the Council.

Councilman Eric Ulrich (R-Ozone Park), who represents a younger generation of Queens Republicans, grew up under the guidance of Ognibene.

"There is no doubt in my mind that all of the communities that he represented are solid middle-class communities today because of Tom's hard work," Ulrich said. "He delivered millions of dollars to those communities for parks, to new schools, to libraries."

"He was a bright light on a City Council that was dominated by ultra liberals," Holden wrote in a 2001 essay for the Juniper Berry, the civic's magazine.

In 2005 Ognibene tried to take his agenda to all five boroughs, challenging then-Mayor Michael Bloomberg in the Republican mayoral primary.

"Tom knew that Bloomberg wasn't really a

Republican and that's why he ran against him," Holden said.

Bloomberg successfully challenged Ognibene's run and disqualified him from the GOP race. Ognibene continued his mayoral candidacy on the Conservative party ticket. Ognibene attempted to win back his old seat in 2009, but lost to current Councilwoman Elizabeth Crowley (D-Glendale).

He backed Joseph Lhota for mayor in 2013, while much of the Queens Republican establishment supported John Catsimatidis.

Ognibene was born during World War II on Manhattan's Upper West Side, son to Josephine, a school principal, and Morris, a paint contractor. A talented student, Ognibene deferred attending college in order to work and assist his family and graduated with honors from C.W. Post College in 1966. He then joined the U.S. Army Armor School Officer Candidate Class. When he left the service in 1970 he moved to Ridgewood with his wife Margaret Bollmann.

"I don't know what I'm going to do without him," Ulrich said. "I'm at a personal and a professional loss. He was a giant and I stood on his shoulders."

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Flushing West riverfront plans revealed

BY MADINA TOURE

Among the proposals included in the Flushing Riverfront project are a mixed-use bus transit center and the creation of a special district for the Flushing West area.

In 2011, the Flushing-Willets Point-Corona Local Development Corporation received a \$1.5 million state Brownfield Opportunity Grant to fund the project, which would clean up and rezone 60 acres on the Flushing waterfront and create a planned community with waterfront access as well as housing and commercial space.

City Planning combined the corporation's project with its Flushing West study as part of Mayor Bill de Blasio's 10-year affordable housing plan.

At a public event Oct. 7, the agency shared the preliminary draft land-use plan and held a community discussion, where individuals raised concerns about issues such as the environment, transportation and affordable housing.



City Planning has unveiled some proposals for the Flushing waterfront area.

Photo courtesy of City Planning

The 32-acre study area runs from Prince Street to Flushing Creek on the west, Roosevelt Avenue on the south and Northern Boulevard on the north.

Three-quarters of the study area is zoned C4-2 for a commercial and residential zone.

The northern part of the study has M1-1 zoning, or light manufacturing. The northern part along the waterfront is zoned M3-1, or heavier manufacturing.

The mixed-use bus transit

center would provide relief to bus congestion from curbside layovers in downtown Flushing.

A City Planning spokesman said the development of the bus transit center would require significant coordination between the MTA, numerous city and state agencies and property owners and developers.

The special district for Flushing West would set maximum building heights ranging from 10 to 14 stories. Additional heights would require review and approval from the Federal Aviation Administration.

The special district would also require new streets to be built as waterfront sites are developed that extend the road network from downtown Flushing to the waterfront.

A City Planning spokesman said that the proposals are initial recommendations that are not set in stone.

Mandatory Inclusionary Housing will require affordable housing as a condition of new housing development within Flushing West.

The agency is exploring two options. The first would be 25 percent of housing floor area affordable at an average of 60 percent area median income, which is \$46,620 annually for a family of three.

The second option would be 30 percent of housing floor area affordable at an average of 80 percent area median income, which is \$62,150 yearly for a family of three.

The agency is planning to host a public scoping meeting to discuss the environmental impact of the project. Next year, the agency will hold a public event in which it will share the final draft land-use framework, draft affordable housing strategy and draft city services and capital planning strategy.

It will also participate in public hearings before Community Board 7, Queens Borough President Melinda Katz, the City Planning Commission and the City Council.

Dutch Kills accepts shelter as Van Bramer says no more

BY BILL PARRY

The city began to move in residents of its new shelter for homeless single women at the Verve Hotel in Dutch Kills this week. The facility, located at 40-03 29th St., will eventually house 200 women when it is at full capacity.

