

Next scheduled issue
Saturday, May 31

The Main Street **WIRE**TM

Roosevelt Island’s Community Newspaper

News updates on **Website NYC10044** www.nyc10044.com



Puttin’ It Together Gathered around a piano at the Main Street Theatre, cast members get their first look at the finale song for *Like Totally Grimm*, an original children’s musical getting its first staging on the Island. Composer Bob McDowell, who wrote the play with Bill McMahon, is at the piano.

MST Readies Premiere of New Children’s Musical

by Linda Humphrey

When third-grader Carla Blumberg first appeared at the Main Street Theatre, in *Bye Bye Birdie*, she was thrilled, mostly because she got to eat cookies on stage. Four years of musicals later, she sang a solo as tough-girl Rizzo in *Grease*. “When I heard the applause, I broke out of character and smiled,” she recalls. She decided right then to become an actress.

Now a graduate of New York University’s Tisch School of the Arts Theater Department, Blumberg has returned to the Main Street Theatre to assist director Nancy Howe on *Like Totally Grimm*, the new children’s musical premiering May 30.

As Howe’s first-ever assistant, she is getting a first chance at directing, coaching the eight- to twelve-year-olds with their lines and toying with the idea of someday running a place like the Main Street Theatre.

“Nancy has done an amazing job – I appreciate it now!” says Blumberg. “She knows how to talk to the kids. On bad days I’m amazed at the way she keeps her cool and gets the work done. The kids don’t stop talking! I’m trying to pay attention to how she directs people – what she looks for.”

For Howe, who runs the Main Street Theatre & Dance Alliance with her husband, Worth Howe, the rough part is casting. “The kids get their hearts set on a certain part,” she says. “It’s a terrible process for me, because I *know* the kids and worry about their feelings. I always want to quit at that time of year!”

All sixty-five acting students in third through seventh grade landed a role in *Grimm*. The kids auditioned for the parts they wanted – and most coveted the leads. “I tried to forewarn them – it’s seldom that a third grader will do a lead!” Howe says. “They also had to sing something. Some just sang *Happy Birthday*. I needed to hear if they could hold a tune.” The group broke into three casts; each will stage two performances.

Once through the dizzying seventeen weeks of rehearsals – two hours

See **Grimm**, page 10

Briefly: Subway, Blotter, AVAC, and... Blood Goal Is 100 Pints

- The Icla da Silva Foundation plans a **June blood drive** with a record Roosevelt Island goal of 100 pints. The drive will culminate with the actual donations on Roosevelt Island Day, June 14. Donors will be signed up today and for the next three Saturdays, from 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., at a table at the Farmer’s Market, under the ramp at Motorgate.

- RIOC has now released **five months of the Public Safety Blotter**, which had been withheld without explanation starting December 14. The period, now on **Website NYC10044** at <http://nyc10044.com/wire/2317/blot2317.html>, includes December, 2002, through April, 2003.

- If you use the **subway in early-morning hours**, you’ll want to be aware of route changes from 12:01 a.m. to 5:00 a.m., Tue.-Fri, May 20-23. Notices are posted in the station here, and we have *The WIRE*’s attempt at an MTA-English to real-English translation on page 14.

- As reported two weeks ago in a *WIRE* between-issues e-mail bulletin, New York City will continue to operate Roosevelt Island’s **AVAC** system under assurances given to politicians representing the Island by the Department of Sanitation. But *The WIRE* has learned that the City plans to cut the AVAC shifts to one, ending at 5:30 p.m., raising the possibility of heavy wear and tear on the system when AVAC system “valves” at each building are “polled” at the start of the morning shift.

- The **Icla da Silva Foundation** is gearing up for a community presentation on its work finding bone-marrow matches for those stricken with leukemia. The session is slated for the evening of June 6 at the Manhattan Park Theater Club (see ad, page 11).

Pataki Plans to Name Former Brooklyn Councilmember to RIOC Presidency

Herbert E. Berman, a Brooklyn Democrat who represented Canarsie and surrounding Brooklyn communities on the City Council for 26 years, will be put forward by Governor George Pataki for the job of RIOC President, according to reports which are not yet officially confirmed, but which *The WIRE* considers reliable.

At Thursday night’s RIOC Board meeting, there was no formal action on the Corporation’s presidency. But in an open forum following the formal meeting, resident leaders offered lavish praise for Patrick Siconolfi for his first 100 days as Acting President. This new role started February 4 when the Board suspended Robert H. Ryan and voted to ask the State Inspector General to investigate generous vacation bonuses Ryan later admitted to *The WIRE* that he had awarded himself and other RIOC staffers for “volunteer” work following the 9/11/01 attack on the Twin Towers.

In a conversation with *The WIRE* following after the session, Board Chair Mary Beth Labate claimed to know nothing of any plan to name Berman. But earlier, when Residents Association delegate Byron Gaspard urged the Board to use its

influence with the Governor to make Siconolfi permanent, Labate responded with a firm assertion: “Ultimately, it will be the Board who will take a vote on who the next President is, and I don’t think that decision has been made. I think I speak for the Board... I’ll speak for myself as Chairperson, I have unqualified confidence in Pat Siconolfi in his role here as Acting President. I’m looking forward to his having a long and even more involved role in the Corporation going forward, and ultimately it will be the Board’s vote that will name a permanent President to the Corporation.”

Historical Society President Judith Berdy and Residents Association President Matthew Katz also praised Siconolfi, who has drawn kudos for moving quickly on several initiatives dear to residents’ hearts, including restoration of Blackwell House, the opening of Southpoint Park, activation of the car turnaround just north of the new Southtown buildings, renovation of the bus turnaround at Gristede’s, and replacement of the doors at the Motorgate atrium.

Whether Labate’s firm stance on behalf of Siconolfi signals a determination by the full Board to keep



him in the post is not immediately clear, but most Board members have complimented him on his work, both in his continuing role as Chief Financial Officer, and his more recent role as Acting President.

Berman, who is 69, chaired the City Council’s Finance Committee from 1990 to 2001, when he was bumped from his City Council seat by term limits. He then campaigned in a Democratic primary race for City Comptroller, running on the strength of his experience in City finances. In July, 2001, the *Canarsie Courier* quoted Berman in a campaign speech, saying, “I don’t need on-the-job training to be the City’s chief financial officer.

See **Berman**, page 10

Southpoint Is a Hit! Now What?

by Robert Laux-Bachand

What’s next for Southpoint?

After 33 years of dreaming and scheming by architects and politicians, after a 21-year lockup, it has come to this:

An immigrant from Bangladesh and his wife and two children, a boy and a girl, ages 3 and 2, wandering down to the shore at midday this week. Canada geese guarding their nests. Two greater black-backed gulls perched on an outcropping of rock about 15 yards offshore; cormorants in the West Channel. The roar of FDR Drive.

“Is this open?” the man asks, taking in the solitude of this urban wild.

His name is Mohammad Hossain, and he lives in Flushing, Queens, and has been in this country for seven years.

Yes indeed, Mr. Hossain, it surely is.

From where he is standing, near the tip of Roosevelt Island, you can see “Good Defeats Evil” by Zurab

Tseretli in the UN sculpture garden. It depicts St. George putting a lance through the Dragon, and was a gift from the Soviet Union in 1987, commemorating a treaty that was meant to ward off nuclear war.

There is no more Soviet Union and, at least for now, no grand idea for Southpoint.

“I like the park and the natural beauty and all human beings,” said Hossain, who added that his goal was to become a holy man.

If he was in search of the sublime, he had come to the right spot, a place that inspired a Roosevelt family foundation to choose Southpoint as the site for an FDR memorial in 1970. The Island, formerly known as Blackwell’s and then Welfare Island, was renamed in September, 1973, as “the first step in a project which was to culminate in the construction of the memorial on the southern tip,” according to a statement presented to an advisory committee of the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation in 1998 by the Franklin

See **Southpoint**, page 12

Islanders

Richard Jolly Returns, Now a Knight

by Anusha Shrivastava

Female-dominant groups of primates, investiture ceremonies at Buckingham Palace, stunt-men specializing in setting themselves on fire, and “adjustment with a human face” rarely get discussed during the course of the same hour-long conversation. But if the conversation is with Sir Richard Jolly, this is not out of the ordinary at all.

Sitting on the second-floor balcony of his Rivercross apartment, Sir Richard recounts how he was incomunicado in the fall of 2000 as his primatologist wife, now Lady Alison Jolly, was studying lemurs in the forests of Madagascar. Upon their return to England, he found there had been frantic messages for him from the Foreign Office, asking him to confirm that he would accept the title of KCMG or Knight Commander, The

See **Jolly**, page 11



The Editorial Page

What’s the Plural for...

What’s the collective for a group of RIOC Presidents? We have a *gaggle of geese* at Southpoint, a *flock of gulls* over the East River, and...

And an *embarrassment of Presidents* at RIOC.

We learned this week that suspended RIOC President Robert H. Ryan is still collecting his salary while *persona non grata* on Roosevelt Island. That’s 100 days worth, at about \$10,000 a month. That’s one RIOC President.

And *The WIRE* has it on good authority that Governor George Pataki has another political ally in mind for the job – Brooklyn Democrat Herbert E. Berman – who has served the Governor as a liaison with the Jewish community, in addition to duties as an economic advisor. That’s two.

And on the job, earning not just a salary but the respect of this community, there is Pat Siconolfi, who first reformed the finances at the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation – and then, placed somewhat suddenly in the role of Acting President, reformed RIOC’s community relations. That’s three.

Governor Pataki has treated the RIOC Presidency like a parking place for tired cronies who need a place to rest while collecting a paycheck. Herb Berman, a distinguished Brooklyn Democrat who earned the respect of his colleagues on the City Council over a quarter century, might be distressed to learn that his predecessor gubernatorial appointments have been serious embarrassments. No slur on him, but who would want to become part of a rogue’s gallery next to Dr. Jerome Blue and Mr. Robert H. Ryan?

It’s time, after all, for the RIOC Presidency to be taken out of the realm of political patronage. It’s time for merit to emerge as the key criterion in that post.

The WIRE has editorialized for this community to have the right to elect the members of the RIOC Board, and for that elected Board to have the power to hire professional community management. We are not at all ready to discard the idea of democratic elections of the Board, but if we had an elected Board with the power to hire a President on experience and merit, we suspect – based on his first 100 days – that such a Board could turn with confidence to Pat Siconolfi to clean up the RIOC act and create a powerful, synergistic connection with the people of this remarkable community.

Siconolfi has already started that process. He has begun to succeed where others failed or failed to try. He wins sincere praise from community leaders too long kept in the dark as RIOC blundered from one mistake to another. They are relieved by his openness, willingness to listen and think creatively, and strong sense of the changes that will make us even more proud to be Roosevelt Islanders.

