

The Main Street **WIRE**

Roosevelt Island’s Community Newspaper

in association with Website NYC10044



Phase One of project proposed by SSJ Development and Triarc International is the first of two 27-story towers. The elevation at the bottom of this page shows the landmarked Smallpox Hospital (Renwick Ruin), as part of the project. Its exterior walls would be rehabilitated, an 1850’s period roof added, and it would house a Conference Center.

Library Celebration Set for Next Saturday as Island Gets NYPL Unit

by Ivy Ess

Next Saturday (June 6) will mark the fulfillment of a 22-year dream to bring to Roosevelt Island the strength and broad services of the New York Public Library (NYPL). On that date a celebration will take place which will include the formal ceremonies handing over the key to the Roosevelt Island Community Library (RICL) to the NYPL. Every resident and organization on the Island is invited to participate in the festivities.

Starting with a fife and drum corps parade which steps off at 10:00 a.m. at Motorgate, the procession will walk to Good Shepherd Plaza where seating and a rostrum will be set up. The cavalcade will include state, city and Island resident officials; the officers and board members of RICL; NYPL officials; leaders of Island organizations; and youth groups.

Leading public figures who are expected to take part in the library transfer will be Peter Vallone, Speaker of The City Council, State Assemblymember Pete Grannis, and City Councilmember Gifford Miller.

The formal transfer will take place when Ivens V Stanton, president of Roosevelt Island Community Literary (Library) Associates and David Bauer, president emeritus, present the keys to the local library to Paul LeClerc, president of The New York Public Library.

Afterward, there will be a reception, with refreshments served directly in front of the “new” branch which will be open for viewing.

Beginnings

When the first residential buildings on Roosevelt Island were under construction about 23 years ago, the master plan called for the inclusion of a public library as one of the amenities. However, because of a state fiscal crisis, the Island never got its planned library.

Fortunately, Dorothy and Herman Reade, a retired couple, moved from Forest Hills to the Island to spend their later years relaxing and reading. Both consumed books voraciously and were astonished to find that they would have to travel to Manhattan to borrow their reading material.

The Reads approached the construction company and were given a small space to begin their venture. Because of the nature of the arriving Island citizens, they received an enormous amount of current and classical books as well as a large number of borrowers (500 signed up in the first year).

When the new library quickly outgrew the small storage space, management gave the Reads a larger area on the first floor of 625 Main Street. In order to outfit the new quarters

See NYPL, page 6

RIOC & Builder Propose Luxury Hotel-Condo-Conference Center In Commercial Use of Southpoint

RIOC President Jerome Blue is asking his Board of Directors to permit development of Roosevelt Island’s Southpoint as a luxury hotel, condominium, conference center and spa. The Board is scheduled to consider the \$140 million proposal Thursday, June 11. Last week, Blue provided Board members with copies of the proposal. On Wednesday night, he presented a summary to residents attending a meeting at the Chapel of the Good Shepherd.

The Proposal
Two 27-story Towers

The proposal for use of Southpoint calls for a “one-of-a-kind luxury hotel, executive conference center, full-service spa and deluxe restaurant,” according to a letter from SSJ Development, LLC, which is joined in the plan by Triarc International. Primary owner of SSJ is Stephen S. Jemal, associated with Nobody Beats the Wiz stores.

The submission to RIOC is well developed, indicating it has been in preparation for some time. It includes letters from several consulting firms, dealing with matters ranging from sewage, water, gas, and electrical service through consideration of hazards of the permitting process. It deals to some extent with the facility’s impact on Island traffic. Over 200 spaces of on-site parking are envisioned.

Eventually consisting of two towers plus several smaller buildings, the project appears to involve as much as eight years of construction.

The owner would pay the State \$2 million or more in yearly ground rent, according to the proposal.

The proposal does not mention FDR Memorial Park, at one time seen as the only use of the entire area in question.