"This community has some concerns about the shelter, but they've been sympathetic, empathetic and compassionate towards the new residents at the Verve," City Councilman Jimmy Van Bramer (D-Sunnyside) said. "There's been no anger or antagonism in this community, like there has been in other neighborhoods. However, there is concern that if one hotel owner came to the belief that they could make more money selling it to the city for a shelter, what is to stop others from doing so?"

With 27 hotels in the im-



The city begins moving in residents of its new shelter for homeless women at the Verve Hotel in Dutch Kills this week.

Photo by Bill Parry

mediate area and over two dozen more in the planning or construction phase, it is a legitimate concern that Van Bramer took directly to City Hall.

"We've asked the administration to agree on a moratorium on more shelters in Dutch Kills," Van Bramer said. "They are taking it very seriously and we are still discussing it. I

believe there will be a commitment, but the details are still being negotiated."

Van Bramer said he has had two community meetings concerning the Verve Hotel.

"They've been incredible, really," he said. "But they're still waiting on some answers."

Nearly 100 residents of East Elmhurst sought an-

swers of their own at a recent town hall meeting at the St. Mark's AME church on Northern Boulevard. Representatives from the Department of Homeless Services and Camba, the service provider that runs the homeless shelter at The Landing, fielded questions about security and the conditions inside the facility.

Elizabeth Stevens, the shelter director, said there is a plan to put kitchenettes, which are required by state law, in each of the shelter's 169 units.

The absence of kitchens in each unit has been one of the reasons City Comptroller Scott Stringer has repeatedly rejected a proposed five year, \$42 million contract between the city and Samaritan Village at the Pan American hotel in Elmhurst. In September, Stringer rejected the permanent contract for a third time arguing that the

shelter had not rectified its violations, addressed the numerous complaints, nor demonstrated that the facility is a safe and proper site capable of being granted permanent status.

State Sen. Tony Avella (D-Bayside) joined members of the civic group Elmhurst United for a rally at the shelter for homeless families after Samaritan Village submitted a proposal for a fourth time.

"The Pan Am shelter illustrates a fundamental problem in the city's services to homeless New Yorkers," Avella said. "When it comes to site selection, rather than proactively finding suitable buildings capable of housing the homeless population, it settles for the first warehouse that presents itself. This site exemplifies the city's unwillingness to consult with the people in the community to come to

a solution. The people in this system deserve better, they deserve kitchens, they deserve to be treated with dignity."

Elmhurst United founding member Jennifer Chu called on the city to shut down the Pan American shelter altogether while offering a common sense alternative for dealing with the homeless crisis.

"For \$3,800 per month per hotel room, for a \$42 million long-term, five-year contract, which is what the City would pay to the Pan Am shelter operator, the city could renovate one of their many foreclosed apartment buildings or vacant lots and create apartments for the homeless rather than enriching these landlords," Chu said.

"We don't need more shelters, we need more permanent and affordable housing."

Merrick flea market property gets cleaned up

Community fought owner to put up fence to keep out trash, squatters, abandoned cars

BY SADEF ALI KULLY

It was a dramatic scene right out of a movie last week. Rudy, the homeless man living on the closed Merrick Flea Market property in Laurelton, blocked the trucks and a team that had come to clean up and lock the property after a fire in August.

After months of lobbying support to have the property secured and cleared, members of Federated Blocks of Laurelton had finally gotten something done to make the neighborhood eyesore safer.

“I am glad they are cleaning up the place,” Dwight Johnson, president of the Federated Blocks of Laurelton, said. “This place had become a danger for the community.”

In August, a small fire broke out inside the flea market warehouse, which



Rudy, a homeless man living on the closed-down Merrick Flea Market property, put his stuff in a supermarket cart after being forced to move out during a cleanup. Photo by Sadeef Kully

exposed the dump site the property had become. It was littered with old furniture, construction trash and cars for sale. Rudy would sweep

up when he could. “I am not homeless. My brother lives around the corner,” said Rudy, which is his nickname. “I just like

being outdoors during the summer. This is my summertime.”

Rudy had created a makeshift living room with an old red leather couch and bedroom with a dresser out of other people’s trash — right in the middle of the open lot. In the summer he would put on his sunglasses while blasting R&B music from his radio.

“Everyone is one of God’s creatures. I choose not to go or to go,” he said. “I gotta sister down South—I don’t know Down South. I lived in this neighborhood for 40 years.”