He’s proved himself, and the job should be his.

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Five months of Public Safety Blotter, previously withheld, are now available on Website NYC10044 at <http://nyc10044.com>



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Letters

To the Editor:

My wife, who uses the Roosevelt Island Tram twice daily to commute to her office and back, takes part in the State’s TransitChek program, as do many other customers of the Tram. Several weeks ago, she was told by a Tram employee that she could not use her TransitCheks to buy tokens for the Tram, which the employee said was to prevent her from purchasing \$65 worth of tokens and selling them for a profit. My wife assured the woman that was not her intent, and that she had, for the past two years, taken the Tram to and from her office daily, and that is what the tokens would be used for.

Forward to May 7. The Tram now costs \$2, a high price for a four-minute ride. Once again, my wife attempted to exchange her TransitCheks for her month’s supply of tokens, and was again told the Cheks would not be accepted. She telephoned a RIOC employee, and he told her the rationale is to prevent people from all over the place coming to the Tram to purchase tokens. This makes no sense, as the tokens are sold at the MTA’s Transit Museum and they are no longer accepted for subway fare. That said, *all* fares are \$2 now, so there is no basis for people buying them from the Tram to save money, or make money. So, all riders of the Tram who are legally taking advantage of the State’s TransitChek program will be forced to either discontinue involvement in the program or quit riding the Tram. This is not a fair situation.

RIOC’s policy of not accepting TransitCheks for Tram tokens is nonsense, and perhaps illegal. RIOC is stating that the Tram fare is increasing to \$2 due to the MTA increases, yet also saying that the Tram is not linked to the MTA, and therefore the Tram cannot be connected to the Metrocard system. This, again, makes no sense. Is the Tram under obligation to raise the fare to \$2? If so, accept MetroCards and TransitCheks!

This situation, and many others, points to this simple fact: It is time for the MetroCard to be accepted for the Tram, period. I, for one, am hereby boycotting the Tram until this situation is rectified.

James Brock

To the Editor:

Perhaps the headline in the *WIRE*’s April 26 issue should have read “Southpoint Park is Open *But* Under Surveillance.” On Friday, April 25, at about 2:00 p.m., I wandered into the park invited by the open gate and signs informing me that closing hour was dusk. (I was out walking the Island snapping photos of spring trees for a course at the Central Park Conservancy.) Fascinated, I gawked at the eerie ruins and the marvelous view. I began photographing the Smallpox Hospital from various angles. I walked to the tip of the Island and admired the view. I aimed my camera at the Pepsi-Cola sign in Queens and it was about then that I became aware of the helicopter above me. (Note: I deliberately took no pictures of the Bridge or the United Nations. See below.) The whirlybird had flown past before rather low, but now I realized it was continuously circling in a wide arc roughly from the Williamsburg Bridge to LaGuardia and back.

Each time it passed near the Island, it passed almost over my head. At one point I took a photo of it. I walked back to take more photos of the ruins and, to be sure, there was the copter again. This time it
See **Letters**, page 14

To Gifford Miller:

We need your help once again with the subway station at Roosevelt Island. Three of the ten escalators have been broken for over a month. We were promised that two of them would be back in service by May 11, and the third by May 20.

Instead, as of Tuesday, May 13, not one of those has been repaired and instead, *five* escalators are now out of service. In addition, the elevator leading to the Manhattan-bound platform is out of service. A sign was posted that it is not going to be repaired anytime soon, but it was impossible to see the ETA for that repair, as the area is taped off, preventing us from getting close enough to read the sign.

As you are aware, the train platforms are ten stories/flights of stairs below ground. Roosevelt Island has many seniors and disabled citizens, so this is a real hardship for them as well as the rest of us with asthma or temporary orthopedic problems. There are also women with young children, some with strollers, who simply cannot negotiate those ten flights of stairs.

Calls to Doug Sussman at NYC transit have resulted in nothing more than typical PR responses about parts on order, and that he is going to call down to those people, but absolutely no action resulting in getting the equipment back in service. Calls to the elevator and escalator repair people are a waste of time. The station manager, Joseph Pappa, is missing in action... won’t return calls. The token booth clerks are useless... won’t even post on their whiteboards whether the escalators are working.

As a result, many of us must use the Tram to avoid this nightmare of a station, and incur an extra \$4 round trip expense per person each day to pick up the subway in Manhattan.

As a result of what I am seeing here, I can only deduce, since I am a bottom-line-oriented person, that the people who are responsible for the escalators and elevators at the Roosevelt Island station are either incompetent or corrupt, and maybe both. It seems that repairs to our equipment go into a queue. However, because of the unique characteristics of this station and our population, Roosevelt Island should be a priority.

Is there anyone on a higher level at the Transit Authority that you can appeal to for help in getting this resolved and getting the equipment back in working order?

Thanks in advance.

Raye Schwartz

Letters Policy

The WIRE welcomes letters to the Editor, to the community, and to/from officials. Publication on a *Name Withheld* basis will be considered, but the writer’s name, address, and phone number **must** be provided for verification and for our records; anonymous letters are not considered for publication.

Preferred methods of submission: E-mail Letters@MainStreetWIR.com (ASCII text preferred, or use any word-processing software, but no MSWord files with macros), or PC-standard 3.5" floppy disk left at 531 Main Street addressed to *The WIRE*.

Alternatives: Typed, double-spaced copy left at 531 Main Street or faxed to 1-212-755-2540 (call ahead to 1-212-826-9055). Clearly handwritten letters will be considered if brief, but we cannot take telephone dictation of letters.

All letters are subject to acceptance, and to editing for length and clarity. Recommend maximum length, 300 words; longer letters will be considered if their content merits the required space.

To RIOC:

Two weeks ago last Friday was one of the first nice Fridays we’ve had in several months. I thought I would take advantage of the weather and make a long-awaited trip, with my 13-month-old twins, to the upper eastside to visit a friend and her new baby. We made it to the Tram, bought tokens and only saw the sign saying the Manhattan-side elevator was out when we were about to enter the cabin. I asked the operator if we could use the emergency lift and she said no. Since my twins can’t walk downstairs and the two of them and the stroller are too heavy to carry, I decided to try the subway. A little wiser, I asked the token-booth clerk if the elevator was working. Yes, it was. Being even wiser I asked if the elevator was working at 63rd street. The clerk called 63rd street and, sure enough, the elevator to the street was out.

We were trapped! It was not a pleasant feeling to know that we could not leave the Island even in an emergency. Since then I haven’t tried to take my children off the Island so, as far as I know, the situation has not changed.

I realize that the subway elevator is not in your control. All the more reason for you to ensure that the Tram elevator is working. The Tram should be a reliable means of transportation. But the elevator has been out almost constantly for months. The elevator is not merely for people in wheelchairs; many people can’t walk up or down stairs, including mothers with babies and all the paraphernalia babies require. When the main elevator is not working, the back-up lift should be available to all those who need it.

Failing that, RIOC should re-institute the system under which a warning flag was flown outside Public Safety whenever the elevator was down.

Now that spring and nice weather are here, it would be wonderful if everyone could take a Tram ride and use the elevator. Please have the elevator repaired so that it stays in good working condition. Thank you for your consideration.

Marguerite Camaioire

To the Editor:

I am distressed by the cavalier “keep outsiders at bay” attitude on display at the Roosevelt Island Gardening Club. We are not members of the club, but in past years, have enjoyed visiting the gardens in flowering season. This year, on three occasions in the past week, we have had to come back disappointed, because the gates were locked, and gardeners present inside rather rudely refused to open them. All these visits were during the day, one of them on a weekend. The apparent reason for keeping the gates locked at all times is to keep vandals out. This is naive. The modest fencing around the gardens would discourage only the most arthritic vandal. Further, few vandals would want to attack when half a dozen gardeners are inside. By refusing to open gates even on request, all the gardeners have managed to do is alienate visitors who would like to admire their efforts. I would suggest keeping gates open during the day, and certainly when gardeners are present inside.

Apurva Varma

Letters deadline for May 31 issue: May 27

After deadline, letters will be considered on a space-available basis

*They took the trees and put them in a tree museum
And they charged the people a dollar and a half just to see 'em.
(Refrain) Don't it always seem to go
That you don't know what you've got 'til it's gone?
They paved paradise and put up a parking lot.*

Joni Mitchell, Big Yellow Taxi

I was sitting in a barber's chair getting a haircut when a cover of the old Joni Mitchell song began to play on the radio. It struck me that the debate in City government over the propriety of amending our General Development Plan to allow the Octagon Apartments development was about paving over paradise. The developers argue that they are giving us more usable parkland than exists today, and they are. However, if *all* the land around the Octagon landmark is preserved and developed as a park, the result will be over three times the usable open space. Only lawyers could define an acre and a half of landscaping under a thirteen-story apartment complex as an Urban Ecological Center, and they do. I'll give you another quote, posted beside my computer hutch, and then move on: **Parkland is forever. If you lose that land, you can never get it back.** —Henry Stern (then NYC Parks Commissioner), *New York Times* 9/11/01.

A couple of weeks ago my wife and I gave ourselves a treat. We decided to visit Southpoint Park the week after it opened to full-time visitation. Sherie had come home early from work that Tuesday, and we ambled down the West Promenade with cherry trees in full bloom to our left and the East River vistas to our right. The late afternoon sun was setting over Manhattan and only one other couple was in the park. In fact, the nesting geese outnumbered the people! What a delight. The only noise was the hum of FDR Drive traffic and the susurrus of the wind in the trees. This is truly one of the most majestic views of Manhattan available and I'm so glad that it now belongs to everyone in the form of a park. Where else in the Big Apple can you see a brace of geese flying thirty feet overhead? I hope you saw the article about our new park in last Sunday's *New York Times* City section. It was charming, although it erred by describing Mark Ponton as an elected RIOC Board member. Don't we wish! Whatever form Southpoint Park may take in the future, it must preserve this sense of tranquility and of being a part of nature or it will diminish what is there right now. That's a challenge for us all.

It seems that the threat to our AVAC system has been turned back. We've learned that our unique garbage-disposal system will remain under City control and manned by City engineers. It seems that we must fight for AVAC annually during budget-negotiation time. My heartfelt thanks to Gifford Miller, to Carolyn Maloney, and to those in the Department of Sanitation who listened to reason.

The fight for our firehouses continues. I understand that Community Board 8 passed a resolution last December endorsing the continued operation of the eight endangered engine companies. And CB8's Roosevelt Island Committee accepted a similar resolution from me at their last meeting. Individually, these resolutions, rallies, letters, and petition drives are unlikely to deter the Mayor from closing these facilities. However, the volume of pressure may be sufficient to encourage His Honor to find his budget savings elsewhere. Stay tuned.

