

Next issue:  
Mar. 31-Apr. 1

# The Main Street WIRE

Roosevelt Island's Community Newspaper

in association with Website NYC10044



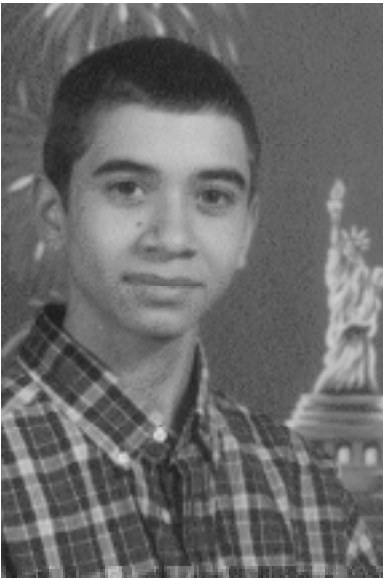
Eleanor Schetlin

Years ago, Blackwell House had wings and Islanders called it Blackwell Mansion. Eleanor Schetlin, who was born when her father worked on Welfare Island and her family lived here, told the Roosevelt Island Historical Society her memories of those years at a meeting Monday night. Her recollections are reproduced on page 4.

## Island Sending Sports Ambassador Overseas

by Anusha Shrivastava

Thirteen-year-old Fabian Medina wants to become a professional baseball player. On second thought, he may choose basketball over baseball. It is tough for him to decide because he loves sports and he's doing well at both. "I've been written about in *The WIRE* twice already," he says, smiling shyly. "I've been scoring well for my team."



Even so, he was surprised to receive a letter from the People to People Sports Ambassadors Program, asking him to represent the country as a sports ambassador in Holland this summer. He will be participating in the Expersport Basketball Classic, a special tournament for youth teams from all over the world. "I was happy and excited but also a little scared," says Fabian. "We were skeptical, initially," admits his mother, Mercedes Lugo. "We thought it might be a scam, but I made a few phone calls and realized this was a genuine program."

President Dwight Eisenhower initiated the program in 1956, in the hope that if "people from different See **Ambassador**, page 7

Cost: \$6,000-10,000

## Rebuffed by RIOC, RIRA May Piggyback on Existing Suits Against Southtown Plan Potential for Competing Fund-Raising

The Roosevelt Island Residents Association (RIRA) may participate in the trial of existing legal actions against the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation (RIOC) over its approved plan for Southtown. The RIOC plan would put buildings on land RIRA says is reserved for a park or a community commons.

The existing cases were brought by Attorney Robert Chira, a Rivercross resident, on behalf of the Alternative Southtown Design Committee, and by Roosevelt Islanders for Responsible Southtown Development (RIRSD), a new resident group formed in December when it became clear RIRA would not take legal action on Southtown before a four-month deadline would expire.

"If RIOC refuses to listen to RIRA's position and adhere to the GDP [General Development Plan], then we will issue a letter of intent to sue and prepare to intervene on the pending lawsuits," said Joan Christianson, RIRA First Vice President, in a statement read to members of RIRA's Common Council last week. (Her complete statement is published on page 3 and on Website NYC10044 at www.nyc10044.com.) RIRA had earlier based its hopes to save the parkland on a discovery by Karen Stewart (whose husband is RIRA President and RIOC Board member Patrick Stewart) that the City Board of Estimate had formally turned down a 1990 RIOC request to reduce the park from "approximately six acres" to three acres.

But RIRA's stance on the six-acre question has already been rejected by RIOC. Its outside Counsel, Stephen Kass of Carter, Ledyard & Milburn, says the reduction to three acres was a *de facto* change even before RIOC's 1990 proposal.

The RIOC argument apparently will be that Eastwood and Rivercross were overbuilt onto the designated open space (which Christianson's statement acknowledges), producing a *fait accompli* reduction of the planned park space – a reduction which then needed no after-the-fact approval by the City. Thus, the legal tug-of-war could center on whether the overbuilding of Northtown reduced the parkland or reduced Southtown by effectively transferring Southtown development acreage to Northtown. Because the City's refusal to reduce the parkland from six to three acres

came in 1990, long after the overbuilding of Northtown, attorneys fighting reduction of the park are likely to argue that the Board of Estimate's 1990 decision made clear its intention to keep the park between Northtown and Southtown at six acres.

But Christianson's statement suggests that RIRA has another "magic bullet" or "smoking gun" available to win its case. Christianson did not provide details on that to members of the Council, telling them, "It is so critical that none of it get back to RIOC that I am going to ask you not to ask."

Designated Southtown developers Hudson and Related have also engaged legal counsel in the cases. He is David Paget of Sive, Paget & Riesel.

Both the Chira suit and the RIRSD suit were filed in January, within the four-month window imposed by State law, leading RIRA President Patrick Stewart to condemn the RIRSD action as "drama concocted out of misinformation and distortion" in a January *WIRE* column. With the six-acre matter apparently in mind, Stewart continued, "We are working on a solution that will be far more effective, and far less costly... We will... accomplish a great deal more than [RIRSD] could ever do."

RIRA's present options appear to be:

- To stand aside.
- To bring a separate action, which would be limited to matters not subject to the four-month deadline, which RIOC attorneys say expired late in January.
- To "intervene" in one or both of the existing actions, which – if allowed by the judge – gives it an opportunity to raise somewhat different issues and enjoy nearly equal standing with the existing plaintiffs but raises the possibility that RIOC's attorneys might seek to limit the scope of their pleadings. A further down side is increased legal costs for all parties, and the resulting potential for competing fund-raising among residents.

While RIRSD's Article 78 action includes the six-acre park argument, it also raises several procedural objections to RIOC's September 22 approval of the Southtown plan, as well as environmental concerns and claims that the plan violates the GDP. RIRSD is See **Southtown**, page 3

### Islanders

## Marilyn Engstler – Enjoying Her Role as the Island's Majordomo

by Anusha Shrivastava

Marilyn Engstler towers above most of us, standing tall at nearly six feet. That makes her hard to miss. However, that's not all that makes her presence so strongly felt. She exudes a sense of calm and self confidence that comes through right away. She seems to be in control of the situation and as Director of Community Relations on the Island, that certainly is a prerequisite for her job. Hers is a role in which she has to juggle many balls simultaneously. One look at her calendar and you can see why. The gigantic "At-a-Glance" on her table has at least one entry for every single day of the week, if not more. These range from bookings of community rooms by various groups like the Artist's Association, the Quran Society and the Cub Scouts, to special events like Career Day at PS/IS 217 and Roosevelt Island Day.