City Councilman Donovan Richards (D-Laurelton), who was at the Oct. 9 cleanup, said his office and the city Department of Homeless Services tried to help Rudy. “We tried to give him everything, but he refused every help.”

The owner of the proper-

ty, Myron Berman, said, “It is a problem beyond us, but we are doing what we can. The fence will be locked by Oct. 13. Once the fence is up—it will become a police matter.”

Berman said his company is in the middle of negotiating the development of the property and expects construction to begin next year.

“There is no one more important than you—you live here and this is your community,” Berman told the residents standing to watch the clearing of the site.

The fire, which was the catalyst for the community, was not Rudy’s fault, he said.

“I went to Key Food that night. I sleep in the Laundromat and keep it safe ‘cause they have TV. I think there were some kids here who started some s---,”

he said.

Rudy, who kept his sneakers neatly on a shelf, his T-shirts on hangers off a hook and his shampoo and lotions on top of a bureau in his makeshift outdoor bedroom, said he used to sweep up the place, too.

“Now they want me to go,” he said as he started to pack his grocery cart with his belongings.

Despite Rudy’s claims, residents did not buy it.

“I have seen bonfires here during the winter,” Johnston said. “It wasn’t safe for anyone.” Johnston said they wanted to see perhaps a sit-down restaurant, a training gym or a small business like a law office.

In the past, Rudy said he had gone to rehab for alcoholics but this time he was planning to go upstate to a veterans home since he had been a peacetime officer.



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Stop & Shop to open store in Ozone Park

5

BY MADINA TOURE

An Ozone Park grocery store formerly owned by the Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company is among five stores in the city that will be converted into Stop & Shop stores in the first round of conversions of supermarkets formerly run by A&P.

The Pathmark store located at 92-10 Atlantic Ave. is one of five stores that were temporarily closed. The others were Waldbaum's stores in East Hampton, L.I. and Southampton, L.I. and Pathmark stores in the Bronx and Brooklyn. The grand openings for the five stores were scheduled for Friday.

"We are very excited to begin the store conversion process and we will strive to minimize the inconvenience to customers," Don Sussman, president of Stop & Shop's New York



A new Stop & Shop store is opening in Ozone Park.

Photo by Michael Shain

Metro Division, said in a statement. "Stop & Shop is

committed to improving the overall shopping experience

in these 25 stores to meet the quality, selection

and savings that customers have come to expect from us."

A&PownsPathmarkand Waldbaum's. Stop & Shop is acquiring 25 A&P stores for \$146 million. On Oct. 8, Stop & Shop announced it would begin converting the stores. During the process, groups of up to five stores will close temporarily for about seven days. The conversions are expected to be completed by Nov. 13.

Stop & Shop plans to make a charitable donation to a local non-profit organization that makes a positive impact on children's lives at each grand-opening event. About 3,000 former A&P store associates will be working at Stop & Shop as well.

"Stop & Shop is committed to being a good neighbor in the communities where it does business," Sussman said.

In July, A&P announced

it had agreed to sell 120 stores for about \$600 million. The company said it secured financing of \$100 million and voluntarily filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection. An A&P spokesman declined to comment.

Stop & Shop currently employs more than 59,000 associates and operates 394 stores throughout Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York and New Jersey.

Offerings include an assortment of natural and organic products, including 1,400 Nature's Promise products and gluten-free and special-diet selections. Peapod, an Internet grocer, will also be available to customers.

Reach reporter Madina Toure by e-mail at mtoure@cnglocal.com or by phone at (718) 260-4566.

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Visitors to Soleluna can try the Fettucine Amatriciano (l.) and Faggotini alla Valerio for a reduced price during Sunnyside Restaurant Week. Photo courtesy Avner Barak

Go feast in Sunnyside

Restaurant Week offers deal to promote 29 eateries

BY BILL PARRY

When Valerio Marchi opened his Italian restaurant Soleluna in May, he made sure to take part in the annual Taste of Sunnyside, a showcase of the neighborhood's culinary diversity in a festival tents pitched under the No. 7 subway line. Now his restaurant will take part in Sunnyside Restaurant Week beginning Oct. 19 and he's hoping it helps build his growing customer base.

"We served samples of our Polpetta meatballs and the Fagottini Alla Valerio, our popular cheese and pear ravioli in a rosemary sauce," Marchi said. "But you can't cook it on site so that it's better warmer and fresher. Now you get the people who tried it at the Taste to come to your restaurant and have it better prepared. Plus they can ex-

perience the full menu and see the restaurant, hear the music and feel the ambience behind the food."