A funny thing happened at last week's Common Council meeting. We are obliged to change our constitution to accommodate our new neighbors at Southtown. In accordance with the constitution, I had presented several amendments for consideration at the April meeting. The rules require either one Council member or 125 RIRA members (that's you) to submit constitutional changes. There's no third way. The rules prevent voting at the same meeting, and so I anticipated discussion and possible action at the May 7 Council session. Imagine my surprise to find that the Roosevelt Island Council of Organizations (RICO), a phantom organization that once was a factor here, had packed the Council with three new members for the purpose of skewing the constitutional vote. The framers of our constitution had included up to five unelected RICO members on the Common Council for reasons that have been lost in the mists of time. These three worthies, Karen Stewart (RICO chair), Kitty Berman, and Deirdre Breslin, are all veterans of the Residents Association, but had declined to run for office last November. And yet, here they were, professing great consternation for an organization that

they were no longer prepared to work for, and representing no one but themselves. What a disgrace! RIRA's only strength is as the elected representative body of the Roosevelt Island residential community and its only reason for being is to work for that community. The constitution has value only insofar as it empowers RIRA in its work. As it happens, we found an alternative solution to our constitutional questions that will attempt to create both a constitution and by-laws out of our impenetrable, ambiguous, contradictory, and self-defeating constitution. Folks, a constitution is supposed to serve the organization, not the other way around. Let's remember why there is a RIRA in the first place. And shame on you, RICO!

Also on the agenda was a visit from our neighbor, Airam da Silva, representing the Icla da Silva Foundation. Many of you know the da Silva family as the founders of an organization, named for Airam's sister Icla, who succumbed to leukemia, that searches for compatible bone marrow donors and conducts blood-donation drives. RIRA participated in the last drive a year and a half ago, and we've been asked again to volunteer to help solicit your blood donations on Roosevelt Island Day, June 14. Thanks to my Common Council colleagues, Bub Arya, Russ DiBello, Erin Feely-Nahem, Vicki Feinmel, Dolores Green, Sherie Helstien, Nurit and Steve Marcus, Debra Mount Cornet, and Margie Smith for offering an hour of their valuable time in that effort. If you can join your Council reps on a Saturday to sign up donors for an hour, call the Foundation at **1-212-593-1807** and offer your services. And, you can sign up on-line to give blood on June 14 at <http://www.icla.org>.

On Tuesday, 24 intrepid Islanders boarded a bus headed up a rainy and windy Hudson River to Albany. This crew chose to take a day off from work or from school to participate in the American ritual of bearding our elected representatives in their place of business to lobby for redress of grievances. Thousands of New Yorkers convened at the steps of the Capitol Building to make the case that the loss of rent regulation could destroy the City's middle class. Our particular message was that Senate bill S2954, which extends the protection of rent stabilization to Mitchell-Lama housing occupied after 1973 (our housing) could spell the difference between Roosevelt Island continuing or not as a community based on affordable housing for the middle class.

After the Capitol Building rally, we got to the heart of the day's business. Our Senator, Olga Mendez, spent forty-five minutes meeting with our group to discuss her strategy for the legislation. Olga is a co-sponsor of the bill and we urged her to help steer it out of the Housing Committee so that it might receive the consideration and vote of the full Senate before the current law expires on June 15. She noted that, until the budget debate is resolved, there is likely to be little discussion of this or any other legislation. The Governor is expected to veto the budget, and the Legislature is expected to override his veto. However, Mendez seemed optimistic about the chances for S2954 to pass. She promised to intervene with Senate Majority Leader, Joseph Bruno, without whose endorsement little happens in the State Senate.

Our group spent the remainder of the afternoon meeting with representatives of the key players in this legislative drama: with counsel for John Bonacic, Chair of the Senate Housing Committee, and with counsel for Frank Padavan, author and chief sponsor of S2954. Among them were our Assemblymember, Pete Grannis, and our own City Councilmember, Speaker Gifford Miller, who provided our bus as well as two others for his Manhattan constituents. Thank you, Gifford, and thanks to our small but determined band who made this effort to protect our Roosevelt Island housing and way of life. Thanks to the RIRA Housing Committee that put the bus trip together, with special acknowledgment of bus captains, Margie Smith and Sherie Helstien. Sherie was responsible for providing the materials and setting up the lobby stations in Westview, Island House, and Eastwood at which we asked you to join us on the bus and to fill out and mail a variety of letters and post cards to influence the vote on the bill. And thanks to Gifford's senior aide, Jessica Lappin, for smoothing the ways, meeting our needs, and just for being a living doll!

The RIRA Column



Matthew Katz
Residents Association President
e-mail: matthewkatz@rcn.com

COMING UP

— This Weekend —

Blood Drive Sign-up at the Farmer's Market, **Sat., May 17**, 8:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m., sponsored by the Icla da Silva Foundation. Volunteers are sought to help with this and future sign-ups; call **1-212-593-1807** or e-mail Airam@icla.org.

Spring Tree Walk, sponsored by the Roosevelt Island Tree Board, **Sat., May 17**, 10:00 a.m., conducted by Forester Bob Bealin. Meet at the bell in Good Shepherd Plaza.

Trees of Roosevelt Island display, throughout May, Rivercross windows on Main Street.

— The Coming Week —

Previously announced for May 19, but postponed: *Religion on Blackwell's and Welfare Island*, visual presentation by the Roosevelt Island Historical Society. (New date to be announced later.)

Blood Drive Sign-up at the Farmer's Market, **Sat., May 24**, 8:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m., sponsored by the Icla da Silva Foundation.

— Future Events —

Like Totally Grimm, The Main Street Theatre's premiere production of a new children's musical, at the Main Street Theatre, **Fri., May 30**, 7:30 p.m. Tickets: **1-212-371-4449**. See ad, page 4.

Blood Drive Sign-up at the Farmer's Market, **Sat., May 31**, 8:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m., sponsored by the Icla da Silva Foundation.

The Main Street WIRE — next scheduled issue, **Sat., May 31**. **Deadlines:** Advertising in the paper, **Fri., May 23**; decision on fliers for *The Bag*, **Tue., May 27**; fliers due **Thur., May 29**. **Future issues:** June 14, 28; July 26; August 23; September 6, 20; October 11, 25; November 8, 22 (Thanksgiving issue); December 13 (holiday issue). **Phone/fax** for news, **1-212-826-9055/755-2540**; phone/fax for display and classified advertising placement and information, **1-212-751-8214/755-2540**. To list your organization's Island events here, e-mail information to ComingUp@MainStreetWIRE.com, or leave it, addressed to *The WIRE*, at the desk at 531 Main Street; provide a telephone number for follow-up.

Like Totally Grimm, The Main Street Theatre's premiere production of a new children's musical, at the Main Street Theatre, **Sat., May 31**, 2:00 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. Tickets: **1-212-371-4449**. See ad, page 4.

Like Totally Grimm, **Sun., June 1**, 2:00 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.

Like Totally Grimm, **Mon., June 2**, 7:30 p.m.

RIRA Common Council meeting, **Wed., June 4**, 8:00 p.m., Chapel of the Good Shepherd. Open to the public; public comments invited near start of meeting.

Annual Membership Drive Reception for the Icla da Silva Foundation, 7:00 p.m., **Fri., June 6**, Manhattan Park Theater Club. Food, drinks, raffles, auction, and a presentation on the Icla da Silva Foundation — its history and activities. For information, call Airam da Silva at **1-212-593-1807** or Fay Vass at **1-212-755-4089**.

Blood Drive Sign-up at the Farmer's Market, **Sat., June 7**, 8:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m., sponsored by the Icla da Silva Foundation.

Opening Reception for ***Challenging Black and White***, exhibit at Gallery RIVAA, **Sat., June 7**, 6:00-9:00 p.m. Free. Gallery hours thereafter: Wednesday and Friday, 6:00-9:00 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday, 11:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.

RIOC Board Meeting, **Thur., June 12**, 9:30 a.m., Chapel of the Good Shepherd.

Roosevelt Island Day, **Sat., June 14**, starting 9:00 a.m. in Good Shepherd Plaza.

Blood Drive at the Senior Center, **Sat., June 14**, 9:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. Donors can make an appointment by calling **1-212-593-1807**, or e-mail Airam@icla.org.

RIRA Common Council meeting, **Wed., Sept. 3**, 8:00 p.m., Chapel of the Good Shepherd. Open to the public; public comments invited near start of meeting.

RIOC Board Meeting, **Thur., Sept. 11**, 5:30 p.m., Chapel of the Good Shepherd.

RIRA Common Council meeting, **Wed., Oct. 1**, 8:00 p.m., Chapel of the Good Shepherd. Open to the public; public comments invited near start of meeting.

Senior Center

Monday

10:30, **Blood Pressure Screen**
12:30, **"Oldies" Movies**
1:00, **Tai Chi**
7:00, **Dance Class** (Beginners)

Tuesday

10-11, **Dance & Relax**
10-11, **Latchhook Class**
6:30, **Yoga Class**
7:30, **Games** (RISA)

Wednesday

9:15, **Stay Well**
7:00, **Pokeno** (RISA)

Thursday

10:00, **Tai Chi**
10:30, **Creative Arts**
12:30, **Movie**
3:00, **Computer Class** (advance registration required)
7:00, **Dance Class** (Advanced)

Friday

9:30, **Yoga Stretch**
1:00, **Bridge Class**
7:00, **Games** (RISA)

Saturday

7:30, **Bingo** (RISA)

Special Events

Sat., May 17, 7:00, **Senior Day Black & White Ball**, Manhattan Park Theater Club

Wed., May 21, **Atlantic City Trip**

Mon., May 26, time to be announced, **Memorial Day Celebration**

Fri., May 30, 12:30, **Birthday Party June 2-5, Wildwood Trip**. For information, call **1-212-750-3952**.

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Editor's note: The President of RIOC has a standing invitation to provide a companion *RIOC Column* for publication here.

