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Roosevelt Island's Independent Community Newspaper

RIOC Board Fires Robert H. Ryan After Probe Focusing on Pay and Bonuses

Ryan Claims the Practices Common in State and OK'd By Others; Board Chair Labate Orders Silence, Citing a Possible Lawsuit

So just *what* was the problem?

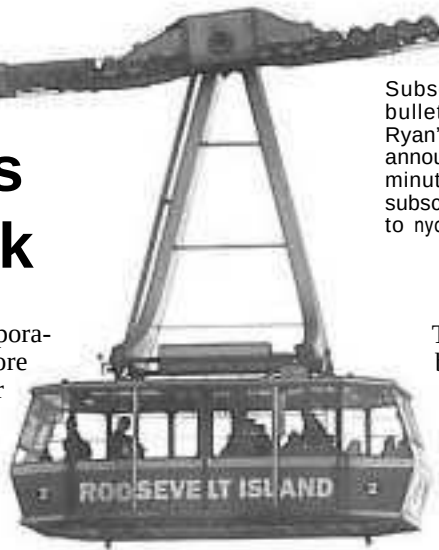
Island Gets Its Tramway Back

by Robert Laux-Bachand

The Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation moved quickly this week to restore Tram service after getting an all-clear signal on the latest safety tests from its independent engineering consultant.

The shutdown, which began on Friday the 13th, and lasted 13 days, may have seemed unlucky to many Islanders, and some said it was unnecessary. But, as Patrick Siconolfi, RIOC's acting president, told his Board of Directors last week, "Safety has to come first."

Siconolfi was referring to studies of the Tram's hanger-arm assemblies, or carriages, that connect the Tramway's cabins to the load-bearing track cables, to the haul rope, and to other wires spanning the East River. Uncertainties in these tests, or "ambiguous readings," as Siconolfi described them, led him to close the Tram on June 13.



Subscribers to *The WIRE*'s e-mail bulletin service learned of Robert Ryan's termination minutes after it was announced, and were kept up-to-the-minute on Tram developments. To subscribe, send an "Add Me" message to nyc10044@rcn.com.

The studies were carried out by specialized regional companies under contract by Doppelmayr-CTEC, the operator of the Tramway. Doppelmayr, an Austrian industrial group with direct ties to the Tram's original builders, took over the sys-

tem in 2001 and immediately instigated an aggressive repair program.

Problems associated with the replacement of the haul rope – which propels the cabins – led to a four-month shutdown in the winter of 2001-02. Doppelmayr has since pushed for replacement of the Tram cabins and carriages, which have been in service since 1976 – two years longer than the average life-span of such equipment, which typically, on ski slopes, is not operated

See **Tram**, page 16

Legislature Disappoints Residents Hoping for Stabilization Protection

by Erik Kriss in Albany

The eight-year extension of rent stabilization laws approved in Albany this month left Roosevelt Island's Mitchell-Lama tenants without the protection they were seeking.

The Democratic-controlled State Assembly had pushed for a change

in the law that would put about 700 Island apartments under rent stabilization when their buildings exit the Mitchell-Lama program.

But Governor George Pataki and his fellow Republicans who control the State Senate outmaneuvered Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver and essentially left him and his

house with the eight-year, take-it-or-leave-it offer on rent stabilization.

"It's pretty devastating," said Sherie Helstien, who lives in Westview and represents tenants in the 360 apartments there on the Residents Association Common Council. "Many people in Manhattan were forced out of their apartments after 20 years. That's what could happen here."

"I think it's going to be devastating, certainly to any Mitchell-Lama building in a desirable location with a strong real-estate market," added Michael McKee, associate director of the New York State Tenants & Neighbors group. He said he would put Roosevelt Island in that category, but "maybe not as strong (a market) as the Upper East Side or other parts of Manhattan."

Island tenants fear the owner of Westview and the Island's other Mitchell-Lama building, Island House, will sell the buildings to a new owner who would jack up rents.

Tenant advocates are pushing for a sale of the buildings to the tenants themselves.

Meantime, there is a clear sense in Albany that Silver and his fellow Democrats will try to re-open the rent-stabilization issue. The thinking in Albany is that the next time Pataki and Senate Majority Leader Joseph Bruno, a Republican representing Brunswick, need the Demo-

See **Stabilization**, page 12

by Dick Lutz

"This is *really* a feast at the public trough."

That was the comment about the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation (RIOC), by one source close to the investigation that led to the outright firing of RIOC President Robert H. Ryan last week.

Ryan's termination, by the RIOC Board of Directors, came at the end of a suspension, imposed as an "administrative leave" on February 4 in a closed executive session of the Board. Roosevelt Island was reportedly off-limits to Ryan during the suspension, which was initially 60 days, then extended twice to a total of four-and-a-half months. Ryan collected his salary, in excess of \$125,000 a year, during the suspension.

The most troubling evidence developed during the investigation had to do with Ryan's handling of his own compensation, but it extended, as well, to bonuses and incentive payments given to other RIOC executives.

Last Tuesday (June 17), after Board members had just over three hours to examine an investigative report, called "fat" by resident Board member David Kraut, they voted to fire Ryan, but made no public announcement of the act in a subsequent public portion of the Board meeting. *The Main Street WIRE* was provided with a copy of the Board's resolution after the meeting, but no vote tally, and the resolution contained no reasons for the termination.

The WIRE subsequently learned that the Board's vote was 5 to 1, with one abstention.

Board Chair Mary Beth Labate, a Deputy Commissioner of the State Division of Housing and Community Renewal, was the abstaining vote. She has drawn a cloak of secrecy around the firing and the reasons for it – the resolution says only that the Board "has determined that it is in the best interests of the Corporation to forthwith remove and terminate the employment of Robert Ryan..."

And Labate has told members of the Board they may not discuss the matter with the press or public. In turning down a request for an interview, Labate responded through a DHCR press representative, with this e-mail, printed here in full and uncorrected:

"absolutely not... will not be doing any interviews... island has a spokesperson... this is a personnel matter... board took action... end of story... just refer the email to John Melia and he will confer with Mollie on what RIOC will be saying... That applies as well to any board member that gets a media inquiry... We should direct them the same way we directed Leo... with RIOC facing potential litigation in this matter... we must be



Robert H. Ryan on Roosevelt Island Day, 1999, during his first visit to Roosevelt Island as newly-designated RIOC President.



RIOC Board Chair Mary Beth Labate, presiding over a December Board meeting. She had asked Ryan not to attend. She is trying to keep the lid on release of information gathered during the investigation of Ryan.

careful what is said..."

John Melia is RIOC's public information officer. Early this week, he said he had no directive to issue a statement on the Ryan matter. The reference to "Mollie" is to Mollie Fullington, an aide in Governor George Pataki's press office and the wife of one of the Fullington twins, who grew up on Roosevelt Island. (Kevin Fullington, counsel to the minority members of the City Council, served for a time on the RIOC Board.) "Leo" refers to Leo Kayser III, a non-resident member of the RIOC Board, who complied with Labate instructions not to reveal details of the Board's executive session in which Ryan was fired.

In reaching its decision, the Board relied on the near-100-page investigative report on RIOC and Ryan, prepared by Attorney Michael Hitsman of Hitsman, Hoffman & O'Reilly, Elmsford (Westchester County), New York. That report is under wraps and was seen by Board members only on the day they voted; previously, it had

See **Ryan**, page 6

Briefly...

Senior Watch Plan – Islanders are talking about creating some kind of "senior buddy system" or daily check-in after the death this week of Hazel Lynch (see page 3) of a stroke she suffered while alone in her apartment. Immobile, her situation was discovered only after several days when she was able to dislodge her telephone to answer a call from Public Safety. *The WIRE* will issue e-mail bulletins (send an "Add Me" to nyc10044@rcn.com) to announce meetings on the issue.

Parking Survey – A careful check of cars parked on Main Street and River Road is reported in this issue in a letter (page 2) from Geoff Kerr, who found only 10% of cars in compliance with parking-permit regulations, and over half unpaid or evading payment by some means. In his letter to RIOC Acting President Patrick Siconolfi, Kerr proposes a set of remedies to open more spaces for residents loading and unloading, and those picking up passengers.

Trams Everywhere! – The Historical Society's Tram-decorating contest has produced a flood of entries (see page 16).

Lilies School Ransacked – Three Island youngsters broke into the Lilies School recently and caused extensive damage. The Public Safety Blotter, with more information, will be published on *Website NYC10044* (<http://nyc10044.com>) when it is made available by RIOC and Public Safety.

Blue Spots – You'll see them on bricks in Good Shepherd Plaza. RIOC will soon undertake a repair project to even things out and replace broken bricks.

WIRE Summer Hiatus – *The WIRE*'s next issue is scheduled for Saturday, July 26. While an "extra" is always a possibility, Island news will be available through the *WIRE Bulletin* service (send an "Add Me" to nyc10044@rcn.com) associated with *Website NYC10044* (<http://nyc10044.com>).



The Editorial Page

A RIOC Out of Control

If what we’ve learned about the content of Attorney Michael Hitsman’s report on RIOC management and compensation practices over the past year or so is solid fact, we have a picture slowly developing of a public-benefit corporation bumping along without meaningful oversight and control.

At this writing, we have little reason to doubt the gravity of a situation in which a chief executive allegedly was able to re-write the terms of his own compensation without anyone giving it a serious glance. We have the opposite, in fact – reason to believe that more will come out.