"I am in touch with all the sixty-odd organizations that exist on the Island. I work on any event that would help enhance the lives of the people living on the Island," says Marilyn. "However, I am not just part of the special events like the Halloween parade, the African-American Heritage Month and the concerts and carnivals. I am responsible for overseeing the membership at the Westview pool, the playrooms, the Senior Center, the bike and sun rooms and bookings of all the community rooms."

She believes that the only way she can do it all and do it right is by being highly organized. "I do things by priority and I do three things at once. I talk to people who come through the door, answer phone calls and handle all the

projects all together. I am currently involved in designing a newsletter for the Spring, organizing a Jazzmobile event for July, and fixing dates for inspections of the bike rooms."

Born and raised in Queens, Engstler got her Bachelor's degree in Fine Arts from Queens College and her Master's degree in Commercial Art from the New York School of Visual Arts. She worked at Bloomingdale's briefly, designing window displays. She has been working on the Island since 1984. She joined as a receptionist and then became a recertification specialist. For a two-year stretch between 1986 and 1988, she worked in real estate sales and then returned to work in the community relations wing of the Roosevelt Island Housing Management, a job funded by RIHM, Rivercross, and Manhattan Park.

Marilyn admits that the job, though exciting, can be stressful. "I try to be patient and polite but I have to deal with people's temperaments. I am a good listener and I try to be respectful of people's opinions but I make my own decisions. I have to deal with so many personalities and some politics, too. Also, the deadlines are tough because everything needs to be done immediately. I guess I do what I can."

What makes her do it? "I am a people person. I like to

work with the volunteers and all the talented people who live here. I never have a dull moment at my job and I love to interact with the wonderful people who always help out when



something seems to be going wrong. When we do outdoor events, there is no time for anything to go wrong. I have found that if there is a problem, I can always make last-minute arrangements. I call people and someone always helps. This is one of the best things about this community, something really special," says Marilyn.

Did she ever consider moving here? "Not really," says Marilyn. "I spend half my life here anyway so it is good that I can get away, recuperate and come back. It is a beautiful place to live but I like living in Queens where I have family." Marilyn lives with her husband and her two kids, Justin and Danielle, aged four and five. A third child is on the way, so she will be taking twelve weeks off beginning next month. "I turned 40 last

April so it was a now-or-never decision," she says. "Right now, family is priority. I used to paint and do art work but there is no time for it anymore. We go roller-skating and bike-riding. We go camping upstate and vacation by the water in the Hamptons or in Rhode Island. Actually, in my See **Engstler**, page 6

Pages of Thought and Opinion

Questions:

Whose Ditch? How Long?

Answers:

Con Ed’s. Forever, Maybe?

It is over a month now and the Main Street Ditch remains.

Opened by Con Ed to repair a cable break underground, the ditch starts at the park and extends north beyond 40 River Road. The minibus stop at 40 River Road is gone. Steel plates cover the street in front of the building. The elderly, the handicapped and families with small children wait in the middle of the street to catch the minibus. No longer are there places for handicapped vans to park on that section of Main Street. At night there are no street lights starting at Gristede’s and going north. The street is pitch black.

Manhattan Park Management has said,

“We were never notified by Con Ed about this work.”

The RIOC street maintenance Division of Nick, Sal, Milkman, Kenney, Fabian, and the Supervisor Chris have done a good job repaving the street in front of 40 River, but can’t do anything more until Con Ed comes back and finishes what they started. RIOC Engineer Vinnie Kopicki told *The WIRE*, “Con Ed needs to be called again and again. I have tried with little success.”

The Con Ed number for reporting hazardous conditions is **800-872-8846**. Con Ed’s customer outreach number is (212) **338-4987**.

George Rubin



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

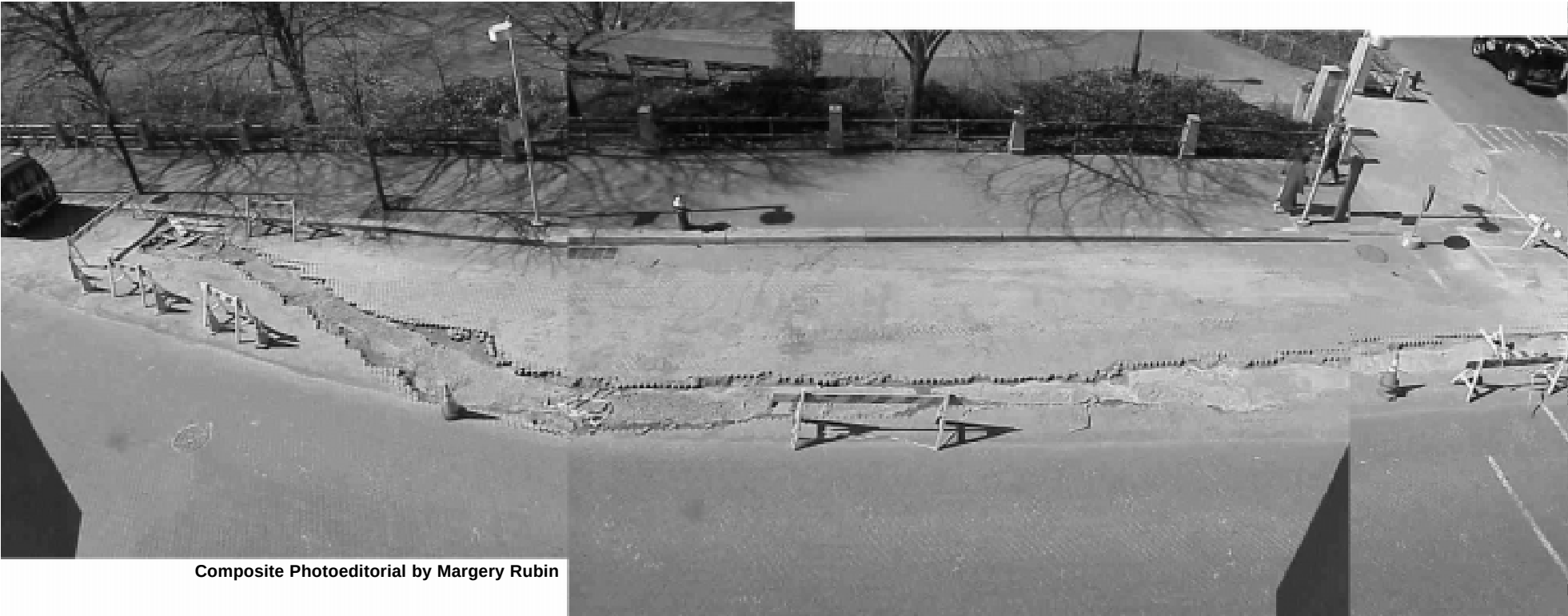
Saturday, March 18, 2000

News (212) **826-9055**  
Urgent news **1-917-353-1647**  
Advertising (212) **751-8214**  
Circulation (212) **935-7534**  
Fax (212) **755-2540**

