

Next issue in
two weeks:
Sat., Feb. 13

The Main Street WIRE™

30th Year as Roosevelt Island's Independent Community Newspaper



In the '70s, George Braithwaite (left) was part of Ping Pong diplomacy. Today, the 34-year resident is heading a table tennis program at Sportspark for RIOC. He spoke about the program Wednesday night as RIOC Recreation Director Mike Smith listened.

Olympics Honoree, a Ping Pong Diplomat, Sparking a New Program at Sportspark

by Jim Baehler

Table tennis, anyone?

That's the rallying cry for George Braithwaite, the man who will head up a new table tennis program at Sportspark. Braithwaite, an Island resident since 1976, is more familiarly known as "The Chief" in recognition of his many accomplishments in tournaments around the world, and his many years of service to the United States Table Tennis Association (also known as USA Table Tennis, or USATT).

The program is already under way, but on Wednesday night (February 3; ad, page 16), an exhibition at Sportspark will launch an expanded program under Braithwaite's direction, with his coaching. The official opening of the program is scheduled at Sportspark in April.

George Braithwaite is uniquely qualified to initiate and supervise a developmental table tennis program. He began his athletic career at an early age in Guyana, where he was a national sprint champion at 100 and

200 meters and excelled at cricket and soccer. In 1959, he came to the United States to attend City College. He was living in Brooklyn in the summer, waiting for the college semester to begin, when a neighbor who was a member of the U.N. cricket team invited George

to join him when the team played a match on Long Island. The team turned out to be a player short, and George was invited to play. He

scored 25 runs in his first game, and was asked to become a full member of the team. He quickly became its star, serving as the lead-off batsman and scoring as many as 99 runs in one game. At the end of the summer season, the captain suggested that George apply for a job at the U.N. He did, passed the clerical exam, and was assigned, not coincidentally, to the documents section where the cricket captain was the supervisor. While working, he attended school part-time, and took up running with the New York Pioneer Track and Field Club.

George says he enjoyed his work at the U.N., but needed an outlet for his energy during the winter, when running was not feasible and cricket play was suspended. He discovered that an upper floor at the U.N. had a Ping Pong table, and he began playing there during his lunch hour and after work. Blessed with exceptional eye-hand coordination and the persistence needed to succeed in any endeavor, he soon began entering tournaments with considerable success, and in 1968 won the United States Class A table tennis championship.

In 1971, George won the Caribbean and Central American Championships in Kingston, Jamaica. Later that year, he was selected to be a member of the U.S. team that traveled to China, a nation with which the U.S. then had no diplomatic relations – it was this "Ping Pong Diplomacy" by President Richard Nixon's administration that opened the door for Nixon's visit the next year.

In China, George won two matches and lost one against opponents who were, in effect, full-time professionals. While there, George was on a bus with other team members and some Chinese government officials. One of them, apparently aware of George's U.N. employment, sat next to him and asked if he thought China should be admitted to the United Nations. At the time, the China seat was occupied by

See **Braithwaite**, page 6

Roosevelt Island's Next Decade – Islanders Share Ideas and Hopes

Hamburger says that, within the next 10 years, those visitors will be attracted by **FDR Four Freedoms Park**. They "will help revitalize our stores by spending their money here for goods, food, and drinks."

She also wants to see **cooperation** between the Residents Association and the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation (RIOC), "working together to maintain and improve the Island for the benefit of residents."

Finally, she calls for the **Public Library** branch to become the community center. It "needs more and better space, and an active program to involve the community not only in books but also in community events."

Author **Gwynne Forster** also cites the **Library** as the potential "hub of literary and cultural activity. We need town-hall-type lectures and a return to the weekly story hours for young children. Published and aspiring authors on the Island need library support for book signings, readings, and writing workshops." Writing groups and literary criticism groups should be able to have meetings in the library, she writes. But she'd like more to be done than in the past. "Of the several free writing workshops I voluntarily conducted at our library, not one was publicized by the library."

Rivercross resident **Larry Parnes** lists four goals:

- "Fill the **Main Street commercial spaces**. We need a bakery and a greengrocer," and he adds a fish store and an ice cream place to that list. "The produce stand outside the subway station is great, but it's not there in cold weather and not convenient to just walk to."

- "**Close Public Safety** and establish a satellite NYPD precinct – an old idea that should be reconsidered."

- "**Finish Southtown**, but only with affordable housing, to strengthen the Island's diversity." When his family moved here, Parnes writes, "the Island was diverse ethnically, economically, and from an age perspective." While still diverse, Parnes says "we are heading toward homogeneity" and, "That trend must stop."

- As a "pie in the sky" idea, Parnes suggests a **pedestrian bridge** to Manhattan. "It could be similar to the Millennium Bridge in London and connect to Manhattan at the former heliport. Large

ships could still use the east channel of the river."

Max Trukhin likes the idea of a footbridge. "It would boost tourism and ease the crowding in the subway station and on the Tram."

Getting on and off the Island are on the minds of **Nina Lublin**, **Bob Chira**, and **Jonathan Kalkin** (more on pages 10 and 11).

Former RIRA President **Steve Marcus** likes the **bridge** idea, but sees it as access to the pedestrian walkway of the Queensboro Bridge.

With others, Marcus wants to "trade in **Public Safety** for a few City or State police," wants to see Westview, Island House, and Rivercross privatized (Eastwood already has been), wants the **pizza parlor** and **bakery** restored to Main Street, and wants improved

Inside:

On pages 10-11, eight Islanders share their thoughts on the community's future.

community access to our **sports fields**.

Dr. Jack Resnick would like to see a halt to the trend at Roosevelt Landings (Eastwood). "Within a few years, this [aging] community will dwindle and ultimately disappear. When my homebound patients move away or pass on, their apartments are renovated and become unavailable to the frail, the elderly, and the disabled. Our country's population is aging rapidly. We need more, not less, old-age-friendly housing." Agreeing with the thrust of a Larry Parnes wish, Resnick adds, "The next three [Southtown] buildings should be dedicated to **housing for the elderly and disabled**. Roosevelt Island should retain and perfect what it already is – a great retirement community."

"Life here is great now. Let's expand on it," writes **L. Scot Bobo**, who has been active with the Island's youth activities. "Let's have more of the same: More people, more neighbors, more children, and **more activities** for them to do, including a bigger theater so more people can enjoy the wonderful shows, a bigger Youth Center, sports fields in better shape..."

Bobo, like others, calls for an improvement of the overall Main Street retail picture.

Activities and leisure programs work for **Ron Becker**, who runs therapeutic recreation at Coler.

See **Future**, page 6
Essays on pages 10-11



Players polished their Ping Pong skills Wednesday night in the run-up to introduction of a new Sportspark program.

Letters

To the Editor:

In response to Jim Luce’s letter to the editor [*The WIRE*, January 16], the Board of Directors of Orphans International America would like to take the opportunity to clear up several misconceptions. We have not come forward previously because it was never our intention to turn this into a public battle, whose only casualties would be the children in the various projects, but we can no longer sit idly by while stories are spun and the public is misled.

We are all in agreement that Jim Luce founded an exceptional organization many years ago, initially born from a genuine desire to help humanity, and that many children’s lives have been impacted in a positive way. But somewhere along the way, something went terribly awry and the current Board of Directors was forced to catapult into action. Each and every single member of the current board has volunteered hands-on either with one or more of the OI projects or at a similar organization. We all know firsthand the intricacies of sustaining a non-profit organization with an all-volunteer staff, as well as the hardships faced by the most vulnerable of children on a daily basis. We were all impressed by Jim Luce’s work and joined forces with him and each other out of a common desire to help make a difference.

Jim Luce claims that last fall, Orphans International Worldwide (OIWW) and the former Orphans International America (OIA) parted ways because OIWW decertified OIA. This is not true. In actuality, last fall, the board of directors of OIA asked Jim Luce to step down prior to any ‘decertification.’ In attempting to carry out its responsibility, the board felt that there were too many unanswered questions, and in good conscience could not allow the situation to continue as it was.

Jim Luce claims that the former OIA was taken over in a palace coup. The truth of the matter is that there is nothing *former* about OIA; it is currently functioning as it should be – an organization dedicated to ensuring the well-being of orphaned and abandoned children around the world. And there was no palace coup. After unsuccessfully seeking detailed information regarding allocation of expenses that went unanswered, the board, which has

fiduciary responsibilities, had no other option but to take decisive measures in the best interests of the organization and the children we are committed to protecting.

OIA was not at any point in time forced to do anything; OIA is the legal entity in this scenario. OIA *chose* to change its doing-business-as name to avoid confusion going forward, since many people do not immediately make the distinction between OIA and OIWW. The logo is inconsequential – it does not make or break the organization. It is important to note that OIWW is not a registered 501(c)3 corporation, therefore the renewed non-governmental organization (NGO) status with the United Nations applies to Orphans International America.

Jim Luce claims that he is paid \$1 per year in his position as founder, president, and executive director. We invite Jim to open the books of OIWW to inspection to confirm whether 100% of OIWW funding now goes directly to the children.

Jim Luce claims that the OIA board could not raise sufficient funds in 2007-2009, creating havoc. There would not have been a financial crisis had Jim Luce not taken out a significant loan on behalf of the organization to replace a large chunk of funding from a single donor that was spent before the project even opened its doors. Jim Luce cannot claim that the board did not maintain adequate business records; maintaining adequate records is a joint effort by the parties who are responsible for reviewing the financial reports and the parties who are spending the funds and are supposed to provide the receipts. The two are not mutually exclusive.

Jim Luce’s amusement by the ‘unawareness’ of a board-authorized loan is no laughing matter. The loan was approved by the previous board, and what we were all unaware of was not the loan itself, as it was a recurring topic of discussion, but that it was incurred to replace funds that were specifically allocated to the project in Sri Lanka. We have reason to believe that the previous board was also not aware of this pertinent detail prior to authorizing the loan.

Jim Luce claims that the board virtually stopped fundraising in 2009. This is not true, either. Many Roosevelt Island residents attended functions that were organized by individual board members

To the Editor:

The new rear-door circuitous access to the elevator for the synagogue and Cultural Center, shockingly imposed on the disabled and seniors in September due to expansion of the Public Safety office, is a flagrant disregard of ADA regulations and plain common decency. It can be somewhat assuaged if Public Safety Chief Guerra would deign to allow attendees the use of the old Main Street entrance, and passage through this new Public Safety space to said elevator, which now finds itself situated behind this newly enlarged “military installation,” but he sits firmly opposed.

The back door now sports three red dumpsters to its immediate right, plus the huge green generator that will power Public Safety in the event of a power failure. I wonder if I’d be permitted, in such an event, to enter from Main Street to plug in my respirator.

More to the point of legal access: My apartment rent now compares with those luxury rentals down the road. The amenities certainly do not.

To my chagrin and bewilderment, neither (1) the Jewish Congregation, nor (2) the Cultural Center, nor (3) RIRA, nor (4) the Mayor’s Office for the Disabled, nor (5) the Human Rights Commission, nor (6) Lenox Hill Neighborhood House, nor (7) the Roosevelt Island Disabled Association has deigned to support this struggle.

There truly is no justice; it seems the military has total control, and business as usual rules this sorry roost.

Sharon Stern

throughout the first half of the year, not to mention contributions made by donors that we personally recruited. We may not have been as aggressive in our fundraising efforts during the latter part of 2009, but this was only because we could not, in good conscience, raise funds without a guarantee that they were reaching their intended destination. We began to receive disturbing reports directly from the program directors – normally, they were only in contact with Jim – informing us that they were owed back salary and they were in dire need of funds to run the programs. Imagine our surprise, especially when we had secured funds and voted at board meetings as to how the funds should be disbursed.