In Wednesday night’s presentation, RIOC President Jerome Blue indicated the FDR Institute had accepted a proposal to limit the FDR Park to 2.8 acres. In its proposal, SSJ asks for “the right to construct a public park at the southernmost tip of the site... designed to compliment and meld with the resort character of the project.”

The hotel, operated by Marriott, would “rise 27 to 30 stories,” and would offer 355 rooms renting at an average room rate of \$255 or more per night, plus 49 condominium units.

See Proposal, page 6

Reaction
Miller: Plan a “Non-Starter”

Stephen S. Jemal, Present of SSJ Development, didn’t appear at Wednesday night’s community meeting. Judith Berdy, Vice President of the Island’s Historical Society, called him just before the meeting, and was told that he plans to meet with the community only after conditional approval of the plan he has submitted. This was one of a series of points put forward by residents reacting to the plan after it was described by RIOC President Jerome Blue.

Reaction was overwhelmingly negative.

Berdy, for example, said, “I think this is a terrible proposal for Roosevelt Island. We are giving away our south end for [only] \$2 million in rent? For 50 luxury condos, including a penthouse?” Implying the project has no relationship to the community, she added, “This is a typical airport hotel. The architects have designed nothing but hotels.” She added, “No! We are not giving up our island to Mr. Jemal or anybody else.”

Longtime resident Shirley Margolin, a defender of the FDR Memorial, pressed her view that any change in the General Development Plan (GDP) for Roosevelt Island requires approval of the City Council. When Blue appeared to be shaking his head negatively in response to this assertion, a staffer from Councilmember Gifford Miller’s office spoke, reading a statement from Miller.

“It is my strong belief that any development of Southpoint would require an amendment to the GDP [which] calls for this area to be parkland. Any amendment to the GDP must be approved by the City Council. Neither Dr. Blue nor any member of RIOC has ever contacted me, or any other elected official to my knowledge, regarding amending the GDP. Therefore, as far as I am concerned, Southpoint is still designated as parkland and will remain as such. Any plan to develop it in another way is a non-starter.” Barbara Allen, until recently a member of Miller’s staff but now working for the Borough President, said her new boss, Virginia Fields, shares Miller’s view.

Residents reacted to the scale of the project, as well as its nature. Some, like Jeffrey Hochman, a member of the Residents Association Common Council, put forward the view that Roosevelt Island has always been intended to be residential, suggesting that the SSJ project would overwhelm the Island with commercial use. Citing a section of the proposal, Hochman worried that access

See Reaction, page 6



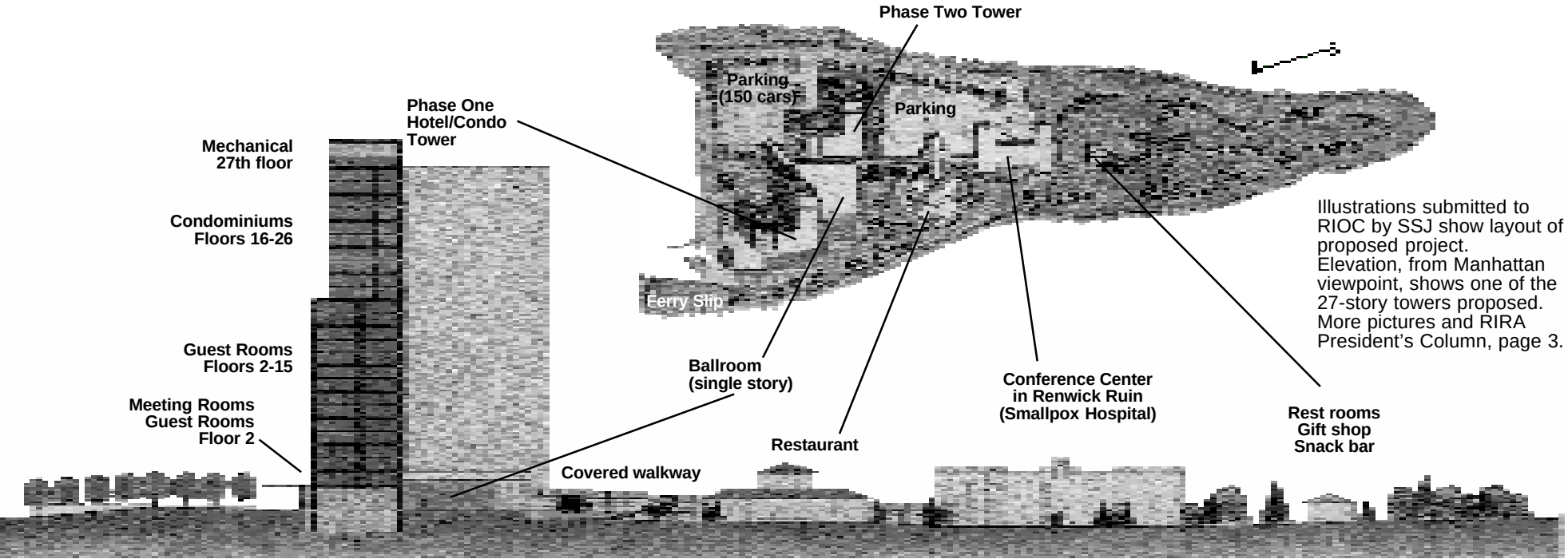
Shirley Margolin told Blue that City Council approval would be required for his plan.