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in association with *Website NYC10044*

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Composite Photoeditorial by Margery Rubin

Tarrytown, New York, March 5, 2000

When the 19th Century was just one third gone and our country just 62 years past the Declaration of Independence, a retired Mayor of New York named William Paulding built himself a cottage overlooking the Hudson River and Tappan Zee.

*island observer*  
To design it, he engaged a famously fashionable architect of the time to conceive a manse in “the pointed style.” That meant *Gothic*, of all styles, and that brought on a gibe: *Paulding’s Folly*, they called the place.

But the architect was Alexander Jackson Davis, and he designed the place right down to tables and chairs. He was the Frank Lloyd Wright of his time, and he knew what he was doing.

This was the period of birth for the Hudson River School in art and architecture. America was feeling its young strength. The Erie Canal brought low-cost grain from the West, and the land overlooking the Hudson was now valued less for agriculture and more as a getaway destination for New Yorkers weary of the City’s summer heat.

Davis was comfortable designing in a variety of styles, but the choice of Gothic was adventurous for the time—a bold statement that survives to this day after passage through several hands famous in their day for shaping a young American economy. The owners were the technology wiz-

ards of their time, imagining and nurturing the railroads that would ultimately stitch together a web of states across the North American continent. One of them, a New York merchant and inventor (of a railcar spring) named George Merritt, so admired Davis’s work that he gave Davis a second crack at it – doubling its size in a seamless extension of style.

Today, Paulding’s Folly is Lyndhurst. It’s one of several architecturally significant estates in the Hudson Valley – a National Trust Historic Site.

In his time, Alexander Jackson Davis also designed a stately hospital for New York City, a symmetrical edifice in the fashion of the time with, as a reception centerpiece, an octagonal tower. The whole of the design was never completed, leaving symmetry unsatisfied. This structure, too, passed through various hands, becoming the City’s Lunatic Asylum, then Metropolitan Hospital.

What remains of it today, we call “the Octagon.” It is in ruins, the victim of decades of neglect, but still architecturally significant – still a design of the forward-thinking Alexander Jackson Davis. And today, it’s a part of our community.

At Lyndhurst, a visitor can see what a relatively small amount of money can do to preserve America’s architectural heritage.

On Roosevelt Island, a visitor can see the product of official imprudence: Blackwell House is still a recent wreck, promised restoration work unstarted; the Octagon is barely holding together after the Labor Day fire that took its roof and much of its structural integrity.

DL



Letters

M·D·E·V·L

Dear Mr. Lutz,

Many people have written or spoken about Ed Logue the planner or Ed Logue the developer, but you have penned the epitaph he would have cherished most:

He had a vision and we live it every day.

Thank you,  
Margaret Logue

March seventh

**Mort Pavane**, a resident of the Island from its residential beginnings, died on Tuesday. An award-winning photographer who documented many of the Island’s structures before their demolition, he was 78. He served in the Air Corps during World War II, then as a Air Force civilian employee for 26 years. We hope to have a photo and additional biographical information next issue.

# Statement by RIRA VP Christianson on RIRA’s Southtown Options

Residents Association Vice President Joan Christianson read the following statement to the Residents Association (RIRA) Common Council last week. It discusses the Southtown development situation and RIRA’s options with regard to pursuing its claim that the plan approved by the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation (RIOC) would violate the Island’s General Development Plan. Material in brackets has been added for clarity.

RIOC had refused, for some weeks, to return [RIRA Attorney] Jeff Glen’s phone calls, so we finally appealed directly to [Deputy Commissioner of DHCR] Steve Hicks, who is Designated Chair of the RIOC Board for [DHCR Commissioner] Joe Lynch. Mr. Hicks intervened, and [RIOC in-house Counsel] Mr. [Ken] Leitner returned Jeff’s call that same day, and explained that RIOC was obtaining outside Counsel on this matter, and a final choice of law firm had not yet been made.

Another ten days was then lost on this same issue. On Friday, March 3, 2000, Jeff Glen of DeForest & Duer met with Steve Kass, outside Counsel, and Ken Leitner, General Counsel, for RIOC.

Steve Kass’s position is that Blackwell Park’s reduction to three acres was a *de facto* amendment made in the 1970’s, and that the Board of Estimate’s failure to recognize that reduction is explicable in many ways. Jeff replied that he himself could not think of one, and would Mr. Kass like to share his thinking, and Mr. Kass predictably responded that he would not.

The original missing three acres of Blackwell Park *do* lie under Eastwood and Rivercross, i.e., Northtown Phase I was overbuilt to the South onto the original Blackwell Park acreage. Many documents bear this fact out.

However, we feel, and DeForest & Duer feels, that the 1990 amendment changes that.

It is important to note that RIOC does not, at this point, take the position that they can violate the GDP.

Rather, they are preparing to argue that the amendment can be interpreted differently from the way we are interpreting it.

Kass asked what RIRA’s objection is to the Southtown Plan and [said] that we should be happy with the new soccer field.

Kass stated the reason no one wants to build the Ramati Plan is that no one believes that the Island can support two core commercial centers. They feel that by separating Northtown and Southtown the present businesses would be hurt. There are several arguments against this position.

Jeff believed as of last Friday morning that RIOC would meet with RIRA to allow us to express our concerns. They then will either listen to us or dismiss us. *No promises.*

The cases pending will be heard by Judge Parness. Briefs are due the second week of April. Arguments will begin in June.

If RIOC refuses to listen to RIRA’s position and adhere to the GDP, then we will issue a letter of intent to sue and prepare to intervene on the pending lawsuits (which Jeff believes will be combined by Judge Parness). It will then be Parness who makes any final decision that is made.

