

The Main Street **WIRE**

Roosevelt Island's Community Newspaper

in association with Website NYC10044



What's Christmas without a tree? These and other members of Island Boy Scout Troop 59 are selling Christmas trees at Motorgate this week.

RIOC May Impose Sudden Rent Hike on Island House

by Dick Lutz

Island House tenants will face a rent increase soon. Westview, too. That's nothing new. It happens every couple of years. What could be different this time is the ultimate source of that rent increase, and where the money will go.

The Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation (RIOCC) has notified the owner of Island House that ground rent – the yearly amount paid to New York State for the land on which the building sits – will go from about \$500,000 to about \$750,000. If the figure holds (it's being negotiated and could be contested), and if it's passed on to tenants without modification, it translates to a monthly rent hike of \$60 for the average Island House apartment.

Such an increase wouldn't be unprecedented. But in this case, the money would go neither to the owner nor to capital improvements. The money would go to RIOCC.

This arises at a time when Island House is in need of 20th-year repairs and maintenance to its roof, pool, exterior sheathing, and more. Whatever the rent increase, the State would take a significant chunk for itself. And whatever the State takes won't be available to use in fixing the building.

How this came about, and how it could play out in January's Budget Rent Determination hearings for Island House and Westview, is the subject of this report. The outcome is likely to bear on Westview rents, and could influence the ground rent negotiations involved in Rivercross privatization. How it might bear on Eastwood is uncertain, but it's an important test of the relationship between the State of New York and the owners of Island housing.

Some Dry History

The lease for the land on which Island House sits provides that one year after the opening of the subway, the State can increase its charges for the property. But it didn't happen in 1990, the year after the subway opened. Had it happened then, it would have been 13 years behind schedule, like the subway itself. And it hasn't happened yet. The State, presently in the form of RIOCC, is actually some seven years behind in imposing the allowed increase.

In the original planning, the idea was that by the year 2005, the owner of Island House would be paying the State the equivalent of the taxes that would be imposed on the land for equivalent conventionally-financed housing. By 2015 the owner would be paying both taxes *and* ground rent equal to what such a building would generate if the land were not State-controlled property and the construction financing had been arranged in the commercial marketplace rather than with the assistance of a State mortgage loan.

In the original planning, that amount of increase presumably would have been imposed gradually over all the years between 1976, the year after the subway was supposed to have opened, and the 2005/2015 dates. But this year, with its announcement to the Island House owner, RIOCC is proposing to catch up on the seven years of increases not yet imposed. Then, the remainder of the allowed increases will presumably be spread over the remaining years, working out to a few dollars per apartment per month, added every year.

Best Laid Plans...

All this could serve as an object lesson to those who presume to plan a quarter-century into the future, reaching through 25 years of calendars to tie a legal straitjacket on future administrators. The subway was *supposed* to be ready by the mid-70's, but a fiscal crisis held it up. Southtown was *supposed* to be in place by now, but a real estate slowdown and other problems kept it from being a source of revenue for the Island and RIOCC.

Crystal balls have yet to be perfected, and plans based on their revelations are bound to be flawed.

See **Rent**, page 3

DHCR Commissioner Meets With Trio of Island Residents

Joe Lynch met with three Island residents this week, and the residents came away hopeful that he'll act on their complaints about Jerome Blue's administration of the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation (RIOCC). Lynch, who as Acting Commissioner of the State's Department of Housing and Community Renewal is Blue's boss, has started chairing RIOCC Board meetings and generally taking a more direct interest in Island matters.

According to those attending, the two-and-a-quarter-hour meeting was wide-ranging, highly specific, a fairly warm exchange - and though another meeting is to take place in a month, rather noncommittal on Lynch's part.

Significantly, Lynch expressed an opinion that Roosevelt Island operations are not self-sufficient, putting him at variance with claims made by Blue.

"I was heartened by the reception we received," said Patrick Stewart, President of the Roosevelt Island Residents Association (RIRA). "I was impressed that their understanding was thorough, their questions excellent, and I came away feeling that I like these guys, and feeling that they have a sincere concern for the well-being of Roosevelt Island. I was impressed that they were willing to spend so much time with us."

In addition to Stewart, the meeting included Andrey Berman, Co-Chair of the Westview/Island House Task Force, and Linda Heimer, President of the Roosevelt Island Safety Coalition. The meeting came about at Lynch's request when Heimer wrote to him recently, disappointed in his response to a letter to Governor George Pataki written by three Rivercross residents. Virginia Ewald, Barbara Packer, and Karen Puritz had encountered Pataki on the beach in the Hamptons on July 4, and Pataki had invited their letter. (All three letters were published in *The WIRE* November 15 and 22. This issue's *Letters* column includes another letter to the Governor by the three women.) On the DHCR side, Lynch was accompanied by Otis Jones, his deputy who has had responsibility for Roosevelt Island.

Commenting on the meeting, Heimer told *The WIRE*, "I was very grateful that someone in a position to do something is finally listening and not just trying to placate us. I'll be very interested to see what they have to say at our next meeting in about a month. Even so, the position we're in is that we can't wait to see what they will do or won't do, because we have only ten months to the [gubernatorial] election, and the only leverage we have is that election. We'll see what they have to say in a month. After that, we'll go back to full-blown demonstrating and take whatever action is necessary to move this forward."

According to the three Islanders at the meeting, these subjects were covered, among others:

- Island self-sufficiency. Lynch agreed that Roosevelt Island has not reached budgetary self-sufficiency. The state has recently issued an RFP for a consulting firm to establish financial controls at RIOCC.

- Lynch indicated an interest, coincident with Blue's professed intent, in involving the MTA with the Tramway. He also expressed sympathy with the idea of a cutback in Tramway hours if passenger load doesn't warrant continuation of the current schedule. But he listened willingly to the residents' assertions that the Tram will be a profit center when Southtown is built.

- Lynch hinted that the RIOCC Board should take greater control over the RIOCC administration, looking more deeply into the facts behind the recommendations made by the RIOCC President.

- Lynch expressed a strong belief in the need for a real community dialog and participation in management of Roosevelt Island. He told the residents that he favors having elected Island residents on the RIOCC Board, a position advocated by the Island's "movement for democracy."