Jim Luce claims that, three years after the tsunami, the goals in Sri Lanka have been met. Not the case. It is not necessary to travel to the other side of the world to understand the complexities of rebuilding a life. Hurricane Katrina occurred in 2005 – there are people still living in trailers – have their needs been met? The tsunami occurred in 2004, and although it has been a little over five years, their needs are still present. Their families didn’t suddenly become independently wealthy and capable of supporting them. You don’t make a commitment to care for a child and then walk away after a handful of years.

Upon visiting the OIWW website, you will notice that only Indonesia and Haiti remain. Although the board of directors did assume responsibility for the care of the children in the orphanage in Haiti, we sincerely hope that any funds that Jim Luce does receive for OI Haiti, in the wake of this tremendous tragedy, will be sent to them in their entirety. By asking the public not to make out any checks to Orphans International

To the Editor:

Two items in the January 16 *WIRE* caught my attention.

Mary Cavanaugh expressed concern about the ongoing preferential and free on-street parking of one particular car. For sure, Public Safety appears to have differing rules for issuing parking tickets. As Mary noted, the Public Safety officers will frequently make a phone call before issuing/ not issuing a ticket. There must be a closely guarded list of vehicles to be excused from being ticketed. Beyond that, there must be some general rules known to the PS traffic checkers – after the light snowfall of last week, judging by the four to six hours of undisturbed snow on Main Street windshields, there were a whole series of cars parking well over the time limit for on-street parking. Can *The WIRE* find out what the rules are, and to whom they apply?

Steve Shane, in his excellent bi-weekly report on RIOC doings, noted that Gristedes needs to be revitalized. He suggests that the Island residents have to know about Gristedes’ offerings. Long before Steve arrived on the Island, Gristedes got mad at *The WIRE* and withdrew any further advertising. In addition to the general suggestions made by Mr. Shane, it is patently evident that Gristedes would be helping themselves by renewing regular advertising in the Island newspaper, which is delivered free to every Island resident.

David J. Bauer

To the Editor:

In the continued absence of any emergency evacuation routes from Roosevelt Island, I would like to see some docking facilities incorporated in the FDR Park, probably on the East Side,

- partly for use by visitors from Manhattan and Queens, as there are not many parking facilities, and
- partly to be available to residents in case of an emergency evacuation.

The docking facility would be very useful during the construction of the memorial, and it would be shortsighted not to evaluate this aspect and, hopefully, allow for it in the final plans.

M.J. Petersen

Letters Policy

The WIRE welcomes letters of local interest to the community, and to/from officials. Requests for a *Name Withheld* signature will be considered, but the writer’s name, address, and phone number **must** be provided for verification and for our records; *letters submitted anonymously will not be published*. **Submit letters by e-mail** to Letters@MainStreetWIRE.com or on a disk left at the desk at 531 Main Street, addressed to *The WIRE*. If you e-mail, *expect a confirming response* and, if you receive none, *resend* and call **212-826-9056** to alert us that it’s been sent. **Alternatives:** Typed copy left at 531 Main Street; allow extra time for typesetting. Clearly handwritten letters will be considered, if brief. We are not able to take telephone dictation of letters. **All letters are subject to acceptance and editing for length and clarity.** Recommended maximum length, 350 words; longer letters will be considered if their content merits the required space.

America (which *does* exist), he is hindering the relief effort for the very children whose well-being he professes to be concerned with. When faced with a disaster of this magnitude, one should not be concerned with *where* the help comes from, one should just be thankful that it arrives.

And yes, initially the board did send \$1,000 out of their own pocket

To the Editor:

Regarding RIOC plans to alter the bus route: I suggest keeping the present bus route and directing *all* other traffic to Main Street. The West Roadway is curved next to the subway station and safety for pedestrians is further diminished due to the many private cars and commercial trucks (for construction, merchants, and hospital) which could and should use Main Street both ways (East Roadway).

Mogens Petersen

To the Editor:

On Saturday morning, several of the participants in planning Blackwell Park walked through the site to understand more clearly, and in three dimensions, what exists today. This was a useful memory aid, given the many elements that the park includes.

I was dismayed to see that the grass verge between the basketball courts and the East Channel Promenade has been turned into a dog toilet. The amount of animal feces was indicative of the disregard that some pet owners have for the law and for common courtesy. As we approach a plan that will include more and better use of Blackwell Park, especially for children, it seems to me that this nasty habit needs to be nipped in the bud. Cleaning up after your pet should be encouraged (and enforced) all over the Island, but especially here.

I hope that signage clarifying the penalties for not cleaning up after your dog will be displayed here. Also, I think a period of observation and ticketing by Public Safety during significant dog-walking hours might go far to change the slovenly habits of what I hope is just a few of my neighbors.

Matt Katz

To the Editor:

From the last edition of *The WIRE*, it appears that permits have not yet been obtained from the City for the cranes or for the work on the towers. Also, it does not appear that permission for street closures, as well as closures for the 59th Street Bridge, have been approved.

If the permits and permission for closures have not yet been obtained, why is the Tram closing on March 1?

Lawrence Intenzo

RIOC President

Steve Shane responds:

The engineers have submitted plans to the Department of Buildings and the Department of Transportation for all of the work to be accomplished, have received comments, and have resubmitted with the corrections, without further objection. The permits themselves, requiring the payment of filing fees and for a limited time, are, as a matter of standard practice, not taken out until immediately before the commencement of the actual work. To our consulting engineer’s satisfaction, all is in readiness for the project to be fully commenced on March 1.

ets last year because the program director reached out to us, informing us that he had not received any funds at all from Jim. Out of 10,000 residents on Roosevelt Island, how many sponsors at \$600 a child does it take to support 12 children?

Jim Luce addressed the Roosevelt Island community at the See **Letters**, page 12



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COMING UP

— This Weekend —

ReelAbilities Film Festival, *Infinity Dance Company*, Sat Jan 30, 6:30pm, auditorium at south campus of Coler-Goldwater Hospital. \$10 (includes film listed below). Info at reelabilities.org. Tickets: **212-318-4728**.
ReelAbilities Film Festival, *Nobody's Perfect*, Sat Jan 30, 7:30pm, auditorium at south campus of Coler-Goldwater Hospital. \$10. Info at reelabilities.org. Tickets: **212-318-4728**.

— Continuing —



Off the Wall, an exhibit of member works, continues through Feb 14, Gallery RIVAA, Sat-Sun 11am-5pm, Wed & Fri, 6-9pm.

Open Swim at Sportspark, **Mon-Fri**, 6-11am (all ages). Adults, \$5; children, \$3; seniors 60 and over, and children 4 and under, free. For additional times and classes, with age restrictions, see tinyurl.com/poolSP.

Knitting for Adults, Tue noon, Library.
Poetry Hour (adults), last Tue of month (except March), 6pm, Library.
Weight Watchers, Tue 7pm, community room, 4 River Road. (See ad, page 4.)

Picture Book Hour (age 4 and under), Wed 11am, Library.
Nintendo Wii Play (kids), Wed 3pm, Library.
RIOC's Ping Pong Night at Sportspark, Wed 6-9pm (free).

— Coming Week & Next Weekend —

ReelAbilities Film Festival, *Shooting Beauty* and *Among the Giants*, Mon Feb 1, 6:30pm, auditorium at south campus of Coler-Goldwater Hospital. \$10. Info at reelabilities.org. Tickets: **212-318-4728**.

Ping Pong Night Photo-Op at Sportspark, Wed Feb 3, 6:30pm, 250 Main St. (See story, page 1, and ad, page 16.) Additional information: **212-832-4559**.

Roosevelt Island Residents Association Common Council meets, **Wed Feb 3**, 8pm, Good Shepherd Community Center. Meetings begin with a public session for resident comments/announcements.

PS/IS 217 PTA Q&A Session, Sat Feb 6, 1pm, at the school. (See ad, page 5.)

Islander Roy Eaton in Concert – *The Meditative Chopin and Joyful Joplin*, presented by the Church of the Good Shepherd Sunday Concert Series, **Sun Feb 7**, 2:30pm, Chapel of the Good Shepherd. Free (donations support the Food Program). (See ad, page 8.)

— Future Weeks —

PS/IS 217 School Tour, Mon Feb 8, 8:45am. RSVP required to psis217info@gmail.com or call **212-980-0294**. (See ad, page 5.)

Toastmasters Public Speaking Group, Mon Feb 8, 8pm. Visitors welcome. For information, call **212-751-9577** or **212-751-1194**.

The Main Street WIRE – Next issue **Sat Feb 13**. **Advertising Deadlines:** Ads in the paper, Wed Feb 3; decision date for circulars/inserts, Tue Feb 9; 6,000 copies due Thu Feb 11. **Additional issues in 2010:** Feb 27; Mar 13, 27; Apr 10, 24; May 8, 22; Jun 5, 19; Jul 3, 31; Aug 28; Sep 11, 25; Oct 9, 23; Nov 6, 20; Dec 4, 18. **News phone, 212-826-9056**; urgent matters, **917-617-0449**. **Advertising**, display and classified: **917-587-3278**.

Island Kids Valentine's Day Celebration and Fundraiser, Sat Feb 14, 11am, 536 Main Street. (See ad, page 9.)

Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation Board of Directors meeting, **Thu Feb 18**, 4:30pm, Good Shepherd Community Center. Town Meeting open for public comments follows formal session.

Book Discussion, *Go Tell It On the Mountain* by James Baldwin, **Thu Feb 18**, 6:30pm, Library.

Toastmasters Public Speaking Group, Mon Feb 22, 8pm. Visitors welcome. For information, call **212-751-9577** or **212-751-1194**.

The Sounds of Motown, a Black History Month event, **Sat Feb 27**, 8pm, Good Shepherd Community Center. Free, sponsored by RIOC in partnership with RISA. Musical journey through the evolution of Motown Records. Light refreshments.

Orphans International Worldwide Benefit, Sun Feb 28, 6-9pm (VIP reception) and 24-hour artithon, Webster Hall, 125 E. 11th St. Proceeds to Haiti project. Information: **212-755-7302**.

Day Nursery Open House, Tue Mar 2 and **Wed Mar 3**, 9-10am, 4 River Road. (See ad, page 5.)

Roosevelt Island Residents Association Common Council meets, **Wed Mar 3**, 8pm, Good Shepherd Community Center. Meetings begin with a public session for resident comments/announcements.

Toastmasters Public Speaking Group, Mon Mar 8, 8pm. Visitors welcome. For information, call **212-751-9577** or **212-751-1194**.

Book Discussion, *March* by Geraldine Brooks, **Thu Mar 18**, 6:30pm, Library.

Women's History Month event, **Sat Mar 20**, Gallery RIVAA, 2pm.

Toastmasters Public Speaking Group, Mon Mar 22, 8pm. Visitors welcome. For information, call **212-751-9577** or **212-751-1194**.

Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation Board of Directors meeting, **Thu Mar 25**, 9:30am, Good Shepherd Community Center.

Easter Egg Hunt, Sun Mar 28, 1:30pm, Blackwell Park.

Roosevelt Island Residents Association Common Council meets, **Wed Apr 7**, 8pm, Good Shepherd Community Center.

Toastmasters Public Speaking Group, Mon Apr 12, 8pm. Visitors welcome. For information, call **212-751-9577** or **212-751-1194**.

Book Discussion, *My Antonia* by Willa Cather, **Thu Apr 15**, 6:30pm, Library.