But RIOC Board Chair Mary Beth Labate – and perhaps the RIOC Board itself – seems determined to withhold as much information as possible, as long as possible, perhaps hoping that damage can be contained, and that the public, press, and watchdog agencies will lose interest. Labate’s gagging of RIOC Board members on the excuse that public statements might later become useful in a suit by deposed President Robert H. Ryan against the corporation has the effect of making the information in quashed reports all the more enticing. *Can it be so bad that it is worth the extraordinary effort required to bottle it up?*

As things stand, no information is flowing from RIOC or DHCR, its overseer agency that was apparently asleep at the switch. The RIOC Board’s brief, bland resolution speaks volumes by what it does *not* say. Likewise, the withheld Hitsman report speaks volumes by its being shut away in a dark closet.

If Attorney Hitsman is worth the considerable fee he was paid to get the goods on Rob Ryan, his report should be solid, and it should stand up to examination by the public, and be ironclad against any possibility that its content can be used against RIOC. The excuse, therefore, that the report must be suppressed because of possible litigation only suggests it is somehow flawed, or unreliable, or that the Board’s decision in firing Ryan can’t stand a test of fairness.

The strategy of withholding the document while gagging the Board members who’ve seen it makes it inevitable that there will be great pressure for the information to break free – not in the carefully-organized lawyerly presentation Hitsman prepared, but in rumor and eager speculation.

From what we know now, the Hitsman report apparently paints a smarmy picture of a State public-benefit corporation retooled as a political-reward machine for the Governor’s favorites, handing them an ATM card for a bank where the public puts the money in and “public servants” take it out, unchecked and unsupervised. It suggests an agency where the executive preoccupation was not with the people’s business, but with finding creative ways to tap the cash machine.

It waves a flag emblazoned with the question, *Can an unpaid Board of Directors be asked to take fiduciary responsibility for an agency whose executives so easily find ways to remold the rules to their own benefit and the public’s detriment?*

And there is another flag waving out there in the breeze: *Just how widespread is this sort of thing in State agencies controlled by the Governor’s people?* Put another way, is somebody up there winking while all this goes on?

DL



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Letters

To the Editor:

You are doing the residents of Roosevelt Island a disservice in describing the proposed appointment by RIOC of former Council Member Herbert Berman as its President as a patronage payoff because he is not an expert in building management.

As someone who worked with both the City Council and the Governor’s office, I feel I am qualified to state that Roosevelt Island should be thrilled to be getting Mr. Berman, which it would never have done without the term limits that put most of the City government’s leaders out of a job on January 1, 2002.

Mr. Berman wasn’t just a “Brooklyn Councilman.” As Chairman of the Finance Committee he was the third most important person in the City’s government (after the Mayor and Council Speaker), since he had the principal responsibility for legislative input into the City’s taxes and spending. He is thus an expert in municipal and public finance, a skill crucial to the Island’s development.

In that capacity, he worked closely with former Mayor Giuliani, City (now State) Comptroller Alan Hevesi, and Governor Pataki, and their staffs and offices, not to mention other Councilmembers and State Legislative leaders, in the development of financial policy and is now in a position to use those contacts and skills for the benefit of RIOC and the people of Roosevelt Island.

Robert Furman

To the Editor:

We would like to clarify the policy of the Roosevelt Island Community Garden regarding the admittance of non-members to the gardens. Formerly, the gardens were kept unlocked on weekends to permit free access, but unfortunately this policy resulted in unacceptable levels of pilferage. As was pointed out in a recent letter to *The WIRE*, anyone can climb the fence and people do. On several occasions the gardens have been prey to large-scale vandalism with gardens torn up, trees and shrubs burned, and garden ornaments smashed. There is little that can be done to prevent this type of wanton destruction by those who climb the fence.

The locked gates can stop the casual thief, however, who, on a stroll through the gardens, helps him or herself to “just one tomato” or “a couple of flowers,” rationalizing “Who will miss them in such a large garden?” Unfortunately, the gardener who has weeded, watered, and fertilized that precious tomato over several months time does. The open-door policy resulted in too much of this casual pilferage. Too many gardeners were losing their best produce or flowers.

As a compromise, therefore, while the gates will be locked, visitors are welcome and may request admission and a tour of the gardens from any available gardener. We regret that, due to a misunderstanding of the current policy, access was denied to the writer of that letter.

Nancy Cruickshank
Roosevelt Island Garden Club

To Patrick Siconolfi, Acting President of RIOC:

The Urban Planners who conceived and master-planned the new urban community of Roosevelt Island envisioned it as a step forward in urban living, and intended it to be virtually traffic free. The original intention was for the Motorgate Plaza to be the stopping point for all traffic crossing the Roosevelt Island Bridge (see Historical Marker # 11), with traffic beyond that being on foot or by public transport, and clearly the road infrastructure was not designed for continuous traffic. When I first moved to Roosevelt Island 26 years ago, it was a joy to return home from work in midtown Manhattan, feeling the City fading behind you as you rode the Tram high above the East River, and then to walk home surrounded by trees and grass and peacefulness.

This now seems to be a memory from the past, and our community seems to be becoming swamped by the automobile, partly by design, such as by requiring every vehicle entering the Island to drive to the Tram and back, stopping 20 times on the way, and partly by neglect, by no longer enforcing any parking regulations, thus permitting and encouraging the use of vehicles in the community.

In order to have facts with which to support my concerns, I took it upon myself to conduct a parking survey of the community. This encompassed Main Street and River Road, from Rivercross to the Community Gardens, and was carried out primarily on Friday, June 20. My first survey trip was made starting at 11:00 a.m. and finishing at 1:30 p.m., and a repeat trip was made between 4:00 and 5:45 p.m.

On my morning survey I recorded a total of 119 vehicles parked on the roads, in addition to which there were 20 vehicles parked in the School yard and 8 in assorted courtyards. Of the 119 vehicles parked on the

See **Letters**, page 19

To the Editor:

The *one* change has to be an elected RIOC Board... stop Pataki patronage... keep Siconolfi.

Other wishes are:

1. Use MTA pass for Tram.
2. Reinstitute ferry crossings, especially in the summer.
3. A marina would be nice.
4. Use our “stored” Z-bricks to repair sidewalks and roads.

I am also sorry to see the Bakery fold because of harassment and rent hike. I thought the family was a welcome addition to our shops – clean with hardworking staff.

Doris Chernik

Letters deadline for July 26 issue: July 22

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

To Patrick Siconolfi:

It seems obvious to me that a bus is useless if it makes no stops. The other day, since the red bus did not stop there, I assumed it was humanly possible to walk from the post office to the bank.

Well, at 89, with a walker, totally exhausted, I finally collapsed at the bank.

Is there some sane reason why RIOC discriminates against the bank and bank users or, for that matter, against the residents who live next to the bank?

Let’s have something more from RIOC than the fact that they cash their excessive checks. Please have the red bus immediately stop at the bank.

Frances Salten

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 to **Letters@MainStreetWIRE.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.



Hazel Lynch

Hazel Lynch, a popular and well-known Islander, died this week after suffering a stroke in her Eastwood apartment, and a second stroke while hospitalized.

She was born in North Chicago, Illinois, in 1918, the daughter of William and Mazie Davis, who were employed at Northwestern University in nearby Evanston. At age 16, she married Robert Lynch. They were later divorced after the birth of two daughters, Barbara Lynch Armstrong, now of Middle Island (Suffolk County), New York; and Haniyfah Fahsheed, who predeceased her mother. Other survivors include three grandchildren and 12 great grandchildren.

At Trellis and at the Island’s Senior Center, Hazel was known for her jokes – often slightly risqué. She was active in a Seniors dance group led by Bernard Dove, a regular member of *The Main Street WIRE*’s Friday-morning stuffing crew, and an avid knitter who of-

ten modeled her own work in Seniors fashion shows.

During World War II, she was a welder, building submarines in New London, Connecticut. Later, she became a licensed practical nurse, assisting a New York physician in a practice of obstetrics and gynecology. She moved to Roosevelt Island in 1992 after the death of her second husband, Alfred Brown.

She was officially a Protestant, but attended church on the Island with both Catholic and Protestant parishioners.

Funeral arrangements are being made at the Thomas Quinn Funeral Home, 35-20 Broadway, Long Island City (1-718-729-3400), where the family was to receive visitors Friday 2:00-5:00 and 7:00-9:00 p.m. Services are scheduled for this morning (Saturday, June 28) at 9:00 in the chapel at the funeral home. She will be interred at the Washington Memorial Park in Coram, New York, near the home of her surviving daughter.

Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.
—Attributed to Thomas Jefferson

When I was a young soldier about a million years ago, I signed the Official Secrets Act in order to receive the security clearance necessary for my job in a missile radar electronics lab. The deal was, you didn’t talk about the work to anyone, even if they had a clearance at your level, unless they also had a “need to know.” This seems to be the system governing communications from RIOC and the RIOC Board of Directors these days on issues critical to this community.

Two weeks ago, on the weekend of Roosevelt Island Day, we discovered, only by word of mouth, that

the Tram was temporarily out of business. RIOC’s sole effort to inform the public was a phone call Friday afternoon by Public Information Officer John Melia to *The Main Street WIRE*, which had just gone to press the evening before. Saturday came and went without a single notice from RIOC appearing on a single Main Street kiosk.

You know what happened next: the rumors started to spread. The Tram was closed for six months; for a year; forever. By Sunday it was clear that RIOC had no intention of spoiling its weekend by issuing a travel advisory for the Tram. And so, my wife and I, as well as *The WIRE* acting independently, made it our business to post information up and down Main Street. It wasn’t until *after* the Monday morning rush-hour commute that official postings from RIOC were seen on our kiosks. I can only assume that Island residents didn’t have the requisite “need to know” for this highly secure information to be shared with us.