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CAST A

Friday, May 30 @ 7:30 PM
Sunday, June 1 @ 2:00 PM

Allie Michels
Laura Genes
Arta Perezic
Hallie Geier
Jessica Rodriguez
Sasha Diamond
Lana Jovanovic
Munin Streitz
Eric Michels
Tyler Cannon
Jeremiah Negrón
Jonathan Stein
Sara Garcia
Ayumi Moore
Jared Francis
Malik Henry
Daniela Jovanovic
Chloe Goldmansour
Nora Weiser
Ellie Cannon

CAST B

Saturday, May 31 @ 2:00 PM
Monday, June 2 @ 7:30 PM

Elana Leopold
Emily Schuman
Colleen Herlihy
Melissa Artest
Christina Montez
Genny Holmes
Samantha Stone
Stephanie Herlihy
Seth Vacira
Stefan Iliescu
Eren Adriansen
Venece Rodriguez
Nicole Herlihy
Annie Battles
Milos Gak
Jake Saunders
Troy Washington
Chaunce DeVine
Alexis Franco
Jena Hirji
Nia Felder

CAST C

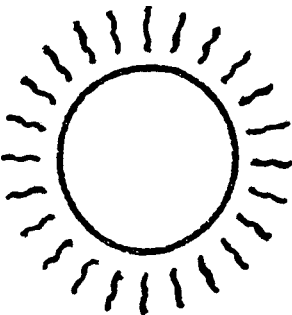
Saturday, May 31 @ 7:30 PM
Sunday, June 1 @ 7:30 PM

Katie Fallone
Kasey Hamilton
Nana Paturet
Lily Nishihira
Alexandra Fallone
Ellie Philips
Nalani Glenn
Tychell Dickerson
Ryan Chono
Djorge Vuckovic
Thibault Coderrens
Danny Ruiz
Anthony Fallone
Ivana Stojkov
Grace Sampaio
Thomas Diamond
Adam Glenn
Natalija Trojanovic
Joan Cusick
Andrea Roganovic
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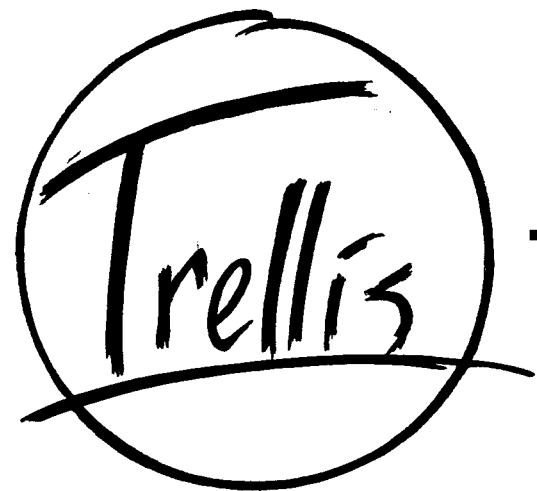
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RIRA Common Council, Facing a Need to Amend the Residents Association Constitution, Assigns Tough Job to a Committee

Confronting the Issue of Those Unelected Voting Seats

by Dick Lutz

The Common Council of the Roosevelt Island Residents Association (RIRA) approached the question of its confusing and outdated constitution in its meeting last week – and backed away. The impetus was the need to provide representation for residents in the new buildings of Southtown. What stood in the way of action was the question of Council members who are not elected, but hold voting seats by virtue of other affiliations. That produced a head-to-head confrontation between RIRA President Matthew Katz and the new head of RICO (the Roosevelt Island Council of Organizations), Karen Stewart.

In the end, constitutional revision was referred to a committee.

While most members of the Common Council are elected from the Island’s residential buildings, more than a dozen voting seats are occupied by, or are potentially open to, unelected delegates. They include the RIOC Board’s resident members, resident appointees serving on Community Board 8, resident members of School Board 2, and – most controversially – five residents designated by RICO, the Roosevelt Island Council of Organizations.

RICO, which once had a voice in awarding the Island’s Public Purpose Funds, has been essentially inactive for many years, though two years ago it used grant funds to pay for compilation of a list of Island organizations. The list was never made public, and is now presumably out of date. Recently, RICO leadership passed from Shirley Margolin to Karen Stewart, whose husband is Patrick Stewart, a RIOC Board member and former RIRA President who lost the office to Katz in 1998.

RICO showed up in force at last week’s RIRA session, with existing appointees Margolin and Joe Cristiano, and three new appointees – Karen Stewart, Kitty Berman, and Deirdre Breslin – all ready to vote against any amendment which would strip unelected Council members of their seats or votes.

In addition, Byron Gaspard, an elected Eastwood delegate, introduced two Eastwood residents to occupy unfilled Eastwood seats – his wife, Margaret Gaspard, and Joan Christianson, a former Council member (and four-year First Vice President) who had chosen not to run in the 2000 election. The RIRA constitution says building committees can designate volunteers to fill Council seats if a building is under-represented.

Since constitutional amendments require a vote of two-thirds of members present, it was clear early in last week’s meeting that a constitutional change removing unelected members from the Council’s voting ranks would have hard going. The upshot was withdrawal by RIRA President Matthew Katz of the constitutional amendments he had proposed in the Council’s April meeting, and referral of the whole matter of constitutional revision to a committee to be chaired by Frank Farance, one of the delegates from Island House.

The affair illustrated rather pointedly a simmering disagreement over just how the Residents Association Common Council should be formed – as its constitution presently provides, with the non-elected members – or, after a constitutional revision, only of elected residents. In last week’s meeting, adherents of both approaches invoked “democracy” in claims to the moral high ground.

The discussion of just how the RIRA Common Council would approach changes to its constitution was instructive as revelatory of the opposing philosophies. It is reproduced here, lightly condensed and abridged slightly, mostly for relevance and clarity.

Frank Farance: I participated in the last [constitutional revision] committee and I would say that there are a good number of ambiguities in the constitution – a number of things that are difficult to understand, even without changing anything. [There was an] excellent example of that [the conditions for seating the added Eastwood delegates] ear-



Mark Chipman, Frank Farance

lier on in this meeting... We have to figure things out. I don’t think it’s productive to have a 20-minute discussion every time we run into some ambiguity. It adds more friction and aggravation to a meeting. [Farance had earlier made the point that the constitution has often become a barrier to reaching consensus when opposing factions interpret it differently.]

Unidentified Voice: Very well said.

Farance: If we’re going to make some changes, which it looks like we’ll have to make [in order to seat delegates from new Southtown buildings], what would be right? I think we should have a much shorter constitution... In many other committees, a constitution is a very short thing – say two or three pages – and then they have by-laws, which makes it easier to interpret, and [then] record the interpretations.

Matthew Katz: I certainly see that as the best way of functioning. [The revision of the constitution] is a daunting task, though.

[Farance then suggested five areas of ambiguity or conflict where constitutional revision might help make the RIRA constitution as useful in 2007 as it was in 1991, when last revised.]

Karen Stewart: My name is Karen Stewart and I’m the head of RICO. More than one of you might have wondered why RICO, which has been pretty much invisible for this session of RIRA, all of a sudden is here in full force exerting every little constitutional muscle that we have. I agree with Mr. Farance 100%. There is one reason why RICO is here tonight in force, and that is simply that the precedent of a single individual [Katz] introducing a number of amendments to the RIRA constitution, which has existed in its essence for 25 years, is entirely unprecedented. RICO believes, and lots of other people believe, that such a process should be undergone through a democratic meeting of many different individuals who work out all these nasty details in commit-



Shirley Margolin, Karen Stewart, Deirdre Breslin

tee meetings, come to a conclusion, usually in a relatively large committee, and then make recommendations back to the Common Council, [which] then makes those recommendations to a town meeting.

The constitution itself prohibits our making a decision on our own constitution. We must, living [under] the laws which exist right now, take these decisions back to the full RIRA membership, which is every resident of Roosevelt Island. The RIRA constitution we have in front of us right now was rewritten with extensive help from one of the top two constitutional law firms in America. I agree with Frank that they did a lousy job. There is no page of the constitution that doesn’t offer ambiguities. I believe, and the other appointees of RICO believe, that what is necessary now is that a group of people, a subcommittee of RIRA, be appointed to iron out what might be the way to resolve those ambiguities, and Frank offers one clear alternative, which is to make everything much simpler and go to a less-structured environment, but I believe and RICO believes and a number of other people believe that this must be done by larger than a single individual’s recommendation to the Common Council.

One of the great flaws of the current constitution is that a single individual – in this instance Mr. Katz – can come up with a set of amendments, present them to a Common Council that does not have extensive history either on those amendments or on RIRA itself. If he gets 18 of you to agree, that’s it. It’s all over. I just don’t believe that that’s the way things should proceed. I think that RIRA has, for 25 years, existed in a community that is defined by its diversity, as a way for those of us who represent very diverse points of view, to get together, iron things out, work it out, bring it to a large body, this Council, to say yes or no.

There has been not one time that the RIRA constitution has been revised that we have had fewer than 500 people in the church upstairs. This time will be the same thing. I just would rather go to these residents with a consensus. If we’re concerned about Roosevelt Island, we can reach a consensus amongst us, and then take that to our neighbors to say, “We’ve worked this out” – not that one person has come up with this, [but that] we’ve worked this out amongst us – all of us representing different aspects of the community – and then move forward.

Katz: I agree with you 100%... I’ve always felt that the best way of dealing with this is to be as inclusive as possible, but I haven’t seen – [and] the fact that the constitution hasn’t been amended since 1991 bears me out – nobody was doing it, and there was a desperate need to do it. That said, I am withdrawing the motion I made in April putting forward the constitutional amendments unilaterally. I am asking Frank to follow through with the suggestion he has made here and to include those people around this table who are interested in participating in what will be the most important business we can do in this cycle of the Common Council.

Karen Stewart: Mr. Katz, may I then please say that I will more than happily take back the four recommendations [of RICO delegates to the CC] that I made this evening and the four members of RICO will withdraw and join Mr. Farance in his constitutional committee, and you won’t have to be bothered with us in this...

Katz: I won’t have RICO to kick around anymore?

Karen Stewart: Yes, so we’re all happy.

Patrick Stewart: I do believe I agree with everybody, I think. To go back to the matter at hand, which is [representation of] Southtown [on the Council], I think what we have to be careful of is distinguishing between changing wording and changing substance.

Katz: We have a time constraint, in order to welcome these [Southtown] people into the fabric of our life here, [but] on the other hand, we’re really not obliged to incorporate them into RIRA [until the population is in the first two buildings, at least], and then to determine how to do it with buildings of different size... We need to find ways to incorporate them, to be as fair as possible.

Debra Mount Cornet: You know, before I came into this meeting, I heard that Ms. Stewart and Mr. Schuppert and Mr. Katz had cut a deal, and it sure looks like that’s what happened. That’s what I had heard. I’m absolutely supportive of what Frank said regarding reviewing the entirety of the constitution... However, I’m very disturbed by what Karen Stewart said – that she would be happy to withdraw her [RICO] delegates if the constitutional committee will review these matters and you will withdraw your proposal. I’m opposed to that kind of behavior. We need democracy. We need it out in the open. I really don’t like anything that smacks of secrecy... I’m very disturbed by what I heard in here, I really am.

Katz: Well, I happen to agree with you that stacking the Common Council for the purpose of one vote is not the purpose of being at this table, but RICO has that power, according to the constitution. There’s nothing I can do about it, unless we decide as a group to change the constitution to something different. But as it stands now, those people who are appointed members of this organization pretty much can [control the process]...

James Whalen: I don’t know what this conversation is all about...