January 25, 2010

1. **Board of Directors:** Next meeting on February 18 at 4:30 p.m., town-hall-style meeting to follow. The New York State Senate has confirmed the nominations of Margie Smith, Dr. Kathie Grimm, and Mike Shinozaki. With these confirmations, the tenures of H. Patrick Stewart and Charlee Miller are concluded. We thank the outgoing Directors for their service, and welcome the new ones to the Board. As previously reported, Commissioner VanAmerongen resigned as of January 15, so the Executive Deputy Commissioner of DHCR, Brian Lawlor, a career executive at DHCR and well known to me as the acting Commissioner of Housing, will be the Chair of RIOC until further notice.

2. Tram:

A. On schedule for **shutdown** March 1 (30 days!!!) and reopening by September 1, 2010. The plans for crane usage, street closings (including the upper ramp of the Queensboro Bridge), permitted times, traffic control, and safety precautions, all as submitted to the Departments of Buildings and Traffic have been reviewed and permits will be issued at the time of shutdown.

B. **Shuttle bus** service to Queens Plaza during morning rush hour is scheduled, starting at 7:30 a.m., departing from the Gristedes loop on the half-hour. There will also be a pickup loop around Southtown.

C. Exploration of possible **ferry service** during

The RIOC Column



Steve Shane, President
Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation
e-mail: SShane@RIOC.com

the morning rush hour continues. Our survey of Tram riders over the last week indicates both price resistance and geographical awkwardness with the half-hourly 7-10 a.m. 35th Street docking and a bus up First Avenue to 57th Street and back down Second Avenue. We are not in a position to alter the proposed route. The business plan requires a \$4,000-per-day expense to be underwritten by RIOC, offset by fare collections. Therefore, break-even is at 1,333 passengers per day at \$3 per ride. In survey results, we found that out of the average Tram ridership of 1,100-1,200 during the 7:00-10:00 a.m. rush, we received approximately 750 responses – about 60% of weekly ridership, weighting for daily usage. Of those responding, about 50% would use the ferry if available and, of those, 75% would be willing to pay an extra \$3 (without transfer to the MetroCard system because, unfortunately, the MTA will not recognize the ferry as a participant in the MetroCard system. This negative is the most common recurring

See **RIOC Column**, page 14

1. **Routing of Buses and Main Street in Southtown area:** As reported in the prior *WIRE*, RIOC Vice President of Operations Fernando Martinez discussed the potential Red Bus rerouting at the January RIRA meeting. This is a complex situation, and RIRA's Planning Committee (Matt Katz, Chair) and Island Services Committee (Aaron Hamburger, Chair) are investigating the problems and potential solutions. More on this soon.

2. **Transportation Problems with Tram Shutdown** [see page 6]: Matt Katz (RIRA Planning Committee Chair) has sent a letter to the MTA complaining about their ignoring our problems. I am following up with my own letter that addresses technical problems with the MTA's analysis. We are considering everything from coordinating action with other communities along the F line to filing an Article 78 on the MTA. We are concerned that once the Tram shuts down, congestion at the station will be so severe that F trains will be delayed, which clogs the whole F line – not merely a delay for Roosevelt Island residents. We are working with the elected officials (Lappin, Kellner, Serrano, Stringer, Maloney) to add pressure to the MTA to resolve these concerns.

3. **The Next 10 Years?** The *WIRE*'s editor Dick Lutz asks for our ideas. Transportation infrastructure and adequate RIOC financing are the Island's main concerns. Without transportation infrastructure, housing is less attractive; meanwhile, RIOC's finances are overly dependent on new Southtown construction. So, using the creative technique "instead of trying to make it better, how do you make it worse?", I think leveling Goldwater Hospital and building 5,000 units of housing will really make things worse. Or will it? If we think about transforming Roosevelt Island to a transportation hub – a Hoboken of the East River – then we might be eligible to receive billions of transportation dollars to improve our transportation infrastructure, because Roosevelt Island transportation

The RIRA Column



Frank Farance, President
Roosevelt Island Residents Association
e-mail: rira-president@rira-council.org

would now provide a *regional* benefit, not merely a local benefit. For example, the 53 Street and 60 Street lines could be hollowed out into subway stations and connected as a transfer point; ferry service would be much more attractive with higher numbers of passengers; and an underground moving walkway, for the length of the Island, would shuttle the new passengers (just like O'Hare airport). In summary, to address our weaknesses (transportation, long-term RIOC finances), we market ourselves as a transportation hub (which betters our weaknesses). OK, this isn't a 10-year plan, but a 20-40-year plan.

4. **Robots for Kids 6-13 Years Old:** Last year, we had a great team of children who learned about and built robots (based upon Lego Mindstorms NXT), and they competed well in a City-wide contest. With the help of the Roosevelt Island Youth Program and the PS/IS 217 Beacon Program, we are entering again this year with a longer/larger program. Brian Dorfmann and I are the mentors/coaches. The cost is free. We meet once a week, 6:30-8:00 p.m. on RIYP's second floor at 506 Main Street. We might expand to two days a week. Both boys and girls enjoy this, they like socializing with children of different ages, and it is a rewarding experience in many ways and at many levels. Pizza is served for kids.

5. **Adult Softball:** We are trying again this year to have a league. I spoke with Riverwalk Bar and Grill about having a kick-off meeting in February. I'll have more details in my next column.

See **RIRA Column**, page 14

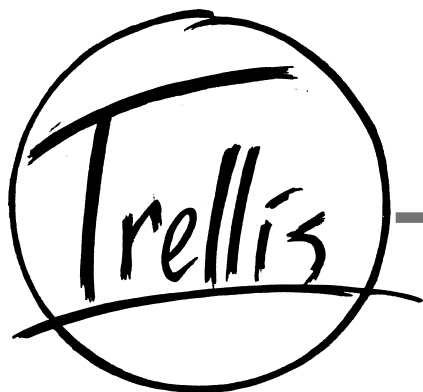
Senior Center

Monday
9:30 **Ballroom Dancing**
11:00 **Tai Chi**
6:00 **Yoga with Nurit**
Tuesday
9:00-1:00 **Free Tax Help**
9:30 **Chinese Massage**
10:20 **Shoppers' Bus**
11:00 **Blood Pressure**
2:00 **Paint & Sculpt**
7:30 **Games (RISA)**
Wednesday
9:30 **Yoga with Irene**
10:20 **Shoppers' Bus**
10:30 **Spanish**
10:30 **Computers**
2:00 **Bingo**
7:00 **Pokeno (RISA)**

Thursday
9:30 **Get Stronger Bones**
10:30 **Arabic**
11:00 **Creative Arts**
12:30 **Movie**
Friday
9:30 **Yoga with Irene**
10:30 **English as 2nd Language**
10:45-11:25 **Art & Poetry** with Legacy High School
1:30 **Korean Games**
6:00 **Ballroom Dancing**
7:00 **Games (RISA)**

Special Events
MetroCard Bus, Mon Feb 8, 11:00-1:00.
Closed, Presidents Day, Mon Feb 15
Grandparent Day with Public Safety, Thu Feb 18, 10:00-1:00.

Home-delivered meals – 212-744-5022, ext. 1203



February...

...is upon us. Around here, we expect it to be the toughest month, chilling bones to the brittle snapping point. It's the month for extra layers of both blankets and outerwear. But the days are getting longer, and Old Man Winter has given us a break or two, so think of it as just another step toward a warm spring. Meantime, come on it for hot coffee.

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1pm**

Also:

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Monday, February 8th
8:45am

Please RSVP to
psis217info@gmail.com

or call Lauraine Rademaker, Parent Coordinator, at
212-980-0294 ext. 1010

Visit our Website at ps217pta.org for information on upcoming events including additional Q&A sessions & school tours, and the PS/IS217 Art Show & Silent Auction



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Asked for Help During Tram Outage, MTA Seems Stuck on “No”

Mr. Farance:

At the December 9 meeting with NYCT, RIOC, RIRA, and elected officials, you requested data on our ridership. Attached please find data on F train ridership at Roosevelt Island. Data is collected by recording MetroCard swipes at the Roosevelt Island subway station. Please note that Mr. Sean Singh at RIOC has done extensive analysis of our data. He may be a good resource for you.

In addition, the following is a summary of the various suggestions for Roosevelt Island subway service submitted by elected officials and residents and our responses to them:

(A) Extend the Q train to the 21st Street-Queensbridge Station to supplement F service.

In the past, trains were able to terminate at the 21st Street-Queensbridge Station. At that time, however, trains did not operate through to eastern Queens. In 2001, we completed the 63rd Street Connector project which links the 63rd Street tunnel tracks to the Queens Boulevard Line. The tracks that were used to terminate trains at the 21st Street-Queensbridge Station now are used as through tracks for F service, which runs every 4-6 minutes during rush hour. In Manhattan, the 63rd Street tunnel tracks have connections to the Sixth Avenue tracks (with access to BDFV service at 47-50 Streets-Rockefeller Center) and the Broadway Line tracks (with access to Q service at 57th Street).

Extending the Q train to the 21st Street-Queensbridge Station to supplement F service is not operationally feasible because there are only two tracks at the 21st Street-Queensbridge Station, and, given that F trains run through the station on those tracks, there is no place to turn around Q trains. In order to ensure safety, whenever trains change directions on a non-terminal track, such as what is sug-

Dear Alissa:

I’ve had a chance to absorb your December 28 detailed response to the options we raised at the December 9 meeting as well as our reception at MTA headquarters. Not surprisingly, I found both to be disappointing. Certainly, having every suggestion labeled as “not operationally feasible” was frustrating although not entirely unexpected. What was truly disappointing was the lack of any “feasible” suggestions from your participating experts either at the meeting or subsequently to address this worsening situation. We came to you requesting solutions to a problem that is real today, will become more critical when the Tram is out of service, and will become permanent as the Roosevelt Island commuting population increases with future development.

What I heard at the meeting is that no problem exists, and this is based on your statistics. My data comes from “boots on the ground” commuters who cannot get to work on time because the F trains, from the first car to the last, are jammed during the morning rush hour. I found the MTA presentation to be unrealistic and, frankly, arrogant, in that you have not interviewed riders or, even worse, consider them whiners and unreliable witnesses.

Alissa, we made other recommendations that have not been addressed in your written response. We suggested that signage urge riders to move away from where the elevator and escalator deposit them on the platform. We suggested that the station manager, currently a phantom presence, spend an hour each weekday morning on the Manhattan-side platform helping riders board the rush-hour trains. These are ideas that, while not providing adequate solutions to the overcrowding problem, are cheap, easy to implement palliatives, and seemed to be received well by the executives representing MTA operations and the F-train line. Can we get a response that excludes “operationally unfeasible” and with some expectation as to when they might be implemented?

Until the MTA acknowledges that our transportation problems exist and are unique to this Island community, there can be no hope for finding a solution. I look forward to your response.

Matthew Katz, Chair
RIRA Planning Committee

gested at the 21st Street-Queensbridge Station, it is necessary to change the direction of the signal system. As a result, other trains would need to be kept at a safe distance until the turn-around operation is completed. To terminate Q trains at the 21st Street-Queensbridge Station, it would be necessary to stop F trains on both tracks for several minutes to give Q trains enough time to switch tracks, change directions, and change crews. As a consequence, there would be significant delays in F service in both directions, which in turn would delay E and V service, which share tracks with the F train. For safety and opera-

tional reasons, NYC Transit does not schedule trains to turn around on the same tracks used by through trains.

(B) Rerouting every other R train via Roosevelt Island.