- In backing the idea of community input on Southtown, Lynch assured the residents that nothing has been firmly and finally decided about Southtown. He said that the Governor's plan for Roosevelt Island is to build it out as originally planned.

- Lynch assured the residents that the State has funds for emergencies, responding to concerns that a tight RIOCC budget may leave the Island unable to handle a sudden problem.

- In a discussion of racial matters, he observed that existing conflict on Roosevelt Island could "fester" if not addressed.

Lynch seemed to feel, said the residents, that RIOCC President Blue has taken more latitude in his management of Roosevelt Island than is appropriate. The residents observed that neither Lynch nor Jones made an effort to defend Blue or his administration, despite agreeing with some Blue positions on specific issues.



Poof! It's a Megastore. Well, not quite "poof." Although the Sloan's Market in Motorgate may *seem* to have become twice its size (from 12,000 square feet to 24,000) and a Gristede's overnight, it's been some five years in the transformation, largely pushed along by Island resident James Kaufman (inset), a member of the RIRA Common Council, who is legal counsel to Big Apple Markets. The new store is having its grand opening this week. More photos and a personal reflection by Judith Berdy appear on page 13.

Season's Greetings from *The WIRE*!

Senator Maloney?

There has been considerable speculation in the media about potential Democratic challengers to Senator Al D’Amato in the upcoming election. Many names have been mentioned, but one that I have not seen, and one that I think should be included, is that of our own Representative Carolyn Maloney.

Carolyn has a lengthy record in public service, including the City Council and the Congress. She has been associated with major legislative initiatives in the House, including many that have advanced the rights of women and families.

Carolyn originated and passed reform bills to centralize and improve federal debt collection, saving us taxpayers billions annually. She has a key role in the future of Governor’s Island as Ranking Member of the House subcommittee providing input on that decision.

As Vice Chair of the Women’s Caucus, the third-term member of Congress has passed legislation emphasizing foster-care reform, funding women’s needs and reproductive freedom. She got national attention for her report during the 105th Congress that analyzed data on sexual harassment and assault in the military.

Last year, her work on economics and finance led to an appointment to the esteemed Joint Economic Committee, the first woman so honored. In her ten years of service as a member of the City Council, beginning in 1982, Carolyn represented the minority district of East Harlem.

In my opinion the party should be taking a look at her.

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The Thin Blue Line

Now that the official word has been received here on the 15-month repair of our only subway will the powers-that-be at the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation relent and take off the pressure on the Tram? Or will they still carry on their war with the majority of residents and insist on trying to reduce hours on our icon? (By the way, have you noticed how often that word is used today?)

Mega Benefits, Mega Concerns

I’m likely one of the few people here who still hasn’t been inside the new, expanded Gristede’s, but I certainly am looking forward to it at the first opportunity. Everyone is talking about it and the current buzz (there’s another one of those words) is that it is a big hit although still pricey despite lots of specials. Also, what worries me is its impact on several of our other merchants.

Speaking of Eating

You can help beat hunger in our City! That’s the theme of our Public Safety’s drive for canned and other non-perishable food for distribution to Emergency Food Programs in the city. Donations will be accepted through January 1 at Public Safety, 552 Main Street.

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Happy Holidays



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Letters

Motorgate: Non Residents Pay Less

To the Editor:

It’s been simmering inside of me for awhile – that annoyance that bubbles under the surface. In particular, I would notice it when we would come home on a Sunday or holiday evening and attempt to park at Motorgate. Trying to find a spot is a real challenge. Usually we get the last spot after we climb higher and higher in the garage. Some future night we probably won’t find one at all, destined to drive round and round perpetually, like the famous sad song about the man who rode forever on the Boston MTA, “the man who never returned.”

The simmer has now expanded into a full boil since I now know that not only do non-residents pay less than residents – but *significantly* less. After receiving an ad in the mail hoping to lure non-Roosevelt Islanders to Motorgate, I discovered that they pay less than half what we do – we pay \$150 for a general spot, and they pay \$61.31!

In what other community do non-residents get preference over residents? In many communities you can’t even buy a spot, let alone get a discount for not living there! And if the present PR campaign continues with unlimited access, eventually there will be so many cars that my forecast of eternal motion is destined to become a fact.

Would someone explain to me why presently I should have to pay \$150 in order to waste my time and anxiety searching high and low for a parking place? Priority should be given to residents and a limit put on the number of cars allowed in the garage (beyond those of Roosevelt Islanders). Let others stay in the visitor’s section if necessary. I see cars with license plates from Tennessee, Connecticut, etc. throughout the garage. Why would they pay less than we do – unless of course you account for the fact that Edison Parking has us over the proverbial barrel – i.e. they can do what they want because where else are we going to go? (Unlike other communities, we don’t even have local street parking.)

Edison’s policy is just another outrageous example of Roosevelt Island “democracy.”

Anirate Westview Resident (name withheld)

About that School Incident...

To my Fellow Islanders:

Many of you have seen a couple of letters recently posted around the island claiming a second grader was “assaulted” while attending class at PS/IS 217. The letters first accused the school authorities of handling the situation extremely poorly and trying to sweep it under the rug, and then when the school, along with the PTA, issued a short statement of explanation, they were labeled with “the pathetic attempt at some form of redemption.”

As someone not directly involved in the incident, it is hard to know the exact specifics of what went on, since all this information is, for obvious reasons, confidential. Indeed, even if one were directly involved, given the fact that all the information comes from these second graders filtered through different adults, it is virtually impossible to determine with any real certitude what exactly went on.

However, a few things for sure are known. At this grade level the bathrooms are actually right in the classroom, and it is very easy for a child to slip in and out. Secondly, there was no discernible physical injury to any of the children involved. From this it is easy to see how the school officials thought it a small scuffle among children that started and ended quickly; something barely to be given a second thought. It was only after the boy of the family who is so upset over the incident told his mother that the incident started to become enlarged. Exactly what the boy told his mother and its accuracy is a question that will probably forever remain unanswered.

In light of what little really can be determined, as with many things in life, it is important that we listen to how the concerned parties are acting and reacting rather than what they are claiming. I am a parent with a kindergarten student in the school. Both my wife and I have extensive contact and involvement with the teacher of our son, numerous school and PTA officials and, in particular, the principal. We have been consistently impressed with the professionalism, warmth, sensitivity and dedication to the children. As an example, in the morning you will often see the principal in the hall greeting the students with particular attention shown to those who are upset or out of sorts or showing signs of misbehaving. Further, what seems incredible to me is she seems to know the name of every child in the school.