Karen Stewart: Jim, pay attention.

Whalen: Shut up.

Joan Christianson: Don’t be rude.

Whalen: Don’t interrupt me and I will not be rude.

Steve Marcus: I watched the Oslo agreements with great interest. The Oslo agreements failed because, while everybody was talking about all sorts of things, nobody was talking about Jerusalem. They just kind of left that to the end. We’re going to talk about the constitution and we’re going to leave off to the end who’s elected, who should sit here, and who should vote, and who shouldn’t. And it’s going to founder on that point. Chances are that since the constitution is jimmied in such a way that it’s impossible to change, then I’m guessing right now that we’re going to continue with representation which is patently undemocratic – patently. Everybody here is talking about democracy. Karen is talking about yanking puppets back and forth. She’s pulling her people, she’s pushing her people, as if this... This is absolutely undemocratic, as if you have control, and you do, because you run RICO...

Karen Stewart: I don’t “run” RICO.

Marcus: Excuse me. Karen is the president of RICO...

Karen Stewart: There is no president of RICO.

Marcus: The head of RICO, supposedly, the chairman – I’m so sorry – chairperson.

Karen Stewart: I like chairman.

Marcus: I feel badly that people who are newly elected here, who joined this group to actually do something, have to sit again through these gyrations, and I have to apologize. It was worse in the last two years. Hopefully, this will be the last time we discuss this for quite a while. What is going to happen here is, hopefully, what I’d like to see, since you guys have cornered the market on RICO, to be able to

continued next page

hold your five guys there, RIOC representatives can show up here even though for the most part the residents are fighting RIOC on things, CB8 (Community Board 8) [people can show up]... Who elects CB8 people? Now, nobody’s arguing whether they’re good people, bad people... Everybody here is a good person. However, with these new buildings, especially if we get Octagon, I did a little math: If you



Steve Marcus, here in a post-meeting conversation with Byron Gaspard

want to keep 7 people in Eastwood, three people in each one of these buildings, you’re going to wind up with 45 people. And that’s just one man, one vote, as close as you can get to one man, one vote.

Karen Stewart: So reduce it.

Marcus: Then you’re going to wind up with two people from each one of these buildings, seven people from Eastwood, and actually...

Karen Stewart: That’s democracy, Steve.

Marcus: No. Real democracy is for you to step down, OK, and say, look, if I want to be on this board, I will *run* for this board. That’s democracy...

Karen Stewart: RICO never has.

Katz: Karen, allow Steve to finish, please.

Karen Stewart: If you’ll allow me to answer him.

Marcus: ...if people want to be on the [Council], they can run. Patrick has, as a RIOC representative, an enormous amount of stuff to contribute. However, I don’t think these folks ought to be voting, but if they want a seat to contribute, great. I personally don’t think they ought to be voting. But I’m talking to the wind because I don’t think you guys are going to agree to it, and [a] two-thirds [vote is needed] to amend the constitution... However, leaving representation aside, the rest of what Frank is suggesting, I think is great, which is, let’s keep the constitution to a minimum – two, three, four pages...

Karen Stewart: Let’s rework it.

Marcus: ...and then let each group, each [newly-elected] group decide their own rules so they’re not hamstrung by [a constitution] that’s impossible to change – and that they go back 15 years isn’t necessarily relevant. That’s it.

Karen Stewart: I... Matt, you promised I could answer...

Various voices: No, he didn’t. / No. / We’re going around the table. / Wait...

Katz: We’re going around the table...

Karen Stewart: All right.

Katz: Ron.

Ron Schuppert: First of all, I want to congratulate Matt on being able to read the handwriting on the wall and withdrawing these amendments. I want to congratulate Karen – I know it seems like an in-and-out thing – [on agreeing] not to stuff the ballot. And Steve’s statement was interesting. However, I have an even more interesting statement signed by five previous RIRA presidents. This is what the five former presidents said, and it seems to me this was done for the people who don’t have the historical background, the new members, and for that matter a lot of the old members who don’t know what’s going on, anyway – not to be condescending to the new members.

[At this point, Schuppert read a letter signed by five former RIRA presidents – Lou Carbonetti (no longer a resident), Nellie Negrin Finnegan, David Kraut (now on the RIOC Board), Sandra Neis, and H. Patrick Stewart (now on the RIOC Board, and participating in the discussion reported here). The letter read, in relevant part:]

“We... urge the... Common Council to reject any further discussion of... amendments to the constitution of RIRA... submitted by a single individual. ... The RIRA constitution is 25 years old and has been amended many times. ... Each [time the] amendments have initially been recommended by a majority of a duly-constituted constitutional committee... then submitted to [the] Common Council for approval and for recommendation to the approval of a Town Meeting. ... While we have no wish to comment on the merits of any individual amendment, we collectively believe that such radical changes to the very nature of RIRA itself should be arrived at through the more democratic and tested process that has been used throughout our community’s history.”

[After Schuppert read the letter, discussion continued.]

Vicki Feinmel: I have two com-

ments. Many people at this table talk about democracy when it suits them, just to suit their purpose. Byron talked about democracy. Even though it’s in the constitution that Joan [Christianson] and Margaret [Gaspard] could come in, because they weren’t voted by Eastwood [residents], I personally don’t think that that’s very democratic. The other thing that really offends me is that [last year] there was a committee working on making revisions to the constitution. Everybody was in agreement that certain things need to be changed. People who weren’t very democratic joined this committee. Well, no one went to the meetings, then there was a vote and everyone yelled that it was undemocratic... And it was solely for political reasons because no one came to the meetings, and now you want another whole committee to go through the process again. You just waste time and it’s very sad here because people here do care about the community but your interests are so much more politically motivated and manipulative that it just goes on and on and on. That’s my comment.

Margie Smith: I find this letter amazing. First of all, there’s a conflict of interest by two people [signing] it, who know that they could get thrown off if the constitution got changed, but if you read the constitution – I assume these guys did – it wasn’t exactly written by Thomas Jefferson. The only way to amend the constitution is to have a member of the CC put an amendment in writing or to have 125 [residents] propose an amendment. Given those options, I think Matthew made the right decision. The joke about democracy... It’s so obvious that the only people who ought to be on this Council are the people who are elected by the community, and people who are protesting are for the most part people who are not elected, and therefore we’ll never get two-thirds, and we’ll never get this place running right, especially with Southtown... We’ll have 43 people sitting around the table.

Karen Stewart: Poor baby.

Farance: I will work on a proposal... I will cooperate with others. I’m not sure, at least initially, of the right way to approach this. I would say one of the things that we had previously with the constitutional committee, we had, for argument’s sake, six people with three separate points of view, and we could not get to a consensus on that, so we came back here and said, “We couldn’t agree but we had three points of view.” Now, what purpose does that serve to the rest of the group here – to bring three points of view in? I don’t know. Maybe there are three different ideas and maybe we should approach things in three different ways, or hear them out. But what I was striving for in thinking about this was not so much worrying about the structure on getting there, but making sure that we were aware of a couple of things. I think Steve said this best when he said, paraphrasing, if we’re not going to get two-thirds on a topic, then it’s dead. We’re not going to get two-thirds support. So from my point of view [running this committee], that’s something that I would want to quickly find out, so that, as we would make progress on this, if we don’t get two-thirds

support, let’s not waste our time on it... For our own sanity, for the sake of getting along as neighbors, let’s figure out what we can agree on, and what we disagree on.

Joe Cristiano: Basically, what I’m hearing is two things. People admit you’re not going to get a two-thirds vote to drastically change the constitution. The thing is, we can agree to that. I want to do what I’ve always said I wanted to do, to clean up the wording, so it [isn’t] ambiguous... What is not being said, and what we can’t drive home, is that we have a constitution that is in place... What I think we should do for the short term is clean up the wording. Perhaps in a year or two when we have our feet wet and we understand a little more, we might want to change the substance... Right now, let’s clean up the wording, and I think we as a group can do a very good job in that respect.

Patrick Stewart: As to why the unelected people are here, namely, RIOC people, CB8 people, RICO people, I believe [that], in the minds of the people who framed it, it’s the inclusion of those people who represent us to the people outside – the Community Board people who are sitting here



Joe Cristiano



After adjournment, Karen Stewart and Matthew Katz continued the debate. Katz had proposed, then withdrew, a proposed constitutional change that would have eliminated unelected voting on the Council; Stewart represents RICO, which holds five unelected seats.



represent the Island to the Community Board, same with RIOC, same with schools, and the same with the others... I believe that what we should be trying to do is not change the substance of the constitution except when the committee believes it is for the best interests of the Island. It is to change the wording, where the wording is unclear.

Katz: What we’ve agreed to do tonight is to take this process off-line...



Island’s Lobbyists-for-a-Day Come Home with Mixed Feelings...

Two dozen Roosevelt Islanders hopped a chartered bus to Albany Tuesday morning and joined in “Showdown 2003,” an effort by affordable-housing advocates to impress the State Senate with the need for legislation preserving rent stabilization. For the Roosevelt Islanders, the specific effort was directed at extending rent stabilization to apartment buildings coming out of the Mitchell-Lama system – a circumstance that Westview and Island House may face in the next year or two.

The immediate goal of the organizers of the lobbying day is getting Senate Bill 2954 out of committee and onto the Senate floor. A duplicate has already been passed in the Assembly. A concern this week is that with all of Albany focused on the Governor’s vetoes of the Legislature’s budget, and on both Houses’ votes to override his vetos, S.2954 could languish until near the June 15 deadline, when present rent-stabilization laws expire.

On the bus ride back from Albany, *The WIRE* asked for impressions of the capital, the legislators, and their day.



Alexis Villafane, Eastwood – From what Senator Olga Mendez said, we have to get at least 400 signatures. We have 10,000 people on the Island... Unless people sign, and write, and show [the State Senate] that they’re alive, they’re not going to do anything. We’re the people who vote for them. As for today, I think we got the runaround a lot. Besides meeting and talking to Olga Mendez, who seemed to be for us, Senator Padavan wasn’t available to us, [Senate Majority Leader] Bruno wasn’t available to us. It was interesting to come and see what the building looks like and where our tax dollars are going to. That was interesting to me but, as a single parent, the concerns for me are greater because I don’t get an 8% increase in my salary; I only get 1% when I get a raise. So to say that \$80,000 is supposedly middle-income – I don’t fall in that range, and I would probably be out in the street.



Clare Krupka, Island House – It was an interesting adventure – an opportunity to meet our legislators up close and personal, and have them answer our questions, and give us some ideas about how to proceed from here. It’s an important issue. It’s something that we have to engage Roosevelt Islanders in, in order to save their community and save our homes. I hope we’ll be able to talk to our neighbors and get them excited and enthusiastic and proceed down this road.