This is not operationally feasible. From an operational standpoint, R trains running via the 63rd Street F Line to Manhattan would be unable to resume their normal route via the Broadway Local tracks because the only track connection between the 63rd Street Line and the Broadway Line is via the Broadway Express tracks at the 57th Street station. Those tracks are used to terminate Q service from Brooklyn and thus any

through R trains diverted via the F line would be blocked by Q trains that are turning around. As mentioned above, for safety and operational reasons, NYC Transit does not schedule trains to turn around on the same tracks used by through trains.

Even if this plan were feasible, it would lead to significant overcrowding on the remaining R trains operating on the regular R route. From a ridership perspective, rerouted R trains would bypass the Lexington Avenue-59th Street station, which is a major destination for R riders. This would leave only half of the R trains available at Queens Plaza for the large volume of riders transferring to/from E trains, leading to overcrowded conditions on those R trains.

(C) Rerouting every other V train via Roosevelt Island.

This would lead to significant operational complexity and overcrowding on the V and E. From an operational standpoint, V trains today must share tracks with R trains between Forest Hills-71st Avenue and Queens Plaza, with E trains between Queens Plaza and 5th Avenue-53rd Street, and with F trains between 47-50 Streets-Rockefeller Center and Lower East Side-2nd Avenue, while E and F trains must share tracks between 75th Avenue and the 36th Street Interlocking. The existing operation is highly complex and requires careful scheduling to ensure even headways and loads within NYC Transit guidelines. Taking half of the V trains and merging them “early” with the F at 36th Street would make the operation even more complex and would introduce additional potential perturbations, as this is a merge point that is not normally used during rush

hours. As a result, there would be a higher likelihood of delays on all four rush hour Queens Boulevard Line services (EFRV).

From a ridership perspective, the rerouted V trains would skip major destinations at Lexington Avenue-53rd Street and 5th Avenue-53rd Street and would not be available to provide valuable capacity through the 53rd Street Tunnel to relieve the heavily utilized E train. The passenger capacity of the V train through the 53rd Street Tunnel is particularly critical at the 23rd Street-Ely Avenue station, where G riders transfer to/from the E and V trains. With V service cut in half at that station, E trains would become very overcrowded.

(D) Extending the Q through the 63rd Street Tunnel to Queens.

This is not operationally feasible. As discussed above, it is not feasible to extend the Q train only to the 21st Street-Queensbridge station, because for safety and operational reasons NYC Transit will not turn around terminating Q trains on the same tracks that are used by through F trains. Extending the Q train farther into Queens is not feasible because there is not enough capacity on the express tracks (EF) to handle any additional trains during rush hours, nor is there capacity during rush hours at the Forest Hills-71st Avenue terminal for local trains in addition to the current R and V trains. Furthermore, there are not enough cars available to extend Q trains to Queens, without reducing service elsewhere.

(E) Keep the first car of the southbound F train closed until Roosevelt Island.

Closing the first car of the train is not operationally feasible and

See **MTA**, page 13

Future from page 1

Goldwater (page 10).

Two-year resident **Janet Falk** agrees that more activities are a good idea, but says they need promotion (page 10).

Writer **David Stone**, who lives in Manhattan Park, thinks that “it will take most of the decade to meld Roosevelt Island into the special community it can be,” partly because of “the segmented way in which our population developed through residential construction. We now have at least four distinct and divided communities. The things separating us are wedges of varying duration – income, location, education, age, history, etc. Yet, we have much more in common.

“Someone or some organization will find the magnet that calls us together – **compelling activities** in our central plaza, art shows, concerts, or a themed fair extending along our one-of-a-kind promenade might get us to rub elbows with strangers we shuffle past on the Red Bus.” Then, writes Stone, “Our innate passion to unite as a community will eventually overwhelm our caution and reserve. We will be one little Island with enormous benefits – the major one our passion for each other.”

Architect **Marianne Lau** offers ideas for such compelling activities (page 10).

Author and Rivercross resident **Mary Camper-Titsingh** likes the idea of **activities** that pull the community together. “I’d like to see our community become more integrated over the next decade. We have so many residents here from different and interesting backgrounds, both in the United States and from other countries. Our communal life would be enhanced, I believe, if we had more opportunities to learn from them about their customs, handicrafts, sports, costumes, foods, music, and dance. Perhaps RIOC and RIRA could sponsor an annual “**Island Residents’ Fair**.”

See pages 10-11 for additional visions of the Island’s future, then send yours.

Democracy is on **Sherie Helstien**’s mind for the next decade – and the sooner the better: “A democratically represented community via direct election [with] community residents running to be on the RIOC Board. Without this, decisions that directly affect our lives are out of our control.” She concludes, “The essence of democracy is everything, the lack of it is tragic.”

Former RIRA president **Matthew Katz** is also concerned about **governance** and a number of related matters (page 11).

Picking up a theme of his letters to *The WIRE*, **Mircea Nicolescu** wants the Main Street **parking** problem fixed, especially in front of his building, Island House. One official vehicle should be adequate for Public Safety in that location, he writes, adding that “the space in front of our building is taken by those who abuse their power on this Island.”

Rabbi Zalman Duchman suggests Islanders should focus on themselves, and on “the small stuff.” He writes, “The ideas begin to mount: What should be done by RIOC, RIRA, RISA, the MTA, ABC, LMNOP, XYZ, and what have you.” But, he says, “I noticed that all of my ideas were what others should do – not what *I* should do. For others, I can always find a job; for myself, I can always find an excuse!” Therefore, he writes, “my ‘big idea’ for the next decade is to focus on **the small things** that I can do all by myself to make a difference: help another person schlepping home groceries up the stairs in the subway when the escalators are out; pick up kosher groceries for those who find it hard to travel.” Not missing the religious dimension of his presence here, the rabbi adds, “...open our home to others with warmth and caring; share Torah’s wisdom; provide counseling to the burdened; lend a listening ear, a compassionate heart, a warm word... All small things I can do all by myself.”

Braithwaite from page 1

the Republic of China (ROC), located on Taiwan. George’s response was worthy of a skilled U.N. diplomat: “I would hope all nations would be members of the U.N.” Later that year, the U.N. gave the ROC seat to mainland China.

George continued to play tournament table tennis. In 1979, he won the Caribbean Championship in Aruba. In 1984, he won the prestigious Canadian International Open Championship. In 1985, he was honored by the U.S. Olympic Committee and the USATT as the Amateur Athlete of the Year. In 1989, he received the sport’s ultimate honor when he was inducted into the United States Table Tennis Hall of Fame. George has continued to compete in tournaments, and to win gold medals, including the 2009 singles, doubles, and mixed doubles championships at the National Seniors Games. As a capstone to his career, in December 2007 he was given the Lifetime Achievement Award at a USATT dinner in Las Vegas.

Playing table tennis against The Chief is a humbling experience. As a former doubles champion at Sampson Air Force Base, this reporter decided to test his game. It is like playing against a backboard – every shot comes back. It doesn’t matter how hard the ball is hit or how much topspin is applied, George casually returns the ball to keep the rally going. At any time, he has the ability to put slice on the ball so that it spins away, unpredictably, depending on how he flicks his wrist. In addition, his serve is unreturnable, placed with devilish accuracy, slicing away from one’s racket.

He’s a splendid teacher, too. He turned my erratic forehand and backhand efforts into consistently reliable shots after correcting my grip, stance, and stroke. (Other than that, my game was fine.) George declares that, to succeed in table tennis, one must be able to serve effectively and to return serve with consistency. The only way to improve is to practice, practice, and practice some more.

That principle is what lies behind the coaching and development program that George is initiating at Sportspark. A Certified National Coach for USATT, he will be not only the director of the new program, but the on-site coach as well. Those who participate in the program will have the benefit of coaching from one of the finest players that the U.S. has ever produced. There will be three levels of play – beginning, intermediate, and advanced – with different time slots assigned to each. George foresees a regular series of clinics in which the fundamentals and advanced techniques of table tennis are demonstrated and then practiced. In addition, challenge ladders will allow players to move up by defeating opponents listed above them. There will be tournaments at all three levels, with awards for the first- and second-place finishers.

George still retains the lean and wiry frame that he enjoyed during his years of competition, and preaches the physical and mental benefits of his sport. The Chief is calling on all Roosevelt Islanders to come to Sportspark, to enjoy table tennis’s pleasures and rewards of his sport.

**John Catsimatidis - CEO
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February, 2010

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An Islander's Special Day Camp Memories

Ellie Philips is a passionate, insightful and vivacious actress and singer with a super voice and charming personality who grew up on Roosevelt Island. These days, she's a theater/psychology double major at Oberlin College and is involved in many exciting projects and assignments. Her future looks promising in so many ways, but part of her solid educational foundation was established long ago during summers at the prestigious Mount Tom Day Camp.

Ellie was only seven years old when she began her first camp adventure. She still remembers getting picked up by the yellow mini-bus in front of the church. "I loved the rides to and from camp every day. I became good friends with all the kids on the bus from the very first day. The commute to New Rochelle was almost too quick because we always played games and had fun with each other and our bus counselors. Of course, when we got to camp there was so much to do: swimming, music, art, tennis, rock climbing, a really cool zip line, pony

rides, nature, and so much more. More importantly, I became close friends with great kids from Manhattan, The Bronx and Westchester.



Running the Show: Roosevelt Island's Ellie Philips went from camper to staff member in just a few short years.



Here's one of my favorite stories about Mount Tom: One of my closest friends was a girl named Caroline. As it turned out, Caroline's parents and my parents had been good friends years ago and lost touch. My camp friendship not only brought us together but also our parents! Mount Tom is like a big extended family. As a matter of fact, two of the directors went there as kids a long time ago."

Ellie "graduated" from camp and eventually became a key part of the summer staff. She has worked there for four camp seasons and, in 2009, was the producer/director of the annual "Broadway at Mount Tom" production. Ellie helped hundreds of children feel good about themselves through their hard work and cooperation putting together an amazing show. She credits Mount Tom for helping her discover her passions for musical theater and teaching.



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What Islanders Want in the Community’s Next Year... or Decade

Publicize! And Welcome!

by Janet Falk

My vision of Roosevelt Island is one where the invisible boundaries that mark the clusters of buildings disappear. Like many towns, even nations, Roosevelt Island is artificially divided, by its residents, into *us* and *them*, on a geographic basis. Central to this artificial division are the residents of the WIRE buildings; many hark back to the idyllic years of the mid- to late ’70s and the ’80s. Their shared memories and experiences of the organizations and activities that built “the community” are largely based in fact, and the institutions and traditions they created are commendable. At times, these reminiscences may be rose-colored, which scientific research has shown is typical of the human memory process. These residents have been known to proclaim loudly that those golden years are sadly ending; they bemoan the dissipation of the community feeling over the past 10 years or so, and link it to the development of the Manhattan Park, Octagon, and Southtown buildings and the influx of more residents. The fact that some are from other lands and live on the Island for a few years before returning to their country suggests to many that they are less likely to become involved with local groups. On the other hand, **the absence of a concerted effort to welcome newer residents into the community** has been palpable. As a Southtown resident of approximately two years, and someone who has sought out and become an active member and volunteer in three organizations (RIJC, RIHS and RICLA), and who attends R&R Concerts and Gallery RIVAA events, I know whereof I speak. For example, there were countless posters and ads in *The WIRE* that proclaimed Roosevelt Island Day in 2008 (my first year), but newer residents like myself had no idea what that meant. Had I known that I would be able to participate in an Island-wide clean-up and planting, listen to music, and share in entertainment for the children, I would have arranged my weekly errands to do my grocery shopping on another day. But, because the majority of residents were familiar with the tradition, some must have felt there was no need to com-

municate the plan for Roosevelt Island Day to the newcomers. A simple flyer prepared by RIRA/ RIOC detailing the activities of the day could have been distributed to the Southtown residents or posted in the lobbies of the then-four buildings at a total cost of less than \$10. Because the focal point of the activities was in the perimeter of the WIRE buildings, it’s not surprising that the residents of Southtown may also have remained oblivious to the activities of Roosevelt Island Day in 2009. Therefore, my vision of Roosevelt Island is to create several measures to promote communication between Island residents and Island groups. 1. RIRA representatives should actively connect with the residents of their own buildings; in addition, reps from the WIRE buildings should partner with their Southtown (and Manhattan Park) counterparts by holding a quarterly meeting in their respective community rooms. 2. RIRA and RIOC should partner with the management of *all* buildings to offer newcomers a *Welcome to the Island* website or kit with general information and a calendar of key dates: Roosevelt Island Day, Health & Fitness Day, July 4, Movie Nights, Ping Pong at Sportspark, and the holiday tree lighting. Island groups should be invited to post a link to their own websites or include information. 3. RIOC should create a community calendar to be emailed each Wednesday to all residents who sign up for it. Unlike the Tram, Subway and Parking notifications that transmit the not-so-good news of service changes, these notices of activities would be *welcomed!* Some groups may schedule events between issues of *The WIRE*, so a weekly e-mail would overlap and supplement communications. 4. Island groups should turn their members into ambassadors who actively recruit newcomers to join their organizations. At a Library Book Club, Doris Chernick invited me to attend a meeting of RICLA. I spoke up at that meeting and later was nominated to be RICLA’s Executive Director. In the middle of Communication – *you*. Island residents, RIRA, and RIOC can proactively welcome and integrate *all* residents into the community and restore some semblance of the golden years.