For some time now, many of us have wondered what Melia actually does to earn his \$97,000 annual salary at RIOC. We don’t see him at Island events, he issues no press briefings, no Island newsletters, nor does he write a companion column to mine although RIOC has a standing offer to do so. When the question comes up, either at RIOC or with Board members, the answer is always, “Oh, we can’t discuss that! It’s political, you know!” Again, we Islanders don’t have the necessary “need to know” as to how our ground rents, our commercial rents, our Motorgate, red bus, and Tram fees are being spent while RIOC pursues its objectives with revenues obtained entirely on-Island. We may have Melia all wrong; he may be doing a bang-up job, but not in any of the areas that I’ve always defined as part of public relations. Who can say? Apparently I don’t have a “need to know” any more than you do. I do know that RIOC’s PR director has never called me to establish a relationship with the residents’ elected spokesperson (that’s me) and that his record of returning residents’ calls is sporadic at best, with a reputation for rudeness to resident callers.

Another case in point: I attended the RIOC Board meeting on June 17. It started with a 2½-hour executive session out of the public’s hearing, during which the Islanders attending the meeting cooled their heels and waited for the public portion to begin. The sum total of information from the executive session shared with that public is that the subject matter discussed was “personnel” and that one vote had been taken. Moments after the meeting adjourned, Deputy Commissioner Mary Beth Labate, who chairs the RIOC Board, gave a copy of the Board’s resolution to *WIRE* editor Dick Lutz, informing him that RIOC president, Robert Ryan, had been fired by the Board.

The first you’ve been able to read about this turn of events is in the newspaper you now hold, produced ten full days after the fact. Several hundred of us subscribe to *The WIRE*’s e-mail bulletin service for timely information (and you can too by sending an “Add Me” subject line to nyc10044@rcn.com) and so I knew the facts on the morning of June 18.

My question is why, during an official meeting of the RIOC Board of Directors on the 17th, this little tidbit of information could not be shared with the community and made part of the public record. Again, you and I just don’t have a “need to know” by government standards. My second questions is, “Who the hell does have a need to know if not us?” And will we find out when the next permanent RIOC president

is on board on the day he walks through the door at 591 Main Street? Better make sure that you’re cleared for Top Secret!

Moving right along: Did you participate in Roosevelt Island Day? This is the seventh event that Housing Management and the Youth Center have produced, and my hat is off to Doryne Isley and Charlie DeFino. Your Residents Association

was there too, offering a free breakfast to all comers. I spent most of the morning working with a group put together by Bonnie Sherk of the Living Library project. Many of you have read in these pages of her plans for an interactive, open-air learning experience to incorporate our children, our seniors, our artists, and Island activists to plan and execute something marvelous in our remaining open space.

If you have a chance to peek into the PS/IS 217 schoolyard, you will see a strip of land newly sodded (and manured!) and planted with a variety of vegetables and flowers that I’m told are “companion” plants. Bonnie honchoed a group of farmers including pre-kindergartners, older children, and a few of us so-called adults. The result is the first salvo in the Roosevelt Island Living Library and a welcome contribution to Island life and beauty.

After my labors I rested my bones at the Senior Center while a friendly phlebotomist milked my veins for some prime A+ blood. My wife was on the next gurney, and so we considered this a date! Airam da Silva informs me that the Icla da Silva Foundation and the New York Blood Center hosted 81 potential donors with 58 pints collected. New York City is again in one of its blood bank crises, and so this effort is truly a lifesaver. Thanks to everyone involved.

We lucked out with the weather until mid-afternoon, and so the kids’ rides, the hot dogs and cotton candy, and part of the Little League finals went off as scheduled. The fabulous Drifters concert was held in the school auditorium, which didn’t dampen the turnout or the enthusiasm of the audience. What a great day!

I’d like to wish everyone a happy Fourth of July and a good (and a drier) summer. I expect that I’ll see many of you at the fireworks presentation at Southpoint Park, our new, *full-time* park space. This holiday has come to mean something new (but really, quite old) for me since I got involved in Island activism. The quote with which I started this column comes to mind, as well as James Otis’s 1763 quote, “Taxation without representation is tyranny.” That this chestnut still applies on Roosevelt Island 240 years after it was written never fails to astonish me. And I’ll end with my favorite, oft-repeated quote – the one that sustains me in my RIRA work:

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful and committed citizens can change the world.
It’s the only thing that ever has.

—Margaret Mead

The RIRA Column



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

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

COMING UP

— This Weekend —

Gallery RIVAA open 11:00-5:00, Saturday and Sunday.

— The Coming Week —

Fourth of July Fireworks Viewing at Southpoint Park, **Fri., July 4**, gate open at 6:00; fireworks at 9:15; Southpoint. Tickets, \$18, available from RIOC office, 591 Main Street, during business hours; at Manhattan-side Tram station; or on-line at www.rioc.com through July 2. **Note:** No large coolers, backpacks, or oversize bags permitted on site; all bags subject to search.



— Future Events —

New York Junior Tennis League Summer program starts **Monday, July 7**, Octagon Tennis Courts; hours 1:00-4:00 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Roosevelt Island Walking Tour, Roosevelt Island in Progress, sponsored by the Municipal Art Society (www.mas.org), **Sat., July 12**, 2:00 p.m., led by Judy Berdy, President of the Roosevelt Island Historical Society. Visit the new buildings of Southtown and the Octagon ruin, and examine the relationship between the Island’s master plan and its present configuration. \$12 for MAS members; \$15 for non-members – no reservation required. Meet at the Manhattan-side Tram station.

Island Kids Fundraiser, a Tupperware Party, **Wed., July 16**, 7:30 p.m., 536 Main Street Community Room. For additional information, call **1-212-758-8408**.

The Main Street WIRE – Next issue, **Sat., July 26**. (E-mail bulletins will be issued during this summer break; to subscribe, send an “Add Me” to nyc10044@rcn.com. **Deadlines:** Advertising in the paper, **Fri., July 18**; decision on fliers for *The Bag*, **Mon., July 21**; fliers due **Thur., July 24**. **Future issues:** 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.

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.

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

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

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**
10:30, **Beading Class**
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Thursday
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12:30, **Movie**
7:00, **Dance Class** (Advanced)
Friday
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1:00, **Bridge Class**
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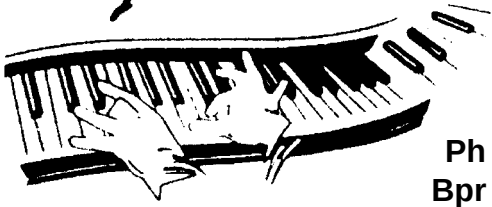
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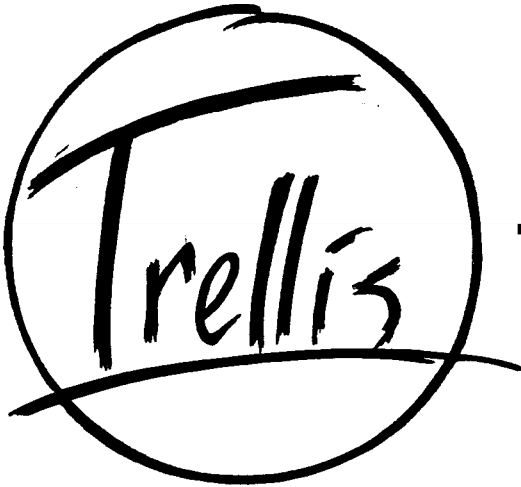
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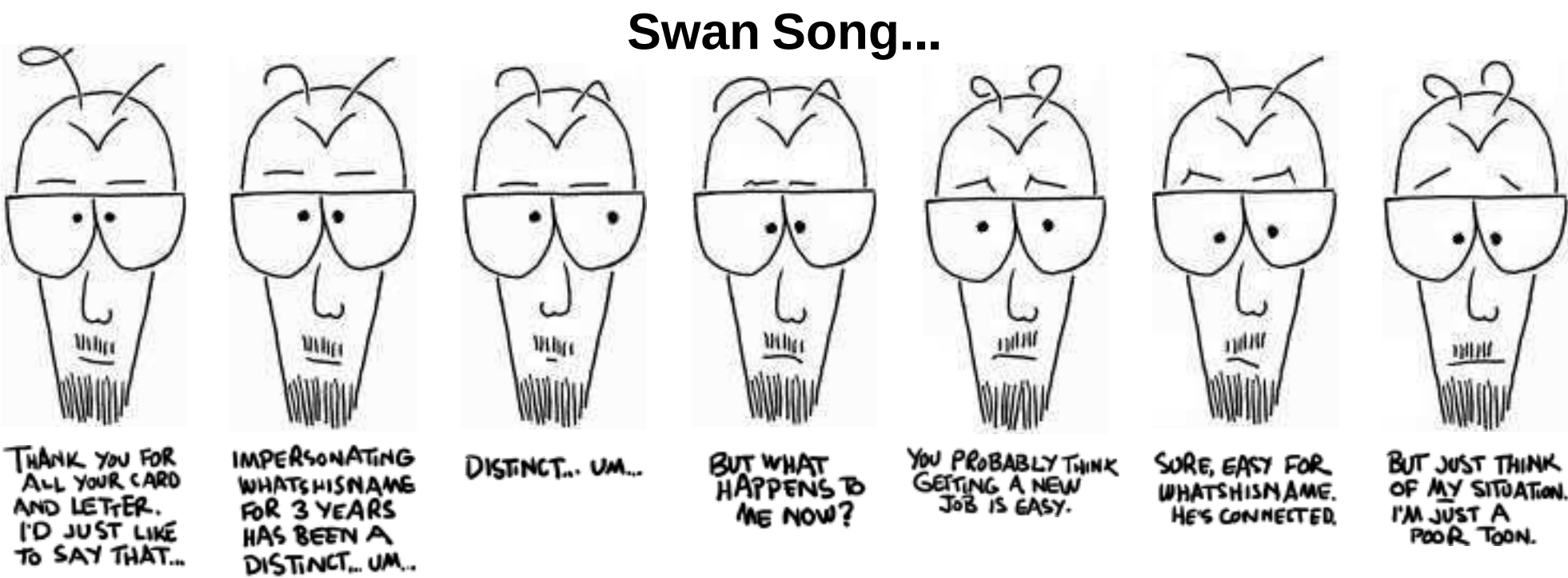
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Four years ago, this editorial cartoon in the Fourth of July issue of *The WIRE* marked the sudden departure of Dr. Jerome Blue as RIOC President, and the arrival of Robert H. Ryan.