John Rochford, Eastwood – An interesting experience today... It’s one of those experiences in applied government. What it does tell you is how difficult it is, and how frustrating it is, to get your message across, even in person. We met with several of our legislators. They were interesting conversations. But still, you depart feeling, “Did I really get my message across?”



Kenneth Diebner, Westview – The only Senator who made herself available was Olga Mendez. It’s my belief that the Senators were obviously missing and unwilling to speak to the constituents who elected them. I think that there’s a long road ahead. Everybody’s worried about the State budget, but we have our own budget to worry about. And I think one of the most memorable things that was said to me today was about “homeland security.” We are fighting for the security of our own homes and the potential that we will be knocked out of our homes – and so few people represented themselves and their apartments that it was disturbing to me that, of 10,000 Island residents, we mustered only 26. I think that we need to show more support for this legislation, so that we can protect our homes, and we’re going to have to sign the petitions and forward them to the State Senate.



The Island’s contingent – one bus out of 80 that made the trip – posed for this photo during their meeting with Senator Olga Mendez (seated, center).



Assemblymember Pete Grannis, who represents the Island, urged those attending the rally to put pressure on the Senate to move the housing legislation out of committee and onto the Senate floor. The Assembly has already passed the bill.

My Trip to Albany

(through a kid’s eyes)

by **Julian Edelman**, 6th grader, PS/IS 217



On May 13, 2003, 24 people met next to the Island House bus stop at 7:30 a.m. We waited until the bus that was taking us to Albany arrived. After we were on the bus, we found out that we were in for a *loooooong* ride, three hours.

When we finally arrived at Albany, we went to the “Tenants’ Day in Albany.” “The Tenants’ Day in Albany” was about passing a new law that makes buildings going private go under rent stabilization. If this law doesn’t pass, a lot of the buildings on Roosevelt Island will be affected because they may go private and the rents will go skyrocketing up. If the buildings go under rent stabilization, the rents can only be raised by a certain amount that the Rent Stabilization Board approves of.

The first thing that happened was the rally. The rally was outdoors and it lasted for one hour. There were approximately three thousand people at the rally. During the rally many people made long speeches and, as during all rallies, people *cheeeeeeered* and *booooooed*!

At 1:15 p.m. my group met with Senator Mendez in a typical blah room to talk about getting the bill of rent stabilization passed. During this time my group and Senator Mendez got a few pictures together. I was lucky enough to get a few pictures with Senator Mendez during the meeting and a bunch of kisses.

After the meeting with Senator Mendez, me and my group met

To add your voice:

Residents who wish to express their views on Senate Bill 2954 themselves should send a letter or postcard to:

Honorable Joseph L. Bruno
New York State Senate
Albany, NY 12247

and/or

Governor George Pataki
Executive Chambers
Albany, NY 12224

The State Assembly has already passed the legislation.

with Senator Frank Padavan (he’s in charge of the 11th Senate district). But Senator Frank Padavan could not make it. Instead we met with his counsel, Mr. Asini.

While the group was talking with Mr. Asini, Senator Mendez took me to the Senate floor. On the Senate floor I got to meet a lot of people, including the Senate Majority leader, Mr. Bruno. I was fortunate enough to get pictures with a few of the people.

After all of this my mom took me to McDonald’s to munch on some stuff. Next I met my group at the bus and started my *loooooong* journey home. Coming home I noticed that this trip wasn’t as bad as I expected it to be.

...and a Renewed Sense of Urgency on Affordable Housing



Linda Heimer, Rivercross – I think the reception was gracious from those willing to meet with us. Unfortunately, those who, we were told, need to be educated most about how this law would affect Roosevelt Island, were not available to us and the difficulty in getting our message across is frustrating. I'm disappointed in the turnout, both from Roosevelt Island and in general, for such an important issue (but understand that the people who need affordable housing most, cannot afford to take the day off from work). On the other hand, I think it's outrageous that we have to come to Albany every few years and fight for something that, as Olga Mendez said, should be our right - affordable housing - and there's less and less of it in New York City all the time. Landlords are in the only business I know of that guarantees profits - if their expenses go up, they simply raise rents - and without bills like S2954, there is no protection for those that need it most, the middle class. So I have mixed feelings about today. I hope what we did made a difference but I am upset with the system that made it necessary.

Alex Marshall, Westview – This is my first experience of this sort of lobbying activity, and I guess I'm not quite sure what I was looking at. It felt a little bit unfocused, and I'm not sure what impression we made, if any, on people who aren't already convinced of what we were trying to say. But perhaps it was useful as a demonstration of support or strength. It was certainly interesting for me to visit the Senate and talk to a couple of people, and to some people from the Island who have been doing this for years. Next time I think I'd like to brief myself a bit better on what to expect and what we should be doing.



Nurit Marcus, Rivercross – I feel that our presence made an impact. It's too bad we didn't have more people showing up, because even though we were thousands of people, it got lost in the vast area of Albany. What we learned is that everybody's busy with the budget right now, and everything else is waiting, so I think we need to keep the pressure on, especially after the budget passes. And we need to call Olga Mendez, who was very available to us today, to thank her and remind her and keep reminding her, because the time is short. We have only until June 15 to put the pressure on, so we need more people, more letters, more phone calls – this has to be a very, very active time.

Gloria Cherif-Jamal, Eastwood – I came along because I feel the buildings in Eastwood will be next, and I want to know what's going on with the other buildings that might leave Mitchell-Lama. But I sort of agree with Ken that people weren't there; no one really got to talk to anybody, and we're just waiting until June to see what it's going to be. It affects everybody.



Margie Smith, Rivercross – I think today just reinforced the way I've been feeling about the Island – that apathy is our strong point. Nobody showed up for the bus to save the firehouse when we needed to rally for that. Only 26 people out of 10,000 showed up for this trip to Albany. If we don't care about our houses burning down or being taken away from us, I guess I don't know what we do care about. I'm sort of curious to find out.



Rebecca Ocampo, Westview – Even though the group is small, we made a noise. I just don't know how far it's going to take us, with the deadline that is looming. I don't know how far we can get this bill to support us. And we have a very important concern, which is the Mitchell-Lama situation of our buildings. But the thing that impressed me today is the attempt of Senator Mendez to give tax relief to owners of buildings, so that they will continue with rent stabilization. I don't know how that is going to play with the proposal of Mayor Bloomberg regarding the increase in property tax of landowners – I also don't know how this is going to play with \$60,000-income range that she is proposing.

Byron Gaspard, Eastwood – I don't really know if anything was accomplished. I would have liked to see more people represent themselves on such a crucial issue. We had approximately 3,000 – though it appeared to be a little less to me – and it seems to me so crucial an issue would have drawn more people. I didn't get the feeling that people saw the importance of the crisis, and the importance of this bill being passed. So my viewpoint might be a little pessimistic. I don't know what was happening, if what took place today is enough to make sure that bill passes. I hope it is.



Vicki Feinmel, Island House / now Rivercross – I think today was a great day. I think that if you want anything changed you have to try to do something about it. You have to talk to your Senators, you have to talk to the people who are involved. And, if nothing else, they'll hopefully hear what you have to say, and understand that you're also representing other constituents. And, of course, as always, I feel that not enough Roosevelt Island people come out in force to work for our destiny.

Sherie Helstien, Westview – I would have liked to have met with a few more people. We met with whom we could meet with. I think that Olga Mendez and the counsel for Senator Padavan were very right – a lot of the Senators still need to be educated. They really need to be made aware of what's needed and what's going on in the City, and I think they need to understand how this impacts on their economies upstate if people start losing their homes and there are no other homes to move to other than out of state or into the outer boroughs – and those in the outer boroughs are disappearing. I think that these guys are very good at receiving constituents and people who aren't even necessarily their direct constituents. I think you really have to push them to get what you want. I think you have to do what Padavan's counsel said – you really have to write lots of letters.



The Rally A crowd estimated at 3,000 heard from housing activists, members of the State Assembly, and Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver.



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Berman from page 1

I’ve earned a degree in municipal finance each of the twelve years I have served as chief negotiator and leader of the City’s \$40 billion budget.” He described himself as “extraordinarily passionate about the City of New York.” Berman had also served six years as the Chair of the City Council Education Committee. *The New York Times* described him as “steeped in the ways of government.”

Berman lost the bitterly-contested Democratic primary race for the Comptroller nomination to his fellow Brooklynite, William Thompson, Jr., and was reportedly making plans to join the Chair of the State Liberal Party in a lobbying firm when Pataki tapped him as a special advisor on economic issues and liaison to the Jewish community in February, 2002.

Presuming the Governor does name Berman to the RIOC post, that will continue the practice of rewarding political supporters with State jobs. Ryan had worked on the first Pataki campaign for Governor, and his predecessor, Dr. Jerome Blue, was affiliated with then-Senator and top Republican Alphonse D’Amato.

How soon Berman might be named, however, is an open question. Labate told *The WIRE* after Thursday night’s Board meeting that she had extended Ryan’s paid leave beyond the 90 days the RIOC Board had voted, as an administrative act. As a matter of form or possible legal liability, it might be necessary to deal formally with Ryan’s status before a successor is installed in the job, or even considered officially.

In a closed executive session last month, the RIOC Board voted to hire an independent investigator to look into the bonuses Ryan handed

out – one day of vacation for every hour worked on the World Trade Center disaster – because the State Inspector General was not conducting a formal inquiry into the matter. But there is, as yet, no formal charge of wrongdoing – only an investigation.

Meanwhile, community support for keeping Siconolfi in the President’s job is growing. Katz told the Board Thursday night during the open forum that followed the Board meeting: “There’s an elephant that’s been in this room all evening, and that’s the succession of the Presidency...”

“I think the last 100 days of this administration of RIOC, with this community, have been extraordinary. The amount of bridge-building that has gone on over the last 100 days has simply not existed before. The number of programs that have reached culmination in the last 100 days – things that have been discussed for years and have never happened, like the repair to Blackwell House, which were pending year after year, and the opening of Southpoint. One member of

the Board said, ‘Why not do this?’ Mr. Siconolfi said, ‘Why not?’ It’s open. All kinds of programs that have been discussed – there has been nothing that he has not been willing to discuss – programs and solutions that are outside the envelope that have not been on the table before.

“I think there’s an opportunity here that would be devastating were it to be lost.

“This entire Board has been appointed by the Governor, and some of you, especially you, Leo [Kayser], have ties with the Governor, and I hope you can use those ties to insure that this presidency, which is a breath of fresh air, an opportunity to create progress, is not lost to us. I think we have an extraordinary opportunity here and hope you will support this community that has found these times so enticing for the future, that you’ll help make this happen. I think it’s our job to encourage something – and it’s *your* job, too. Please help us.”

Residents attending the meeting applauded.