Unite All Peoples

by Ron Becker

Director of Therapeutic Recreation, Coler-Goldwater

Roosevelt Island is, on some levels, a model for inclusion, where people with and without disabilities live, work, and play. With hospital campuses at either end of the Island, there is a unique environment and opportunity to combine leisure and social interaction through the arts to provide education, understanding, and acceptance for all. How about expanding the scope and availability of the arts through “on the street” programs and spontaneous events? I propose an Island-wide program that invites all ages, cultures, and individuals or groups to participate in leisure programs and activities that are ongoing, new, and groundbreaking in their content, process, and availability. Various sidewalk areas, small parks, and the new Southpoint Park will lend themselves as “new program” environments. One example is a community “barker” who invites passersby to share a word/thought with the gathering spectators while an activity is taking place. Provide activities and “barker” narrative that affirms and enlightens those in attendance through humor and insight, while creating an exciting and nurturing environment for education and entertainment. Transmitting the event as it occurs via the web would draw interest, notoriety, and opportunity to highlight what the Island community has to offer. Involving all people, through accessibility, delivers a message of understanding and acceptance, providing opportunities for many to reflect on their own fears or misperceptions about people with disabilities. RIOC could sponsor this community program as it continues to support and build a more vibrant community.

by Marianne Lau

We should encourage active living on Roosevelt Island. *Active Design Guidelines* have been issued at nyc.gov/ddc, including this language: *Today, physical inactivity and unhealthy diet are second only to tobacco as the main causes of premature death in the United States. A growing body of research suggests that evidence-based architectural and urban design strategies can increase regular physical activity and healthy eating.* With that in mind: • Encourage stair use for health. Walking up stairs is a weight-bearing exercise beneficial for maintaining bone density and muscle strength. Studies show that people in their 70’s, 80’s and 90’s can benefit. Existing stairs can entice frequent use with lighting, color, and increased attention to security. • Erect graphic distance markers for pedestrians identifying 1/10-mile increments. • Designate bike lanes on perimeter roads and the promenade to encourage courteous use and well-maintained riding surfaces. • Provide bike-riding safety instruction for the general public. • Promote bike sales and rentals for all ages. • Provide modified bikes for se-

niors and less-mobile riders • Establish regular walking groups, perhaps every Sunday afternoon from 2-5 p.m., for walkers, strollers, wheelchairs, and visitors as a form of social activity and exercise. Associated events could be tours (by the Historical Society), bird-watching, tree walks, and community scavenger hunts. • Encourage use of Roosevelt Island’s outdoors with a performance platform at Lighthouse Park. • Sponsor an *Imagine Roosevelt Island* annual competition addressing Roosevelt Island’s past, present, and/or future. Written entries can take the form of fiction and non-fiction writing, poetry, music (all genres), sculpture, photography, or theater about Roosevelt Island or

This is an ongoing dialogue. What are your ideas for Roosevelt Island’s future?

Make Transit Better With Technology

by Jonathan Kalkin
Member, RIOC Board of Directors

Roosevelt Island has many transportation concerns that can be alleviated through the use of technology. I have been exploring some new and interesting ways to make travel on and off the Island a more pleasant and efficient experience. **Red Bus** The Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation (RIOC) has direct control over the Red Bus used regularly by almost every Islander. There have been many complaints about the reliability, the bunching that results in service gaps, the route, and the frequency. Some residents argue that we need a firm schedule; others respond that a schedule would increase reliability but reduce frequency. Both are correct. With increased frequency, you get increased maintenance and operating costs and an increased potential for bunching. With a schedule, you get fewer buses per hour. Some argue that the bus should be free, but the system costs about a million dollars a year, and there’s a deficit even with the present fare. Global Positioning System (GPS) tracking can improve the system. I pushed for GPS tracking technology as a member of the RIOC Operations Committee. It has been installed, and you can access it on the internet or a mobile device at nextbus.com (click on Roosevelt Island). You can see when the next bus will arrive at your stop, and time your departure or decide to walk. On a mobile device, you can make the wait-or-walk judgment on the fly. (For cell phones without browsers, the information is available via text message.) Countdown clocks at the bus stops can help, too. The configuration of Main Street makes it difficult to see whether a bus is coming, but a clock can help you decide whether to wait or walk. Thanks to funding arranged by Assemblymember Micah Kellner, we should have such clocks soon. Tap cards, which are like EZ-Pass, can also help. Boarding, you pay by tapping your card on a terminal, even without taking it out of your purse or wallet. The system can be designed to alert the driver if someone passes without paying, so that both doors can be used for boarding. Ridership statistics provided by such a system can help us apply for funding for further improvement of the overall system. Merchants can offer discounts for owners of these cards to increase patronage at their stores.

Subway

Improving the Red Bus system is only a start. Once you’ve reached the Tram or subway station, you may find it hard to board. The MTA says we have enough trains per hour to accommodate our population. In its recent study, Columbia University agreed. But both noticed that trains are often late and, when the system slows down, there are not enough trains. Islanders in any time period (past, present, or future), drawings (any genre). Entries could be exhibited on the Island, online, in *The Main Street WIRE*, and on Roosevelt Island blogs. Viewers could choose their favorites, from which a jury of Islanders and officials would select final winners for each category. It would be ideal to include many different ages in both contest and jury, with winners published professionally together with up-to-date statistics and information about the Island. Possible projects (fictional or otherwise): AVAC/underground thriller; observations of a wheelchair-patient, a newcomer, a RIOC director’s past, a time traveler, a seagull; fictional diary of the inmate who built the Lighthouse; movie of Nellie Bly’s experience as a patient in the insane asylum; a story of a future resident’s escape as global warming causes the East River to overtake the Island’s river banks; story of a fictional soldier who gets separated from General Washington as they evade the British Army; music and lyrics for the Island anthem in 2020; documentary of Roosevelt Island as an experimental New York City project in the 1960’s and 1970’s with realistic or alternative endings...

The good news is that much of this is on its way to being fixed, but the bad news is that it’s going to take years. Signal systems on the F line are at least a half-century old, but are “newer” than on other lines. They won’t be upgraded anytime soon, but it is part of their capital plan. **Human Behavior** Most people need to get to work by about 9:00 a.m., which creates the morning jam that we call rush-hour. Twenty minutes earlier, the Manhattan platform is not yet a clogged mess, but getting people to leave a bit earlier is difficult without an incentive. Recognizing this, many cities use congestion pricing, charging more at peak travel times. Our new MTA chairman, Jay Walder, adopted this approach in London. Here, it can help spread the load, too. The MTA also noted that people wait in one small area of the subway platform rather than spreading out. Cars fill unevenly, and boarding is more difficult. Signs can advise passengers to move to the part of the platform served by cars that are less jammed. Commuters should also contact the managers of their stations about problems. The necessary e-mail addresses are on the MTA website, and I’ve suggested posting them in the stations as well. **Signals** When the MTA updates the current F train signal system, it may introduce countdown clocks on the platforms. Once they are in place, they can post other information, too. Information about elevator availability, for example, would help the disabled know in advance what problems they might encounter down the line. The disabled would also be helped by signs at wheelchair-eye-level (with the traditional blue and white colors for such signs), and signs showing the proper way to help a wheelchair passenger board (backward) would be helpful. And the MTA should mark the floors of the subway cars and the wheelchair loading area with signage to reserve space for wheelchair passengers. **Funding** Partial funding and ideas should come from private industry and open-source (free) software competitions. The initial GPS Red Bus installations were funded by the developer of The Octagon. Verizon FIOS will provide the internet infrastructure that will power much of the technology discussed in this article. Subway screens can be designed with open-source software competitions, and can be supported with on-screen advertising. Private industry can innovate at a greater speed than government bureaucracy. Technology won’t solve all our transportation problems, but it can make our commute easier as the Island’s population grows. We were once at the forefront of technology in New York City, and there is no reason why we can’t lead again.

What Islanders Want in the Community’s Next Decade... or Year

Governance, Housing, Transit...

by **Matthew Katz**
Chair, RIRA Planning Committee
I’ve spent much of the past 12 years thinking about these questions, and trying to influence Roosevelt Island’s future to include maintaining what is best about the Island along with the inevitable changes we face. Over the next 10 years, some things seem clear, others quite murky. Here’s a run-down:

Government
Every Island issue depends on “who decides?” For much of our history, New York’s governor appointed a Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation (RIOC) Board of Directors whose members didn’t live here, were not stakeholders in the community, and answered only to the governor. In 2004, Governor Pataki signed into law a bill that we had recommended, requiring the Board to be composed of a majority of Island residents. Over the past two years, the Roosevelt Island Residents Association (RIRA), with government approval, conducted two elections to seek the community’s endorsement of candidates for the governor’s appointment. And so, incrementally and sometimes tangentially, we are approaching democratic home rule. We’ve already seen change in how the Island is managed; for the first time, the Board is asserting itself rather than acting as a rubber stamp to RIOC executive dictates.

Housing
The inexorable gentrification of Island housing continues. The Island was created as a sanctuary for seniors, for the disabled, and for low-income folk. Within 10 years, that presence will disappear. This is not by happenstance; it is a concerted effort by developers (and with government complicity) to circumvent the General Development Plan, which lays out specific ratios of low-income to middle-income to fair-market housing in both Northtown and Southtown. RIRA has participated in two Article 78 suits (involving Southtown and The Octagon) to slow this process, but without success. The results of this change in our *raison d’être* may be seen in Roosevelt Landings (formerly Eastwood), where a disastrous Mitchell-Lama buyout is causing hardship among present tenants, with their inevitable replacement by younger, healthier, and more affluent residents.

Transportation
The transportation needs of a small Island are different from those of the rest of the City. We know that the morning commute is

already untenable for many. In the short term, the six-month (or longer) Tram outage will cause hardship among F-train rush-hour commuters. In the long term, continued development in Southtown will increase morning ridership beyond the current system’s capacity to cope, and will certainly limit the inclination of working people to move here. RIOC has not been particularly responsive to finding solutions, and the MTA simply doesn’t recognize the problem, citing statistics that show F-train capacity to be adequate to our needs. If our future needs are to be met, we must make a concerted effort *now* to change minds, find answers, and get “the powers that be” off the dime.

