

Next issue:
February 26-27

Roosevelt Island's Community Newspaper

in association with Website NYC10044

The Main Street WIRE



Ali Khan

Stationery Store Faces Squeeze

by Mary Camper-Titsingh

On January 19th there was a sign on the door of the Roosevelt Island Stationers Store: *Shop is closed for Muslim holiday. You can pay me later.* The newspapers were unattended and neatly arranged on a trestle in front of the shop's closed door.

That's the kind of friendliness and courtesy that Island residents have come to appreciate about Ali Khan, the Stationery Shop's Manager.

"Have you noticed how worried Ali looks lately?" a friend asked me recently. She also buys a daily newspaper at the shop. I had seen the uncharacteristically drawn and sad look on Ali's broad face, though he always smiles a friendly hello whenever I see him.

"Are you OK?" I asked him. "I'm worried about keeping the store open," he confessed. "I'm having trouble meeting my rent. Since I had to let one of my helpers

See Kahn, page 10

Two-Story Plan for Mini-Schools Tabled; Eldercare May Take Sportspark Site

Site South of Bridge Would Rise 31 Stories

Wednesday night, a Town Meeting convened by City Councilmember Gifford Miller heard spirited community criticism of a site at Sportspark for an eldercare facility.

Thursday morning, the Board of the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation met and unanimously approved the Sportspark site.

The vote seemed to sweep aside resident objections based on air quality at the bridge, questions about the suitability of a 31-story tower just south of the Queensboro Bridge, matters of traffic, and other considerations.

To some, this was a distinct disconnect, if not an unusual one, between resident views and RIOC action. The behind-the-scenes considerations that led to the vote were not immediately apparent. It appears, however, that RIOC Board members were responding to two influences: The community appears to favor development of an eldercare capability. The developer, Engel-Burman, is weary of being "bounced" from site, as one of the partners described it at Wednesday's Town Meeting at PS 217.

RIOC President Jerome Blue had led Engel-Burman to believe Octagon Park would be available for the proposed facility, but a carefully developed plan was set aside when resident leaders raised a red flag over the taking of parkland.

Almost nothing favorable was said about the Sportspark site at Wednesday night's Town Meeting. "This site stinks," declared Judith Berdy, a member of the Residents Association Common Council. Referring to the fact that all of Sportspark except the swimming pool and locker room would be demolished, she added, "We should not lose a gym to build a 31-story building. Put it in Southtown where it belongs."

Unofficially, in fact, word was out that Engel-Burman had talked with The Related Companies, which has control of the Southtown site, but had found Related's terms too pricey. But by the end of Wednesday night's Town Meeting, the two interests had agreed to talk again. To some observers, that development suggests that Thursday's RIOC vote to

See Eldercare, page 10

Quick Community Response To Condo Plan for Schools

Swift community reaction has again blocked a development plan promoted by RIOC President Jerome Blue. This one would have authorized addition of a floor to school buildings at Westview, Island House (diagram, bottom of page), and Rivercross, converting them to condos.

The plan was set aside for future consideration at Thursday morning's meeting of the RIOC Board of Directors.

Community leaders, and residents of the affected buildings, objected when Blue announced to a small mailing list that the plan, proposed by Diane Wilson of Corporate Realty Partners, was available for inspection at his office. Some activists had trouble getting detailed information, but a memo from Doryne Isley of Roosevelt Island Housing Management alerted residents that Wilson's plans contemplate addition of a full second floor to the buildings. Sight lines would be affected. In addition, some of the condo units would have fireplaces whose chimney gases arguably would float upward toward the upper stories of the adjacent structures.

Residents objected that Blue was allowing only about a week for responses, but not providing adequate

information — there were no architectural renderings, for example — on which to base a reaction. Further, reaction was due before Thursday's RIOC Board meeting, and before this week's RIRA Common Council meeting. Judith Berdy complained, "It took three days to get copies of the plans that were offered by RIOC in the letter," and Ken MacDermotRoe told the panel, "We're very mad." He said leaseholds would be affected, and the three days' notice he had received presented an unrealistic deadline for preparing comment. "This is a typical RIOC operation," Berdy said. "It's a disgrace and an insult to the community... not the way to run a public benefit corporation. This operation is a sham. RIOC has completely alienated itself from the community."

Nonetheless, residents marshaled resources. Three groups each shot a list of questions to Blue. The Westview-Island House Task Force objected to the short time provided for community reaction. Blue's office responded that "Community forums and meetings have been held on the proposed development..." None, however, had revealed a plan to add height to the buildings.

The Planning Committee of the Residents Association asked, "How many apartments will have views blocked by the new construction and to what extent?" RIOC answered, "Two apartments in Island House and two apartments in Westview may have a slight diminution of view," a response that was met with disbelief in more than one community gathering.

The owner of Island House, Charles Lucido, told *The WIRE* on Wednesday that he generally favors the Wilson proposal, but awaits a demonstration that views will not be adversely affected, among other concerns. In a statement prepared for Thursday's RIOC Board meeting, Housing

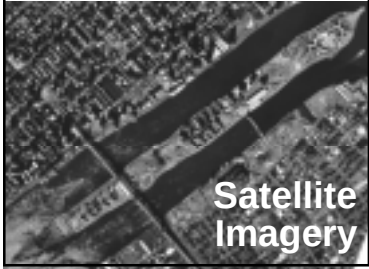
See Mini-Schools, page 10; illustration below

Forget "Acting" – It's Commissioner



This week, the Acting Commissioner of New York State's Division of Housing and Community Renewal, Joseph Lynch, had the "Acting" removed from his title by Governor George Pataki. Lynch chairs meetings of the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation (RIOC) Board of Directors. In recent months, he has taken a stronger hand in planning Roosevelt Island's future, taking some authority away from the controversial President of RIOC, Dr. Jerome Blue.