On the other hand, I do not know the family of the boy who was involved in this regrettable incident; all I know are the two letters that were posted around the island. When one reads them, there is a distinct accusatory, inflamed, almost ranting tone.

Looking at what can possibly be learned of what actually happened and reactions of all those involved, it leaves me with a strong uneasy feeling about the family of this boy and much more importantly, a deep chill in witnessing the bludgeonings so easily rained down on even our best educators.

With many hopes that we will all recover from this incident quickly and be able to allow our highly competent and sensitive school staff to focus on educating, in which I have every confidence of their abilities.

Lee Edelman

Bringing Health Care Home

To the Editor:

I was quoted in *The Times* as saying, “We used to call this Paradise Island—but not any more.” Well, I have good news. Maybe we’re at least semi-Paradise Island.

How come? Jack Resnick, M.D. has decided to grace our Island with his warmth and talents. I rushed to his office as soon as I heard – and am I glad I did! I’d visit him anywhere in Manhattan or Queens – but, let’s face it, of all our health care providers, the one most likely to be needed in an emergency is our internist. So what could be more fortunate than having him right on the Island?

My heart sank when I learned that Dr. Resnick had, at the request of many patients, joined Empire Associates HMO. I will never join an HMO. But what luck! Dr. Resnick also accepts non-HMO patients!

I’ll admit there was one disappointment—he accepts Medicare assignment and I like to feel I’m paying my own way; I like to write a check as I leave the doctor’s office. Well, you know what they say: “You can’t have everything.”

Frances Salten

Letters Policy

The WIRE will consider publication of letters on a *Name Withheld* basis, but the writer’s name, address, and phone number must be provided. Submit on IBM-compatible 3.5” floppy disk (any wordprocessing software) left at 531 Main Street for *The WIRE*; by ASCII text email (72260.20@compuserve.com); or typed, left at 531 Main Street. All letters are subject to editing for length.

To the Governor: Patience Thinning

Governor George Pataki
c/o Ms.Berry Ravitz, Executive Chamber
633 Third Ave., 38th Floor
New York, NY 10017

Dear Governor Pataki:

On July 9 we wrote to you—on your invitation—to express our concerns about our community of Roosevelt Island. We had no response until October 16, when we heard, not from you, but from Joseph Lynch, Acting Commissioner of DHCR.

Mr. Lynch responded point by point to our letter but we can only conclude that he missed the point. The responses are actually non-responses, of the type we are used to hearing from Dr. Jerome Blue, the president of the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation. Most of our concerns are still outstanding; they still have not been addressed. Moreover, since we wrote our letter other concerns have arisen: the proposed development of Southpoint (which was to have been parkland); exorbitant Sportspark pool fees; the attempted takeover of scheduling in our Good Shepherd Church; the repeated threat of cuts in Tramway service, token (or no) consultation with residents on development issues; the construction of a racial divide.

The patience of the residents of the Island is wearing thin as we see governing by fiat on the part of RIOC. Residents have already organized one protest since we last wrote to you, and they are ready to engage in more in order to make their strong feelings heard and acknowledged. In our letter we extended an invitation to you to visit our Island and to meet with a group of concerned residents in a nonconfrontational setting. That invitation still holds. We think such a visit would go a long way toward defusing the situation here and giving some assurance that we are not the forgotten stepchild of the state.

We look forward to hearing from you, Governor.

**Virginia J. Ewald
Barbara Packer
Karen M. Puritz**

Praising PS/IS 217

To the Editor:

Some Islanders assume that PS/IS 217 is not good enough for their kids – without ever looking into it. I couldn’t be more pleased with my son’s kindergarten experience. He’s enjoying his classes and learning a lot. His teacher is very responsive to him. He comes home excited about something every day. In the eighth grade, they do a great job helping the kids get through the high school application process. My oldest daughter went from IS 217 to Bronx Science, and I have the dedication of several IS 217 teachers to thank for that. It’s here. Do yourself a favor and check it out.

Ivy Hamlin

Wonderful Drood!

To the Editor:

What a wonderful evening we recently spent seeing *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, presented by the Main Street Theatre. The plan had all the ingredients of a first-class musical triumph on Broadway: surprise outstanding performances by our own Roosevelt Island neighbors, great singing and dancing, and a most unusual plot with twists, turns, comedy and drama. And what’s more, Nancy Howe playing such a part. Who would have believed it?

My wife and I came away with a wonderful feeling of glow and joy.

While on Broadway tickets are so high and often hard to get, right here on our little Island, we have our own theatrical gold mine, at \$15-\$25 a ticket!

The moral of the story: Next time, don’t walk, run to get your tickets!

Finally, to Worth and Nancy Howe, a hearty *Bravo!* We love you.

Al Weinstein

RIRA

Roosevelt Island Residents Association Common Council Members Eastwood

Isabel Adelson, 510 Main St. #1302, 212-688-4245

Gwen Almo-Duvar, 540 Main St. #736, 212-371-0201

David Blumberg, 546 Main St., 212-759-7498

Joan Christianson, 540 Main St. #446, 212-759-8336

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Walter Hill, 560 Main St. #710, 212-715-9847

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Jesse Rademaker, 560 Main St. #462, 212-752-1388

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Linda Warren, 560 Main St. #1006, 212-832-2915

Island House

Judith Berdy, 575 Main St. #1301, 212-688-4836, 212-628-9754

Joan Brooks, 575 Main St. #1908, 212-838-7688

Joseph Castine, 555 Main St. #1104, 212-308-6722

Debra Mount Cornet, 555 Main St. #1311, 212-838-2729

Frank Farance, 555 Main St. #705, 212-838-7447

Patrick Stewart, **President**, 575 Main St. #1602, 212-371-2332

Manhattan Park

Charles (Chip) Damsel III, 40 River Rd. #11E, 212-753-3247

Sherie Helstien & Matthew Katz, 20 River Rd. #16J, 212-935-7534

Guy Midkiff, 20 River Rd. #7E, 212-935-7359

Jeffrey Palmer, 30 River Rd. #5R, 212-935-5194

Harry Small, 40 River Rd. #8M, 212-583-0064

Rivercross

Malcolm Cohen, 531 Main St. , 212-758-1661

Jeffrey Hochman, 531 Main St. #710, 212-688-7383

Ron Schuppert, **Vice President**, 531 Main St. #923, 212-308-9863

Al Weinstein, 531 Main St. #126, 212-688-1381

Westview

Edward Gardner, 595 Main St. #1112, 212-421-1231

Joseph Palermo, 595 Main St. #1202, 212-486-2596

Zakie Wazani, 625 Main St. #725, 212-759-6949, fax 212-751-3839

I believe in magic. I always have. Of course, for eleven months of the year, I keep it pretty much under wraps, and rely on a belief in all those other, more mundane virtues to inspire me to get things done. Each December, though, out it pops, as if it were brand new.