Now in its third year, 29 eateries have signed up to participate in the event, organized by Sunnyside Shines, offering a three-course dinner menu for \$25 with many establishments offering additional lunch specials. The lineup includes Peruvian, Japanese, Thai, Colombian, Filipino, Irish, Mexican and French cuisine.

It includes two restaurants recognized as Michelin "Bib Gourmands," Venturo and Salt and Fat. Bib Gourmands are awarded to restaurants offering high quality on a budget, specifically two course plus wine or dessert for \$40 or less.

Other longtime neighborhood favorites such as Sidetracks and Dazies are taking part as is the Cop-

per Kettle, which celebrated its 20th anniversary last Saturday.

"Last year's event was a big success for our neighborhood eateries," said Sara Nordmann, Sunnyside Shines interim executive director. "This event highlights the diverse range of restaurants in Sunnyside, but there's a huge problem - figuring out how to eat in all these amazing restaurants in just one week."

The five-day event will feature short film screenings from the Queens World Film Festival. Don and Katha Cato will show some of the festival winners at Bliss Plaza on opening night, "Queens-centric" shorts on Wednesday night at Claret Wine Bar (46-02 Skillman Ave.) and a collection of dark comedy and horror shorts Friday and the Dog and Duck (45-20 Skillman Ave.).

The art group No Longer Empty will curate a presentation of art videos for dinner time viewing Tuesday, Oct. 20 at Dazies (39-41 Queens Blvd.) and short films by William Wegman Thursday, Oct. 22 at Don Pollo (41-06 Greenpoint Ave.).

New York City-based artist Giorgio Casu will unveil a mural on the outside wall of Soleluna along 40th Street as part of Restaurant Week's opening Monday, where he will give a talk. Casu's murals are seen in major cities around the world as well as the White House, where he presented a portrait of President Obama in 2010.

"I picked George myself because I've seen his work before," Marchi said. "I'm not sure exactly what he's going to do, but I hope it's ready in time for opening night."

Mayor signs new bill that conserves energy

BY BILL PARRY

Beginning next summer, you will no longer feel a blast of cold air as you walk past the front door of a store.

Mayor Bill de Blasio has signed legislation making it illegal for stores and restaurants to run the air conditioning with doors and windows open. The new law will prevent owners from luring customers in from the sweltering heat and wasting energy.

"It's always been a pet peeve of mine," de Blasio said Oct. 7 before signing the bill, which was sponsored by Councilman Costa Constantinides (D-Astoria), the chairman of the Council's Environmental Protection Committee.

"I know I'm not the only one who has walked past open doors to feel a blast of cold air pouring out," de Blasio said. "We don't need to be cooling our sidewalks!"

By requiring businesses to simply close the door, this bill is a win on multiple fronts and is a small but important part of our efforts to fight climate change."

Violators would face fines ranging from \$250 for a first offense to as much as \$1,000 for an especially grievous violation. Enforcement will be carried out by the Department of Consumer Affairs beginning July 1.

"This year had the most 80-degree days we've had in New York City on record — action had to be spurred," Constantinides said. "Shutting the front doors of businesses so that air conditioning doesn't escape will conserve energy and allow business owners to save on their utility bills. This law will significantly impact our power grid, where most plants are old, inefficient and produce larger emissions."



Councilman Costa Constantinides shakes hands with Mayor Bill de Blasio after he signed legislation regulating businesses use of air conditioning. Photo courtesy Constantinides' office.

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Photographed by Sean Kennedy Santos

Transit

Continued from Page 1

"We all know the work has to get done," 7 Train Blues founding member Melissa Orlando said. "It's just gone on for so long it just adds to the frustration that we feel. It's always more of the same. At least this time the MTA sent a representative to explain the suspension at the Community Board 2 meeting."

The No. 7 runs straight through the district of City Councilman Jimmy Van Bramer (D-Sunnyside), who has led numerous rallies over the past several years, protesting the week-end shutdowns and dangerous conditions. Just last month, the Citizens Budget Commission released a study that said the 7 had the highest percentage of stations in disrepair of any line in the city.

"Investing in public transit is the right thing to do on so many different levels," Van Bramer said. "Given the issues that the 7 train riders face every day, it affects the quality of life. We have to make the MTA more accountable and that's what this deal accomplishes."