Intervening on the existing suits is by far the cheapest way to proceed. To intervene we must demonstrate that (a) we have separate and different interests from the existing Plaintiffs, which we do as the elected representatives of the Island residents, and (b) that both the arguments and the evidence we are going to present is materially different from those arguments that are listed in the existing suits. Both of these restrictions are easily filled in our instance. Jeff remains entirely confident that we have a very strong argument with plenty of evidence to support it.

March 8, 2000: Jeff Glen called. He has not heard from Kass and he is preparing a letter of intent. Although much of the work Karen Stewart has done will save us huge sums of money, he feels it will be ten hours of work on the brief on the Board of Estimate decision. Then he will need to do a Memorandum of Law and go before Judge Parness. He believes it is likely to cost somewhere between \$6,000 and \$10,000. The Common Council must decide if we want to proceed, and to raise the additional money.

Our case focuses on the six acres of land designated as Blackwell Park by the Board of Estimate in 1990. I realize that I am asking a lot from the Council in not offering you the specific evidence or arguments we hold on this matter. It is, however, so critical that none of it get back to RIOC that I am going to ask you not to ask. RIOC’s choice of the two lawyers demonstrate that they are focusing on the environmental cases (they are strong environmental lawyers, they are *not* land-use lawyers) rather than the land-use issues.



## COMING UP

Compiled by Claire Friedland – phone/fax 317-8523

**Sun., Mar. 19,** 3:00 p.m., **World Voices** at Manhattan Park Theatre Club, *The Story of Deirdre*, actors and puppets perform. \$6 child or adult, or season subscription for once-a-month presentations.

**Mon., Mar. 27,** 8:00 p.m., **Historical Society Lecture, Vanished Structures**, Island House Community Room. Free to members, \$5 seniors/students, \$10 to adults. Information, **688-4836**.

**Mon., Mar. 27,** 8:00 p.m., **Toastmasters**. Information, **687-4010**.

**Sat., Apr. 1,** next issue of **The Main Street WIRE. Deadlines:** Advertising in the paper, Fri., Mar. 24; decision on stuffers for *The Bag*, Mon., Mar. 27; bag materials due Mar. 30. **Future issues:** Apr. 15, 29; May 13, 27; June 10; July 1 (for July 4); Aug. 26; Sept. 9, 23; generally every two weeks thereafter. 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 (no charge), **317-8523**.

**Wed., Apr. 5,** 8:00 p.m., **RIRA Common Council Meeting**, Chapel of the Good Shepherd.

**Mon., Apr. 10,** 8:00 p.m., **Historical Society Lecture, The Women’s Workhouse**, Island House Community Room. Free to members, \$5 seniors/students, \$10 to adults. Information, **688-4836**.

**Thur., Apr. 13,** 7:00 p.m., **RIOC Board of Directors Meeting**, Chapel of the Good Shepherd.

**Fri., Apr. 21,** 12 noon, **River Music** presents the **Bordeaux String Quartet**, playing Haydn’s *Seven Last Words of Christ*, as part of Good Friday observance. Chapel of the Good Shepherd. Free.

**Mon., Apr. 24,** 8:00 p.m., **Historical Society Lecture, Blackwell House Update and Archives Night**, Island House Community Room. Free to members, \$5 seniors/students, \$10 to adults. Information, **688-4836**.

### At the Senior Center

**Monday**  
9:15-10:15, **Stay Well** (Exercise)  
9:30, **Basic Computer Class**  
10:00-12:00, **English as 2nd Language**  
11:00-12:30, **Metrocard Bus 3/27**  
12:45 **Arts & Crafts 3/27**  
6:30, **Line Dancing**  
**Tuesday**  
10:00, **Jazzercise**  
12:30-2:30, **Visiting Nurse Service 3/28**  
1:30, **Games** (RISA)  
7:00, **Korean English**  
**Wednesday**  
9:15, **Stay Well** (Stretch)  
10:30-11:30, **Creative Arts**  
8:00, **Bridge**  
**Thursday**  
10:00-11:00, **T’ai Chi**  
12:30, **Movie 3/23**  
**Friday**  
9:15, **Stay Well**  
10:00-11:00, **Citizenship**  
10:30-11:30, **Blood Pressure Screening**  
12:30, **Movie 3/31**  
**Saturday**  
7:30 p.m., **Bingo** (RISA)

### Special Events

**Call in advance for details: 980-1888**  
Fri., Mar. 24, 12:15, **Vial of Life Lecture**  
Thur., Mar. 30, 12:30, **Birthday Party**

## Southtown from page 1

also challenging use of City DEP funds originally earmarked for Octagon Park to pay for Southtown infrastructure (water, sewer, AVAC, electricity), without complying with a City environmental review process.

Chira’s action opposes Southtown on much the same grounds as the RIRSD suit. The recitation of facts in his filing suggests RIOC misled the community with claims that “nothing is cast in stone” long after environmental consultants were asked to provide justification for doing no new environmental assessment for the April 1999 plan – a request that meant the plan was effectively final.

Legal experts who have looked at the cases say Justice Stanley Parness of the State Supreme Court is likely to combine them for trial.

### Fund-Raising Issues

The Residents Association’s potential intervention raises the potential of competing fund-raising by RIRA and RIRSD, both of which have gone to the community for the money to foot the lawyers’ bills.

Both groups have existing war chests, but legal actions consume funds at an alarming rate, so further fund-raising is probably inevitable. RIRA’s legal fund-raising goes back to April and May, responding to various RIOC development proposals, including the plan for a twin-tower hotel at Southpoint. Residents contributed an immediate \$10,000 in cash and pledges, but the organization’s efforts to raise funds has since stalled. As recently as March 8, only about a third of the Common Council – which voted unanimously to create the fund – had contributed to it.

RIRA’s legal funds have been used for payment of a monthly retainer to DeForest & Duer. However, the firm’s attention to approval of the Southtown plan was delayed in a misunderstanding: While the RIRA Common Council had approved the retainer for advice on all Island development, for a time the law firm was under the impression that its mandate concerned only Southpoint.

[**Southpoint** is the Island’s southernmost 10 acres. Acreage designated for **Southtown** lies north of the Tram station. The land in dispute in the legal actions is approximately the area occupied by the soccer/baseball field just north of the abandoned Nurses Residence. The developers have proposed a replacement soccer field just north of the Queensboro Bridge, near the Island’s east shore.]