I owe it to my mother, of course, as we all do. I say, "We all do," because I firmly believe that somewhere, each of us still has that core belief in magic, and that we all got it the same way, on the morning of some other December 25th.

Oh, admittedly it gets dented and tarnished, and some of us undoubtedly believe we've routed it out for good, but it's still there. It's almost indestructible, thank goodness. It's

what saves us each time we think we've finally come to the 'last straw,' and we've all seen a few last straws in our lives.

Today's mothers amaze me. Most of them have jobs on top of the 24-hour-a-day job they have to begin with. Many, far too many, are alone. And yet, they still manage, somehow, to create the miracle of Christmas morning for another child, ensuring that yet another generation will be blessed with the knowledge of magic, true magic.

I don't mean at all to disparage fathers in all this, but mostly, if we admit it, we just follow directions, we know who's in charge of Christmas.

Happily for me, I get to spend a lot of time with a two-year-old these days, and recently I watched Zoe encounter her first Christmas tree. Houdini himself had nothing to touch it. Someone had to give, to give of themselves in time and effort and love for that Christmas tree to be there at all.

I sincerely wish each of you the joy of the magic of Christmas, and hope that, for at least one moment, you are touched with the memory of your own most magical personal Christmas. May each of us know love in our own hearts, and may each of us be inspired to give of that love to others.



Patrick Stewart

COMING UP

Compiled by Claire Friedland • 317-8523

Dec. 22, Monday Evenings, 8:00 to 10:00 p.m., Bridge, Director/instructor Lila Gilbert, 546 Main Street, main floor, private room newly refurbished. Free. Bring your own cards.

Jan. 3, Sunday, 10:00 a.m. – Roosevelt Island Art Association meets the first Sunday of every month at 546 Main Street, in the Artists' Studio, 12th floor. For information: **421-5939**.

Jan. 7, Wednesday, 8:00 p.m., Roosevelt Island Residents Association (RIRA). Downstairs at the Chapel of the Good Shepherd.

Jan. 8, Thursday, 10:00 a.m., Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation (RIOC) Board of Directors meeting. Chapel of the Good Shepherd.

At the Senior Center

Every week:

Stay Well (Exercise), **Mondays** 10-11 a.m., **Wednesdays** 9:30-10 a.m.

English Classes, Mondays 12-1 p.m., **Wednesdays & Fridays** 10-11

T'ai Chi (exercise), **Thursdays** 10-11 a.m.

Arts & Crafts - Mondays 12:45 p.m.

Special events:

Dec. 20 (Saturday) 8:00 p.m. – RISA'S Holiday party

Dec. 23 Tuesday, 10-4 p.m. – Metrocard Bus (refill your Metrocard without going to the subway, or apply for the Metrocard. Entire community welcome.)

Dec. 25 (Christmas Day) – **Closed**: Activities, Lunch, Office

Dec. 26 & January 9 (Fridays) - 12:30 p.m. – Oldies But Goldies Movie

Dec. 30 (Tuesday) 10:30 a.m. – Nutritionist Denise Sabal, Healthy Holiday Eating, Part 2

Dec. 31 (Wednesday) – 8:00 p.m. - RISA'S New Years Party

Jan. 14, 1998 (Wednesday) – 10:00 a.m. – Learn how the Medical Alert System can save your life.

Public Safety Blotter

November 26 - Grand Larceny, 625 Main Street. A resident reported that jewelry valued at about \$40,000 had been removed from her apartment. She said that a relative had been seen carrying a large suitcase and entering a taxi in front of the building.

November 29 - Robbery, 30 River Road. A taxi driver reported that a fare picked up in Manhattan and taken to the Island had grabbed her arm as she was making change and forced her to give up about \$150 and keys and then fled.

December 1 - Attempted Robbery, 599 Main Street. Speaking through a translator, the owner of the local jewelry store reported that two men, one with a gun in the waistband of his pants, had tried to pull a holdup. When the victim screamed, the duo fled. A search by police failed to net the pair.

December 4 - Arrest for Grand Larceny, 4 River Road, front. A PSD detective arrested a 19-year-old Island resident on an open NYPD complaint, in front of his home. When Anibal Ramirez reportedly refused to be handcuffed, additional PSD officers were summoned to effect the arrest. Allegedly, Ramirez stole a cellular phone from his employer and used it to charge thousands of dollars of calls.

December 6 - Disorderly Conduct, 540 Main Street. Responding to an earlier complaint, PSD Officers were near the third-floor laundry room when they heard loud noises coming from the elevator. Two officers went to the main level while two others remained in place. As the doors opened at the third floor, six juveniles were seen kicking and banging the car walls. Their parents were called to the PSD office and, when there was no visible damage noted to the elevator, the youths were handed over to parental custody.

December 7 - DOA, east roadway beneath the 59th Street Bridge. The body of an Island teenager, C.D. Scott, was discovered by a PSD officer in the pre-dawn hours. The youth apparently fell after being stricken ill while on the bridge, according to reports.



Mr. & Mrs. Walter Hill recently celebrated their 45th anniversary.

Rent, from page 1

An object lesson it might be, but for Island House residents, it's more of an immediate crisis in the making. Working through the tangled history of the building's finances, its mind-numbing lease, and its need for extensive repairs and renovation - and doing all this at a time when the building's owner and residents are trying to sort out a conversion of the building to an occupant-owned cooperative - well, it's a massive migraine.