Inside: Second Avenue Subway Will Serve Island Commuters



Satellite Imagery

Campaign for Passage Starts as Self-Governance Gets Fresh RIRA Backing

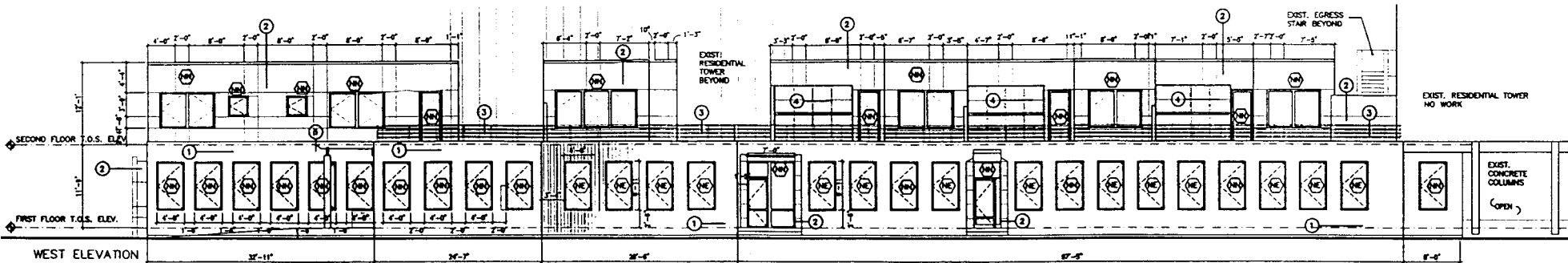
The Roosevelt Island Residents Association (RIRA) Common Council gave a fresh endorsement to self-governance Thursday night. There was near-unanimity in passing a resolution to put forth RIRA's best efforts to secure passage of legislation crafted by the Island's Maple Tree Group (MTG) and introduced by Assemblymember Pete Grannis.

Nineteen Council members voted yes; three, including RIRA President Patrick Stewart, abstained.

The vote set the stage for an MTG campaign to gather names and addresses of New York State residents whom Islanders can ask to contact their State legislators requesting support for the bill. (See editorial, page 2.)

If passed by both houses of the State Legislature and signed into law by Governor George Pataki, the legislation will replace the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation with a new public benefit corporation, The Roosevelt Island Community. The RIOC Board of Directors will be replaced by a Board of Resident Directors, composed of residents and elected by residents. And the President of RIOC will be replaced by a professional municipal manager hired by the Board of Residents.

Under the legislation, RIOC assets would pass to the community. Further amendments to the bill are expected in legislative horse-trading that will precede its consideration by the Senate and Assembly.



A full floor plus heating, ventilating and air conditioning equipment would be added to the Island House mini-school in turning it into a condominium residence. Similar conversions are planned at Rivercross and Westview, according to plans under consideration by the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation. RIOC is to make its case to the community, for the plans, in the next 30 days.

Pages of Thought and Opinion

Your Role in Bringing About Self-Governance

It’s time to fish or cut bait. State Assemblymember Pete Grannis, who has to be one of the world’s most responsive politicians, is in the process of putting his legislation for Roosevelt Island self-governance back into the Albany mill. State Senator Olga Mendez has agreed to back the idea.

As slow as they grind, the gears of State government are about to grind for Roosevelt Island in response to that overwhelming November vote that registered 92% support for the idea of reforming management of the Island to put it in the hands of an elected Board of Residents and the professionals they would hire – and take it out of the hands of non-resident political appointees.

David Bauer’s Maple Tree Group (MTG), which has been working on all this for a couple of years, is finally seeing its inch-at-a-time effort moving toward the fast track. This is a genuine grass-roots movement, given little chance of success at its start, that just might be the fulcrum on which the Island’s future turns.

But MTG sees the need for State-wide support for the legislation: A majority in the State Assembly and a majority in the State Senate must vote yes when the roll is called. But too many of them have never heard of Roosevelt Island, much less studied the specifics of our situation here.

To get the backing and votes of those upstate legislators, MTG wants us to ask our New York State relatives and acquaintances to write their legislators. That’s a lot to ask, so the group has worked out a way to make it painless. A yellow brochure distributed with this issue of *The WIRE* describes the process, but briefly, it goes this way:

Jim Bowser is taking a break. His editorial column will return soon.



You provide names and addresses of your New York State relatives, classmates, and friends. Using their zip codes to connect them to the appropriate legislators, MTG will generate letters for them to sign and send, as well as a cover letter from you to your friends explaining our situation and why you want their help. When the timing’s right, you’ll be asked to send the package to your friends to start the fuse burning on a slow explosion of State-wide support.

The hope – and the need – is for enough upstate legislators to hear from enough of their constituents to become conscious of the Roosevelt Island matter, and to respond to the request that they bring an end to undemocratic (and inept) management of Roosevelt Island.

Searching your address book and class reunion list for a few New York State residents who will help will take some effort, but it’s an effort worth making for the future of your Island home and the future of self-determination here.

It’s time to fish. *And* cut bait. Let’s work together to make this happen.