Parks
Southpoint Park, 13 acres that have been considered for development since the founding of Roosevelt Island, is actually under construction. The northernmost 10 acres, including the Renwick Ruin, will quickly absorb the \$12.5 million raised, and future plans are dependent on what funds can be raised now, in a time of fiscal austerity, and in the future. The FDR Memorial is scheduled to begin construction despite the fact that only \$16.5 million or so has been raised toward the estimated \$45 million required to complete the project. My hope is that RIOC will carefully monitor both segments of Southpoint Park, and ensure that no opportunities exist to walk away from incomplete sites when funds run out.

Currently, RIOC has invited RIRA to participate in the planning for Blackwell Park renovations, required by the need to move the tot lot off Southtown property that is part of the site for building number 7, should it ever be built. With the assistance of a landscape architect, RIOC has proposed other major “improvements.” We have been listening to park users who like the original design, suggest that “less is more,” and ask only for regular maintenance of this and other Island parkland.

These seem to me to be the most critical issues facing us in the “teens.” Others will consider other issues more important, and I look forward to reading their thoughtful prognostications. However, our opportunity to have a positive influence on our future is dependent on how committed Islanders are to making a difference, through the Residents Association and other Island organizations.

Complaining solves nothing; getting involved often results in solutions. It’s up to you.

Transit Solutions Now!

by **Nina Lublin**
I cannot think about the *next* 10 years without thinking about the first 10 months, All I can think about is the pending Tram shutdown fiasco with no direct bus transportation to Manhattan (free, low-cost, or other) for the elderly, disabled, and other subway-challenged commuters, Island employees, students, tourists, and others – especially during the morning rush and on weekends. That no one can come up with a decent bus solution from the Island to Second Avenue is incredible to me. The clowns at RIOC, DHCR, the MTA, and our elected officials should be ashamed of themselves. And that the Octagon owners and Related folks can’t come up with anything is pretty sad. A ferry is not going to do it for most of us. And with the loss of Deborah VanAmerongen, well, who knows what the governor has up his sleeve. It is incredible that our resident RIOC Board seatholders and the incredibly smart yet annoying Frank Farance have not been able to rouse the population to get an Article 78 or other court-ordered action either delaying the start of work till Island-to-Manhattan transportation can be arranged or ordering RIOC to provide limited direct bus service to Manhattan. Al Weinstein and others must be spinning in their graves.

It’s Time for A Midlife Reset for Roosevelt Island

by **Dick Lutz**
Editor-Publisher, *The Main Street WIRE*
The definition of the impossible? *Something that requires citizens, government, and industry all to give up something to reach a goal.* But this community was born because all three did: Government provided incentives that included relinquishing some tax income; developers gave up immediate large profits to create Mitchell-Lama housing; citizens rented and bought that housing, knowing that any upside from their investment would be long delayed.

Can it be done again?
It *must* be. We are 35 years into this “experiment,” out of the test tube and living in the real world. We’ll be at the mid-point of the State’s leasehold in just eight years. But we have **58** years to go. Which of the WIRE buildings (Westview, Island House, Rivercross, Eastwood/Roosevelt Landings) do we honestly expect will last that long?

It’s time to think about renewal, create a plan, and start to work out the ways we can act on it.
So here’s a wild idea that would ask much of many in the short run, but open a path to a greater good. Or not – and that depends on your viewpoint. It would require an unprecedented mix of sacrifice, compromise, and opportunity that might reasonably be called *impossible*. At least at first.

It’s a multi-step remaking of the aging core of Roosevelt Island:
1. **Build Southtown 7-8-9 with an enhanced affordable component.**
2. **Move everybody in Roosevelt Landings (Eastwood) into those three new buildings.**
3. **Raze Roosevelt Landings (Eastwood).**
4. **Replace it with something new.**

The *something new* would be – no, let’s make that *will be*, just to assert the fantasy more strongly – the subject of an architectural competition guided by a set of basic requirements promulgated by Roosevelt Islanders, government, and industry in a new phase of Northtown development.

Those basic requirements might look something like this:
The *New Eastwood* will present a concave face to Main Street – a sweeping arc of open space that includes a significant parking area and a green pocket-park. It is a state-of-the-art high-rise apartment building with the same 1,003-unit capacity as today’s structure. It includes:

- New street-level retail spaces, all more appropriately sized than now, with the goal of providing some magnet shopping, dining, and entertainment.
- A state-of-the-art public library.
- A state-of-the-art youth center.
- A new senior center.
- A state-of-the-art Main Street Theatre & Dance Alliance (MST&DA).
- Within the MST&DA space, a renewed cultural center, and
- A facility that includes video and film screening and conference-friendly technology

And here, fill in the blank with your pet project that can help to rejuvenate the geographic and population center of the Island, and its continuing role as the cultural heart. **What are your ideas?**

- Associated with the library, there are state-of-the-art meeting rooms, including a multipurpose “council hall” for amplified and televised meetings of the RIOC Board of Directors, the RIRA Common Council, and other Island organizations – as well as guest conferences organized by universities to address the important issues of our local, state, national, and international future.
- At the center, residents have walk-through access to a ferry landing on the east promenade.
- Upper floors, rising as high as 25 or 27 stories to make up for the lost square-footage given over to the open arc facing Main Street, consist of a flexible mix of housing. The precise minimums of the mix will be

negotiated among the parties to the deal, but scattered among the building’s units are affordable apartments, luxury units, units designed to the newest standards for the disabled, and opportunities for ownership.

- At the penthouse level, some luxury units, but also meeting and party rooms that look beyond the other buildings of Northtown to a spectacular panorama of Manhattan.

The *practical* in us might reject all this as absurd daydreaming, especially given the state of today’s economy and its effect on all levels of government. But the American spirit is known for creating opportunity out of adversity, and there are many on-the-ground reasons why the *New Eastwood* might just work.

- It gives Southtown developers Hudson and Related an incentive to build Southtown 7-8-9 simultaneously, since occupancy is ready-made.
- It delays the 7-8-9 population expansion and the transit mess that will result – delays it until Eastwood housing is replaced. Overall, it’s a multi-year process.

- The new owners of Roosevelt Landings may now be stinging from an ownership plan that tried to include a shift of outrageous energy costs to tenants, but failed when government re-leveled the playing field, enjoining an approach that could have made many homeless. The building is energy-inefficient and not amenable to an efficiency makeover. *Why not start from scratch and do it right?*
- Northtown retail suffers, according to a consultant report, from wrong-sized retail spaces that overburden small operators, a lack of parking to draw off-Island customers, and the lack of anything truly special to make retail operations a must-stop for Island residents. *Why not start from scratch and do it right?*
- While the current unit-by-unit conversion of Roosevelt Landings to upscale housing might eventually produce a building that’s economically workable, it does so at the expense of losing senior and disabled housing, affordable units, and the diversity-soul of Roosevelt Island. Because of economics, the Island as a whole, and all who sponsored it, are walking away from a very good idea. *Why not start from scratch and make the economics serve the people – as well as housing entrepreneurs and the good-affordable-housing goals of good government?*

Unquestionably, something like this would require bold and imaginative leadership, able to create the right incentives for all parties. Consider, for example, the difficulty of providing every resident of Eastwood with an incentive to change her/his address. Yet, new digs might be attractive, especially at reasonable rent levels in new buildings. What might follow? Could it be extended to a larger makeover, including a renewal of the other WIRE buildings – Westview, Island House, and perhaps even Rivercross? Rivercross demonstrates the value of citizen-residents managing their own property through a mix of values not dominated by profit alone. But even Rivercross was built to standards shaped by toxic incentives to install electric heating. Unless some over-the-horizon technology makes electricity cheap again, even Rivercross must ultimately be replaced. It’s in the distance, but why not fold the eventual need into a larger plan now?

Impossible? Let’s not ask if it’s possible. Let’s ask, first, if it would be a good thing do. If it is, let’s figure out how to make it possible.

For the longer term, perhaps nearly all of Roosevelt Island might be reconsidered and reshaped according to a better understanding of the values that brought it to life in the first place: *What do we have? What should we keep? What can we reshape to serve our values better?*

And is it time to assemble a new *Future-Island* conference of the best minds to ask and answer those questions anew?

Halt Development or Deal With Transit Issues

by **Robert Chira**
The most significant challenge to keeping Roosevelt Island as a desirable place to live is to deal with its overpopulation relative to its transportation. My wish for the next decade is that the State and residents make living on this Island more accessible and less congested. That means *no more high-rise buildings for new residents* in Southtown, Riverwalk, or anywhere else; frequent ferry stops and services from Island points to Manhattan and LaGuardia Airport; ex-

press bus service every hour on the hour from the Island to Manhattan and back; a special subway train reserved for Island residents during the morning rush, say at 8:00, 8:30, 9:00; a taxi stand serviced by a private carrier with the right to join passengers together for a common destination in Manhattan or an airport.

The State, MTA, NYCity Transit and private developers must realize that the Island cannot accommodate more working people: Only a community of retirees, chil-

dren who stay at home, and the disabled will be able to live here comfortably – not a working population. If more buildings are allowed, the Island will become a very undesirable place to live. We cannot transport 10,000 people per day to work in Manhattan, but that is precisely the requirement if any more high rise residential buildings are built.

The number one priority for this Island over the next decade is making the Island accessible to those who work in Manhattan.

The Island’s Haiti Connection – Controversy Continues Over Split Separating Jim Luce from Orphans International America

To the Editor:

Money is going to our orphan home in Haiti. Contrary to a discussion at Gallery RIVAA on January 16, money can be safely transferred to the orphan home, operated by Orphans International America (OIA), in Cyvadier, Haiti. We have done it. I am happy to report that the children and staff are safe, and the orphans’ home withstood the earthquake and is still a sound structure. The children were running outside during the aftershocks and frightened, but safe. They are still too afraid to stay in the house. Communication and electricity are disrupted, but so far we are in a far better place than many in Haiti.

Immediately after the devastating earthquakes beginning Tuesday January 12, I called Jim Luce, founder of Orphans International Worldwide (OIWW). He indicated that all the OIWW money was tied up in the CharityHelp account and he couldn’t help immediately. We learned that Haitian Director Jacques Africot was desperate; he had only \$200, the water was not safe and food, if found, was extremely expensive. Then Linda Stanley (Executive Director of OIA for two years), Board President of Better Future International (BFI) Kristie Dekoker, and I contacted former Haiti donors. Over the holiday weekend, we found a previous Haiti donor, Tom Pegues, not only willing but able to gather \$2,500 in cash for Haiti. Linda and I spent a full day calling our contacts in Haiti for some means of getting the money to Haiti. On Monday January 18, we learned that our friends at ACDI-VOCA in Washington, DC, had a team leaving for Haiti Tuesday at 3:00 p.m. and they agreed to take the money if we could get it to them on time. Within three days, Jacques received \$2,500. In the meantime, Better Future International was in the process of arranging a truck delivery with money, water, food, and other goods to Cyvadier through the Dominican Republic.