Ryan from page 1

been withheld from them by Labate, and they were required to leave their copies behind after the vote.

Voting to fire Ryan were resident Board members Stewart, Kraut, and Mark Ponton, plus non-resident Board members Nancy Reuss (of the State Budget Office; she voted by phone) and John Mannix. Kayser voted against the termination.

Some Board members (see additional reports, pages 6 and 7) have commented, but have carefully limited what they’ve said to avoid dispensing information or opinions that might be useful to Ryan’s attorney, former Federal prosecutor Robert J. Costello, who did speak for the record in expressing outrage at his client’s dismissal and how it was handled. From earlier reports and sources close to the investigation who insisted they not be identified, *The WIRE* has pieced together a general picture of the rationale for Ryan’s dismissal, and some of the content of the Hitsman report.

Hitsman was hired, at \$235 an hour, to investigate when a Board request that the State Inspector General look into the Ryan matter was only half-heartedly passed along by Labate. (A source at the Inspector General’s office professes no knowledge of any investigation or report.) Hitsman recorded interviews with key RIOC administrative employees, including Ryan, Vice President Robert Antonek (who has since resigned), General Counsel Kenneth Leitner, and others. While *The WIRE* has submitted a Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) request for the tapes and Hitsman’s report, the FOIL process is time-consuming, and the RIOC Board may claim attorney-client privilege to refuse their release.

The questions asked by Hitsman and his associates during the interviews mostly focused on compensation practices at RIOC.

What came out, in major part, was a list of RIOC practices regarding executive pay that provided key employees with hidden raises never reviewed or approved by RIOC’s Board of Directors, which has responsibility for compensation decisions:

- One financial windfall was confirmed by Ryan, in an interview with *The WIRE* early in his suspension. He awarded time off to employees, including himself, who volunteered at and near Ground Zero after the 9/11/01 World Trade Center disaster. The award was said to be one day of vacation for every hour worked at Ground Zero, and it was

exchangeable for cash. In the case of at least one employee, it may amount to the equivalent of a year’s pay.

- Given a raise after months of seeking one, Ryan made it retroactive by several months.
- Ryan allegedly gave an underling a raise, then had that underling sign off on a raise for Ryan.
- RIOC administrators who agree to put three percent of their salaries into a “savings incentive program” are rewarded with a six percent salary bonus – but the six percent doesn’t go into the savings plan, it comes in cash. One source characterized the program as “obviously just a hidden raise.” (*The WIRE* has not yet been able to de-

termine whether larger percentages may be saved, with the cash-payment “incentive” also doubled.)

- A program of “floating holidays” for RIOC’s top employees rewards them with time off for time worked beyond a 40-hour week – virtually unheard of in high-salary executive positions (most of the employees in question earn over \$110,000 a year) in or out of government.
- RIOC administrators allegedly awarded themselves various “performance bonuses.”

Three months after suspending Ryan and near the end of the Hitsman inquiry, the RIOC Board closed a door. In passing a 2003-04 budget, they appended this lan-

guage to their resolution: “...the total salaries and fringe benefits for RIOC employees listed in the Fiscal Year 2003-2004 budget shall not be altered without the approval of the Chairperson/Chief Executive Officer after consultation with the Board of Directors; and no expansion in other compensation will be made without the approval of the Chairperson/Chief Executive Officer after consultation with the Board of Directors.” The Board, with this language, was clamping down on compensaton practices some saw as out of control.

One particular example of a performance bonus apparently followed a raucous December 12, 2002, environmental hearing on a pro-

posal to turn the Island’s landmark Octagon structure and nearby land (designated as parkland in the Island’s master plan) into the Octagon Apartments, 400 units of high-priced housing with 100 units for low-income families.

The December 12 hearing descended into a near-debacle when Ryan, who chaired it, argued with residents who appeared to voice sentiments against the plan. One of the residents addressing the hearing became irked by audience members urging others to “Stand up!” to protest against the plan and Ryan’s handling of the hearing. He said, intending his comment for the audience, “Don’t stand up, *shut up.*”

Ryan heard the “shut up” as directed at him. He shouted into his microphone, overdriving the public address system, “Don’t tell me to shut up or you’ll be escorted out of this room, sir. I am not rude to people...” The resident said something more, inaudible in *The WIRE*’s recordings of the meeting. Ryan continued, “If you want to be escorted out of this room...” Then he stood, shouting, “You know something? You know something? No one... OK! You know what? We’re closing this whole thing right now. If you are going to act like this... I have never told anybody in my life to shut up. You do not tell me to shut up, sir...” (The transcript of the full exchange is available on *Website NYC10044* at <http://nyc10044.com/121202.html>.)

But the hearing was not shut down. Antonek and Leitner, who sat at Ryan’s side throughout the session, kept it going, though one RIOC Board member, David Kraut, had already walked out in disgust over Ryan’s behavior.

Days later, on December 19, Board Chair Labate conducted a meeting of the RIOC Board, but told Ryan not to attend. Reportedly, bonuses were awarded in connection with the Octagon project, presumably to Antonek and Leitner for their handling of the hearing.

Attorney Hitsman’s line of inquiry, in his investigation of Ryan and RIOC practices, also touched on whether Ryan’s job-performance ever appeared to be alcohol-impaired. Residents who attended the December 12 hearing have speculated on the reasons for Ryan’s argumentative attitude and behavior in a hearing where his role could have been limited to saying, “Thank you. Next, please,” after each resident’s testimony. No qualified expert has declared that he was “under the influence,” but had he succeeded in shutting down the hearing, RIOC’s ability to meet cer-

continued next page

“Actions in a Cloud of Bad Judgment” Were Ryan’s Downfall, Says Stewart

by Robert Laux-Bachand

Patrick Stewart, a resident Board member of the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation, said that a series of mistakes and misjudgments by RIOC President Robert H. Ryan led to his dismissal.

Ryan’s award of vacation bonuses for himself and other RIOC volunteers for their work at Ground Zero was widely publicized at the time of his suspension in February, but Stewart said that was not the only issue: “9/11 was not the crux of the matter.”

“The whole thing is a matter of actions taken by Rob, it was in a sort of cloud of bad judgment,” Stewart told *The WIRE* last week, while declining to go into specifics pending the release of official reports. “I can’t point specifically to one set of circumstances, it was an accumulation of actions and events that you couldn’t really not notice,” he said.

The Board’s initial concerns, he said, were based on internal information that came to the attention of the board regarding “some irregularities.”

“That’s what started the ball rolling,” he said, noting that this information “came in the normal course of affairs” and did not come from “a mole or squealer” from within the RIOC staff.

“We believed that we had done what we needed to do in ethical fairness and that it was now time to take action,” Stewart said, referring to the board’s vote on Tuesday, June 17, to remove Ryan as an officer of the Corporation and terminate his employment. He said it would not have been fair to Island residents, to the State – which continued to pay Ryan’s salary throughout the long suspension – or to Ryan himself “to run this on indefinitely.”

Stewart was careful to avoid any description of the Board’s voting or deliberations, or even to characterize the tone of its discussion, which was held in a closed session, as allowed by law when dealing with a personnel matter. But speaking personally, he said, “I have been very distressed by the whole damn thing” – and not least because he had been an outspoken supporter of Ryan over the past several years.



Resident member H. Patrick Stewart in the publicly-held portion of last week’s RIOC Board meeting.

“One of Rob’s great skills was to bring in great people,” he said, noting that Patrick Siconolfi, now the Acting President, came on board as Chief Financial Officer to serve under Ryan. “Rob has done more for the Island than all of the previous executives put together, and especially as compared to his predecessor,” Stewart added, referring to Dr. Jerome Blue. (Blue and Stewart were often at odds during Stewart’s time as president of the Residents Association.)

“I am personally fond of Rob Ryan and, all things considered, he has done a good job in my opinion, and, had he exercised better judgment, all this would not have happened,” Stewart said. “I know in my heart that this is not a crook or a criminal. It was a serious lapse of judgment. On the other hand, having said this ... you have things you have to do and you have to answer to those things good or bad.”

Stewart said that Mary Beth Labate, the deputy commissioner of the State Division of Housing and Community Renewal, has been a skilled leader in chairing the RIOC Board (“She knows how to run things and keep going in the right direction; she is well organized and civil.”). But he rejected the idea that the Ryan matter had been orchestrated from Albany.