DL



Published by **The Main Street WIRE**
©1998 **The Main Street WIRE**
531 Main St. #413, Roosevelt Island, NY 10044

Saturday, Feb. 13, 1999
Editorial (212) **826-9055**
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in association with
Website NYC10044

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Jerry Blue is now irrelevant. He has done it to himself. He has donned the emperor’s new mantle of office. He comes to his office daily, and apparently goes through some motions that pass for work, but he no longer leaves footprints on the soil of Roosevelt Island’s future.

This week, the Governor made Joe Lynch the Commissioner of DHCR, removing “Acting” from the title. Pataki has apparently decided that he can no longer protect Blue from his own stubborn incompetence.

Lynch had already signalled Blue’s irrelevance by creating committees empowered to think through the Island’s future without Blue as a distraction. And Lynch had already put Blue quite firmly into his proper place in closed meetings, Blue’s grinding jaw notwithstanding.

After Wednesday night’s Town Meeting – Blue failed to show and there was spontaneous laughter at the fantasy that he might have come to speak for his failed administration – developers know that dealing with Blue is not just a waste of their time and money, it is also a close imitation of the embrace of death. To the representatives of The Related Companies and of Engel-Burman, it was clear they have been playing the game at the wrong table.

Diane Wilson, the entrepreneur who proposes turning the mini-schools into residential condos, stayed away from the Town Meeting. In his patent-pending “stealth development” fashion, Blue had attempted to slip her add-a-floor idea past the community (see story, page 1). The idea may not be as bad as it first seems, but she surely knows by now that working through Blue puts it under immediate suspicion.

Wednesday night, no defenders spoke for Blue. Even they have given up on him.

So everybody knows it: Blue is not a factor.

Alas, his *shadow* is still a factor. The pall he has cast over Roosevelt Island in his short eternity as President of RIOC will not pass quickly.

island observer

• While still unrestrained, he turned RIOC into a *develop-at-any-cost* operation. In a mistaken effort to overcome the reluctance of the development community to get involved here, he discarded all RIOC responsibility to nurture and guide and plan, tried to declare decades of planning irrelevant, and put Southtown in the hands of a developer, asking too few questions about what might lie beyond his short-sight horizon. To that extent, he delivered for the State Republicans’ heavy contributors. Steve Ross’s Related Companies may be serious about finding a formula for developing Southtown, and tying up site rights may yet prove a small See **Observer**, page 8

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 word-processing 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.

RIOC... Better All the Time...



Photoeditorial by Website NYC10044

The elevator at Tramway Plaza was out part of last week. This determined visitor was Island-bound to see her grandchildren. RIOC, which withdrew the Tramway contractor’s authority to order parts some time ago, had failed to return calls over a period of weeks asking permission to stock a spare part in advance of anticipated need, according to Attorney Jim Kaufman, a member of the RIRA Common Council who got results by threatening action in federal court under the Americans With Disabilities Act. The visitor made it... eventually.

Letters

To the Editor:

After reading Elie Gamburg’s article *Two Southtown Proposals: Towers in a Park that won’t work* commenting on the Davis Brody Bond Plan and the Thoresen and Linard “Alternative Plan” for Southtown (*The Main Street WIRE*, January 23, 1999), we would like to clarify certain issues involved.

1. The most distinctive difference between our “Alternative Plan” and the Davis Brody Bond plan is that our proposal eschews the concept of “Towers in a Park.” Rather, it advances the continuation of a planning concept that both Mr. Gamburg and we admire, find appropriate for Roosevelt Island and unique in New York City.
2. The towers shown in our plan are part of a continuum of structures that, by economic necessity, rise above the lower row of buildings that relate more closely to the pedestrian. The towers themselves are conceptually different. Ours are more compact and ‘tower’ like while the DBB buildings are more ‘slab’ like. In either case it is too early to critique their design as there are many factors that eventually will determine their configuration.
3. Our plan provides ample opportunity to create well-designed, intimate spaces for the specific uses of the residents of the adjacent buildings – the “private” spaces referred to by Mr. Gamburg. In addition we provide a “vast” open space, a Common or Green available to all the residents of the Island to use and enjoy. Its vastness is relative, however, with a length that can be walked in about five minutes and a breadth of a little more than a city block.
4. Although we appreciate the original planning concept, in its execution Main Street through Northtown was left with some shortcomings in terms of light, air, scale, trees, drop-offs, etc., that we believe we have remedied with our plan.
5. There are a number of other considerations that we took into account in developing the “Alternative Plan”. We refer you to our letter and Jeffrey Hochman’s comments in *The WIRE* of December 19.

At this stage, our proposal represents the framework for a well-designed, achievable Southtown, as well as a vision of the uniqueness of Roosevelt Island. Given the opportunity, we would continue to build upon that framework, taking into account the comments and suggestions of the community.

Thoresen and Linard

Commissioner Joseph Lynch
State of New York Executive Department
Division of Housing and Community Renewal
25 Beaver Street
New York, NY 10004

Dear Commissioner Lynch:

I am writing in my capacity as President of the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute on a matter of great importance. I must correct a significant error in the January/February edition of *RIOC News*. In an article entitled *Southpoint Marriott Hotel and Conference Center Referred to Newly Formed Capital Planning & Development Committee: FDR Memorial*, it is suggested that the Roosevelt Institute has entered into an agreement with the Marriott developers to create some sort of memorial to FDR on Southpoint Park. This is not the case.

See **Letters**, page 8

I don't get it. I do not get it. It's not as if we, the residents, just sit idly by, cocooned in our passivity, paying no attention to RIOC's effect on the Island. It's not as if we haven't demonstrated effective community action over and over again. It's not as if they'd got away with it just one time, just once, mind you, so they knew the taste of victory and just had to try again. Nope. None of that.