Questions, Options, Questions

The matter raises questions. Why didn't the State start imposing increases long before now? (The building was in receivership, but that wouldn't have prevented an increase in ground rent.) Can the State impose the increases now, having foregone them for so long? Can the State legitimately make up for lost years in one fell swoop? Does RIOC actually have the authority to impose the increase? Did RIOC inform State entities above it in the power structure that it was about to do this? In the absence of a City assessment, does any increase based on building or land value have legitimacy? If the increases are to be imposed, is there some way of averaging out the amounts over many years, rather than hitting present tenants with a large catch-up amount in one shot?

And for tenants, will this be a cause for protest or litigation?

As for turning Island House into a cooperative: It needs work. Without the work, it's less of a bargain for buyers. Doing the work requires financial input that would ordinarily come from rents. But if a major part of any rent increase has to go to RIOC, the funds can't go into repairs and improvements. The result: higher rents, a building whose deterioration is not fully arrested in a timely fashion, and a harder sell as a cooperative.

It is tempting to speculate that New York State's withdrawal of a subsidy for Roosevelt Island is the root cause of this potential bump in rents. RIOC needs money, and all the evidence suggests its president, Dr. Jerome Blue, is looking in every nook and cranny for it. He wouldn't have to do that, presumably, were the State's support still in place, as planners originally envisioned. (The Island was to be subsidized until its population reached 20,000; it's presently 8,300.) RIOC therefore might have continued to forego the increase in ground rent and PILOT (payments in lieu of taxes) payments, had the subsidy continued. A more substantial chunk of any rent increase might have gone to repairs.

Yet the State may be required, legally, to impose the increases, as the lease is structured. On the other hand, there are some legal niceties that are supposed to feed into the process, such as a City assessment of the building, and those requirements haven't yet been satisfied.

Hearings on the Island House and Westview rent increase, formally known as Budget Rent Determination, are scheduled for January 20. Just how the normal high drama will be rewritten with this new factor in the mix is anybody's guess.

Memo to Bigelow Pharmacy: Stock up on headache remedies.

I've put out a Christmas list for Santa, and if he finds my wish list acceptable, 1998 will bring *The Main Street WIRE* a genuine **editorial cartoonist** – that is, someone who can actually draw.

If pressed, I'll admit that despite my lack of artistic talent, I genuinely enjoy editorial cartooning. It's a chance to blend reality and symbolism to make a point in a way just subtle enough to require some thought, yet sharp enough to crack the habitual obfuscation of officialdom and make a point. Despite that, *WIRE* readers deserve someone in these pages who has skill

with the implements of the artist, as well as the wit that sometimes fails me. Candidates, pick up the phone. The number here is **826-9055**.

The WIRE's list for Santa also includes **commissioned advertising sellers** for Queens and Manhattan. Ellen Levy's tireless efforts on behalf of this publication are one of its consistent strengths, though I fail to

*island
observer*

tell Ellen that often enough. But she deserves some help, and less of a panic each issue to make sure we hit the quota that will put the paper over the break-even mark.

And no managing editor's Christmas list would be complete without a cry for more **feature writers** of the caliber of Barbara Lowenthal and Jim Baehler. Roosevelt Island has so many talented writers – and writing for these pages is a great way to invest some of yourself in your community.

That number, again, is **826-9055**.

Best of the season!

Dick Lutz

John & Tony's

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**Beside Motorgate
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HAPPY HOLIDAYS!!



St. Frances Xavier Cabrini Parish

Holiday Schedule

Christmas Eve

Wednesday, December 24

Midnight Mass at 10:00 P.M.

Christmas Day

Thursday, December 25

Mass on Christmas Day at 11:15 A.M.

New Year's Eve

Wednesday, December 31

Holy Hour from 11:30 PM to 12:30 AM

Cabrini Chapel, 564 Main Street

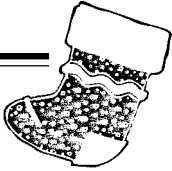
New Year's Day

Thursday, January 1, 1998

Mass at 11:15

All are invited

Gristede's full page



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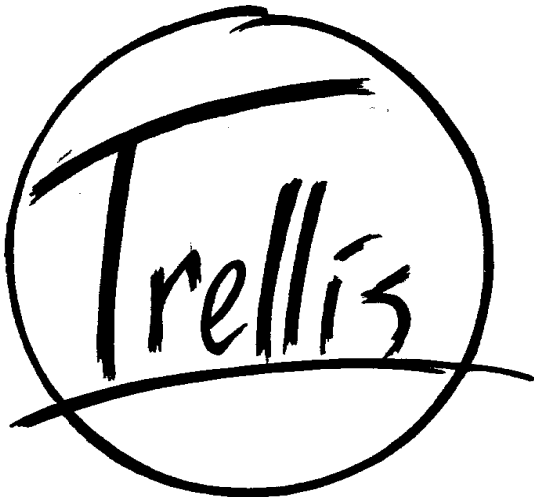
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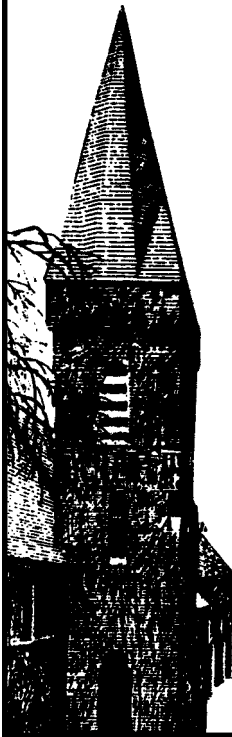
Sunday School Christmas Program, December 21, at 4:00 p.m., Lower Community Room. You do not need to have a child in Sunday School to have your heart warmed by this special service. Come and support and encourage our Island's young people!

Christmas Eve Service – Family Service of Holy Communion, December 24 at 8:00 p.m. Main Chapel

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Join us for our Gospel Sermon and traditional Hymns from our choir.
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For more information on all Good Shepherd Services and Programs,
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David Kraut, Mary Jo Schager, Greg Goodman



Carrie Rupnow, foreground; Elizabeth Mialaret, Kevin Gates, Jim Baehler, Scott Kerstetter

Being in *Drood*

by Jim Baehler

“Places, please! Places, everyone!” The stage manager’s call momentarily quelled the nervous jokes and restless pacing backstage at the Main Street Theatre. In each performer’s mind hummed the same refrain, “Six weeks isn’t enough rehearsal time! This play is too demanding! How can opening night be here already?”