“It was not a call from the Second Floor, none of that happened,” he said, referring to the Governor’s office. “I’m not delighted at what happened. But it was a Board decision. As far as the Governor calling or the secretary calling – this was the Board alone, as it will be or has been in whoever RIOC hires, it has to have RIOC Board approval.”

Stewart rates this current Board as RIOC’s best ever in terms of its professional qualifications and says it is motivated by a desire to make the Island a better place to live. “I think this Board takes its obligations seriously, takes the Island seriously, and its obligations to the personnel of RIOC and the whole functioning of the system,” he said, defending its decisions not only in the Ryan episode but on development issues like Southtown and the Octagon Apartments proposal.

...And Debut



Ryan from page 6
tain deadlines in the progress of the Octagon project might have been jeopardized.
Whether the RIOC Board passed on the Octagon bonuses is not known, but Kraut has expressed dismay that there were other bonuses of various kinds that the Board did not have an opportunity to consider.
Ryan’s attorney says, for the record, “I think they fired him for his drinking problem. But he’s taken care of that.” Early in his four-and-a-half-month leave, Ryan is believed to have gone through a rehab or drying-out program.
Costello, outraged that the RIOC Board “acted in the dead of night”

and “in secret,” allowed a member to attend the meeting by telephone (and perhaps vote), didn’t vote in public, and didn’t announce the breakdown of its vote, says Ryan “wants his good name back.” But he was not prepared, in telephone conversations with *The WIRE*, to specify a course of legal action for his client. He says Ryan was promised an opportunity to appear before the Board, but was never given a bill of particulars to respond to, and when finally invited to appear, was told it would be “without counsel.” Costello points out that the RIOC Board would likely have Counsel present, and sees those arrangements as unfair to his client. Costello and Ryan also decided against an interview with *The*

WIRE for this report.
Hitsman, who was reached in Florida, on vacation, would not go into detail for publication. He said, “I can’t really comment on it at this time. This is a personnel matter that could lead to litigation. We already have a notice of claim from Mr. [Robert] Antonek for all his accrued leave time.”
On the matter of compensation practices at RIOC, Costello repeated the core of the defense he says Ryan gave during an interview with Hitsman: All the practices were either already in place when Ryan arrived at RIOC four years ago, were used in other State agencies, or they were approved by Chief Financial Officer Patrick Siconolfi. Some testimony has suggested that

*For Fireworks visitors (and the Island clueless): Dr. Jerome Blue, former President of the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation, left that job in June [1999], and was named State Commissioner of Human Rights by Governor George Pataki. Robert Ryan replaced Blue as RIOC President. **Added note, 2003:** Blue held the Human Rights job for one stormy year, then was moved to Battery Park as Vice President for Construction.

Siconolfi, who came over from DHCR to straighten out RIOC’s accounting and financial situation (at Ryan’s request, says Costello), may have gotten Labate’s approval for the rationale and method by which additional compensation went to employees without the full RIOC Board’s passing on it. One source said, “It was clear nothing financial could be done there without Siconolfi’s giving the go-ahead.”
As to the practices of other State agencies, Costello offers the example of the Empire State Development Corporation, where Chief Executive Officer Charles Gargano

awarded employees a week of annual leave as a “thank you for the essential work that you performed in affiliation with the WTC business recovery effort.” Gargano’s January 15, 2003, letter to employees told them the leave could be exchanged for cash.
Ryan’s defense on the charges of excessive compensation, then, is that he only did what other State agency heads were doing, or that the practices pre-dated his arrival, or that Siconolfi approved them or, in some cases, originated them.
The RIOC Board designated

continued next page

“Disappointed As Can Be,” Kraut Laments, Saying Rob Ryan Was “On His Way to Becoming the Best President We Ever Had”

What can you say about the Ryan firing?
Because this is a personnel matter, everything has to remain confidential. All we’re allowed to say is that the Board met and voted to terminate his service.
Did you vote with the majority?
Yes.
Were you satisfied with what you saw to justify your vote?
Yes.
How much time did you have with the Hitsman [investigative] report [on RIOC and Ryan]?
Sufficient time, I think. There was a very fat document with many exhibits and appendices, but there was also an executive summary.
Was the content of the report mostly focused on financial matters?
I can’t comment on the content of the report.
In your vote, was alcohol – drinking – a factor?
Not with me. I’ve said this before and I’ll say it again. People have seen me express irritation with Rob Ryan’s behavior, for example, as you reported at the December [12th Octagon environmental] hearing. But I personally have no evidence whatsoever of a drinking problem. I’ve never drunk with him, nor seen him take a drink, nor have I ever smelled alcohol on his breath. The fact that the man shouts at times and is rude to the public is another matter. I’ve shouted and been rude at times myself.
Did the fact that he shouts and is rude at times have to do with your decision on your vote?
Again, I can’t comment directly on the reasons for my vote or any other member’s.

Are you familiar with a “savings incentive program” at RIOC?
Not by that name.
Are you familiar with a program in which an employee who saves 3% of his salary is given a 6% cash reward?
No.
Do you feel this board has enough information to supervise the RIOC staff?
In what way do you mean the Board should supervise the RIOC staff?
Well, for example, in terms of compensation such as performance bonuses.
All compensation matters are the responsibility of the Board. I don’t think there’s any surprise or news to anybody that we were surprised to find additional compensation. I have no trouble alluding to it because Ryan did so in an interview... [At this point, Kraut referred to an article run in February by *The New York Observer* reporting on possible charges against Ryan, and Ryan’s admission that he gave bonuses for World Trade Center volunteer work.]
I personally was surprised to learn that he had done this when it became public back in February. Our [administrative] employees are not hourly employees. They’re paid annual salaries for whatever work they’re required to do, and they are paid fairly. If you’re required to turn out for extra long hours, that comes with your basic salary. There’s no overtime or extra compensation. Any corporation I know of, executives don’t get that. You don’t get that in government work. Firefighters or police officers, yes. They have special condi-

tions and so forth. As a Board member, I wasn’t asked to, nor did I ever approve any extra compensation for those people. No one asked us. No one came to us, not me personally, and therefore it became a matter of compensation without the Board’s approval. All compensation matters are supposed to be in the hands of the board.
Was there a good deal of compensation beyond the World Trade Center matter?
No comment.
I’m highly disappointed with this whole thing. Rob Ryan was at least the second-best president RIOC ever had, and he was on his way to becoming – unqualifiedly – the best we ever had. He got an incredible amount of work done for this Island on behalf of its residents. He was working full steam to attain my personal vision, which I shared with him and with the Governor, in getting this Island to a point of financial independence, so that we never again would have to depend on largesse from any government or person or politician, so that, however the RIOC Board was chosen in the future, [the Board] would be able to operate with a free hand.
He also did away with some of the bad ideas of his direct prede-

cessor, and accomplished more than any President since Rosina Abramson, and was on his way to accomplishing even more than that. I remind you the only reason we have a bank on this Island is because his staff under his leadership was able to get a bank here when no bank wanted to come. Stuff like that gets overlooked – stuff like [Robert] Antonek negotiating free [hybrid-powered] buses, state of the art – like getting us out of the [Diane] Wilson [minischools] condo deal, and like getting a proper school in the [mini]school spaces at last, after all the false starts and bad ideas from various predecessors. [Also:] Getting our finances under control, getting our reporting and accounting systems under logical control... These are incredible feathers in the guy’s cap and, despite all the criticism, and [despite] whatever enemies he may have made along the way, there were great deeds – with more to come. And I’m just disappointed as can be that he made whatever mistakes that lost him the confidence of his Board.
Aside from that, I like the guy...
[Question about RIOC serving as a political-reward machine:]
Yes, RIOC can be considered a patronage apparatus... This Island

used to be run by three people in a room, and it wasn’t enough to operate it or develop it. Obviously, something else was needed, so RIOC quickly became a patronage reward for people, just like many other government agencies and entities, and a lot of us looked askance at why, all of a sudden, we needed all these people where before there had been too few. But despite that, RIOC is clearly one of the more effective organizations and, despite what you think, the people like Siconolfi, Antonek, Leitner, and Kopicki are a pretty damn good team who earn their money. They work hard for their money and their results are all measurable. This particular bunch has brought some number of millions of dollars of investment to this community. It’s going to have positive fall-out for residents in the millions over the years. They’ve earned their salaries and beyond.
Generally, you [*The WIRE*] don’t report on them as doing a good job. You’re critical of them all the time. But I’m telling you, these people earn their income many times over, bringing in hundreds of millions of dollars of investment, to the future benefit of the residents of the Island. Within a couple of years the Board of Directors of RIOC, elected directly by the community or whatever, will be free of the need to beg government, of whatever party or political stripe, for anything. We’ll pay our own way, and that’s because of the work of these people. So I wish we could have given them raises, but nobody in State government got raises, so they couldn’t get any, and Ryan’s problems stem from that.



Resident RIOC Board member David Kraut, in the open portion of last week’s meeting. Behind him is Mark Ponton, another resident member. Ponton had no comment on the Ryan dismissal.