Well, here we go again. Once more, the management of RIOC has taken a shot at slipping through a deal: this time not only to convert the mini-schools to luxury condominiums, but, while they're at it, to raise the school buildings to a second story, blocking out the river view from

several Island House and Westview apartments. Naturally, they have not gone through any of the legal steps necessary to do so.

There are many, many questions. For instance, the proposed condominium is on land leased to Island House, Westview and Rivercross. They violate

the Master Plan regarding use, which says that space such as this should be used for a public purpose. RIOC's "done-deed" notice is legally defective and violates due process rights. They have failed to hold any public hearing on the matter, and have failed to seek or obtain release from the proper involved parties.

These aren't obscure technicalities; they are the bread and butter daily duties of such an agency with even minimal competence. This is large scale buffoonery, and puts me in mind of the Pink Panther, or better yet, Jimmy Breslin's *Gang That Couldn't Shoot Straight*.

Although, of course, Albany bears the final responsibility for this lot, I personally have come to believe that what is going on here was never the Governor's specific intention. If Albany wanted to send us a crook, they would have sent us a competent crook. If they genuinely intended that the place just go to hell, they could easily have managed that insidiously and much would have been accomplished before we ever caught on.

Who would ever have thought that this tiny little place, that most New Yorkers don't even know exists, could be mismanaged into public notoriety? Who would have thought that these 3,000-some apartments could so consume the time of DHCR management, which is responsible for over 1.2 million rental units (amongst many, many other things), or of our elected City officials..

Because of the publisher's deadline constraints, I'm writing this before the RIOC Board meeting, which I'm sure will be covered elsewhere in *The WIRE*, and before Gifford Miller's Wednesday night public meeting on future planning for the Island.

I'm confident that the Board will move the mini-school matter over to their new Planning Committee where sanity will reign. They shouldn't have to. None of this should be necessary.

Meanwhile, by the way, all this rain is clearly demonstrating that the Motorgate repairs were no more effective than anything else done by RIOC. If this record precipitation doesn't drop back down to normal, we stand in real danger of the unrepaired Main Street caving in, or the roof of Blackwell House or the roof of the Chapel going.

Well, there are only 54 days left 'til Spring. There's one good thought.



Jeremiah J. Shea, Jr.

Jeremiah J. Shea, Jr. ("Jerry"), a 16-yr. resident of Roosevelt Island, passed away January 28 as a result of heart disease. He was 79. He was a native New Yorker and was well-known to Roosevelt Islanders. He worked as an electrician with over 25 years service at Bloomingdale's. He served in World War II for 5 years with honors. He is survived by two twin daughters here on Roosevelt Island (Janet and Jean), another daughter (Joan) and twin grandsons in Chicago, and nieces and nephews in Albany, in North Carolina and in Massachusetts.

Jerry lost his beloved wife Eleanor, to Alzheimer's disease in Nov. '97. Both Jerry and Eleanor loved Roosevelt Island (as do their daughters). Janet, Jean and Joan Shea are so thankful that their mom and dad were able to live out their last years in such a great community. They also wish to extend their heartfelt gratitude to all those here on the Island who have given their help and their hearts to all of them.

Free River Music Jazz Tuesday Night



Cassie Dragt

Jazz vocalist Monika Brand and her ensemble will present a program of original compositions and classic jazz as part of the River Music concert series at 8:00 pm Tuesday, February 16, at the Chapel of the Good Shepherd. Admission is free. The concert is present in cooperation with the Carnegie Hall Neighborhood Concerts.

The Main Street WIRE, Sat., Feb 13, 1999 • 3

Al Weinstein Remembered at UN

Colleagues and friends who knew Al Weinstein during the 47 years that he served the United Nations gathered January 21 for a memorial service at the Church Center for the United Nations, in an event organized by the UN retirees to honor a much-loved fellow worker. The service was conducted by the president of the retirees' association, known as AFICS, and it featured the world-renowned UN Singers, tributes by several colleagues and friends, including Helen Roht of Roosevelt Island, whose elegy to Al was printed in the program. Messages were read from officials of the UN, including Kofi Annan, former Island resident and now UN Secretary-General. The tribute by Roht follows:



*Where shall we find such a good man and true?
His every thought was from the heart,
He saw in man the better part.
When life fell short, he showed no rancor;
His faith in people was his anchor.
His well of hope never ran dry,
Even when death would life deny.*

COMING UP

Compiled by Claire Friendland – phone/fax 317-8523

Tue., Feb. 16, 8:00 p.m., **River Music Jazz Concert** by vocalist Monika Brand and her esemble, Chapel of the Good Shepherd. Free.

Mon., Feb. 15, 8:00 p.m., meeting of the **Maple Tree Group**. Discussion of progress toward legislation for Island self-governance. (Every Monday, 8:00 p.m., until further notice.) For information, **593-7259**.

Tuesdays, Feb. 16, 23, 6:30 p.m. **Weight Watchers**, Senior Center. For information, call **832-3456**.

Thur., Mar. 11, 11:00 a.m., meeting of the **Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation Board of Directors**, Chapel of the Good Shepherd. Future meetings scheduled (all Thursdays) 11:00 a.m. Apr. 8; 7:00 p.m. May 13; 11:00 a.m. June 10, July 8, August 12, Sept. 9; 7:00 p.m. Oct. 14; 11:00 a.m. Nov. 11, Dec. 9. Members of the community who wish to address the Board are asked to register in advance by calling **832-4540**.