WIRE E-Mail Bulletin

Service Catching On

The *WIRE*’s e-mail bulletin service now has nearly 500 subscribers, and the list is growing rapidly. The free service supplements print coverage on important Island news stories between issues of the newspaper.

Residents and others can become subscribers to the service, which is free, by sending an e-mail with the subject, “Add me,” to nyc10044@rcn.com.

Recent bulletins have included updates on the handling of AVAC in the City budget, Southpoint Park’s first Sunday, developments in the suspension of RIOC President Robert H. Ryan, and actions by Assemblymember Pete Grannis on the Octagon Apartments proposal. They are issued as warranted by news developments.

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Grimm from page 1

every week – the kids feel that they’re a team. “That’s one thing about show business that people don’t know,” Howe says. “A little bonus. The kids come away feeling really good about themselves.”

Some have leapt to Broadway and television. Aliane Baquerot is currently on Broadway in *Movin’ Out*. Her credits include *Saturday Night Fever* on Broadway, and television shows *Saturday Night Live*, *Sesame Street*, and *One Life to Live*. Child-actor John Babcock landed a lead role on Broadway in *The Secret Garden*. Natalia Ortiz appeared on television’s *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*. Neil Tandon is writing and directing plays at Cooper Union. Still, few of the students are lured by show business. “It is a very difficult business to crack,” Howe warns. “It takes a lot of way off-Broadway shows or student or independent movies, lots of hard work and money spent on lessons and pictures, and sometimes – most of the time – success doesn’t come. I see a few younger kids coming up who will probably try. Boys, especially, are usually discouraged from doing it.”

For many kids – would-be stars or not – a spell at the Theatre cures shyness. “It’s an opportunity for people who don’t express themselves easily in the world to express their feelings in a safe place, within the context of portraying a character,” Howe says. “It’s an amazing process to watch because their confidence accelerates once they experience being on stage.”

Blumberg, in fact, says she was shy growing up and hadn’t wanted to play Rizzo in *Grease*. “I wanted to be Sandy, the shy, sweet girl! But I kept getting cast as Rizzo in different forms.”

For Blumberg, the Main Street

Theatre brought Island-based friends as well, especially after she left for the United Nations International School and the neighborhood kids took off for other schools. After she left for college, she came back to act in some of the Theatre’s adult shows. “NYU hasn’t always been the most supportive place,” she says. “I come back here to get that great acting feeling, and I leave with a huge smile on my face.”

Like Totally Grimm, with music and lyrics by Bob McDowell and book by Bill McMahon, opens May 30 and runs through June 2. Tickets for regular seating are \$10, with mat seating available at \$5 for children ten and under.

Three casts will each stage two performances. There are evening performances on Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and Monday at 7:30 p.m. and Saturday and Sunday matinees at 2:00 p.m. Reservations and information: 1-212-371-4449.



Carla Blumberg, a veteran of the Main Street Children’s Theatre, is back in the fold as director’s assistant on the new musical, *Like Totally Grimm*.

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Jolly from page 1

Most Distinguished Order of St. Michael and St. George. “I was the last but one person to respond,” says Sir Richard, a towering, white-haired distinguished-looking gentleman in his late 60s. “I was a little embarrassed – on the other hand, I didn’t refuse,” he says, adding with a smile, “I regret to say it sort of grows on you.”

A development economist by training, Sir Richard served as UNICEF’s Deputy Executive Director from 1982 to 1995 and as special coordinator of the United Nations Development Program’s Human Development Report from 1996 to 2000. Prior to all of this, he was Director of the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex in England.

In semi-retirement now, he is working with the United Nations Intellectual History Project, focusing on the social and economic actions of the UN, an organization whose goals he remains ardently devoted to. “Many people seem to believe that the UN is mostly concerned with Security Council debates, peace-keeping, and humanitarian action,” he says, speaking slowly and deliberately. “The truth is that the majority of people at the UN work in areas relating to health, education, human rights, and economic and social development. In these areas, the UN has been able ... to have more of an impact than in peace-keeping and political matters.” He cites the fact that child mortality in developing countries is down despite the fact that these countries have been suffering economic stagnation and decline.

He says his commitment to the UN’s humanitarian goals springs from several sources. As a pacifist, he says he always felt there must be an alternative to war. As a young economist working in Africa – he was a community development officer in Kenya in the late 1950s – he says he saw the need to review economics in terms of the reality of different countries, especially the poorer countries. “Soon this leads you to ask how things could be different and how international policies could be changed to give poorer countries better opportunities and fairer deals.”

Armed with a degree in economics from Cambridge University and a doctorate from Yale in 1966, his intelligent probing shaped his work at UNICEF. “He brought analytical and substantive issues to UNICEF,” says Hans R. Narula, a former colleague at the agency and a close friend and neighbor. “He helped make UNICEF a developmental agency. His ex-

cellent partnership with his boss, Jim Grant, was very good for the stability of UNICEF.”

For his part, Sir Richard says his years at UNICEF showed him how a UN agency “with a pocketful of pennies but truly committed staff, could work with local people” to accomplish some of these countries’ development goals. “He has a unique combination of two things,” says Djibril Diallo, Director of the Communications Office at the United Nations Development Program and a close associate of Sir Richard since the early 1980’s. “He is a man of vision and always has the wherewithal to carry out that vision.” Diallo



says Sir Richard was known to help coin slogans like “adjustment with a human face” and follow them with an unequalled passion.

That passion is still clear from Sir Richard’s vision of the UN’s role in the current world situation. He hopes that the sidelining of the UN in Iraq turns out to be temporary, feeling that without UN involvement, the coalition forces could lose credibility and fail to achieve stability and full democracy. “Certainly the UN as a whole needs to be brought back and allowed to play a much fuller role,” he says, though he does not offer any concrete suggestions on how this might be done. He does, however, mention that UNICEF, the World Food Program, and some other UN agencies already have several hundred staff in different parts of Iraq doing their best to protect children and others from the immediate consequences of the war.

Another cause Sir Richard has been passionate about for a long time is the settling of UN staff on Roosevelt Island. Diallo says Sir Richard encouraged UN people from different parts of the world to move here, knowing they would find it a smooth transition to a life away from their countries. He stressed the greenery, the open space, and the fact that

the Island was not too far from work. “The General Assembly and the UN Secretariat is only a couple of hundred yards from Southpoint,” he says. “When we moved here, we always thought there was a link between the international diversity of the UN and the diversity of the Island.”

The Island was home to his four children, Margareta, now an academic at Exeter University in England; Susan, a researcher at the Institute of Development Studies, also in England; Arthur, formerly a stunt-man specializing in setting himself on fire but now a helicopter pilot in Alabama; and Richard, a computer programmer based in Scotland.

Recalling with fondness the annual Christmas high tea Sir Richard and his wife organized for the families of UNICEF staffers, Dr. Sudershan Narula, Director of Medical Services at the UN, mentioned that Arthur kept a snake as a pet. Thankfully, the snake never made an appearance at these social events and the children, albeit a trifle wary of the coiled reptile, happily played games. She added that Sir Richard will always be “just Richard” for her because she has been his physician and because he is not the kind of person to put on any airs.

Sir Richard really does seem to take the honor with a pinch of salt. He said he initially thought the honor was anachronistic and that two of his four children did not attend the ceremony at Buckingham Palace because they felt the same way.

He practically chuckles as he mentions the informal version of what the abbreviation may stand for, starting with the expansion of CMG or “Call me God” instead of “Companion, The Most Distinguished Order of St. Michael and St. George” and says KCMG could stand for “Kindly call me God” instead of “Knight Commander, The Most...” The cherry on the cake is the expanded version of GCMG, or “Knights Grand Cross, The Most Distinguished Order of St. Michael and St. George, the highest honor: “God calls me God.”

Having spent a few years away from the Island, mainly in Sussex, “Richard” now plans to spend more time here as he works on the UN History project.

To get an inkling about what else he might do, let’s just say he was spending the weekend reading Lenin’s *Imperialism*, had plans to see *Urinetown*, and had entries like Uppsala, Ethiopia, and Boston as destinations on his itinerary.

For Sir Richard, this is not at all out of the ordinary.

Southpoint from page 1
and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute.

Barrels of money and printer’s ink have been expended toward this goal. The City and State made their pledges, the Institute reported, and in 1994 RIOC “shaped and graded the site of the memorial” to conform with a triangular design prepared by the renowned architect Louis Kahn, the dean at the University of Pennsylvania, who died in 1974.

That is the explanation for the huge ramp of earth, arising from the south, that ascends to a point overlooking Southpoint’s architectural jewel, the Gothic Revival ruins of the Smallpox Hospital (1854-56) designed by James Renwick, Jr., who also designed St. Patrick’s Cathedral, Grace Church, and other New York landmarks, including the Island’s Light-house.

Financial problems, public and private, have prevented any other serious work on the FDR Memorial, which was supposed to be a sloping promenade, framed by trees, leading down to a sculpture court and a 72-foot “room” open to the sky at the tip of the island, according to a 1999 article in *The WIRE* by Barbara Lowenthal, who drew on research by Island historian Judith Berdy. By that time, construction estimates had risen to \$15 million.

Other proposals also fell by the wayside, including a res-

taurant-pavilion designed by another famous architect, the Spaniard Santiago Calatrava, and, five years ago, a Marriott hotel. The Roosevelt Institute has since moved on to other projects, an FDR monument has opened in Washington, D.C., and a new State law has been enacted to preserve the area as parkland.

What is left is an overgrown, still largely inaccessible 10-acre area, but one that represents, nonetheless, “one of the most phenomenal views and places in the City,” Berdy told *The WIRE* this week.

It had been sealed off since 1982, except for the annual July 4 Macy’s fireworks show, for which RIOC has charged \$15 admission. (Patrick Siconolfi, RIOC’s acting president, told *The WIRE* on Thursday that the show would go on this year, with the fees, as normal.) A corrugated-iron fence, topped by razor wire, separates Southpoint from the rest of the Island. But RIOC finally opened the gate in the fence on April 23, after a determined push by Mark Ponton, a new resident member of the RIOC board. Suddenly, the whole two-mile Island was open, north to south. How had Ponton succeeded in overcoming years of inaction?

“Bulldog tenacity and common sense,” Ponton told *The WIRE* this week. “There was no reason to keep it closed. The problem is no one stuck to it long enough.”

The man who gave the go-ahead was Siconolfi.

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In looking ahead, Ponton suggested some guiding principles for development of the park, and a checklist of short- and long-term objectives. He also made it clear that he intended to keep working to protect and further open up what he called “a very precious piece of land.”

“The first thing we have to do is not do something stupid,” he said. It would be stupid, he said, to start installing barbecue pits or permanent benches or other structures before a design is in place. “Anytime you pour the concrete they never take it down,” he said.