New York state has committed to provide \$8.3 billion, and New York City will pitch in \$2.5 billion toward the program, which



Straphangers on the No. 7 subway line are hoping service improves now that the governor and mayor have reached agreement on MTA funding.

Photo by Michael Shain

totals \$26.1 billion worth of investments to renew, enhance and expand the MTA network of subways, trains and buses.

A key part of the deal was de Blasio's demand that the governor stop raiding MTA funds and redirecting them to non-mass transit projects.

"The state will not divert any funds or fail to provide any funding committed to this capital program" the agreement reads.

"It's called a lockbox — the funds cannot be diverted," Van Bramer said. "The agreement also calls for MTA board members to work with City Council members to make sure the money is going to the places and projects that are most in need of repair."

The city and state will

fund on the same schedule on a proportionate basis. Cuomo is already promising to buy 1,000 new subway cars and 1,400 new buses.

However, the program is not fully funded. There is still a \$700 million funding hole that "will be closed by MTA efforts to seek further efficiencies or necessary program reductions," an MTA spokesman said. Additional fare hikes have been ruled out by the MTA.

Van Bramer will take a wait-and-see approach.

"I just don't trust the MTA to do the right thing and 7 train riders all believe the same thing," he said.

Reach reporter Bill Parry by e-mail at bparry@cnglocal.com or by phone at (718) 260-4538.

Carriages

Continued from Page 1

elections that are fair and free of coordination that distorts the democratic process," Schneiderman said in a statement. "The law preventing coordination between candidates and advocacy campaigns is clear. Today's agreement sends a clear message that campaign coordination is unacceptable in New York City and state politics."

New Yorkers for Clean, Livable and Safe Streets, the animal and political advocacy group that has been trying to sway City Council votes to ban the horse-carriage industry in Central

Park, spent millions in the 2013 election on contributions to those in favor of the ban and on campaigns attacking those who opposed it.

NYCLASS contributed funds to Mayor Bill de Blasio and other candidates who sought to put an end to the industry the group sees as inhumane and cruel, although industry supporters claim the horses are well cared for.

Many of the carriage drivers are residents of Bay-side and Jackson Heights.

The CFB fined NYCLASS about \$26,000 in December for sidestepping the rules by disbursing too much money to at least two City Council candidates in 2013.

Those candidates, Laurie Cumbo (D-Brooklyn) and Mark Levine (D-Manhattan) were fined about \$7,900 and \$8,700, respectively, in May 2014 for having accepted those campaign contributions after being warned they would be in violation of CFB rules.

The CFB issued a total of \$58,000 in fines to all parties involved in the illegal contributions coordinated by The Advance Group.

The Advance Group said it accepted the fines to avoid costly legal fees to fight the case.

Reach reporter Tom Momberg by e-mail at tmomberg@cnglocal.com or by phone at (718) 260-4573.

Program tackles boro youth's literacy struggle

Reading 4 Smiles founder sees success in its creative approach to academics

BY TOM MOMBERG

Reading and writing proficiency is something educators are always talking about to see where their students can improve.

About 31.3 percent of Queens students in grades three through eight demonstrated proficient levels on last year's state-standardized English Language Arts exams. Although borough kids beat the city and state averages, that number is really low—lower than the 38.1 percent of students who scored at least proficient on their state math exams.

One Astoria-based nonprofit has started to tackle literacy for elementary and middle school students. By driving kids and teens to success in its summer and after-school program, Reading 4 Smiles has grown from an enrollment of 10 students five years ago to helping well over 100 today.

Founder Yawne Robinson grew up in the city Housing Authority's Queensbridge houses,



Reading 4 Smiles staff and volunteers help kids advance their reading and writing skills Nzingha Freeman (l-r), Tenzin Yangkyi, Yawne Robinson, Natalia Belchikov, Courtney Ranchor and Alisa Mizukami are part of the program.

Courtesy of Yawne Robinson

where she saw a need for literacy support and first introduced the program there. She works as a data analyst for Our World Neighborhood Charter School in Astoria, and now takes in students from across Queens who have an array of literacy needs. She is trying to raise money to either expand to other school buildings or

to look for space of her own.

"This also allows me to peek into what our schools are not doing, and why we still have such a big literacy gap just among (students)," Robinson said. "Writing and reading are things that if you don't do them often, you lose them."