Jim Luce, founder of OIWW, and I have been working together in Haiti for the past 10 years. Together, we made 18-20 trips to Haiti. This experience brought both joy and great frustration because, from the very beginning, we were nearly always 4-5 months behind in our agreed-upon payments to the orphan home. And today we are 18 months behind in Director Jacques’ salary. I marvel that Jacques was able to keep the orphan home running. Because of this, it is hard to understand why the past 4-5 months of CharityHelp sponsor money wasn’t routinely sent to the Fonkoze bank in Haiti. In addition, Jim received a \$10,000 grant for the three operating orphan centers before the earthquake, but only \$1,000 was sent to our Haiti orphan home. Jim continues to raise money but, as of this date, OIWW has not sent any money to Director Jacques since the earthquake and only \$1,000 since the split in early November. In this crisis, we must make sure that 100% of all funds collected for Haiti are sent to our orphan home in Cyvadier as soon as possible.

I love Jim for his unique vision and all the work he has done in the past, but there is a definite split between OIWW and Better Future International since November. This is most unfortunate, because both groups have so much to offer. My own loyalty is to our Haiti project. And I will do everything that I can to sustain the program and make it grow.

The board of directors of Better Future International has been raising money through Facebook and PayPal. Check their website at www.betterfutureinternational.org, where you can follow their work. I have been impressed with their work, energy, and dedication to the Haiti project. They are an all-volunteer group, and we want to thank everyone who has stepped forward to help. As indicated above, the board of Better Future International is planning a trip to bring supplies to Haiti at Jacques’ request. They will also bring all money raised to date.

We all certainly appreciate the enthusiastic support from our Roosevelt Island neighbors. All checks that I have received to date have been immediately deposited with The City National Bank, which then transfers all monies, without fees according to President Louis Prezeau, to Jacques at the Fonkoze bank in Jacmel.

Our Cyvadier orphan home in Haiti has many money problems. Right now, we have to pay for next year’s lease on our Haiti home as soon as possible or we will be in danger of losing our home. We anticipate a large increase in price because so many houses were destroyed. In addition, so many, many local people are asking for our help. Director Jacques would like to help orphans nearby who lost their parents in the earthquake. If nothing else, it would be wonderful if we were able to provide these orphans with one good meal a day. And, if we have the funds, we also would like to take on many more orphans, using the Family Care Model, which has been so successful in Tanzania. The Family Care Model is especially attractive because we work through the extended family and provide them the financial means to care for a niece, nephew, or cousin. Because it is less costly, it makes it possible for us to help many more people in this tragic country; and, even more important perhaps, we create a “mini-community” of citizens willing to work together.

If you want to help, please contact Doris at dchernik@nyct.net or telephone **212-751-9577**. Things are changing rapidly, day-to-day.

Doris Chernik
Haiti Coordinator

Letters from page 2

RIVAA art gallery on January 16. Besides implying that the current board of directors is afflicted by some sort of collective psychosis (we can assure you that we are all perfectly sane), he stated that Linda Stanley and Doris Chernik were naive little old ladies who were misled by the board. These comments are not only inappropriate, they are downright insulting. Doris Chernik has been instrumental in heading the project in Haiti. Jim Luce said so himself. Was she naive when she was helping him all those years? Linda Stanley worked over 60 hours a week non-stop for over a year on every

aspect of the organization, from one end of the spectrum to the other. They both dedicated their time and money for a cause they believed in. If they were naive, so were we all. Without the tireless efforts of volunteers such as Doris, Linda, and the countless others who have come and gone, OIWW would be nothing more than a great idea on paper. Jim Luce has not slowed down. Not at all. He has been very busy writing articles in his defense for an attack that never materialized. All we did was ask him, in private, to step down and allow us to do the job that he asked us to do when he appointed us. To date, we have not responded to the numerous and baseless statements published by Jim Luce about OIA since he was dismissed. At this point, though, we felt the need to set the record straight. We now plan on returning our focus to the charitable works of OIA and

To the Editor:

At our Island’s Toastmasters Club this week, I was asked to speak extemporaneously on both the idiom “elephant in the room” and “adversity.” Having experienced the shock of a hostile take-over of half my organization – Orphans International America (now calling themselves “Better Future International – BFI”) – I found myself before a receptive audience.

Last week I spoke at Gallery RIVAA, which graciously opened its doors to me, to chat with my neighbors about what on earth this palace coup was all about. A board member of “Better Future International” attended the art gallery forum, and my neighbors let her know how little they thought of BFI.

At the next RIRA Common Council meeting, I will continue clearing the air as to why Orphans International has been torn in two – the old OI America (now BFI), and the decade-old OI Worldwide, which I continue to lead.

Mostly, I am leading Haiti relief efforts this month, in the wake of the tsunami-like earthquake there. Shades of Indonesia and Sri Lanka years ago. Luckily, our kids are fine and I will be with them in just a few weeks. We are able to get funding to them, and they are surviving.

My extraordinary director in Jacmel, Jacques Africot, has reported to me using solar power. “Kids were very scared but, once again we are safe. God’s hands are on us. No damage at all on our side.” I am in almost daily communication with him, by phone, Skype, IM, and e-mail.

He writes, “Jim and (BFI) want me to take sides. As I told them, my problem is not to take sides. My problem is who I need to trust to bring the project forward... I still continue to think that the project is Jim’s project and that I am just working with him with no power to decide.”

I continue to advocate for our kids in the *Huffington Post* and *Daily Kos*, and have written much about Haiti in the last 10 days, which you can Google:

- OI Worldwide Haiti to Build Second Project in Léogane With Global Partners
- Orphans International Worldwide Haiti Survives Second Shock in Jacmel
- Major NYC Benefit Planned For OI Worldwide Haiti 2/28 At Historic Webster Hall
- Orphans International Movement Around the World
- No Word Yet From Our Orphaned Children in Haiti

Supporters have been so generous that we have announced the creation of our second project in Haiti with the Colline Academie in Léogane, near Port-au-Prince, on the road to Jacmel where our first project is located. The synergies will be very beneficial.

Webster Hall will host two benefits in the next month: one for Doctors Without Borders and one for Orphans International Worldwide. Our turn is Sunday, February 28. Proceeds will go to OI Worldwide’s efforts in Haiti.

OI Haiti has been in crisis because the OI America (BFI) Board did not raise adequate funds since I left it as director to run OI Worldwide in 2007, and left its Board in 2008. The Board members simply did not pitch in enough.

Ironically, the devastating earthquake allows us to raise enough funds now to erase the empty promises fed to our kids in Haiti over the last two years by the Board of “Better Future International.”

When I founded Orphans International Worldwide in 1999, I had no idea it would grow into an international brand and movement. Like Alcoholics Anonymous, this brand idea caught fire. Today, there are over 100 “Orphans International” organizations in Asia, Africa, and the Americas, plus Europe.

OI America – now Better Future International – is one of dozens of clones who claim they want to help kids. I hope they do.

OI Worldwide has raised funds since the schism last fall, working with our non-profit partner and fiscal sponsor, CharityHelp International (charityhelp.org), an IRS 501(c)3 organization. OI Worldwide is now in the process of New York State incorporation and gaining our own 501(c)3 tax-exempt status.

We have retained the same accountants that we have always used, who will handle all funds once OI Worldwide has its own status. At this point, all funds flow through CharityHelp, and are paid out directly to our kids. We have more top *pro bono* lawyers on hand than I know the names of.

CharityHelp International continues to accept contributions on behalf of OI Worldwide. Checks can be made out to CharityHelp International, memo: “Orphans International.” As always, send to 540 Main Street #418, N.Y., N.Y. 10044.

Many of you have already sent \$100, \$500, and \$1,000 checks for our children in Haiti – thank you so much! The generosity of Roosevelt Islanders always amazes me. Please note that OI Worldwide’s Board is assuming 100% of the administrative costs, so all of your dollars go only to our kids. I remain on a salary of \$1 per year.

On-line contributions to OIWW’s children at www.oiww.org have been processed by CharityHelp for three years, and continue to be processed today. Please note that BFI has received a cease-and-desist letter to no longer use the brand name “Orphans International America.” Please do not write checks to that name.

I wish to let the air out of the “elephant in the room” – and move forward with the important task of helping humanity, especially today in Haiti. I can deal with accusations, but am growing tired of innuendo. Let’s move forward: I hope to see you at Webster Hall Sunday, February 28, to help our kids!

Jim Luce
Founder, President, & Executive Director
Orphans International Worldwide

hope to avoid any further public battle – it benefits no one. We prefer to conserve our collective energy for picking up the pieces of what was once a great organization and ensuring that the children are cared for properly for the duration of their childhood. Would it have been easier for us to resign and walk away? Absolutely. Would it have been the right thing to do? Absolutely *not*. We could have all gone our separate ways and started our own independent projects, as some people have pointed out. Had we done that, eventually the projects would

have been forced to disband and the children would have been back out on the street.

Jim Luce is a motivational speaker and a proficient writer, with the ability to inspire the best in people. The world would be a better place if Jim Luce would use his gifts for the betterment of society and refrain from unnecessary discourse.

Starlene Johnson, Kristie Dekoker, Nancy Zhang, Kimberly Andino, Alastair Busbhy
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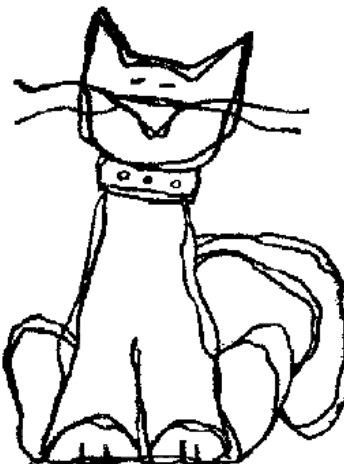
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RIOC Column from page 3

comment in survey results). So, applying the response percentages to the entire user population (1,150 x 50% x 75% x \$3), a highly suspect assumption would leave RIOCI, for the anticipated Tram outage of 130 week days, with an approximate \$350,000 subsidy. The Board will have to consider whether this expense is warranted. Meanwhile, the Octagon developer is talking about underwriting the service from the existing dock at The Octagon. Stay tuned.

4. **Southpoint-FDR Memorial:** Legal work on NYC Funding and Development agreements continues, with the attorneys for the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute carrying the load. Construction will start in the spring, after execution of final documents by the City, RIOCI, and the developer. State Parks has rescheduled the meeting to determine methodology for future maintenance for January 29. A \$2 million endowment was received by State Parks. The governor's budget contains the re-appropriation of \$4 million of State funds.

5. Projects:

A. The contract for the engineering study of the status of the **helix** leading to the Island from the bridge is let, and work is under way.

B. **Octagon Soccer Field resurfacing:** Approved by the Board on January 14. Contract execution and commencement of work are imminent.

C. **AVAC, Sportspark, fiber optic cabling, Good Shepherd HVAC, Octagon sewer, street lighting, tot lot improvements,** etc. all keep engineering very busy.

5. **Public Purpose Fund:** Seven applications for the 2010/11 cycle were submitted. Completed applications were delivered to RIRA for review and recommendation to the Board in time for consideration at the March meeting.

6. **Budget:** The proposed 2010/11 budget has been published and posted on RIOCI's website for public review and comment before formal presentation to the Board for adoption, after possible amendment, at the March meeting. RIRA and other interested parties are welcome to review, comment, and raise questions as part of the process. We have tried to set forth the detail of the assumptions that are part of the exercise and have made the projections for 15 years, subject to the inevitable infirmities of far-off estimates. Both operating and capital budgets have been set forth.

7. **Blackwell Park:** Community participation in the planning process is seemingly on track. Complaints about dog walkers not properly cleaning up after their pets have been made. There will be increased enforce-

RIRA Column from page 3

6. **Upcoming RIRA meetings:** The next Common Council meetings are February 3 and March 3 at 8:00 p.m. in the Good Shepherd Community Center, lower level. Former RIRA President Steve Marcus is chairing the Public Purpose Grant committee, which is reviewing the seven applications received by RIOCI. The meetings are open to the public; come to the February 3 RIRA meeting to hear Steve's status report. The next RIRA town hall meeting (for reviewing the RIOCI Board agenda) is February 10 at 8:00 p.m. in the Community Center, upper level. These town meetings are very informative – come listen and ask your own questions.