Sat., Feb. 27, 10 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., **African-American Heritage Celebration**, 546 Main Street (Senior Center), including Caribbean Food Court, Book Mart, special story hour for young children, lectures, videos, dance, and music.

Fri.-Sat., Feb 26-27, next issue of **The Main Street WIRE**. **Deadlines:** Advertising in the paper, Fri., Feb. 19; decision on stuffers for *The Bag*, Mon., Feb. 22. **Future issues:** March 13, 27 (Easter issue); Apr. 10, 24; May 8 (Mother's Day issue), 22; June 12 (Father's Day issue); July 3 (Fourth of July/Fireworks/Business cards issue), 31; Aug. 28 (Labor Day/Back-to-School issue); Sept. 11 (Rosh Hashanah issue), 25; Oct. 9, 23 (Halloween issue); Nov. 6, 20 (Thanksgiving/Business Cards issue); Dec. 4, 18 (Christmas/New Year issue); Jan. 8, 22, 2000. Advertisers wishing to be included in unscheduled **EXTRA editions**, *without notice at the time*, are invited to call **826-9055** to make their interest known. **Phone/fax** for news, (212) **826-9055/755-2540**; urgent/breaking news, 917-353-1647; phone/fax for advertising inquiries, (212) **751-8214/755-2540**; phone/fax to list your Island organization's event here without charge, **317-8523**.

Mon., Mar. 15, 6:00-8:00 p.m., Historical Society exhibit opening, **Portrait of a Changing Island: 19th-21st Century Maps**; dedication of **Arlene Atkinson Historical Reference Archive**, Cultural Center, 548 Main Street.

At the Senior Center Every week

Mondays

9:00 **Stay Well** (exercise)
10:00 **English as 2nd Language (Beginner)**
10:00 **Computer Class**
12:00 **English as 2nd Language (Intermediate)**
12:30 **Arts & Crafts**

Tuesdays

9-10 **Korean/English Class**
10-11 **Blood Pressure Screening**
10-11 **Free Tax Counseling** (also 12:30-4)
12:30 **Bingo**

Wednesdays

9:00 **Stay Well** (Stretch)
10:00 **English as 2nd Language (Beginner)**
11:00 **English as 2nd Language (Intermediate)**
12:30 **Lotto** (Games)

Thursdays

10:30 **Crafts Program**
12:30 **Movie**

Fridays

10-11 **English as 2nd** (conversation & written)
10:00 **Billiards/Pool Table Open**
10:00 **English as 2nd Language**

Saturdays

7:30 **Bingo & Games**

Special Events

Sat., Feb. 13, 7:00 p.m., **Valentine's Party** with Middle Eastern Dancers
Tue., Feb. 16, 6:00 p.m., **New Year's Party**
Wed., Feb. 17, **Atlantic City Trip**
Thur., Feb. 18, **Fiddler on the Roof** video from Main Street Theatre production
Sat., Feb. 20, 7:00 p.m., **Monthly Birthday Party**
Mon., Feb. 22, 10-12, **Metrocard Bus**
Sat., Feb 27, 9-4, **Black History Month Celebration**

Father Adde Serving Island Catholics

by Judith Berdy

Watching Father Adde perform evening mass, you might note his easy ways and lilting accent. A native of Silesia (now Poland and Eastern Germany), Father Joachim von Kerssenbrock – Father Adde to his parishioners – emigrated to the United States over 40 years ago. As a young Jesuit, he studied in his homeland and then worked in England and Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). He now lives in the Bronx and is the administrator of the St. Boniface Society, which raises funds for churches in eastern Europe.

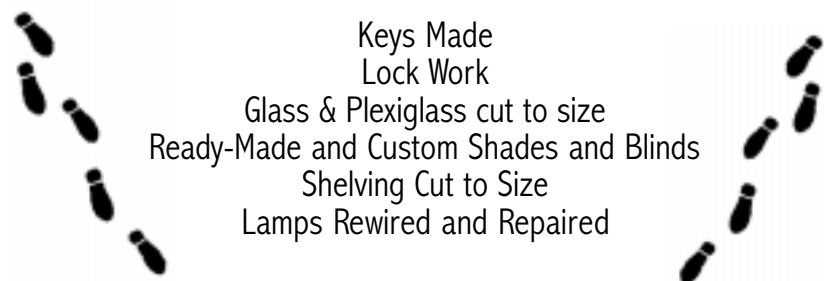
Father Adde delivers a brief sermon, while making good points. *Do we make a life-long effort to practice our love of God to each other? Do we love each other or just love our own?*

Father Adde says he enjoys ministering on Roosevelt Island. He has been our back-up priest for over 20 years. Currently, he is here on Saturday evenings and Sunday mornings for mass.



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Satellite imagery by U.S. Coast & Geodetic Survey
March 13, 1995
See keyed map, page 10

The Main Street WIRE



African-American Heritage Celebration

Saturday, February 27, 1999
546 Main Street – Senior Center
10 AM - 5 PM

*** LIVE LIVE ***
ENTERTAINMENT
LIVE * * * LIVE

Percussion
Workshop

Caribbean
Food Court

Lectures

Story-
telling

BOOK
MART

Children's
Activities

This event organized through the Department of Community Relations has been made possible by Housing Management, Roosevelt Island Senior Association, PS/IS 217 PTA, and the Collective Artists' Expo. For further information call Marilyn Engstler, Director of Community Relations, at (212) 838-4747.