Program assistant Caprise

Scott had enrolled his son Amani Scott in the Saturday program for a couple years "just so his brain wouldn't rot on the weekend. He's a smart kid, but his grades even improved," he said. "I can see Reading 4 Smiles as a model for the future. It serves an ethnically diverse population and does it well."

And with space provided by the charter school she works for and funding that relies almost solely on private donations, Robinson and her team have developed programs that touch on everything from financial literacy, health, public speaking, theater, world culture and science.

The programs are split by grade level and are all-inclusive for students with varying language backgrounds and reading abilities.

"These topics give them another aspect into learning. For me, it's more about putting them in a position to think about their future," Robinson said. "A lot of our activities we create in-house

allow them to dive in no matter what their reading level is. That's the fun part about it."

Robinson said most of the kids her program serves are either immigrants or come from low-income backgrounds. But even then, she said, the program means different things for different students, some of whom are just looking to get ahead and advance their literary abilities.

But when these kids of varying abilities are all learning together, Robinson said the best outcomes are produced. And teenagers who are hired on for the summer through a city grant program get paid to mentor the kids through the program, making sure every student gets some one-on-one attention.

Patricia McSharry, whose fifth-grade son Timothy Huber attends Our World and has been enrolled in Reading 4 Smiles for three years, said she has seen tremendous improvement in his writing ability.

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Cupcakes

Continued from Page 1

Brooklyn Cupcake's flagship store opened shortly after.

In 2012, the Daily News named Brooklyn Cupcake one of the tastiest cupcakes in the New York. They were also named Brooklyn Small Business of the Year by Deputy Mayor Robert Steel and Small Business Services Commissioner Robert Walsh.

In 2013, Brooklyn Cupcake appeared on the hit Food Network show "Cupcake Wars," in which the company competed for the chance to cater an exclusive cast-and-crew party celebrating the 10,000th episode of the soap opera "The Young and the Restless."

"There could be a Brooklyn Cupcake in every state," Rodriguez said on the show. "But I'm from Brooklyn and I become more resourceful under stress."

The menu at Brooklyn Cupcake represents both the family's Puerto Ri-

can and Italian heritage and will feature most of the same flavors offered at their Brooklyn location. Guava con Queso is a guava paste baked into yellow cake topped with vanilla frosting and guava jelly and Flan de Queso is a vanilla cake stuffed with homemade flan and topped with their signature vanilla frosting.

More traditional offerings include Tiramisu, espresso and vanilla cake injected with marsala and coffee, topped with mascarpone whipped cream and a sprinkle of cocoa, and Red Velvet, a classic buttermilk cake with a hint of cocoa topped with traditional vanilla cream cheese frosting. One of the shop's most popular flavors is Classic Vanilla, which has a signature frosting that can be adorned with sprinkles and M&M's frosting available in colors.

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Ferry

Continued from Page 1

Springer, the commissioner of the city Economic Development Corporation, saying the proposed location at the northern end of the park "is not the best use of" scarce public green space.

"I have some concerns about the placement of a ferry in Gantry Park," Nolan said. "If this site is ultimately chosen, then the city of New York or the ferry operator should make the necessary accommodations to ensure that Gantry State Park is preserved."

The EDC is in the process of choosing between the Gantry location, at the top of Center Boulevard and North Basin Road, and another site north of Anable Basin off 44th Drive. Nolan prefers the second choice.

"The increased traffic through the park may detract from the enjoyment of parkgoers and cause undue wear and tear on



The city is leaning towards placing a ferry landing at the north end of Gantry Plaza State Park, but Catherine Nolan has concerns.

Photo by Bill Parry

the park facilities," Nolan wrote to Torres-Springer. "How will the lines of people be handled at this location? The park should not be a queuing location for the ferry."

If the EDC chooses the Gantry location, Nolan wants the city or the ferry operator to make accommodations in order to minimize the impact. She listed the need for bathrooms at the north end of the park, funds to compensate the state Parks

Department for the additional wear and tear, more staff to insure the safety of the public and to keep the park clean.

Nolan also wants the ferry operator to assign staff to ensure that loading and unloading is orderly and makes a minimal impact on the park.

Rob Basch, the president of the Hunters Point Parks Conservancy, agrees with most of Nolan's points, but he has additional concerns. In

numerous meetings with the EDC, Basch requested that the ferry landing be designed so that the boats do not have to back out of their slips.