Depending on the course of legal events and the judge’s procedural decisions, estimates are that each of the Islanders’ suits could cost as much as \$30,000 to \$50,000, given that appeals are likely. Southtown construction is sure to be delayed at least until July, but it’s also possible that, with appeals, years could elapse before ground is broken.

Arguments in the Southtown cases are scheduled to start in May.

A Sense of Place

# Welfare Island from the '20s to the '40s

Eleanor Schetlin was born in 1920, in the 20th year of her father's employment in the Island's storehouse. Now nearly 80, she treated members of the Roosevelt Island Historical Society and their guests to her luminous memories of her childhood here. She spent later years here, too, with the Metropolitan Hospital School of Nursing. The photos are hers, except where separately credited. (More of her photographs are on Website NYC10044 www.nyc10044.com.)

We lived on Cottage Row, Welfare Island. There were six cottages. We lived in the one that was nearest the East River so we had a marvelous view of all the sunsets over Manhattan, for all my childhood. I thought everybody lived like this; it was a lovely place to live.

My parents had once lived in Blackwell Mansion, we called it then, because it had wings on it. The first place they lived in when they came here was the Penitentiary, on



Website NYC10044

the top floor, and my mother was terrified, particularly when a prisoner escaped. My father used to say, "Don't be frightened, they're not going to come to the top floor of the penitentiary... they're trying to escape."

I can't get over how much concrete there is here [now]...

There were fields, trees, hedges, much space... It was living in the country, in a sense, but it was also a life of magic. Because my father had maintenance, we had a big laundry bin, and my mother would put all the laundry in that. The men would come and haul this big thing away, and bring in a bin of clean laundry, and she would check off everything to make sure she was getting it all back... Our name, Schetlin, was stitched in the corner in red of every piece of linen we had, because the laundry was so big – there were so many people, so many institutions, so many wards of hospitals – they had to be able to identify easily what belonged to whom. Anyway, the big bin would come back and it was like magic. We didn't do shopping the way ordinary people did shopping, either. My mother would check off how much she needed of artichokes, or whatever, brussels sprouts, or potatoes, and she sent it off, and a bin would come back loaded with whatever she needed. They'd unpack it for her... Magic!

It was actually a remarkable kind of life... I'm still looking for the magic.

We lived on the grounds of the City Home for the Aged and Infirm. We had very strong instructions from our parents: Never stare at people, be polite, don't make anybody feel uncomfortable, don't ever embarrass anybody... We did have some people who were misshapen, so we learned just to take them for granted.

We also went to the movies. There was a building on the Island... glass enclosed, called "the Klondike." You couldn't see the movies until night fell, because it wasn't dark enough. We kids went up the stairs and sat on a platform around the projection booth. People in wheelchairs came in and sat on the sides; there were benches in the center for the people who could walk in. We saw silent films, the first films I ever saw there. Then, of course, the early speaking things...

We used the [Queensboro] Bridge to get to the City... It had the elevator building [next to the Bridge].

There were enormous freight elevators on the north side of the building – three of them in a row – and they were slow, slower, and slowest, and they were intended to be because they had to carry weights, and of course the slowest



From the Lighthouse: Draper Hall, home of the Metropolitan Hospital School of Nursing

carried the heaviest weights, and so on. They had enormous doors. The men would pull on these big ropes, and that pulled the upper door up and the bottom door down, and trucks could drive in, and then unload to any floor in the storehouse. They would take the stuff right off the trucks and onto the floor. On the ninth floor of this building there was a small hospital called Reception Hospital, and the ambulance could stop there. Somebody could be taken there if they didn't have time to get down to the other hospitals.

At the top [on the tenth floor] there was a big concourse that connected with the bridge. You drove right out of the elevators, across the concourse, across the trolley tracks. There was a little police booth, and the policeman would change the traffic light on the bridge so that you could sail out or in as the case may be.

They had a list at the elevator of who could go first, and it had to be ambulances first, then doctors, and then other passengers, and so on.

To get to the passenger part of it, where we went to school every day... You went to the other side of the building, to the passenger elevator. There were five of them, I think. We took the passenger elevators up to the top. You went along a tiled hall, at the end of which was a turnstile, and you had to show your pass to show that you were legitimately leaving the Island, that you weren't one of the people living in the Home for the Aged and Infirm making a getaway. You had to show it coming in, too.

Then you turned left and you went on to a platform that hung underneath the car platform above you. You were on the 9th floor; they were coming out on the tenth. You went across a little platform.

If you had to go to Queens, you went across this hanging passageway. It wasn't terribly wide, you could touch the sides of it easily. You were underneath a bridge on which traffic was rumbling. The whole thing would shake, and so would you. You didn't have to look down, but every once in a while you could look down because the metal panels only went four or five feet high, so you could look over and see the ground below. For a child it was terrifying. Most people took it for granted, but to feel the reverberations of the bridge was particularly alarming. We got used to it and we simply tramped across.

Then you got out on a platform that was attached to the side of the bridge, that is, there's the traffic on the bridge, then stanchions, then the trolley track, then your platform was beyond them. so you're out over nothing, absolutely nothing, shaking... Eventually the trolley would come and you'd get aboard...

[Eleanor Schetlin returned to Welfare Island in 1943.]

I took a Civil Service exam to be a Recreation Leader, and, for heaven's sakes, was appointed to the Metropolitan School of Nursing!

The students and I had a wonderful time together. These were young people who were committed to doing the right thing. They wanted to help in the world. They were all going to be nurses.

I was trying to keep them sane, because they lived on Welfare Island, isolated. They couldn't meet people easily. You needed paper clips? You had to spend an hour and half going over to the City. It was an isolated kind of life. They had each other, but that was all they had. Then they had me, and that was all they had. But they also had house mothers, well-meaning and as kind and as good as they could be. But they were nervous about their furniture, and they were nervous about the noise, and they were nervous about... they gave the impression that everything would have been lovely if only the students hadn't been there.

I was something of an intermediary between the two... One of my adventures happened in the Central Nurses Residence [the now-abandoned building just north of the Island subway station], when the Head House Mother – quite a personage – came to me and said, "Would you come with me to help me quiet the students on the seventh floor? They're making a racket." I said, "Let's go to the sixth floor, and walk up, so we appear without their hearing the elevator." I spent my time trying to outwit them, you see. We appeared suddenly in the middle of the corridor, and, leading this conga line that was shrieking at the top of its lungs, was the President of the Students Association, and she was suddenly faced with the two of us – the House Mother and me – the Director of Recreation and Guidance, so they scattered... the doors, all the way down the hallway, bang, bang, bang. But one door opens,



The Schetlin Cottage on Cottage Row, Welfare Island

and out comes the President of the Students Association: "I'm so sorry. I really know better, but I got carried away. When I saw you, my first impulse was to run in my room and slam the door, and lock it. But then I thought, 'What am I doing? I'm the President of the Students Association!'"