Letters from page 2

When Welfare Island was renamed Roosevelt Island in 1973 a public commitment was made by the Mayor and Governor that a memorial to FDR would be built on land then designated and set aside for that purpose. The Roosevelt Institute, supported by funding from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, engaged the services of Louis Kahn, one of the truly great architects of this century, to design the memorial. He finished the design in 1974 and died just months later. The design has been lauded as “one of the noblest unbuilt projects in New York” by *The New York Times*. It is one of only three Louis Kahn designs not yet built. No Louis Kahn structures have ever been built in New York.

Then came the financial crisis of New York City and the project was put aside. In 1985 Governor Cuomo appointed a commission led by Robert Wagner and Louis Lefkowitz to review the proposed memorial. Their commission strongly endorsed the site and the design.

Because of continuing fiscal difficulties, federal, state and city funding was not available at that time, but progress continued to be made toward the realization of the Memorial. The ruins of the old city hospital at the southern end of Roosevelt Island, which were in dangerous condition and impeded access to the site of the Memorial, were taken down. And in 1994, RIOC filled, shaped and graded the site of the Memorial in accordance with Kahn’s design. It had also planned to rebuild the sea walls around the Memorial site before its capital budget was cut.

Since the Roosevelt Institute put up the funding for the design, we have a continuing interest, as does the architectural community, to try to see that this memorial is built. We think that this endeavor will require a public/private partnership, which, in these more prosperous times, we believe can be organized.

When RIOC publicized a Request for Proposals to develop Southpoint Park, the residents of Roosevelt Island, as well as other New York City residents concerned about the development of designated open space, were quite upset. As an interested party in

the Louis Kahn FDR Memorial, we, too, were concerned about RIOC’s plans. I contacted Dr. Blue and met with him twice last spring – the second time with the architects and engineers who assumed responsibility for the project upon Louis Kahn’s death – to present to Dr. Blue the Kahn design. We impressed upon him the historical, cultural and artistic import of constructing the Louis Kahn memorial and as Dr. Blue had indicated that he would be allocating funds to the building of sea walls, we strongly urged him to build them in a manner comporting with Kahn’s plans. We discussed the possibility of a public/private partnership to accomplish the Memorial purpose. No commitments were made by Dr. Blue or myself, not by RIOC nor FERL.

I have not met with Dr. Blue nor have I discussed Southpoint Park with him by telephone, correspondence or in any other manner since. Therefore I was concerned to read the article in the RIOC newsletter, which states that the Kahn memorial is “too passive” for the site and then states, “...developers agreed to collaborate with Ambassador William vanden Heuvel on a Memorial for FDR on Southpoint.” I have never met with any developers. I have never had any discussions that would permit such a statement. The Roosevelt Institute is committed to the execution of the Louis Kahn design. In our judgment, New York State, New York City and RIOC should feel the same commitment.

The Roosevelt Institute has always worked with RIOC and the residents of Roosevelt Island to accomplish the original objective of the Memorial. We believe that the Louis Kahn memorial would be a cultural and historical contribution to Roosevelt Island, to New York City and to New York State. Our commitment is to the Kahn project. We have not abandoned this project, as the article suggests, to partners with developers to create some other memorial to FDR on some random portion of Southpoint Park as yet undetermined. The Institute has received an angry response from Island residents who were misled by the article and were concerned that we had compromised our historic commitment. We have not.

So that the record is straight, let me make clear again that no representative of the

Roosevelt Institute has ever met or spoken with potential developers of Southpoint Park, nor is there any sort of agreement whatsoever between the Roosevelt Institute and developers.

I hope to see the Louis Kahn memorial to FDR on the southernmost tip of the Island. So do the residents of Roosevelt Island. It took 40 years after the Congress approved it to finally build the FDR Memorial in the nation’s capitol. It is now the most popular visitors’ attraction in Washington. To combine a great art work with a memorial to a New Yorker who became the greatest president of the 20th century is a noble objective that requires open, candid communication between the parties whose involvement is necessary to bring it about.

William J. vanden Heuvel
President

Observer from page 2

bonanza, but without community assent to what they plan, they have site rights tied up in a bundle of troubles.

- Blue put Rivercross through two years of privatization planning, only to have its Board learn, at the end, that Blue couldn’t make the deal he claimed he could. Money was wasted. Time was lost.

- During his time among us, Blue made a serious effort at disrupting the warm comfort between the races here. Untainted by any hint of real skill, he tried to spend the coin of his skin color. Only a few followed him down that path, but still, some time will pass before the cracks he put into racial relations will be fully repaired and trust restored without its hint of reserve.

- He made neglect and deterioration a maintenance policy. Below the surface, and above, there’s a mess.

- He so ripped relations between the residents of Roosevelt Island and New York State that there was a 92% vote to get the State out of Roosevelt Island affairs. Blue’s performance confirmed the importance of continuing on that path.

The list goes on, and on, and on. Over the last two years, Blue wrote himself into the dictionary definition of *failure*.

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Unfortunately, as long as Blue reports to the RIOC office, there will be a need to guard against the kind of destructive lashing out that is characteristic of a wounded animal. While his staff continues to admire his emperor’s new mantle of office, doing his bidding, he still has the power to screw things up – at least the short-term administrative things that remain within his narrowly delimited power.

So he should pack up his new clothes and what remains of his dignity, declare himself a success, and go on his way. A long vacation, perhaps. Maybe North Korea.

But in terms of Roosevelt Island’s future, and where we go from here, he is not a factor. Any real change will await his actual physical departure, of course. A genuine effort at rebuilding will be set aside until the Governor shows how he will play his hand in setting up something interim as a transition between Blue and the self-governance Islanders have come to accept as the only truly workable future for their home ground.