Opening Night! A magical phrase for any theater. Whether in a Broadway playhouse or a church basement, opening night produces the same thrilling state of apprehension for all those involved in the endeavor to please an audience and win its applause. Few of us in the cast had seen a stage production of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, so its book, music and lyrics were indeed a mystery. Our faith in the skill and judgment of Worth and Nancy Howe, the creative core of the Main Street Theatre, had drawn us to the auditions hoping a suitable part was available.

And the concept of a musical drama from an unfinished novel by Dickens was intriguing, as was the plan to allow each night’s audience to vote on how they thought the drama should unfold. “Hey, this could be a very interesting night in the theater” was in the mind of each performer. Then came the first few rehearsals and the realization that *Drood* contained the most hellish set of music and lyrics ever put on paper. This was like Gilbert and Sullivan on speed – tongue-twisting lyrics delivered at a pace that a tobacco auctioneer might stumble over, all to be sung on a melodic line in time to the music!

Who is this Rupert Holmes listed as author, composer and lyricist? An Englishman yes, but he had obviously crossed the Channel to attend the Marquis de Sade School of Music. He created the role of Chairman for *Drood*, which is so extensive and daunting that Worth Howe in his wisdom divided it in two. Mary Jo Schager was assigned half, then one week into rehearsal learned that the gentleman to play the other half would not be available and, without a replacement, it would be much appreciated if Mary Jo could assume the entire role. We gasped at the thought of one person being on stage virtually every minute of the production and with an introduction to Act Two that Worth aptly described as memorizing the first two chapters of *War and Peace*. With some understandable hesitation Mary Jo agreed to do the entire role as my eyes



Jim Baehler

widened in admiration and awe.

First rehearsals are an interesting time for a number of reasons, especially with a cast that has not previously worked together. In each person’s mind are two thoughts, can I do my part justice and, are the other performers up to their parts? Since Worth would be the director and both he and Nancy Howe were to have roles, I knew that their skill and training would benefit us all. Mary Jo had demonstrated her consummate ability as a singer and actress in many previous Main Street Theatre productions and my only concern was the incredible demands that the role of Chairman places upon any performer. That she was able to master the part while working full time during the day is a staggering accomplishment. Which was also true of Carrie Rupnow and Scott Kerstetter, whose musical numbers are as difficult and intricate as any I have ever



The company



Bob McDowell

witnessed. There are many groups of professional actors that would find it all but impossible to mount a full-scale musical in six weeks of part-time rehearsals but that is the history and, to some extent, the pride of the Main Street Theatre.

Aside from the other principals, I knew that any musical with Anita Michael in a major role would be a joy to a fellow performer. You can go to any show on Broadway or any cabaret in the city and you will not see an actress and singer whose talent exceeds hers. I was in the audience at the first rehearsal when Anita performed *The Wages of Sin*, and all I could say to myself was, *How many times have I paid \$75 for a Broadway musical and not seen a show-stopper like that.* Afterward, the cast agreed that any Island resident who didn’t pay \$15 or \$25 to see *Drood* missed out on a musical number they would remember forever.

Soon after rehearsals began any questions about the ability of the other cast members quickly dissolved. It was instantly apparent that the romantic leads, Scott Kerstetter and Carrie Rupnow, had voices comparable to any on Broadway. They handled the most difficult musical passages with ease and clarity. Their duet, *You Call it Love*, is a furious piece in which Jasper presses his love on Rosa who fiercely spurns his advances. The music, lyrics, and timing are so difficult that I quickly retitled it, *You Call it Love - I Call it Heartburn.*

Kevin Gates as Neville Landless, described as “recently arrived from Ceylon with his twin sister, Helena,” portrayed by Elizabeth Mialaret, were a wonderfully exotic couple and brought the air of mystery that we ascribe to the Indian subcontinent and its environs. After one performance, and while still in makeup, Kevin was asked by a member of the audience what part of India he was native to. No greater praise could an actor from Texas receive.

Those who know David Kraut may have been surprised as I was by the flair for comedy he demonstrated in his role of Durdles, the drunken stonemason. I was pleased to discover that beneath David’s serious manner beats the heart of an *opera bouffe* comic. Greg Goodman, as Durdles’ young son, could get a laugh by simply opening a curtain with the proper panache and when matched by the audience with Anita Michael as lovers at the end of the show left even the cast laughing.

OK, the rest of the cast is superb, now what about me? Is this a role that I can portray up to the standard set by the others? Who is this Reverend Crisparkle that I am to play? The script gives only one hint, he was once engaged to Rosa’s mother. All right then, why was the engagement broken – and by whom? No way of knowing. There is also the slightest suggestion that perhaps Crisparkle threw Rosa’s mother off a cliff in a jealous rage. Not much to build a character on. All right, let’s think about this. Do I play the character straight? That doesn’t make sense; the script reads like a farce, with absurd situations and exaggerated characters.

A farce! Hot damn! Here’s a role I can get as wild with as I choose. How wild and in what way? How about combining the worst of a languid English snob with a smarmy American TV evangelist? That could work. I’ll need a snobby English accent married to the deep, portentous tones of the guy on television who needs your money to carry on his work saving souls from damnation. Okay, let’s work on the voice. Make it as smarmy and self-satisfied as possible – a combination of Jimmy Swaggart at his most unctuous and John Cleese at his most British. Surround that with false piety and... I think I’ve got it.

When the cast laughs at your antics then you know you’re on the right path and I soon felt that my character was in place. But there’s no way I can ever feel entirely comfortable with the music. I’m going to have to work on this every minute.



Foreground: Mary Jo Schager, Nancy Howe, Anita Michael



Carrie Rupnow, Scott Kestetter



David Kraut



Anita Michael

Sounding good *and* looking good are not in the picture; I'm just hoping not to embarrass myself during the musical numbers.

In rehearsals, there are the inevitable frustrations of missed cues and bungled lines. *Why does everyone in the cast seem to have their roles under much better control than I do?*

It can get complicated. After the *No Good Can Come From Bad* number, I exit center, close the doors and wait. Kevin opens the doors and exits. He waits for Elizabeth to exit and I close the right door. After Nancy exits I close the right door again while Greg fixes the curtains. He opens the left door while I open the right and feel for the hook in the dark to hold the door in place. I quickly make an entrance stage right while trying to remember my entrance cue and opening lines.