During the war the students carried enormous responsibility. I got there in 1943. The War was on. Students were carrying responsibility for entire wards with one supervisor going from ward to ward. The students, for the most part, were terrified and they were gritting their teeth... They were hoping the supervisor could get to them if they needed help, and they were just almost nervous wrecks. And to this day they say, "If there was anything we learned at Metropolitan Hospital, we learned to improvise. We had to fill in, We had to think up what we had to do and we had to go ahead and do it." So they carried the Hospital, particularly at night, and it was a remarkable responsibility for them, and many of them said they wouldn't have traded it for the world. They knew that they had come through and had done it well.

Anyway, trying to keep them sane... I had a camera club. We had a glee club. I had a softball team, volley ball, tennis... anything that any one of them might be interested in, I developed into an activity. We had a school magazine.

We would have Spring shows, where I would write lyrics, and they would get up and belt them out... We gave marvelous

shows. And we would take a theme... like they'd say they want to show the life of a "probie." So I'd sit down and write about the troubles probies have, that they can't pronounce things, and the words you're using... I'd write and they'd sing.

We had a fine mixture of ethnicities, which I was kind of proud of because it was back in the 1940's and we were doing things before other people were, about African-Americans and Caucasians getting along together, and the Irish not killing the Polish, and... whatever. We did well with it. I think these students bonded in particular because they were so isolated. They couldn't say, "Well, I'll run down to the movies..." They were all together and they either had to tolerate each other or give up.

I knew them differently from the way the faculty members did. They'd come to me and pour out their hearts, and you've no idea the troubles some of these young people had... We forget that young people can be terribly burdened with problems, and fears, and terrors, and disappointments, and heartaches.

Negative views of Welfare Island, held by many, do not agree with my view of the Island. To my mind, the negatives are stereotypes perpetuated from earlier times.

Certainly the Island wasn't necessarily the best of places to be, and some staff may have been uncaring or some facilities old or old-fashioned. Nevertheless, the Island was a good place to be – the aged and infirm weren't swept aside and weren't abandoned. Today they would be our homeless, trying to survive on the streets instead of being sheltered, clothed, and fed. The hospital patients and chronically ill weren't sent here to die; they received care from the hard-working, earnest health care workers that included the student and graduate nurses I knew and earnest young interns, all doing their best. Today the people who were cared for on Welfare Island would be struggling to afford health care, hoping for long-term care, seeking assisted-living facilities. Remembering the Welfare Island I knew brings memories of a life-affirming place that showed that at least the people of New York City cared, and were trying to help.

I was born the year women got the vote. We think of it as so long ago, but it's within my lifetime, and it's not over yet. We've come an enormous distance. Women couldn't get their children in divorce; they weren't granted custody; they couldn't keep their own money, there weren't any jobs for them. They weren't allowed to do all that much in college... they were discouraged from going to college. So, *hey, Baby!*

The Historical Society's lecture series continues Monday, 8:00 p.m. See ComingUp, page 3.

# Irish Night Captivates Its Crowd

by Mary Camper-Titsingh

“It’s hard to keep from tapping my toes,” exclaimed Mary Fitzgerald last week at River Music’s Seventh Annual Concert of Irish Music and Dancers in the Chapel of the Good Shepherd. Robin Russell, Founder and Director of River Music, had introduced the three accomplished musicians who played the many lively Irish tunes: Brian Conway on the fiddle, John Nolan whose fingers flew over the button accordion, and their piano accompanist Felix Dolan.

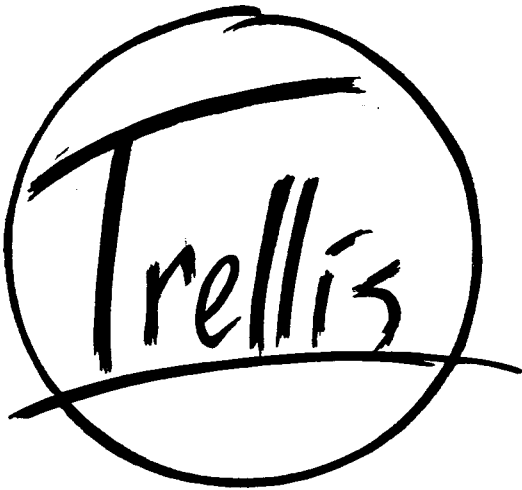
Vivian Bergin and Carol McCann brought nine gorgeously costumed girls, ages 9-15, from their respective Irish Dancing Schools in Queens, to perform traditional, high-kicking Irish Stepdances. “We dance both soft-shoe reels and hard-shoe jigs,” explained Christina Scibelli, who has been dancing the spirited steps since age three. Tara Cooney, 15, did not let a broken zipper stop her from a triumphant hard-shoe solo performance of an ear-shattering Irish jig called *Waves of Torres*. Both girls, like their schoolmates, were dressed in spectacular traditional Irish dance costumes: white Carrickmacross (cutwork) lace collars over handmade velvet dresses and short, full skirts embroidered with Celtic designs from the Book of Kells, the eighth-century illustrated Irish manuscript of the Latin Gospels. “The girls may some day follow in the tapping shoes of my daughter, Geraldine, who formerly danced as a student here on Roosevelt Island and is now the lead dancer with the *Lord of the Dance* troupe performing in Las Vegas,” Vivian Bergin said, as the young dancers listened with hope in their eyes.

The melodious “Danny Boy,” everyone’s favorite Irish song, ended the entertainment, except for an invitation to members of the audience to dance a four-hand reel with the young Irish dancers. The jolly evening was presented, admission free, under the auspices of the Parish of Saint Frances Cabrini. Even so, Sister Regina seemed quite pleased by the many voluntary donations from the enthusiastic spectators.



Margery Rubin

Dancers from the Bergin School of Irish Dance perform a Treble Jig. Many additional photos on Website NYC10044 at [www.nyc10044.com](http://www.nyc10044.com).