But as far as Blue is concerned, the fat lady may now take center stage and begin the first chorus of *Bye Bye Blue*.



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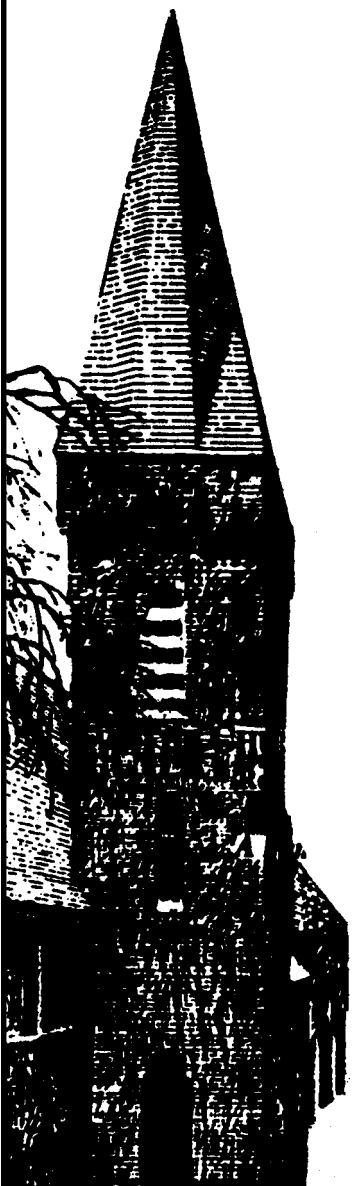
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Planned Second Avenue Subway Would Serve Island’s Commuters

by **Matthew Katz**
A subway for Second Avenue is “an idea whose time has come,” according to politicians who convened a forum on the subject at the end of January.

The new line would serve Roosevelt Island through a connection with the Q line at Lexington Avenue and 63rd Street, and relieve rush-hour congestion on the Lexington Avenue line, which often operates at 126% of designed capacity.

A packed house attended the session at Lenox Hill Neighborhood House, called by Manhattan Borough President C. Virginia Fields. Another forum, on alternatives for financing the subway expansion, is planned by Representative Carolyn Maloney for March 30. That session will take place at 6:00 p.m. at the Hunter College School of Social Work. Maloney told those attending, “The MTA must come up with their five-year budget this year, so this is a critical year to get them to include this.”

Fields said she had assurances of support for a subway expansion from State Senator Roy Goodman, Governor George Pataki, and Mayor Rudolph Giuliani. No matter which plan might be adopted, she said, it would provide a major boost for the 116th Street shopping mall in East Harlem, and would serve the 19,000 additional riders resulting when the Long Island Rail Road is linked to the Lexington Avenue line at Grand Central Station.

Background

Congressmember Maloney presented a short history of the Second Avenue project, which was first proposed in the 1920’s to replace the Second and Third Avenue elevated railways when they were torn down. The idea was revived in 1968. Bonds were issued. Ground was broken in 1972 – but in 1975 funds were diverted to save the 50-cent transit fare.

Maloney stressed her view that funding for a project must come from all levels of government. She said State Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver and Senate Minority Leader Martin Connor have been supportive of the idea.

Maloney rejected the idea of terminating the new line at 63rd Street with a link to the N and R trains, saying that the project must serve a now-underserved Lower East Side, as well.

City Councilmember Gifford Miller discussed the rapid growth on Manhattan’s East Side, saying a Department of Transportation study of job growth projections predicts some 600,000 new jobs in the City, producing some 400,000 added subway trips in the Central Business District – all by the year 2020. Miller said, “This City will perish if we don’t continue to grow,” and asserted the City must provide new infrastructure to meet the new growth, and find other ways to invest in itself. He urged those attending to

hold their local politicians accountable for making the plan a reality.

Alternatives

Two plans were presented at January’s meeting – one by the Regional Plan Association (RPA), and the other from the MTA’s Manhattan East Side Alternatives (MESA) study.

Jeffrey M. Zupan of the RPA presented its MetroLink plan, a comprehensive project providing capacity for 240,000 AM-peak riders entering Manhattan every day. The RPA proposal envisions using new and existing tunnels, Amtrak rights-of-way in the Bronx, and LIRR tracks in Brooklyn. It would provide subway access for the Upper East Side, East Village, Lower East Side, North Bronx (including Coop City) and Southeast Queens where none has existed before. The plan incorporates service to Kennedy Airport, providing a one-seat 32-minute ride from Grand Central. It would be completed by 2013 at an estimated cost of \$13 billion.

A member of Fields’ staff, Timothy Forker, presented the MTA’s MESA study. (The MTA was said to have declined an invitation to send a representative to the session.) The plan offers three alternatives: a \$3.5 billion plan for a Second Avenue subway from 125th Street to 63rd Street, connecting to the N and R lines; combining the new subway with a surface light-rail line going across 14th Street and down to City Hall; and a no-build plan including bus extensions, new routes, and designated bus lanes.

Questions

Asked about the disruption resulting from subway construction, the RPA’s Zupan said that while the existing tunnels on Second Avenue had been build by open trench, a disruptive method, modern technology involves deep-bore drilling, coming to the surface only at station locations. He said it will result in much less hassle for Second Avenue residents and visitors. At one mile per year, the three miles of construction on Second Avenue would take three years. Based on engineering experience in Paris, Oslo, Cairo, Sydney and other ongoing and completed projects, he said, the first segment could be ready by 2008, with the full project completed in another five years.