As rehearsals progress, backstage is virtually void of the usual banter and byplay that is so much a part of any theater. The cast is too busy checking dialogue, cues, entrances, and lyrics to engage in japery. Even during our first weekend's performances a peek backstage would have revealed the same study of scripts for many of the cast, including me. In most theaters, such behavior is considered amateurish; with *Drood* it was a scene-saving necessity. The offstage mumbling of upcoming lines by actors waiting to go on was much like the subdued sound of cicadas in the Spring – a low, ever-present hum.

Now it's two days before opening night and time for the first dress rehearsal. My first scene is an embarrassment. I get my first line out but the strangeness of the costumes and the intensity of the lights distract me just as I notice that the sweat is running down Scott's face. *What's going on here?* My next line goes out of my head and I stand there, my brain completely blank. After an agonizing moment Carrie bails me out by saying my line and the scene goes on. As I exit I slap my-



Mary Jo Schager

self in the head hard enough to make my hand sting and vow never to blow another line. No matter what happens, I have to stay fully concentrated!

Friday. *Opening Night.* I'm not as nervous as I usually am, mostly because I enjoy my part. My only apprehension concerns the two numbers I might have to deliver based on the voting of the audience. Just to make things more difficult for the performers, the author provides multiple endings depending on audience choices and we have to be prepared for any of them with little or, in some cases, *no* notice. My luck holds and I am not called upon to deliver either number.

Backstage, afterward, there is an air of subdued elation after our curtain calls. There were no obvious blunders during the performance. The audience laughed in all the right places - and some where we did not expect them to. They heartily applauded the musical and dance numbers. And our curtain calls were greeted with enthusiasm. What more could an actor desire? And our reward is to do it again on Saturday night and twice on Sunday, then repeat it all the next weekend. Perhaps by then I'll have those two numbers well in hand.



Clockwise from lower left: Eugenie Martin, Debbie Beck, Barbara Parker, Jackie Fernandez, Connie Lustig, Marilyn Atkins as Scott Kerstetter's hallucination in an opium den



Elizabeth Mialaret, Kevin Gates

To all our
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the season and for a
happy, healthy
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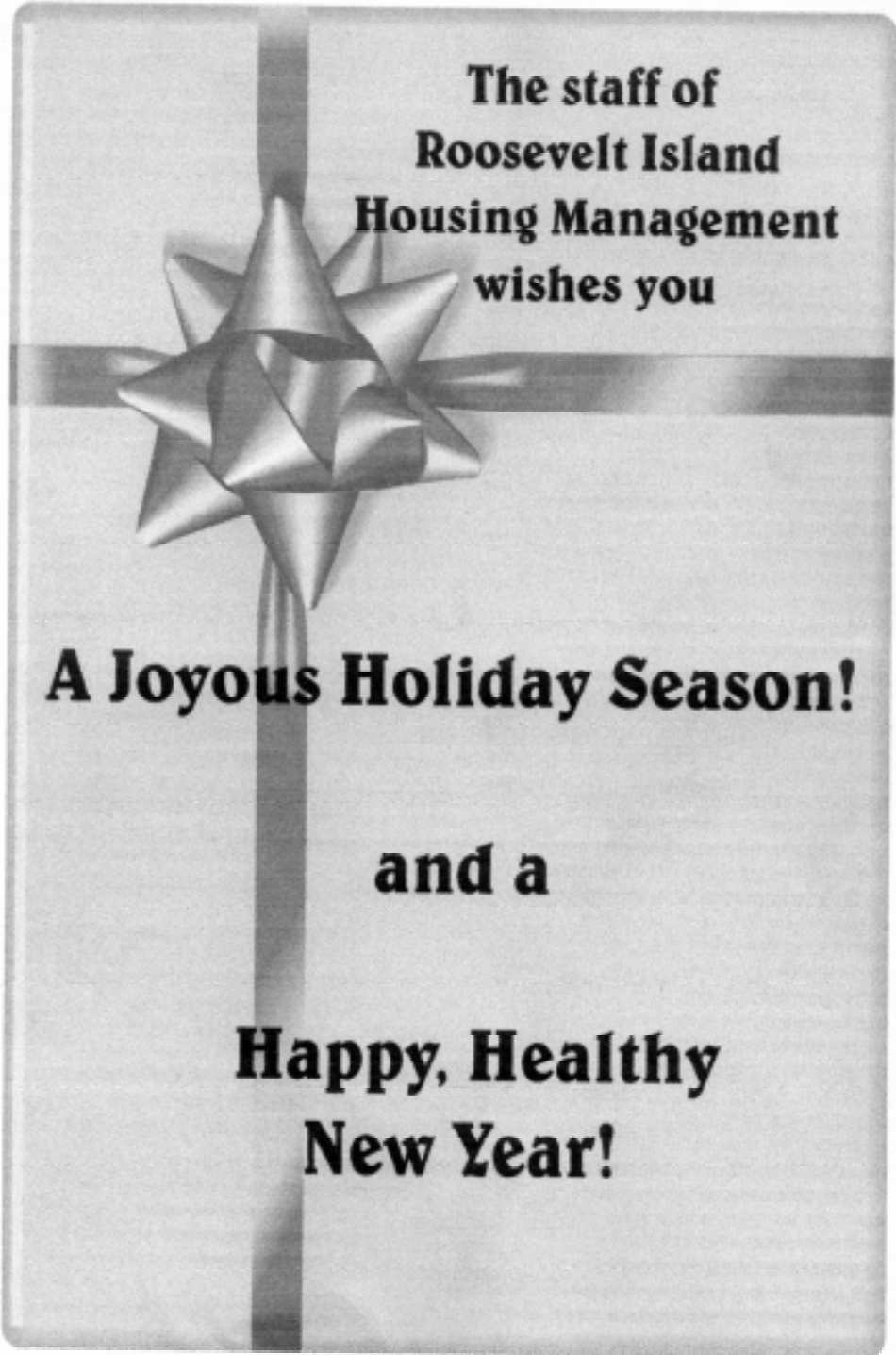


MANHATTAN PARK

ON ROOSEVELT ISLAND

and

Roosevelt Island Associates Inc.