Jerome Blue



Residents lined up Wednesday night to question Blue.



More Stealth Development

Can Jerry Blue do *anything* right? Blue has poisoned the well of resident sentiment so thoroughly that the question of his ability doesn't really matter anymore. Anything carrying the Blue-Pataki-D'Amato label is received with automatic suspicion – a kind of moral conviction that it must be underhanded, just a bit corrupt, probably irresponsible, and certainly unresponsive to the needs of Roosevelt Island residents.

So it was that this past week Island leaders greeted the emergence of the Blue-endorsed SSJ plan for use of Southpoint with a sequence of reactions: *first*, a certainty that the idea had to be bad for the Island; *second*, a special determination to consider the proposal carefully without the Blue pall over it; *third*, the beginning of a clear understanding that this plan for a luxury hotel-condo has absolutely nothing to do with making Roosevelt Island a better place to live. That is...

The residential viability of Roosevelt Island is irrelevant – indeed, the *residents themselves* are irrelevant – in the Blue-Pataki-D'Amato orbit. Were the SSJ plan to produce some inadvertent benefit for residents, it would probably not be the cause of wailing and gnashing of teeth at RIOC, in Albany, or in Senator Al's inner sanctum, but the possibility of benefit or detriment for those who live here is plainly *not* a consideration in the minds of Blue, Pataki, or D'Amato.

Potential developers who wish to drink from this poisoned well should be on notice: Residents here *do* care about the residential viability of this Island, and residents *will be heard* on this subject in reaction to any proposal.

As to the Plan Itself...

At first glance (and that's all we've had), the idea of a grand hotel opposite the United Nations, and some entity managing and caring for the south tip of Roosevelt Island, has some appeal. The thought of world leaders making our Island their temporary home while here to negotiate the future course of the planet has the tempting ring of history.

Jim Bowser is hospitalized for the second time in two weeks. We hope his editorial column will return next issue.



when she turned her back on Jerry Blue and told the audience: "I pity most of you sitting out there. You have no idea what we are talking about here." Berdy's point was well taken.