"We're very concerned with the horn blaring," Basch said. "If the ferries have to back out of the landing, the law requires four blasts of the ship's horn. That would be quite a lot every half hour. If there's a way to design the landing so the ferries can come in sideways, that would be beneficial."

He also wants the city or the ferry operator to build some type of shelter like the one at the current landing in Hunters Point South Park.

"I think they (the EDC) is leaning towards the location at Gantry," Basch said. "That means there is going to be a lot more people going through there and tramping through our gardens. It also means there's going to be a lot more trash, so I hope they can allocate more funding for cleaning crews."



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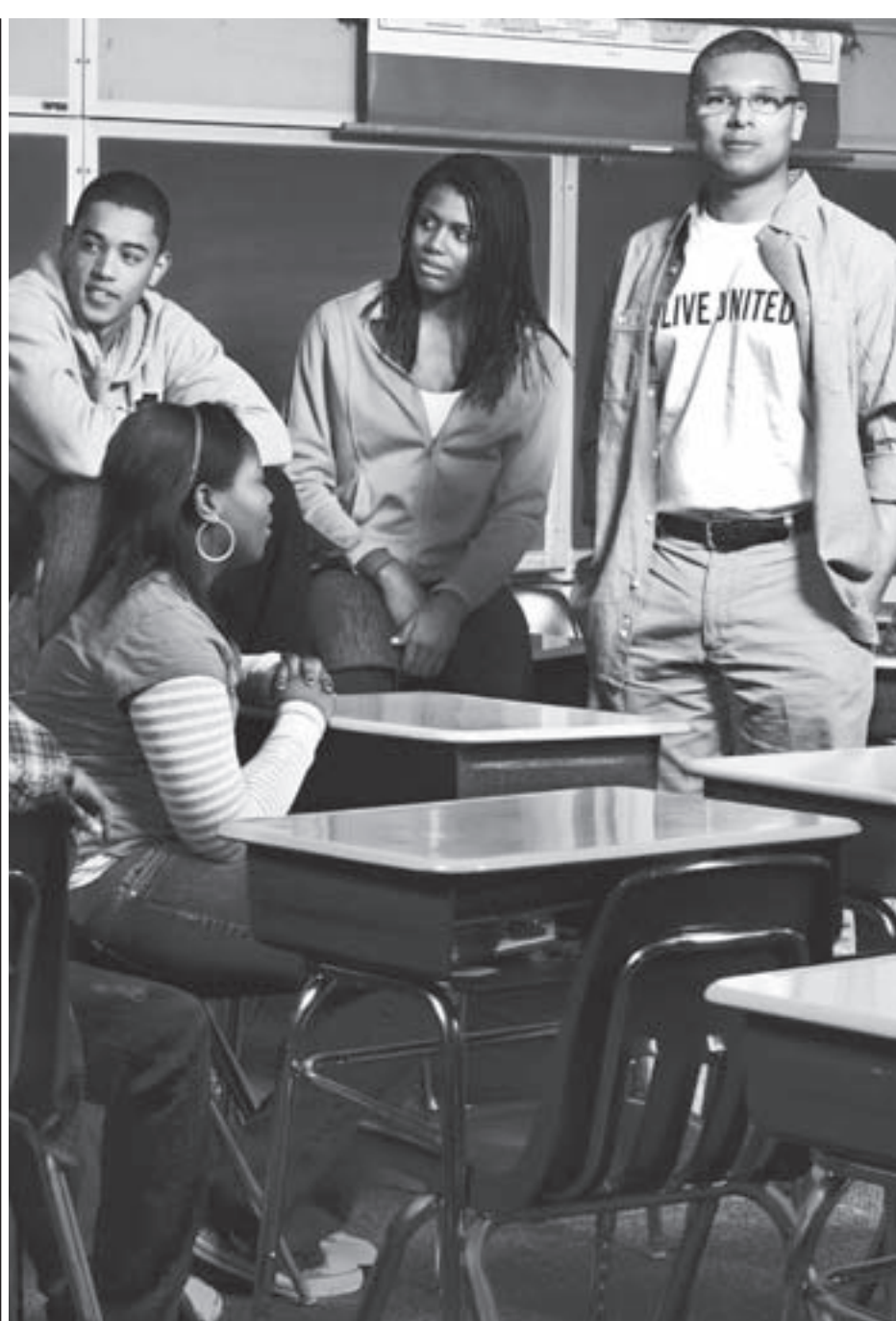
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