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Friday, July 18 – Indonesia (Sulawesi, Bali, Java)
Video: Indonesia – Java - Bali; 2000

Friday, July 25 – Haiti
Video: A Painted Haiti; 1997

Friday, Aug. 1 – Philippines
Video: Philippines; 1996

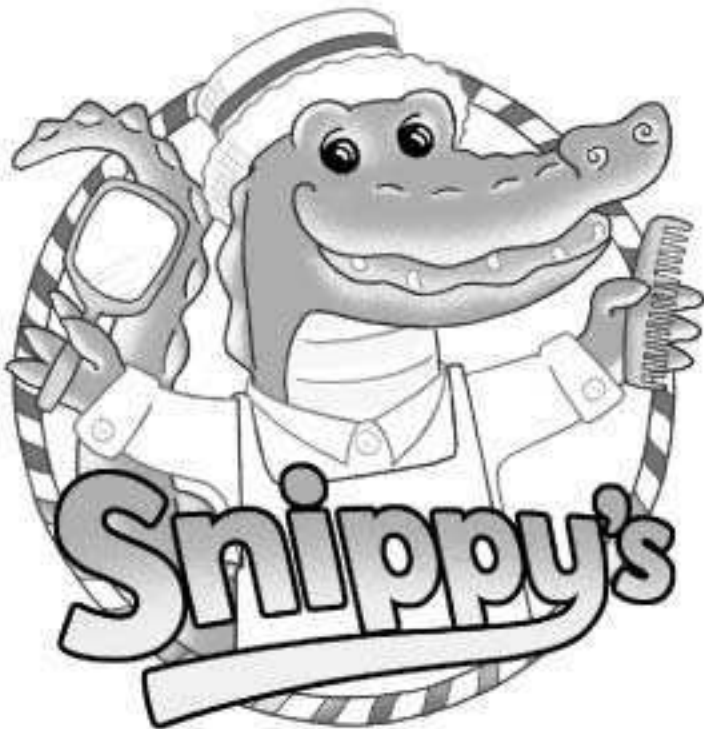
Friday, Aug. 8 – Africa (South Africa, Togo)
Video: A Journey to West Africa; 1995

Friday, Aug. 15 –Guatemala
Video: Easter in Guatemala; 1994

Friday, Aug. 22 – China & East Timor
Video: to be announced

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The Chapel of the Good Shepherd was full on Father's Day as Fr. Peter Miqueli was installed as Pastor of Cabrini Parish. His parents were on hand for a celebratory dinner at Manhattan Park Theater Club.



Resident Tex Allen brought his Sextet to the Island for a jazz concert at the Chapel on Sunday, June 22.



At PS/IS 217, The Living Library created a new garden on Roosevelt Island Day





Spring Tennis Wraps The New York Junior Tennis League Spring season finished with a carnival and awards presentation for over 100 participants on Thursday, June 26th. Pictured in the boys and girls categories, along with their coaches, are Nachiketa Goyal, MVP; Sean Ticona, Best Sportsmanship; Bilal Hussain, Most Improved (not pictured); Nikita Goyal, MVP; Ashley Yauvoli, Most Improved; and Franchesca Fanchin, Best Sportsmanship. The Summer NYJTL program begins July 7. Summer hours are 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. at the Octagon Park courts, Monday through Friday. The NYJTL program is made possible by City Council Speaker Gifford Miller and the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation

Stabilization from page 1

crats, Silver could use changes in rent-stabilization laws as a bargaining chip.

But there is no telling whether the Mitchell-Lama provision would go back on the table.

Bruno is not planning on reconvening the Senate until September, and that may be only to confirm gubernatorial appointments and approve bills that have already passed the Assembly.

“Clearly it’s an issue we would want to revisit,” Charles “Skip” Carrier, a spokesman for Silver, D-Manhattan, said of rent stabilization. “It’s designed to provide middle-income folks an opportunity to find affordable housing in the City and remain a part of the community.”

Carrier noted the Assembly had passed separate legislation in recent years to put post-1973 buildings exiting the Mitchell-Lama program under rent stabilization. But this year, the issue was wrapped into the larger rent-control debate.

Will the Assembly again push the Mitchell-Lama issue independent of rent control?

“It’s something we’d obviously be interested in,” Carrier said.

McKee said the issue’s failure was a big disappointment.

“We thought that the Mitchell-Lama piece would be politically easier for the Republicans to swallow, because it doesn’t affect the landlords who give money to the Republicans, by and large,” he said. “To do things like repealing vacancy de-control or rent stabilization is basically a slap in the face to the landlords who’ve given Republicans and the State Conservative Party \$4 million in the last four years.”

Pataki has said the rent stabilization law passed in 1997 worked well to protect tenants and balance interests during the six years it was in effect and he saw no need to change it.

But Island tenants are worrying.

“The fact they didn’t do that (the Mitchell-Lama change) really puts us into a rough spot,” said Helstein. “How’s it going to see the light of day? I’m not terribly hopeful they (the State Legislature) are going to do anything.”

Opher Pail, the elected chair of the Westview Task Force, said tenants can’t count on the Legislature.

“We feel we should take our destiny into our own hands, and we’re doing that as we speak,” he said.

Pail said 85 percent of Westview tenants want to buy their apartments, especially in the face of a current rent-determination process.

He said tenants have hired a law firm to represent their interests and have begun a “major fund-raising effort to cover legal and engineering fees,” among other things.

Pail said the effort involves “going floor to floor every night.

“What happened with the Legislature emphasizes more that this is the only way to go now,” he said. “We have to do it ourselves. We need professionals.” He added that Westview tenants pay the highest rents of any residents in the State under the Mitchell-Lama program – \$1,500 for a two-bedroom apartment.

The Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation may have the ultimate say in rent changes and in the sale of the two buildings by virtue of its control over the ground leases.

Charles Lucido, part-owner of both Westview and Island House, could not be reached for comment before *The WIRE*’s Thursday-night deadline.

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While the Island’s Icon Was Out of Service for Two Weeks...

Tram from page 1

with the frequency of the Island’s commuter system, the company said.

As Larry Wollum, an engineer with Doppelmayr-CTEC’s office in Watertown, N.Y., told *The WIRE* this week, the Tram’s “duty cycle” is one of the highest in the world.

RIOC accepted Doppelmayr’s agenda this spring and put \$1.1 million in its capital-management plan for 2003-04 to replace both Tram cabins, at an estimated cost of \$500,000 each, plus \$100,000 for carriage repairs. This expenditure was one of the major changes in the RIOC budget between the time that Siconolfi presented the spending plan in March and its adoption on May 13. RIOC originally planned to spend \$500,000 for one cabin in this fiscal year, but evidently bowed to board members’ concerns about the amount of time needed to install each new cabin. In an appearance before the board in March, Wollum estimated the replacement time at two weeks. Several board members suggested that doing both cabins at once would reduce the downtime of the Tram.

The ongoing testing associated with this project appears to have touched off the latest shutdown. Last year, RIOC hired Kimley-Horn and Associates, an engineering and planning firm with connections to the Colorado skiing industry, as its Tram consultant. Kimley-Horn provides a service for RIOC that is similar to that of AMEC, the multinational company that is overseeing the construction of Southtown and a new private-school construction project. These companies furnish RIOC with professional oversight. And in the case of the Tram, Siconolfi told the board, something didn’t click.

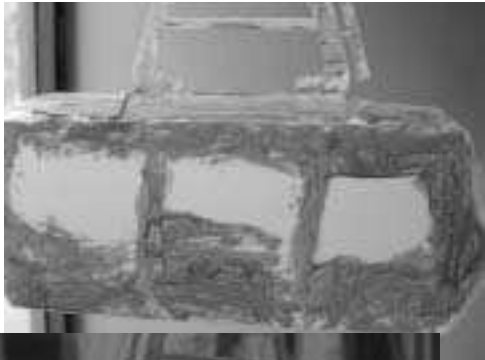
“The independent engineer expressed concerns that the data did not adequately answer the question as to whether the Tram is safe or not,” Siconolfi said at a board meeting on June 17. “And, in fact, he went on to suggest that additional testing was necessary before one could say conclusively that the Tram was safe. So we have instructed Doppelmayr to conduct the additional testing.”

But what, exactly, was going on?

Gregg Paravati, a longtime Tram employee who resumed the West Channel crossing at 6:00 a.m. on Thursday, said he had been somewhat surprised at the shutdown, because safety considerations are so ingrained in the daily operations of the system.

Paravati, a union steward, said that he was glad that RIOC was committed to safety, but he pointed out that the Tram crew already performed 42 “PMs” or preventive maintenance checks, at various intervals. The cables, main pins, and cabin structural poles, he said, are continually monitored.

In any case, the workers were not penalized, as they were during the long shutdown of 2001-02, which was also caused by an engineering question (concerning the integrity of the haul rope at varying wraps around the drum that connects



the carriage to the haul rope). Paravati said the crew was not laid off this time as they were the last time around, but was kept at work, doing repairs and maintenance on the Tramway.

He did note, though, that the new rounds of testing had produced some unusual sights. The technicians, at one point, he said, inserted a tube into the hanger arm to photograph the interior to check on welds and other features, “just like a colonoscopy.”

Siconolfi told *The WIRE* that the raw data developed by the Doppelmayr contractors was quite technical and called it “well beyond my understanding.” Kimley-Horn had recommended two additional tests after the original submission, he said, and the results were delivered to RIOC Wednesday morning. After reviewing the new data, the consulting engineer gave a go-ahead, and Siconolfi was on the phone by 4:15 p.m. to tell Paravati and the other Tram employees that they were back in business as of 6:00 a.m. Thursday.

Wollum, the Doppelmayr-CTEC engineering representative, said that the two main tests in the initial round were finite-element and strain-gauge testing. In an appearance before the RIOC board in March, Wollum had mentioned that aluminum, the metal used in the Tram’s cabin and carriage, was more difficult to evaluate than steel.

Meanwhile, Trying to Get Useful Information Is a Bit Like Pulling a Tram Across the River – With Your Teeth

by Robert Laux-Bachand

Weaknesses in the public information practices of the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation were exposed in the latest Tram shutdown, according to Patrick Stewart, a resident member of the RIOC Board.