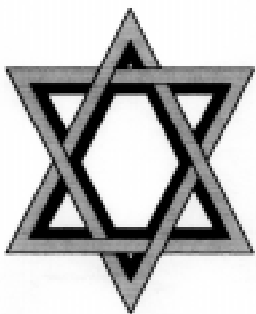


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from
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After years of planning, a new supermarket

by Judith Berdy

After 20 years of scooting up and down the four aisles of Sloan's Market and taking no more than 15 minutes to do my weekly shopping, I am confronted by the 20th Century.

A few days back... After weeks of work the new Sloan's, hereafter to be known as Gristede's Mega Store, is about to open and I head off for an excursion. Even before entering the store, I am confused. You used to walk in the door and go straight ahead or to the left. Now you can go right, left, ahead, up various aisles and all over the place.

The store is squeaky clean and well-lighted. That alone is a shock.

I head off to the farthest point in any supermarket, where the milk is kept. On the way I am confronted by showcases of imported cheese being arranged by two young men. To enhance the display, they are stuffing raffia around the packages. Pates, herrings, specialty foods and smoked fish are also in this area.

Next to the cheeses are many feet of deli counter containing salads, cold cuts and meats that are cut-to-order.

My old friend and corporate manager Al Feraldi shows me the meat counter with pride. He has been telling me this store will be improved...for a long time. We pass the frozen Carvel cakes, aisles of cakes, candies and cookies.

Up and down the aisles we cruise, occasionally reminding the manager that all customers are not 6 feet tall and the high shelving is unreachable to many of us.

There is a small selection of wines now, among all the beers, which include one called "Rhino Chaser." The water variety has improved. We now have water imported from Australia. With all their droughts, maybe we should send it back?

A young man is busy attaching signs to the shelves indicating "Low Fat, No Sugar, Natural" to appropriate items in the cookies and crackers aisle.

Of course I read these signs and proceed to the ice cream section, where Ben and Jerry have established an acre of residency. Haagen Dazs is now in the pint and bigger sizes. Decadence by the gallon, I presume. Sant Amboise gelati looks tempting as do so many new brands.

With all the paper towels on display we can unroll them and circumnavigate the island a few dozen times, I decide.

I have almost finished with my visit to the new part of the store and though it is cold in here, I intrepidly plough on to the original section. There is not yet a plaque attached to the wall of the original area saying "Here Shopped Roosevelt Islanders for 21 Years, 1976-1997."

Fruits and vegetables are vertically displayed in their new area in the middle of the store. The shelving has little nozzles on top of the display. Occasionally the staff brings them to life. A water mist shower moistens the vegetables. The system has the sound of thunder and will soon have lights – finally our own theater of the absurd amongst the lettuce.

Back in the coffee aisle, there are 22 blends to choose from in bean form and grind yourself. Luckily, they also stock my favorite Nescafe Classic.

There is a larger than ever selection of imported foods, kosher, German, Greek and Middle Eastern to choose from. You can buy soy products and milk substitute beverages.

I am happy to report that there is a vast selection of cat foods to choose from, as well as feeding dishes. Now Speedy (my cat) can reject more types of Amore, Fancy Feast and Sheba than ever.

In the packaged meat and fish cases there is even fresh Empire kosher poultry and a large selection of their frozen chicken and turkey. The fish in the adjoining refrigerated cabinets tonight even look fresh and tempting.

To the far end of the store, what used to be vegetables is now flowers, hardware, baby needs, beauty aids. We note that this is the Island replacement for Woolworth's. These aisles are still being stocked, so I decided to investigate this area at a later date.

The front of the store has scanners at the four checkout aisles. They are not in use yet and our old friend Lucy the cashier is trying to get used to the new system. Now, the conveyor belts work on the checkout stands. *Miracles!* You can watch your bill add up on the computer screen as the items are scanned. I am stunned to find that it has cost me \$52.16 to pick up a few impulse items this evening.

It is fun to have our own food store that is considered average in any other city. We have waited and suffered with mediocrity a long time. Hopefully John Catsimatidis, the owner, and Victor, our store manager, and all the employees will maintain this high caliber of shopping. If you can believe it, it is now tempting to go to the supermarket on Roosevelt Island.

There are lots of things that need to be finished in the store and a lot of residents who need to be tempted back to shop here. We all know that fair prices, an efficient staff and good service in a clean store will do this. When I asked neighbors what they thought of the new store the response was universally positive. The universal concern was that the store would still have Manhattan prices and be unaffordable to many families here. I have been told numerous

times that this store will have Queens pricing and will offer better deals than in the past. We will hold you to that pledge. In the meantime, stop by and enjoy the experience.

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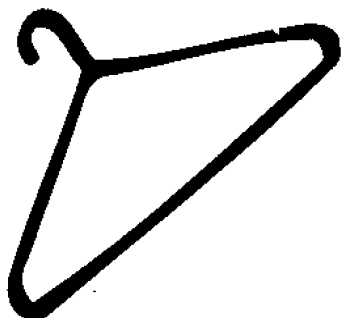
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If you have sports-related news, announcements, questions or comments please call me at **688-3358** or E-mail me at wiresports@aol.com, so it can be included in future issues of *The Main Street WIRE*. Photos of Island sports events (with caption information) are also welcome (leave for Jay Levine at the Westview door station, 625 Main Street).



Real Steuber

At the USA Karate Junior Olympics in Honolulu, Julius Thiry, PhD, President, USA National Karate-do Federation, congratulates Brandon Steuber on his Bronze medal.

In the Junior Division, Sadiq Abubakar got 3 of his and in the Minors Division, Elliot Levine netted 4 and his fourth consecutive shutout as the Yellow unbeaten team.

ers, coaches and referees for your hard work and

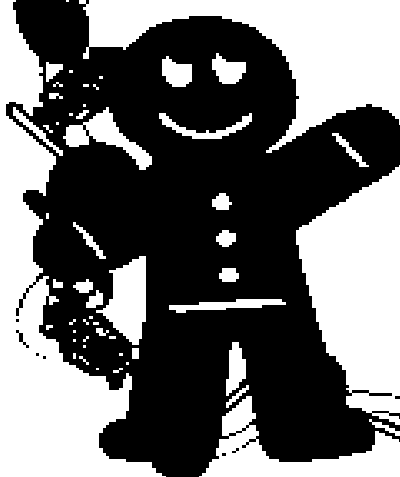
Championship
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