If there is to be a design, he added, it would be stupid to delegate the job to amateurs – and he put himself in that category. “Who are today’s Calvert Vaux and Frederick Law Olmsted?” he asked, referring to the designers of Prospect Park and Central Park. Ideally, he said, a commission would be able to select a designer with top credentials, or perhaps even solicit some pro bono work.

But the RIOC Board’s first job, Ponton said, is to clearly establish the park’s status under the Island’s open-space law. “Is it a protected territory or is it just a joke,” he asked, referring to the 2002 legislation. “If it is a protected territory, what part? From the fence to the water or something else? After we get that figured out, we can proceed – or assume nothing can be built.”

Ponton is more than a theorist. He insisted that two portable toilets that RIOC initially positioned atop the Louis Kahn slope be removed to a less visible location in the “valley” south of the Renwick ruins. In the first location, he said, these toilets commandeered the view from River House, the palatial co-op on 52nd Street: not a good public relations move if you consider affluent eastsiders as potential donors for Southpoint. Ponton said he accompanied a RIOC crew that solved the problem in a matter of 10 minutes.

He is also promoting some quick fixes to improve the site. Here are some of his suggestions:

- Reroute the fencing. “A whole lot of land is shut off from residents,” he said. The Smallpox ruins and the neo-Renaissance Strecker Memorial Laboratory, a pathology lab overlooking the East Channel that was built in 1892, could be surrounded with fences without having to block off nearly all of the rest of the park, which includes a meadow, woods, and rockpiles that may be judged suitable for children to climb. (The lab was converted into an electric substation for the MTA in 1999; it is near an emergency exit from the 53rd Street subway tunnel. Ponton said the MTA had no objections to RIOC’s decision to open the park.)

- Push the perimeter fences closer to the water. Except for the southern tip, the fencing is about 30 feet away from the river. Ponton said that people should be able to get closer to the water, to sit in the woods or meadows or to fish.

- Provide some weather-resistant chairs that visitors could bring to the shore or other areas of Southpoint. Ponton said he was thinking of cheap, one piece chairs that could possibly be rented out by the Island’s Youth Program. “There are any number of options,” he said, but obviously a cheap, bulky chair would not be a temptation to a thief who would have to carry it a long way up-Island to make his getaway in any case. (Some type of chair may be needed simply because the concentration of goose excrement would discourage anyone from putting down a blanket, for example.)

- Take down the *Stalag 17* fence on the north side. “We don’t need a rusted, corrugated metal fence down there,” he said.

- Establish unambiguous hours and allow visitors at night, so that people can enjoy the beauty of the lighted buildings in Manhattan, such as the Chrysler and Empire State. The park now closes a “half hour before sunset,” which Ponton views as an arbitrary cutoff.

- Provide transportation. Ponton said he has suggested that RIOC extend Red Bus service to Southpoint on weekends and holidays during the summer. He said that the bus could easily make a run in the time it is standing idle waiting at the Tram. (A leisurely walk from the Tram station to the Southpoint gate takes about seven or eight minutes. RIOC said it has heard some suggestions for parking spots at Southpoint.)

Longer term, Ponton favors stabilization of the Renwick ruin that would allow it to be used for arts performances.

He also favors the use of the southernmost site for concerts, as long as the apparatus – a bandshell or stage, for example – could be dismantled and removed after the event.

Ponton said his concept for Southpoint is that Roosevelt Island has the potential to be a “destination.” Some of the previous efforts to market the Island, he said, have relied too heavily on the ancillary effects of development, without recognizing the Island’s prime attractions. As he points out, it’s not the Starbucks near the Metropolitan Opera that creates a demand for coffee, but the opera itself. And people aren’t going to come to Roosevelt Island to buy a garden hose simply because they know we have a hardware store. Southpoint, on the other hand, he said, could attract visitors who, in turn, could patronize Island businesses.

Ponton’s vision for Southpoint, in the absence of any other concrete plans, could be the focus of debate in the years ahead. Berdy, for example, who is a fellow champion for opening the site, said that stabilizing the Renwick ruin would be an enormous project, much more expensive than restoring the Octagon, on the north end of the Island, simply because the Smallpox Hospital is so much bigger. The wings alone, which were added in 1903-04, measure more than 4,000 square feet, she said.

Berdy, who posted a history of the smallpox hospital that has since been stolen from the perimeter fence, is concerned

continued next page

Now Open: A Southpoint Gallery of Minor (and Major) Wonders



Many more Southpoint photos, in color, on Website NYC10044, at <http://nyc10044.com>



Southpoint from page 12

that the ruins may simply collapse in the years ahead. She noted that the rubble at the northwest corner of the site dates to this winter. Wooden braces were installed in 1975, she said, to prop up the projecting window casings, but some of these braces are now on the ground on the north-west corner.

She fears that, if stabilization is not done soon, “the whole building will be down in five years.”

As for the rest of the site, she favors a passive use: “It’s a place to go, it doesn’t have to be anything,” she said.

Berdy herself isn’t pushing for the removal of the fortress fence, saying the narrow gate makes it seem that entering Southpoint is “something special,” but RIOC itself has indicated a willingness to replace the barrier with something more aesthetically pleasing.



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SPORTSWIRE

by Seth Kaufman

Baseball: The standings in the RI Youth Program’s Little League as of May 14th are:

Minors		Majors	
Green	2-1	Red	3-0-2
Royal	2-1	Green	3-1-2
Red	1-2	Royal	1-1-3
Silver	1-2	Silver	0-5-1

Minors: In action Saturday, May 10, Green defeated previously-undefeated Royal 3-2 to move into a tie for first place. Eric Michaels had a two-run triple for Royal, scoring Jacob Kelman and Rahul Dhodapkar. In the other game that day, Silver won its first game of the season by defeating Red 7-1 behind Diana Folla’s home run.

Majors: In games played Saturday, May 10, Red took over first place by defeating Green 6-1 behind the combined one-hitter of Jenna Stueber and Neal Stueber. Jenna pitched the first four innings allowing the one hit, with Neal coming on for the last two innings to close out the game. In the other game that day, Royal and Silver played a 5-5 tie. In action Wednesday, May 14, Green defeated Silver 9-2. Anass Dorani pitched the first three innings to pick up the win, and Alex Beola and Jonathan Jackson closed out the game. Eyosyus Tadesse played outstanding defense for Green in center field, taking an extra-base hit away from Joshua Hart with a spectacular catch. For Green, Maurice Dickerson had a double and an RBI.

Subway Service Changes

The MTA has announced early-morning service diversions, now posted in the Island station. What follows is *The WIRE*’s interpretation, specific to Roosevelt Island. It was provided to the MTA, but a representative refused to confirm its accuracy; riders using the trains in the midnight-to-5:00 a.m. period on these dates are urged to work out the details of their travel based on the MTA posters.

Tue.-Wed., 5/20-21, 12:01 a.m. to 5 a.m. only, the **Manhattan-bound** F train will use the E track, skipping several stations, including Roosevelt Island.
To go from Roosevelt Island to Manhattan, you’ll need to take the Queens-bound F to Roosevelt Avenue, where you’ll transfer to a Manhattan-bound F, which will take the E track to 47-50th/6Av, and continue downtown from there. (To go to Lex/63rd or 57th St., you’ll need to transfer to an uptown F train at 47-50th.)
During those hours, service from Manhattan to Roosevelt Island will be normal from all stations.

Thur.-Fri., 5/22-23, 12:01 a.m. to 5 a.m. only, the **Queens-bound** F will use the E track, skipping several stations, including Roosevelt Island.
Returning from Manhattan to Roosevelt Island, take the F from 47-50th/6Av, or any station south of there, to Roosevelt Avenue, Queens, where you’ll transfer to a Manhattan-bound F for the final leg to Roosevelt Island. (If you’re starting from 57th or 63/Lex, you’ll need to start by taking the F downtown to 47-50th.)
If you’re going from Roosevelt Island to Queens during those hours, you’ll need to take a Manhattan-bound F to 47-50th, then transfer there to a Queens-bound F.

Letters from page 2

had opened doors in its belly and was, I assume, photographing me! Feeling decidedly harassed I began to wave and smile for the surveillance cameras above. As I continued my walk north along the eastern waterfront path, the copter returned again and again to its path over the East River. From my vantage point I could not tell what agency sponsored the copter – there was no clear signage. Who is responsible for these daily helicopter patrols, I wonder?

This bizarre experience came on top of a related disturbing incident just three weeks before. On Saturday, April 5, for the same photo course, I was walking the Island with my camera photographing trees in the glorious sunshine. When I focused my lens on a tree that happened to have the Queensboro Bridge behind it, a policewoman waved at me from a distance and forbade me to do so. She came over and asked if I live here and I said yes. (I wonder what would have happened if I wasn’t a resident?) I said that the tree with the Bridge behind made a good picture. No photos of the Bridge were allowed, she told me. I had heard nothing of such a policy so I asked the source of the order? She gave no details. I observed that there must be thousands of photos of the Bridge in books and on postcards available in the public domain. I wondered if photos of the Empire State Building or the Statue of Liberty are forbidden too? I lamented the loss of freedom and noted that the September 11 terrorists had achieved a great deal if the city had been reduced to such a state. The policewoman then vented her frustration, saying that she had refused to work the Manhattan side of the Bridge, because there a policeman was known to have ripped the film from a tourist’s video camera because, I assume, the span was somewhere in the picture.

I would like to laugh about these experiences, but I cannot. National Public Radio’s program *On the Media* just aired a story about the curtailment of basic rights under the Patriot Act in the name of national security. These small incidents made me aware of freedom I take for granted. No wonder New York City spent a reported \$5 million per week on heightened security during the Iraq war, if a 5-foot, 1-inch amateur photographer (with an ordinary camera in plain view – no huge telephoto lens or miniaturized version) warrants the attention of the powers that be!

To be prepared in case a policeman confiscates my film one day, I telephoned Police Headquarters to ask for the policy on photography. I tried extensions for Community Affairs, Security, Public Information, and then finally General Information – to no avail. No one had any answer about such a policy. So I contacted the Mayor’s Office, beginning with Community Assistance. From there I was transferred to “311” where I got a recording about parking regulations, and eventually I was transferred to the office that issues permits to make movies in the city. The gentleman on the phone was sympathetic but he could only issue commercial photography permits, and had nothing to empower amateurs. Finally, I called the Public Advocate’s Office, and there I was told the issue would be examined and I would receive a reply in 10 days time. Meanwhile, my face, filmed by the copter from 600 feet aloft has probably gone into a CIA computer and even now is being circulated.

Lynne A. Grifo

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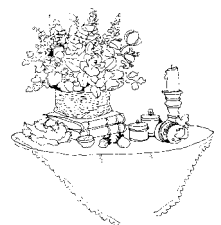
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