At the Board’s June 17 meeting, Stewart praised Patrick Siconolfi, RIOC’s Acting President, for handling the situation “exactly right” in deciding to close the Tramway pending more safety tests.

However, Stewart criticized RIOC’s handling of notices of the shutdown.

“The communication of its being shut down was abysmal,” Stewart said. “Now, we’ve all talked about this on many an occasion, not keeping the residents in the community informed, and I again have heard of crowds of people being at the Tram and being told that it is not running, expecting to go to work; crowds of people at the Tram then went back to the subway station, being told that the subway wasn’t running. And this is news to everybody.

“So I implore you that, especially in issues like this where it affects the day-to-day lives of the people here who need to get to work, need to get to doctor’s appointments, and so on, that they can reasonably expect to be told what, why, where, and when.”

No notices were posted on June 13 that the Tram was shut down, and no RIOC notices were posted on the Island’s kiosks or in other public places on June 14, that might have informed Islanders of the situation. Residents who ventured down to the Tram en-

trance on Saturday were greeted by a rope barrier with a dangling Tram model informing them that the cable car was out of service.

Although *The WIRE* posted Internet notices and kiosk statements announcing that “The Tram Is Down: Here’s Why,” RIOC’s official bus schedule revisions did not appear until the following week. (It is worth noting, however, that residents, once they found out, were quite appreciative of the 25-cent fare to and from Manhattan, which was a Siconolfi decision.)

Siconolfi told Stewart at the meeting that “if we can do better on that, we will.” He also noted that RIOC had put out a quick press release to *The WIRE* and had updated its Web site.

As the shutdown moved toward its conclusion this week, RIOC appeared to improve its public relations. Late Wednesday, copies of a notice announcing the Thursday resumption of Tram service were stacked on the dashboard of a Red Bus, although the notices were not yet posted on kiosks or within the bus itself. Eventually, the notices were posted.

The word seemed to get out, if only as a tacit acknowledgment that the Pataki administration, which controls Roosevelt Island, prefers private-enterprise solutions, and is willing to let the chips fall as they may in allowing *The WIRE*, in this instance, to handle its notices.

But no detailed information has been made available about the shutdown itself, and RIOC appears to have decided that no one needs to know, in detail, its reasons for closing the Tram. Siconolfi

refused to provide *The WIRE* with any of the relevant engineering data or memos related to the shutdown.

Here is, in toto, the statement by Patrick Siconolfi on resumption of Tram service, as provided by John Melia, RIOC’s vice president for public affairs:

“After additional testing to the hanger arms of the Tram, our independent engineer, and the Tram operator, have concurred that the Tram is safe for operation. The Tram will resume service at 6:00 a.m. on Thursday, June 26, 2003.”

Sari Halper Dickson, Siconolfi’s assistant, who is an Assistant Commissioner of the State Division of Housing and Community Renewal, was asked on Thursday whether it would not be appropriate to explain the so-called “ambiguity” behind the Tram test results. What, exactly, was the issue or ambiguity in these tests that had led Siconolfi to close the Tramway? Would it not be a reasonable premise to conclude that a factual matter relating to one’s choice of suspending oneself 250 feet above the water might be of some concern?

Dickson, a Stuyvesant High grad, said she couldn’t comment one way or another on the validity of this “premise.”

When she finally got back to *The WIRE* late Thursday afternoon, she recited a declaration from a Kimley-Horn engineering official saying it was OK to ride the Tram again. But she furnished no data, no explanation, no access, no test results and no insight into the real reasons, whatever they might be, behind the Tram’s 13-day shutdown.

The finite element test, he said, is “not 100 percent, but it indicates where a failure may occur.” It is an examination of the components of the system. “A chain is only as strong as the weakest link,” he said, and the test looks for points of stress and fatigue, such as cracks and weak welds.

Strain gauge testing, he said, is used to confirm assumptions, and is more of a process evaluation. Instruments are deployed to measure the stress and loading at various points as the system is being operated under different loads.

Siconolfi told the board on June 17 that “not only is there the question of whether or not the results are clear-cut, but also the question of whether or not the two sets of results say the same thing.”

On several occasions, Siconolfi has quoted Red Blomer, the head of Doppelmayr’s operations here, as saying that there is no “redundancy,” or safety net, in the Tramway. “A failure will produce a catastrophic result,” Siconolfi told *The WIRE* this week, in language nearly identical to his warning to the RIOC board on June 17, when he stated that “what we need is something better than ambiguous test results.”

Siconolfi’s warning may seem obvious to anyone who is suspended 250 feet above a fast-moving, 35-foot-deep navigation channel, but Wollum, a typically laid-back professional, was not afraid to offer a word of qualification.

“There is certainly no redundancy in some parts of the system such as pieces of the tower,” he said, but he indicated that the same cannot be said of the cabin connections or the cabin itself.

He further noted that the type of testing being done on the Tram is quite common in the industry and is continuously being performed, even on two-person chair lifts.

Wollum was presented with a carefully-couched safety question, but he cut it off:

“Would I ride it? Sure,” he said, although he noted that he does not get down to New York City very often.

The RIOC Board passed a resolution on May 13 authorizing its staff to negotiate with Doppelmayr “for replacement of aerial Tramway cabins” and hanger arms.

At the same meeting, Blomer gave a presentation saying that “the cabins are due to be replaced after 28 years of service, but that the Tram is at present, safe,” RIOC reported in its minutes of the meeting. “Mr. Blomer stated, however, that the Tram would not last forever and that it was time to upgrade the system.”

This assertion did not sit well with everyone in attendance.

Robert Liss, an Island resident and a structural engineer who spoke up at the meeting, asked this week, “If it was safe a month ago, why not now?”

Liss said RIOC should have engaged an independent engineer to conduct the testing, not just to evaluate the tests performed on behalf of Doppelmayr. He questioned whether there have ever been any tram failures in comparable circumstances.

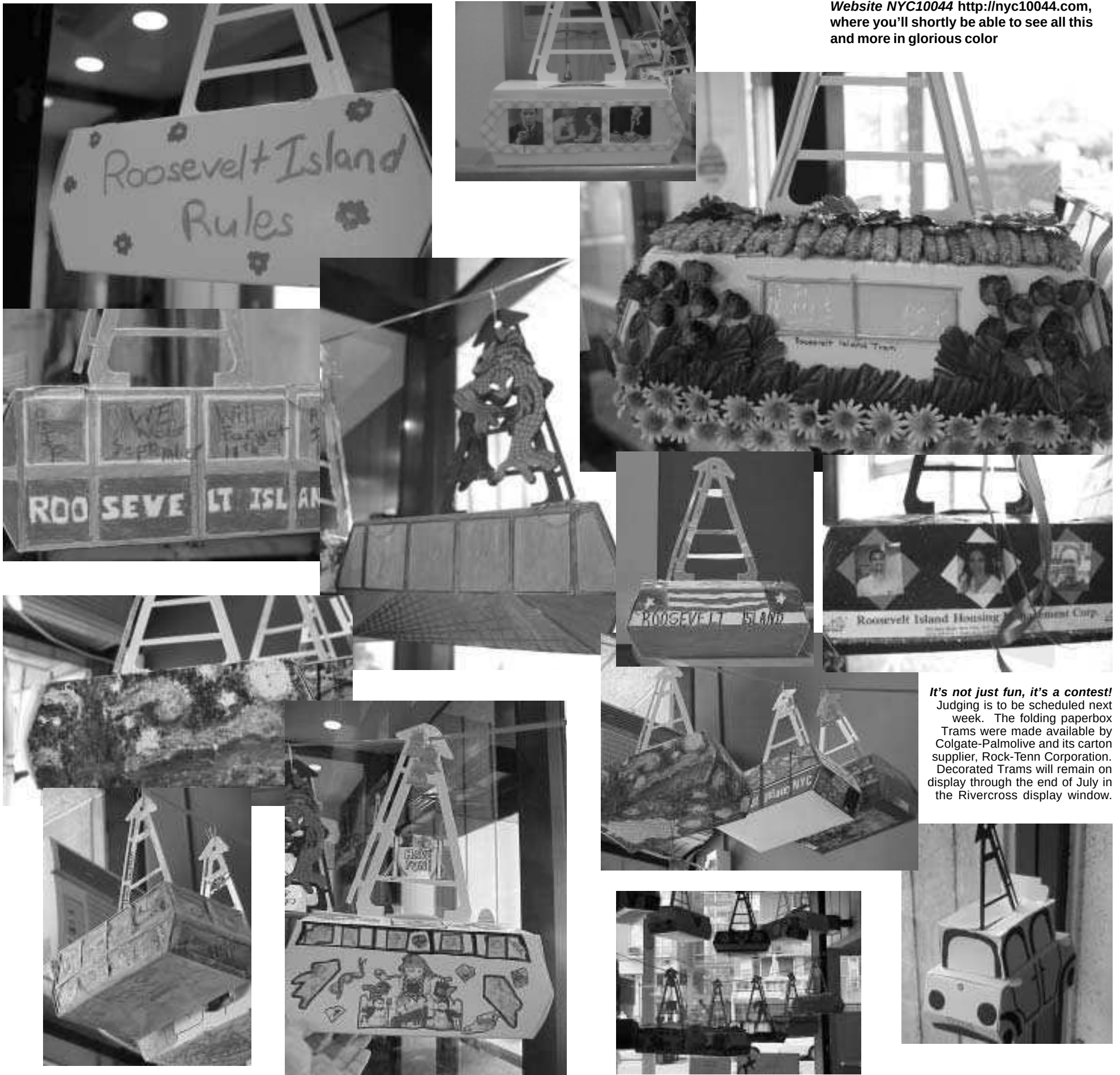
He asserted that the “ultimate design capability” of the cabin should be three times its stated load of 125 persons, and recommended that an outside consultant should be retained for a stress strain test or radiographic X-rays.