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Public Safety Blotter

February 15-March 13, 2000

2/16, Marijuana Possession, 546 Main St., Arrest / criminal possession of marijuana. Officer observed two youths entering L stairwell from 4 fl. Officer conducted surveillance and smelled what seemed to be marijuana, requested additional units who responded, intercepted youths exiting at rear of building, apprehended them, escorted them to Y.O.’s office. While conducting search of male youth, officer found a 4x4 clear bag with what appeared to be marijuana and misc. items. Female youth was searched by female officer, no controlled substance was found on her. Youtths’ parents were contacted, female was released to father. She was issued a Juvenile Report. Boy’s father responded and was informed his son was being placed under arrest; youth was transported to 19 Pct. for processing, instead youth was issued a Juvenile Report, because marijuana weighed less than one ounce.

2/19, Vehicle Accident, 300 Main St., RIOC bus driver (bus #1) informed Sgt. that he’d accidentally struck light pole exposing electrical wires when bus slid on ice. Bus’s side view mirror cracked. No injuries were incurred.

2/20, Found Property, 300 Main St., Anonymous male entered PSD, surrendered wallet containing US\$11.01, Mastercard, Visa and several other items. Wallet was secured at PSD.

2/21, Trespassing, 580 Main St., Arrests (2), Officer saw male on 7 fl. possibly smoking marijuana. Other officers responded, 2 youths fled upward, officers apprehended them and they were each issued a C summons, underage youth was given a Juvenile Delinquent report.

2/23, Investigation, 510 Main St., Officer responded to scene with NYPD. Resident reported having seen a snake in bedroom. Officers searched entire apartment with negative results.

2/23, Grand Larceny, 300 Main St., Arrest. Officers responded to anonymous complaint of car being driven up and down ramp in suspicious manner. Officer noticed male sitting in driver’s seat of car with engine running, interior lights on. Officer approached it, noticed steering wheel stripped, right window shattered, glass inside vehicle. He pulled perp. out of car, placed him under arrest. Victim was contacted and he did not know perp. Perp. was transported to PSD and subsequently to 19 Pct. for processing.

2/23, Larceny, 686 Main St., Gristede’s Mgr. phoned PSD, stated a female youth had taken a camera valued at \$11 and fled out of store. Security guard detained another female youth, who said she did not know the perp. and she was released.

2/23, Disorderly Youtths, 580 Main St., Officers responded to scene, complaint had been received of youths smoking “drugs”; upon their arrival youths ran into perp’s apartment. Area was filled with smoke and smelled of marijuana. Perp. was in front of apartment. When asked if he and friends were smoking marijuana perp. replied “Yeah, so what?” He was instructed to go into apartment and not to come out again. Another youth exited apartment and went into another apartment.

2/24, Criminal Mischief, 605 Main St., Officers responded to complaint of shattered glass from NYPD officer, who stated he’d observed broken window and saw two male youths running northbound. Officers searched area with negative results. A piece of brick was inside shop. Owner arrived searched interior and all was in order. NYPD officer searched further and took into custody an island youth who was in possession of a knife.

2/24, Criminal Mischief, 900 Main St., Female phoned PSD, said all four of her car’s tires had been slashed by unknown person. Officer searched area with negative results. Victim stated she would go to NYPD. Car was towed. Coler Hospital Sgt. notified and stated they had not seen any suspicious persons in parking lot.

2/26, Missing Person, 540 Main St., Attendant of male, wheel-bound tenant informed PSD officer victim left apartment evening of 2/24 and at 2/25 12:30 a.m. he’d not returned. Officers notified all the usual personnel, conducted an island wide search. At 10:50 p.m., the man got off the Queens Surface #102 bus at Gristede’s. He was in good health and was assisted home by officer.

3/1/00, Burglary 506 Main St., Owner of Lilies International School phoned PSD, said unknown persons had entered & taken property from school (three electronic devices of unknown value). The premises were in disarray and desk drawers were open. Reporter unable to ascertain if other property was missing. A female who was another reporter said that on 2/29, there had been three youths in school without authorization. When she confronted them, they ran out of school. NYPD was refused. Officers searched building with negative results.

3/1/00, Investigation, 513 Main St., Owner entered PSD, stated unknown male has entered Back Page several times partly displaying badge/shield and asking if health or fire dept. was after them. He does not purchase anything and leaves the tavern having caused the owner and patrons to be alarmed, man then drives away in a Cadillac.

3/4/00, Larceny, 688 Main St., Victim informed Sgt. that unknown person had removed AM/FM radio/CD player valued at \$500 from vehicle. Sgt. observed possible pry marks on dashboard and scratch marks on passenger’s side door. Victim also reported small puncture on passenger side seat. Victim stated he would report to NYPD on his own.

3/5/00, Vehicle Accident, 900 Main St., RIOC bus #6 and another vehicle had an accident adjacent to the boat-house. Both vehicles incurred minor damages.

3/10/00 Property Damage, 609 Main St., Officer responded to scene to report of youths breaking divider in front of 609. Man stated he had seen youth horse playing when one youth went into glass divider, cracking same. Mother of youth stated she would make restitution to RIHM.

3/10/00 Trespassing, 500 Main St., Arrests (3), Officers responded to scene from anonymous female of numerous youths at Blackwell House. Upon arriving and searching premises, they found 8 youths, they were escorted to PSD, then to Good Shepherd Chapel, where 3 of them (16 years and over) were issued “C” summonses, the rest were given NYPD youth referrals. A male was given authorizations by all of the youths’ parents to receive custody of all the youths. RIOC facilities personnel secured window.

3/11/00 Missing Person, 1 Main St., Goldwater Police Sgt. phoned PSD, stated patient had been missing since 3/10. All units notified, a search of island was made with negative results. NYPD responded and stated they would conduct a search of their own.

3/12/00, Larceny, 579 Main St., Deli owner phoned PSD, said non resident male had taken a bottle of beer, put it into his jacket. When officer questioned him, he said he’d purchased somewhere else but could not produce receipt. NYPD refused. Owner did not want to press charges. Perp. was escorted out of premises.

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## Engstler from page 1

spare time I am just a boring Mom with a busy schedule, sending the kids to school, making dinner, attending to weekend chores and visiting family,” she says in self-deprecation.