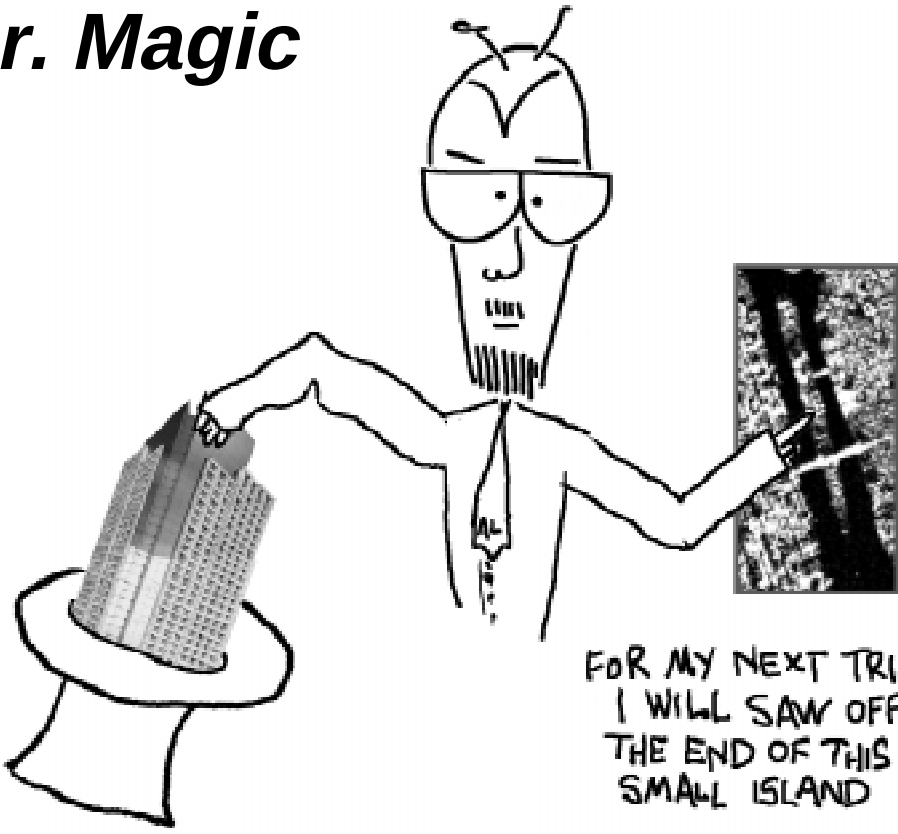
Jerry Blue's attempt to slip yet another project past residents without adequate time for appropriate review by the Residents Association or other resident groups is just more poison in the well. Until he stops treating community input as a pro forma requirement and begins to understand that residents expect a strong role in shaping the future of this residential island, any project he backs is bound to have a rough road to traverse.

And Debbie Beck made something else clear: For every resident in the crowd Wednesday night, there are probably another ten who would have come if the meeting had been given adequate publicity. It was little more than a rumor when the last *WIRE* was published, and RIOC efforts to publicize the event looked more like an effort to keep it a secret.

But of all the comments heard Wednesday night, those of Shirley Margolin and Councilmember Gifford Miller in the statement he sent are most important: This project cannot go forward under the control of Jerry Blue alone. Before any change can be made in the plans for Southpoint, the City Council must have its say. Failing that, legal action should block the plan.

It's scheduled for a vote by the RIOC Board at its meeting Thursday morning, June 11. Like the stealthily-introduced eldercare project, it should be tabled while its impact is calmly considered, without haste, by the residents who have made a long-term commitment to this Island.

Dr. Magic



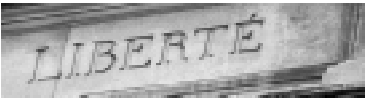
island observer

Paris, Saturday, May 16, 1998:

We have come upon Place de la Bastille, ever alive with the power of the offended common man to recast the leading roles of history. There is a brain-scrambling explosion of irritated pistons as a thousand motorcyclists circle the monument at the center. For thirty minutes, the massed bikers tie up the traffic of five key streets feeding this busy intersection, invoking French history in their anger over some act of government.

Finally, they park, ignoring the horns of taxis and the half-hearted imprecations of gendarmes, who realize they are powerless to deal with so vast an army.

What is government's transgression? A halting multi-language conversation with a sympathetic on-

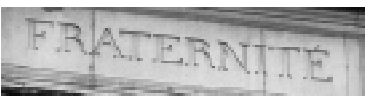


looker reveals that some minister or other has done something with the speed limit. In consequence, the word has been passed among those who speedily thread their way through Paris traffic on two wheels. Their message is simple: They want the decree rolled back, and they have



invoked the power of citizens in a democracy to speak loudly together through song, rhetoric or blasting engine exhaust.