Liss’ formulation is that one should “follow the dots, follow the money,” and he questioned whether Doppelmayr was simply trying to add to its business. He said that he could understand the idea of replacing the old cabins for aesthetic reasons, but not on the basis of safety, and he expressed concern that the added costs would simply show up in Islanders’ rents.

...A Coincidental Historical Society Project Enticed Dozens of Islanders to Coax It Back to Life by Decorating Paper Models...

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by Seth Kaufman

SPORTSWIRE



Winning pitcher Jenna Stueber of the Red team scores a strike on a Green team hitter during the first inning of last Saturday's match at Capobianco Field.

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Baseball: The Roosevelt Island Youth Program’s Little League season came to a close on Monday, June 16, with the completion of the Minor League championship game, which was postponed from Saturday, June 14, because of rain. The championship game in the Major League was completed on Saturday, June 14.

Minors: Before the championship game could be started, the semifinals of the playoffs had to be completed. In the first game of a planned doubleheader on Saturday, June 14, Silver defeated Red 5-2 to advance to the championship game against Green, which had already won its semifinal game. Silver took the lead in the bottom of the first inning when Diana Folla and Eno Brodman hit back-to-back doubles with two outs. Neither team was able to generate much offense until the fourth inning, when Ryan ChonoDeAbreu of the Red team led off with a double and, with two outs, Parker Ellis drove him in to tie the score at one apiece. However, Silver broke the game open in the fifth inning when, with one out, Chris Schrum, Asher Russem, and Baba Kane singled to load the bases. Diana Folla drove in one run with the fourth straight single of the inning, but the big blow in the inning came when Eno Brodman, batting after Diana, cleared the bases with a grand slam home run. Red was able to score one run in the top of the sixth on Justus Burgos’ home run, but Red’s comeback attempt fell short.

The championship game in the Minor League matched first-place Green against second-place Silver, and the teams were evenly matched as the game went five extra innings before Green prevailed 3-2 in 11 innings. The game started on Saturday, June 14, but had to be stopped after three innings due to rain, and was completed on Monday, June 16. Green jumped out ahead 2-0 in the first inning with a two-out rally. Jacob Kelman and Andrew Feeley hit back-to-back singles, and Eric Michels drove in both runs with a triple. Silver threatened in the second inning when Eno Brodman led off with a double, but he was stranded at third. Silver did break through, however, in the fifth when Derek Hughes hit a two-out double, and Kiah Lawrence drove him in with another double, cutting Green’s lead to 2-1. In the top of the sixth inning, Silver made the most of its last at bat when Baba Kane hit a one-out triple and scored on Diana Folla’s RBI groundout. Green almost won the game in the bottom of the sixth as Jacob Kelman and Andrew Feeley hit back-to-back singles to lead off the inning, but they never advanced. In the ninth inning, Silver threatened when they loaded the bases with one out on singles by Eno Brodman, Chris Schrum, and Derek Hughes, but Silver could not push a run across. Green finally won the game in the 11th inning when Andrew Feeley and Eric Michels led off the inning with hits, putting runners on second and third with no one out. The next two batters struck out, but just when it looked as though the game would go to another inning, Michael Mungal came through in the clutch with a walk-off single up the middle. Congratulations to the members of the Green team: Austin Charles, Rahul Dhodapkar, Thomas Diamond, Alexander Dow, Andrew Feeley, Adam Glenn, Luka Ivcevic, Donte Jones, Jacob Kelman, Eric Michels, and Michael Mungal – and their coaches, Mark Diamond and Andy Kelman.

Majors: In the Major League championship game, first-place Red completed an undefeated season by defeating second-place Green 5-4. Green took the lead in the top of the first inning when Alex Beola and Eyosyus Tadesse reached base on errors with one out and Sean Suarez hit a two-out double to drive them in. In the bottom of the second, Red scored three runs to take the lead. David Dinkins was hit by a pitch to lead off the inning, and Alex Pinks and Kevin Breslin walked. With two outs, Philip Santos hit a base-clearing triple. Green, however, came right back in the top of the third, scoring two runs on Sean Suarez’s RBI triple and Maurice Dickerson’s RBI double. Green’s lead lasted only until the bottom of the third as Red tied the score when Kenny Pizarro tripled home Neal Stueber, who had walked. The game remained tied until the sixth inning. In the top of the sixth, Maurice Dickerson singled and Shawn Lee walked for Green. With two outs, Anass Dorani hit a shot to left field that looked to be extra bases; however, Alex Schrum of Red made the defensive play of the game by running down the fly ball to end the inning. In the bottom of the sixth, Alex Pinks led off the inning with a walk and stole second base. Then, with one out, Alfredo Figueroa singled to center to score Alex and give Red the championship. Eyosyus Tadesse pitched the first five innings for Green, while Jenna Stueber pitched a complete game for Red and earned the win. Congratulations to the members of the Red team: Kevin Breslin, Jack Conery, David Dinkins, Alfredo Figueroa, Daniel Folla, Alex Pinks, Kenny Pizarro, Dylan Ramirez, Jake Russem, Philip Santos, Alex Schrum, Jenna Stueber, and Neal Stueber – and their coaches, Patti Stueber and Glen Pinks.



Red team coach Patti Stueber talks strategy with Kenny Pizarro during the first inning of last Saturday's match between Red and Green.

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Letters from page 2

streets, 12 had paid for parking, 12 were working commercial vehicles, 24 carried some form of handicapped identification, 6 carried Firefighter's ID, 2 had RIOC-issued passes permitting street parking, valid for one year, 44 simply had not paid, and 19 had various suggestions as to why the regulations should not apply to them (e.g., PBA stickers, local merchants, building employees). No parking tickets were evident, the only ticket seen on a windshield having been issued for an expired inspection sticker. It was very wet and 2 days old. Of the vehicles, 43 were still parked at the time of the afternoon survey.

Several things were clear to me:

1. Main Street north of Manhattan Park is being used for free on-street parking by firefighters, RIOC employees, and probably AVAC employees. The afternoon survey took place after the day shift had ended, and most of the vehicles parked there in the morning had gone and were replaced with a new batch of free parkers.

2. River Road is being regularly used for all day and 24-hour parking. A follow-up visit at 8:00 p.m. on Monday, June 23, found 10 vehicles parked on or in the vicinity of River Road which had been parked there on Friday. This included the 2 vehicles with on-street parking permits issued by RIOC. There is also one vehicle continuously parked on Main Street directly outside the RIOC office.

3. A number of vehicles that in the morning survey were recorded as being parked illegally were found in the afternoon survey to be similarly illegally parked in a different location, suggesting that they are used for transport within the community.

4. It appears that any vehicle can park free for any length of time with impunity; parking regulations are not being enforced, and are probably therefore currently unenforceable in a court of law. Anarchy prevails.

Plenty of off-street parking appears to be available. At the time of my morning survey I also surveyed the north end of Motorgate,

and estimated that it was no more than 50% occupied. The ground floor is expressly set aside for wheelchair parking, with large parking spaces and, of the 15 parking places, 7 had vehicles in them, only 2 of which had current handicapped-parking ID.

I do not know whether the present vehicular state of affairs is the result of conscious management decisions or simply lack of concern by those who do not live here. I personally have a strong preference for a return to something closer to the original concept of a traffic-free environment. I am, for example, very strongly opposed to any new buildings including parking, which would inevitably increase traffic. Part of the problem may be that Motorgate is now regarded as an income generator rather than the community support facility it was originally planned to be.

It would seem to me that some of the steps that need to be taken should include:

1. Do what is necessary to get off the streets and into Motorgate those vehicles driven here by non-residents who work here. When the outdoor parking lot that originally provided parking for employees was eliminated for the building of Manhattan Park, arrangements were made for employee parking in Motorgate, at \$30 per month. This has since escalated substantially.

2. Establish a reasonable alternative to street parking for vehicles with valid handicapped parking ID's.

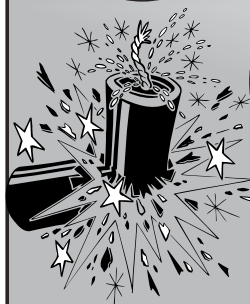
3. Change the short-term fee structure at Motorgate to make it an attractive alternative to on-street parking.

4. RIOC, in consultation with all interested parties, should clearly define driving and parking regulations on Roosevelt Island, publicize them, and then enforce them fairly, and without favor.

What we do not want is for Roosevelt Island to become a preferred parking destination for those visiting Manhattan, because of the availability of free parking in close proximity to a subway.

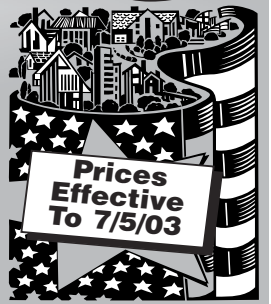
All data I accumulated during my survey can be made available to you or your staff if this would be helpful.

Geoffrey Kerr



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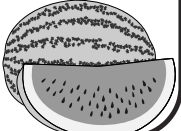
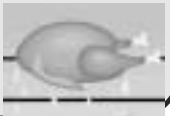


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