People who work with Marilyn enjoy her style and energy. Fay Vass, an Island resident since 1976, says Marilyn is the best community relations person ever “because she loves the Island, and puts her heart and soul into it.” Fay says, “It is not just a job for her. She never cuts corners and she goes beyond her call to make each event special and more meaningful. Nothing seems to be too difficult for her and she does everything right.” Dolores Green, President of the Roosevelt Island Seniors Association, says Marilyn is an asset to the community. “Her dedication to the seniors is unsurpassed. Whenever we call upon her to help, she is right there to help us, and we are happy to have her on our side. Take the Black History Month celebration, for instance. Marilyn made it a wonderful affair even though she is pregnant. It made us admire her even more.”

Sister Regina Palamara, who runs the Thrift Shop, says she admires Marilyn’s dedication and resourcefulness. “When Marilyn does an event, she does her work thoroughly. At the end, she picks up all the pieces and leaves nothing undone. She does the beginning, the middle and the end. Above all, she makes Roosevelt Island look good.”

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# SPORTSWIRE

**BASKETBALL** The Roosevelt Island Youth Program's Basketball League 2000 season concluded the first weekend in March with two exciting championship games. In the 14-16 Division, the first-place Celtics continued their outstanding play by defeating the second-place Lakers by a 91-66 score. The final score was not indicative of the competitiveness of the game, as the Lakers cut a 25-point halftime lead to just 8 points with seven minutes to go in the game. However, the Lakers suffered a devastating blow when their leading scorer had to leave the game with an injury and two other players fouled out less than a minute later. For the Celtics, Charles McCoy, the league's leading scorer, continued his dominating play, scoring 40 points and pulling down 19 rebounds. Marcus Moore had 23 points with 11 rebounds for the winners, while Blas Looor added 16 points. Other members of the championship team included John Mason, Alhussein Camara, Max Sinelnikov, and Fernando Nevarez. In the 11-13 Division, the Lakers defeated the Knicks by a 43-41 score in a game that went down to the wire, as the Knicks' attempt to tie the score just missed before time expired. The Lakers were paced by Joel Arroyo, who scored 25 points, and Pedro Valerio, who scored 12 points. Other members of the championship team were Lamar Burrows, Fode Bah, Carol Woody, Rahim Drame, Fabian Williams, Dennis Perezic, Hugo Genes and Emmanuelle Eboum.

**BASEBALL:** The Youth Program completed registration for the Baseball program on March 4th. The Baseball season will open April 8th. There will be four teams in the Major League (ages 11-13) and four teams in the Minor League (ages 8-10). There are still some spots available for the Tee-Ball program for children 6 and 7 years old.

## Ambassador from page 1

cultures came together in peace and friendship, so eventually would countries." The aim of the program is to give student athletes a greater understanding of people throughout the world. Students are encouraged to compete with other participants and also get involved in cultural and educational activities that would help acquaint them with the political, economic and cultural characteristics of the countries visited.

Born on the Island, Fabian used to attend the Roosevelt Island Day Nursery as a child and is now a seventh-grade student at the Chelsea School in Manhattan. Inspired to play by his mother, a former baseball coach on the Island, and his brother, Joey, who won a baseball scholarship many years ago, Fabian has played every game he possibly could. He currently plays hockey, soccer, baseball and basketball. "I believe that if you enjoy a game, you should play. If you are good at it, that becomes an incentive to play more," says Fabian philosophically.

He claims his mother makes him do his homework before he is allowed to go for games practice. He has no time for hobbies but tries to make little things which he thinks might be considered inventions sometime in the future. "He has been trying to make all kinds of contraptions since he was a young child," says his mother, who is known as Cookie among friends on the Island. "But sports is the most important thing in his life and I will help him pursue his passion."

In order to be able to go for the ten-day summer program beginning July 29, Fabian needs to raise \$4000 and his mother is doing everything she can to arrange for the money. "I am contacting people. A politician from the Bronx has already given me \$500. One gentleman from Rivercross has given Fabian a \$200 check. Sister Regina Palamara at the Church is giving me a free table to sell baked stuff and Spanish food that I cook. My friends are giving me clothes, jewelry and pictures to sell at the Farmer's market on Saturdays. The bakery is going to help me raffle cookies. I think I should be able to do it," says Mercedes. "I have lived on the Island for 25 years and people know us. I am counting on them to come forward and help Fabian go to Holland. Anyone who wants to help should just call me at (212) 644-2142."

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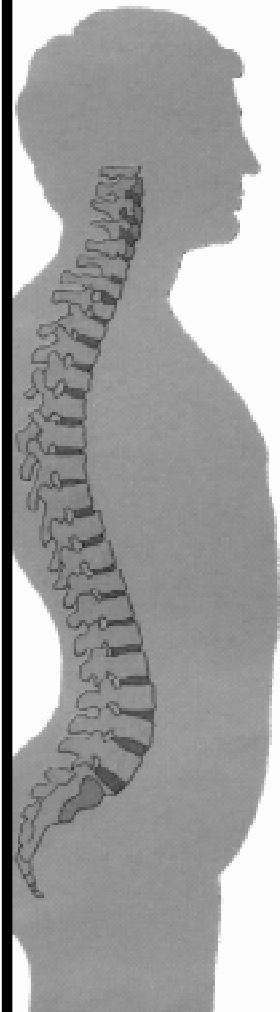
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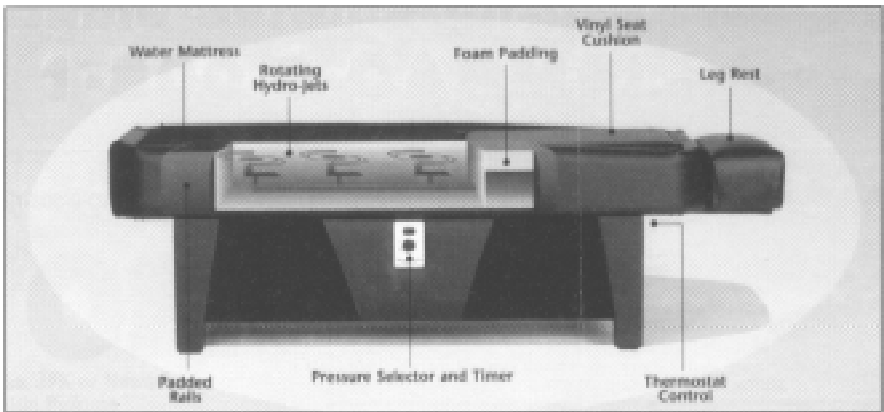
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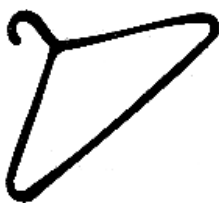
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