Here, in the home of Voltaire and Rousseau, on the Revolutionary stomping ground of Thomas Jefferson, and the home of *Le Resis-*



tance, the very stone of buildings dating to the 17th Century bristles with democracy and the power of the people.

I am five time zones and 3,600 miles from Roosevelt Island. But, for the moment, my heart is equally at home in this place where officials, when they misstep – even in so small a matter as a speed limit – *hear* from those who take offense.



Mr. Charles DeFino
Executive Director
R.I. Youth Program
Dear Mr. DeFino:

I regret to inform you that Governor Pataki vetoed the \$9,500 that the Assembly and Senate agreed to include in the 1998-99 New York State Budget for the Roosevelt Island Youth Program.

I am shocked and saddened by the Governor's unprecedented and irresponsible action. As was widely reported, the Legislature this year for the first time used a conference committee process to openly and publicly negotiate a fiscally responsible, bipartisan budget, which included funding for programs that are vital to the citizens of New York State. Despite our efforts, the Governor slashed funding for many important community projects and organizations such as yours.

My support for the Roosevelt Island Youth Program was based on its success in providing recreation, education help and guidance to scores of young people. The services offered by your program have been a lifeline to the young people living and going to school on the Island. By singling out your program in his veto frenzy, the Governor has chosen to ignore this important commitment.

I urge you to contact the Governor to express your disappointment with his actions. He needs to know the detrimental effect his veto will have on the Roosevelt Island community. Communications should be directed to: Governor George Pataki, Executive Chamber, State Capitol, Albany, NY 12224 and 518-474-8390 or 212-681-4580.

Alexander B. Grannis
Member of Assembly

To the Editor:
Can't we get rid of RIOC, whose purpose seems to be to make a commercial disaster out of what was a harmonious little village?

Can you believe an impersonal Megastore with high prices ruining our friendly little neighborhood stores?

Take John at Bigelow's. Ten years ago, when I fractured my ankle, he gave me a wheelchair, **free**, as long as needed, and with his good wishes.

When I fell and hurt my back badly two weeks ago, John sent a walker up to my apartment, again **free**.

Question to RIOC: Should I have called the Megastore?

Frances Salten

Letters Policy

The WIRE welcomes letters to the Editor, to the community, and to/from officials, and will consider publication on a *Name Withheld* basis, but the writer's name, address, and telephone number must be provided. **Preferred methods of submission:** IBM-compatible 3.5-inch floppy disk (any wordprocessing software) left at 531 Main Street for *The WIRE*; by ASCII text e-mail (72260.20@compuserve.com); or typed, double-spaced copy left at 531 Main Street or faxed to (212) 755-2540. Clearly handwritten letters will be considered. We cannot take dictation of letters by telephone. **All letters are subject to editing for length and clarity.**



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A photo credit was omitted from *The WIRE's* last issue. Apologies to **H.B. Shepherd**, who should have been credited for the page 1 photo of George Plimpton.



Illustrations adapted from developer's renderings (above and at bottom of page) show the Phase One Hotel/Condo tower (above) and the two-tower configuration (below) that represents completion of Phase Two of the SSJ project.

COMING UP

Compiled by Claire Friedland • 317-8523

At the Senior Center

Sun., May 31, Annual Dance Recital, Main Street Theatre & Dance Alliance, 6:30 p.m. Free.

Mon., June 1, Training and Development classes start at the **Young Adult League**. Classes in use of computers free to those age 18-25 (fee for other ages). Registration, 599 Main Street. **813-9406**.

Sat., June 6, Library Salute Day as the Island's Community Library becomes part of the New York Public Library.

Mon., June 8, Toastmasters, Community Room, 531 Main Street. Last meeting until September. **935-3017**.