Linda Heimer, the Roosevelt Island Residents Association Vice President for Government Relations, complained to the panel that Roosevelt Island has been discriminated against on transportation for some time. The Q line was not linked to any East side subway, she said, and the Tram continues to be the only form of mass transportation in the City without the Metrocard. She expressed hope that the Second Avenue Subway will be linked with the Q line, and was assured it would. Councilmember Miller called the lack of Metrocard for the Tramway “an outrage.”

If built as proposed, the facility would have 450 units – 150 assisted living, and 300 independent living.

RIRA President Patrick Stewart expressed concerns about cost, saying he favors a facility affordable for the Island’s residents. Figures quoted on monthly cost range from \$2,500 a month to just under \$5,000.

Mammina described the plans as “extremely preliminary.” The next official step is for new committees formed by DHCR Commission Joseph Lynch to consider the eldercare site.



Laundry Room Break-Ins Continue to Plague Eastwood

A laundry room break in at Eastwood/540 last week brought the tally of such incidents in 1999 to two. There were five such break-ins in 1998.

In the most recent incident, the burglary occurred in early morning hours when the laundry room was locked. The perpetrators appear to have gained access by stopping the elevator at the floor and forcing its doors open. Tops were ripped off washers to gain access to the machines’ coin boxes.

Housing Management is making plans to put video cameras in all laundry rooms.

Khan from page 1

go I’m working seven days a week here.”

Ali explained that with the expanded supermarket on the Island selling greeting cards, what used to be his best business is now practically dead. “They sell nearly every single thing I have in my shop. When we opened this shop many years ago, we were promised the exclusive right to sell greeting cards and stationery here. But they have now gone back on that promise.”

The Stationers shop, which opens at 6:30 a.m. on weekdays and at 7:00 a.m. on Sundays, sells much more than greeting cards and stationery. Adults come in for newspapers, cigarettes, lottery tickets, gift items and wrappings, and magazines. But, “We don’t sell dirty magazines,” the devout Muslim told me. Children crowd around the candy and school-supplies counters every weekday before and after school. “We had to remove the video game machines that we formerly had in the back of the store, too many arguments and fights over them.”

Ali Khan was born in Hyderabad, India. He was nine years old when his father died, leaving a large family poverty-stricken. As a young man Ali traveled across the Arabian Sea to Oman to seek work, but work in a gas station was all that was available to him. “Oh, the terrible heat that radiated from the adjacent highway,” Ali exclaimed as he remembered life in that country along the coast of southeast Arabia.

In 1984 an older brother living in the United States agreed to be his sponsor so that Ali could obtain the necessary “green card” to be able to work in this country.

Ali and his wife, Ayesha, have three children: a son, Zakir, age 10, and two daughters, Hafsa, age 7, who is named after the prophet Mohammed’s wife, and Hajira, age 3, after the prophet Abraham’s wife. Ali told me that both the Old and New Testament prophets figure in the Islamic religion. “But we believe that Mohammed was the last and

final prophet and we follow his teachings of total submission to the will of God. That is what being a Muslim means.

“Those people in other parts of the world who blow up buildings and kill innocent people are terrorists, they are giving good Muslims a bad name.” During Islam’s holy month of Ramadan, “we cleanse our souls by fasting and prayer.” A Festival called Eid is celebrated on the last day of Ramadan. It fell on January 19th this year – that’s why the Stationers Shop was closed.

“Are all of your helpers from India too?”, I asked him. “All except one. I’m sure you’ve seen Wesley Koval, who works here on Saturdays and Sundays putting the newspapers together. He began to work here six years ago as a very young boy. Now he is a tall teenager and a very reliable and good worker. I’m afraid it will be a few years before my 10-year-old son, Zakir, will be able to come and help me in the shop,” he said.

Then he added, looking worried again, “If I last that long.”

Mini-Schools from page 1

General Manager Doryne Isley told the Board, “Until there is a memorandum of agreement between [Lucido and Wilson], it is premature for the Board to give RIOC authorization to enter into a lease agreement with Wilson.” Isley listed a series of concerns: air rights, views, the AVAC load, contributions to public safety, and more. She called a RIOC threat to use condemnation proceedings against the property involved “the bully approach [that] would only lead to legal conflict and further the division of RIOC and the community.”

The mini-schools matter was removed from Thursday’s RIOC agenda. DHCR Commissioner Joseph Lynch, who chaired the meeting, ordered that efforts be made in the next 30 days to inform the community about the plan before placing it on the RIOC agenda again.

Eldercare from page 1

advance consideration of the Sportspark site one notch has two practical functions: It demonstrates to Engel-Burman that its eldercare idea enjoys acceptance here, and it gives the company leverage with Related, which might be more willing to loosen up on the Southtown site if faced with the possibility of a 31-story structure, just south of the Queensboro Bridge, overshadowing Related’s buildings at Southtown.

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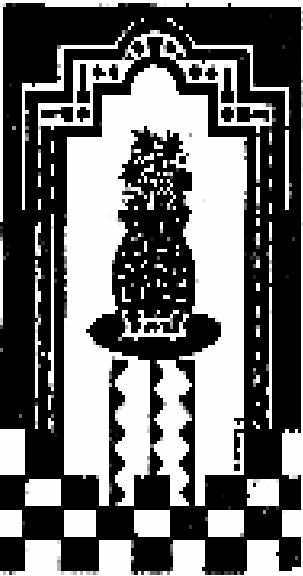
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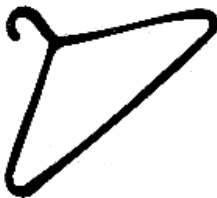
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