Fri.-Sat., June 12-13, next scheduled issue of **The Main Street WIRE**. **Deadlines:** Advertising in the paper, Fri., June 5; decision on stuffers for *The Bag*, Mon., June 8. **Future issues** generally every three weeks (or more often) through summer, then every two weeks September through May. Unscheduled **extra** editions may be published as news and advertising support warrant; advertisers who would like to be included in one or more **extra** editions, without warning, are invited to call **826-9055** to make their interest known. **Phone/fax** for news, (212) **826-9055/755-2540**; phone/fax for advertising inquiries, (212) **751-8214/755-2540**; phone & fax for events, **317-8523**.

Sat., June 20, Roosevelt Island Day. Clean-up and entertainment activities all day. To get involved, call **838-4747**.

Tue., June 23, 6:00 p.m., Debut Presentation of Renwick Lighthouse Collectible, Lighthouse Park, sponsored by Roosevelt Island Historical Society. The replica will be available at the event, at a cost of \$25, or in advance by calling **688-4836**.

Every week:

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

English as a Second Language (ESL), Beginner, Mondays 11-12. ESL, Intermediate, Mondays 12 noon-1:00 p.m.

Bingo, Tuesdays 1:30 p.m.

English Classes, Mon. 12-1 p.m., Wed. 9:30-10 a.m., Fri. 10-11 a.m.

Arts & Crafts, Mon. 12:45-2:30 p.m.

Movie, Thursdays 12:30 p.m.

Scheduled activities & events:

Tuesdays, 10:00 a.m., Arts & Crafts Project, Pot holder

Tuesday, June 2, Jessica Lappin, Councilmember Miller's office

Friday, June 5, 12:30 p.m., Biography of Marilyn Monroe

Tuesday, June 9, all day, RISA election

Friday, June 12, 10:00 a.m., Lake Ronkonkoma (Babarian Restaurant)

Friday, June 12, 12:30-1:30 p.m., Fire Safety Program

Fax or phone event information to **317-8523**. Please provide a phone number for follow-up. **There is no charge** for listing Island events here.

The management of the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation (RIOCC) has proposed the development of a 350-room, 50-unit residential condominium, two-tower Marriott Hotel/Resort within Southpoint Park.

It's Wednesday night as I write this, and I've just come from the "Second" Community Meeting on this matter. The first one, according to RIOCC, was held the day of the Tram accident. I wonder who was invited. I was scheduled for a noontime meeting with RIOCC President Jerome Blue on that day, and when I got there, hoping to discuss the accident, he was nowhere to be found. We were officially told he was not on the Island.

Maybe he was having the Community Meeting in Island Park (Senator Al D'Amato's home town on Long Island.)

Anyway, Wednesday night's meeting was the usual brouhaha. **It's clear that these meetings are held simply as a legal formality.** Blue schedules two hours for the community to vent, then goes back to the office and does what he pleases, with no regard for the community.

Not a single note was taken. No minutes. No record of anything said by the many residents who spoke. Dave Kraut, one of RIOCC's Roosevelt Island resident board members, who chaired the meeting as the head of RIOCC's Development Committee, acknowledged that, until last Friday, he himself had no knowledge that the project existed; that there had been no Development Committee meetings on the subject.

It figures.

All the members of the Board found out about the project the same way last week. Seemingly Blue has little more regard for the Board than he does for the residents.

Clearly he sees it as a done deed, with only a few minor, if irritating, formalities to go through. He seemed genuinely puzzled over why we wouldn't want a two-tower resort (27 stories each) with 350 first-class hotel rooms and 50 condominiums in our back yard.

What does it matter that our streets, designed and constructed for no traffic at all, will now bear the burden of construction traffic for four simultaneous 25-plus story buildings (Southtown and Southpoint), let alone ongoing employee, guest and service traffic?

They want to save money by not extending the AVAC system and plan instead to use dumpsters and garbage trucks. Want to guess how much garbage a 350-room, 50-apartment resort/conference facility can produce? And at what hour the trucks will transit Main Street?

Construction is planned over the next *eight* years. When they're done there will be a manned, gated wall to the north of Goldwater Hospital to insure privacy for the guests. A perimeter walk will be built for resident access to the very tip of the island where the FDR memorial is planned.

We had the usual wrangle over the fact that the General Development Plan (GDP) designates this entire area as open space parkland. RIOCC's attitude is that if no one can come up with the money to develop the park site, RIOCC can put it up for commercial grabs.

The General Development Plan can be modified solely with the approval of the City Council, though Blue clearly does not accept that. Both Gifford Miller's office and Virginia Fields' Manhattan Borough President's office sent formal pledges to protect the parkland. Community Board 8 and the Roosevelt Institute gave similar pledges.

We have a copy of the full Request for Proposal (RFP) that resulted in both this and the Eldercare facility slated for Octagon Park.

At last month's meeting on the eldercare facility, Blue insisted again and again that the site was not in Octagon Park. This is what his own RFP says:

"The request is in connection with the development generally including approximately 10 acres of Southpoint for commercial, residential, or mixed use, and areas of Octagon Park, Tramway Plaza..."

He insists he can change or ignore the General Development Plan. This is what his RFP says on that:

"After execution of the 1969 City Lease, UDC created a subsidiary, Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation, *to carry out the GDP.*" (Emphasis added here and below.)

In the Controls section of the RFP, the first paragraph states:

"Development of sites, and each individual site, *must be in accordance with the City Lease and the GDP.*"

No modification of the GDP has ever been permitted without the approval of the City Council (formerly the Board of Estimate). It will be interesting indeed if Pataki takes this on in an election year, not to mention with the President of the City Council running against him.

Blue has, as the sole New Business slated for the June 11 RIOCC Board of Directors meeting, a resolution that will allow him, and *only him*, to "negotiate... agreement with SSJ for development of the Site... [and] take such actions and execute such agreements *as he deems necessary* to effectuate the foregoing." It adds, "This resolution shall take effect immediately."

Not in our lifetime, Buster.

RIRA President's Column



Patrick Stewart



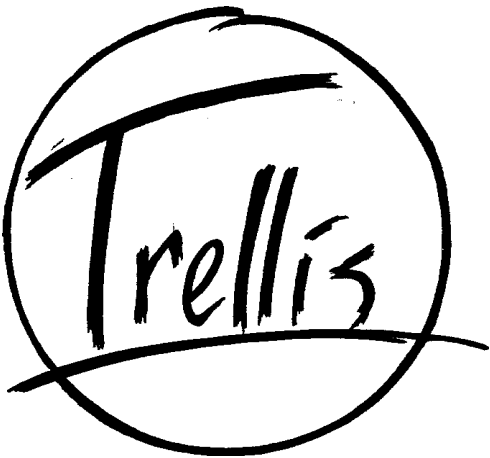
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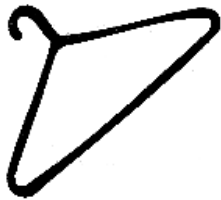
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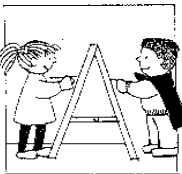
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The Church of the Good Shepherd Special Events

Sunday, May 31, 10:00 a.m.

Richard Parkins, Director of Migration Ministries for the Episcopal Church, will speak about his recent visits to the persecuted Christians of the Sudan, and tell us how we can help them.

Sunday, June 7, 10:00 a.m.

Youth Sunday. Hear our Youth Choir and see our fine young people perform a skit.

Sunday, June 14, 6:00 p.m.

Bishop of New York E. Don Taylor will confirm several parishioners. A reception for the Bishop will follow.

Sundays, 10:00 a.m.

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Church of the Good Shepherd Services and Programs,
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The Clean-Up Cubs. Roosevelt Island Cub Scout Pack 59 celebrated Earth Day in late April by collecting trash all over the Island.

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