Join the dialog about the Island's future. See pages 10-11. Then, put your own wishes and vision into an e-mail to editor@MainStreetWIRE.com

ment of the leash laws, including the obvious responsibility to everyone's neighbors to clean up.

8. **Credit cards use at Motorgate:** As soon as the mechanics of establishing a local bank account and entering into a credit-card-processing agreement are accomplished, transient parkers will be able to use credit cards to pay the parking charges at Motorgate. Estimated to be 2-3 weeks, or mid-February.

9. **Gristedes:** We met at the store with owner John Catsimatidis and his staff to discuss operations. An open letter to Island residents is published in this edition of *The WIRE*. If they come through with their promises, everyone should benefit.

10. **Public Safety:** With the certification for radar use and the acquisition of handheld units, PSD will be more rigorously enforcing the speed limits on the Island. The first week was conducted with warnings. Special attention is being given to shift changes at the hospitals. Starting the week of January 25, summonses were issued. With greater public awareness, the streets should be safer. Pleased to report PSD's participation in apprehension of a perpetrator allegedly responsible for a rash of thefts in Motorgate. According to NYPD, Roosevelt Island crime statistics show a drop of 18% in reported crimes. I believe kudus are in order for PSD. Similarly with respect to the efforts put into improving community relations.



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HAITI

Islanders who would like to contribute to the relief efforts for the victims of the earthquake in Haiti should visit rioc.ny.gov for links to several reputable organizations accepting donations. Non-perishable items will be collected Island-wide at a future date. For more information, please contact Erica Wilder at **212-832-4540**

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Dr. Selma Kaplan received her DMD from the University of Pennsylvania. Dr. Kaplan received her post-doctoral degree in periodontics from Columbia University. Presently, she is clinical instructor at Columbia University Periodontic Department.

Endodontist: Dr. Maria Pruss, DDS

Dr. Maria Pruss received her DDS from Nova Southeastern University School of Dental Medicine in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. She went on to complete a hospital-based residency program at New York Presbyterian Hospital. In 2007, Dr. Pruss received her post-doctoral degree in endodontics from Nova Southeastern University. She dedicates her time to Friends Without a Border, including volunteer missions to Angkor Hospital for Children in Cambodia, as well as volunteer missions to Israel and Spain. She is a member of the American Association of Endodontics, American Dental Association, and New York State Dental Association.

Orthodontist: Dr. George Pliakas, DDS

Dr. George Pliakas received his DDS degree and certification of orthodontics from Columbia University School of Dental Medicine. He is proficient in Spanish and fluent in Greek. As a native of New York, Dr. Pliakas attended Bronx High School of Science and he received his B.S. degree from Harvard University.

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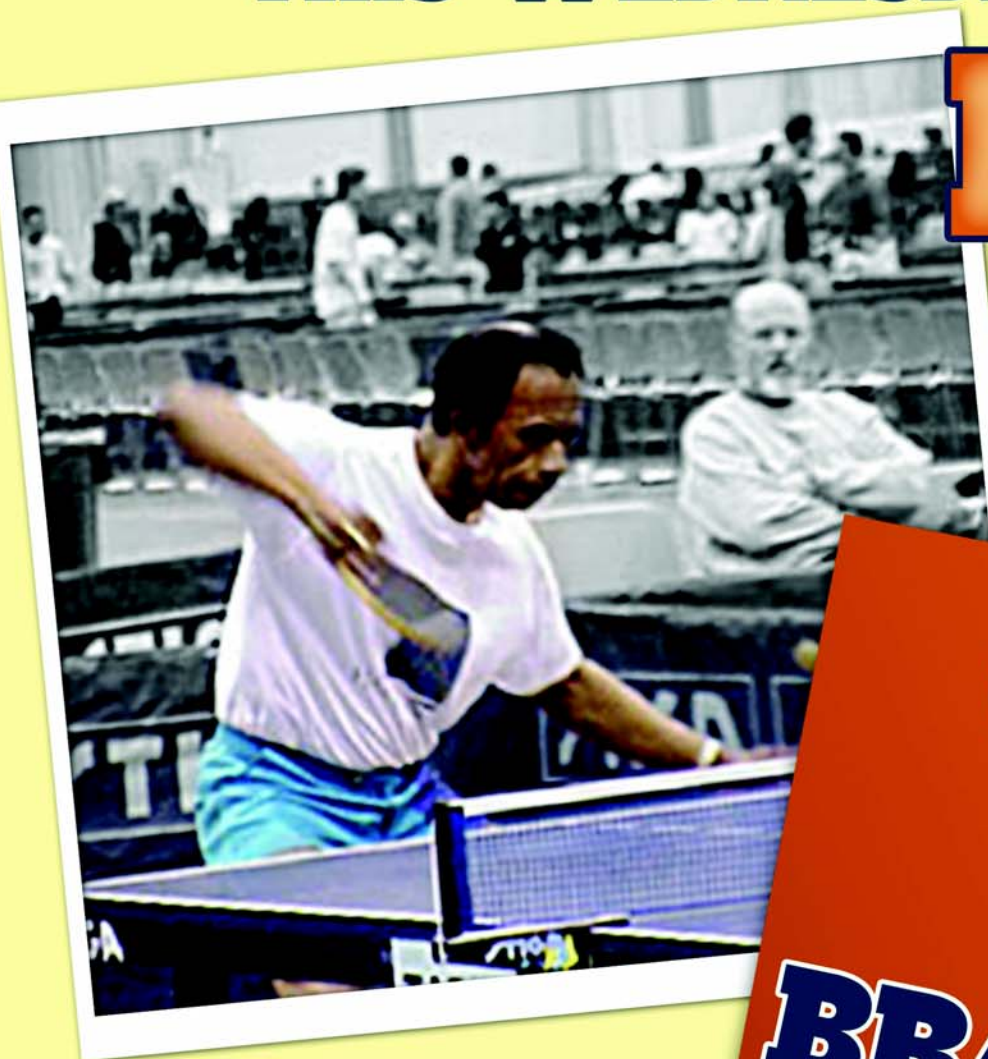
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Rabbi Zalman Duchman

by Jim Baehler

God. Family. Within the scope of those two words lies the life of Rabbi Zalman Duchman and his wife, Nechama. Their mission is to use their home as a place where Roosevelt Island Jews can find a renewal of their faith, and guidance in dealing with the everyday problems of life. Every Friday evening for the start of the Sabbath, Nechama prepares dinner for up to 20 guests, who come for food, conversation, and religious sustenance. For annual festivities such as a seder, Zalman and Nechama will rent a community room and host a dinner for up to 100. Recently, for the festival of Hanukah, nearly that number joined in the traditional lighting of the Menorah in front of Blackwell House.

With his full beard and black clothing, the 30-year-old rabbi is a formidable presence, but his quick smile and hearty laugh soon dispel any image of religious severity. He was born into the Lubavitch Hasidic community of Crown Heights. His father, grandfather, and great-grandfather were all rabbis, and Zalman was enrolled in a yeshiva at an early age, continuing as a Talmudic scholar until he had completed his studies. Before coming to Roosevelt Island, he served Jewish communities in Australia, where he served as an apprentice. Then followed Thailand, Croatia/Bosnia, and three years in Florida, where he was in charge of adult education at The Shul of Bal Harbour, Florida.

Chabad is the organizational arm of Hasidic Judaism. The movement was established in the 18th century by Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, a town in Russia, and overseen by successive Rebbe's, with the seventh and final being Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, who died in 1994. In 1940, the movement's headquarters moved to Brooklyn. Under the direction of Rabbi Schneerson, "Jewish Outreach" was begun to spread the message of Judaism. That effort has now produced 5,000 Chabad centers in 75 countries around the world. Rabbi Schneerson believed strongly in education, and was instrumental in getting President Jimmy Carter to declare 1977 the "Year of Education." Carter also declared that the first Education Day would coincide with Schneerson's birthday, and each succeeding president has followed that precedent.

In 2004, Zalman was introduced to Nechama by a cousin with the traditional *Oh, have I got a girl for you!* She lived in Montreal, the fifth of 16 children. Her background and upbringing were similar to those of Zalman, who was the second of 13 children. After their marriage and the birth of their first son, the family moved to Roosevelt Island to be closer to Zalman's work in Manhattan. In addition to his work as a rabbi, he is in charge of U.S. and Canadian fundraising and development for Colel Chabad, the oldest continuous charity in Israel. His effort produces about \$16 million a year to help finance the charity's social welfare programs.

After two years at The Octagon, the Duchmans moved to Riverwalk two years ago. There are now four children – the boys are Mendel, 4½, and Benzion, 3; the girls are Mushkie, 18 months; and Chana, 4 months. Each day, Nechama drives the two boys to yeshiva school in Brooklyn, accompanied by the two girls. Zalman and Nechama are forthright about the value of large families. He laughs, saying, "When God says *Go forth and multiply*, He means it."

Growing up, Nechama never felt left out, she says, because everyone was always together. She wasn't aware of not having all her parents' attention, because there were so many other children around and she enjoyed their company. "We were all together all the time. Zalman and I will be content with however many children God gives us."

Rabbi Duchman is eloquent on the subject: "The greatest gift is the gift of life. People have the opportunity to accept God's blessing of the gift of life. I don't think a person should refrain from having children just because they cost too much to raise or because a child might turn to drugs or do something else that is destructive. Children are a great, great responsibility, and it may be that some people don't want to accept that responsibility. It is the greatest responsibility in the world, but it is well worth it for the rewards."

Rabbi Duchman also speaks with conviction about the role of a rabbi. "It is not a career. It's a way of life. Many rabbis have a career outside their rabbinical duties. Nevertheless, a rabbi has to be a rabbi when he wakes up in the morning. When he eats, he has to eat like a rabbi. When he walks the street, he has to walk the street like a rabbi. When he thinks, he has to think like a rabbi. Your religion is not separate from your ordinary life."

When asked how thinking like a rabbi differs from other thinking, he replied, "I don't know. I never thought in other ways. When a rabbi takes an action, he must think not only how it affects him but also how it affects other people. The consequences of a person's actions must be considered. You can't get away with anything."

"Everywhere in life, there is a price to be paid. In the military life, there is a code of ethics that must be adhered to while in uniform. The difference is that a rabbi never takes off the uniform. The rabbi is always in uniform, mentally."

When asked about the absence of a formal congregation and a dedicated place of worship, Rabbi Zalman said, "I believe Judaism should be experienced at home and at the synagogue, but the primary experience is at home. It's not like going to a gym for an afternoon, where you do your workout and leave. Judaism is something that should be experienced in a home environment, in a work environment, in a social environment, in every environment. It's a way of life. Most of the interaction with the local community on Roosevelt Island takes place in our home. I have about 20 chairs, and we have people here in a home environment, where they can come for a shabat dinner or for counseling, or couples with family matters or issues, or marital problems, or those having challenges with the education of children."

"Judaism is supposed to be a wholesome experience."

"The people who come are here for guidance, for conversation, for a shoulder to lean on, friendship. Some weeks, we can have people here every night. Some weeks, less. We are currently working with a young couple intending to get married, and we discuss building a strong foundation in the home. We are talking with a single mom, having difficulties with a son, who comes to us for guidance."

Rabbi Zalman deplores efforts to place people in categories. "All Jews follow the same Torah. There are philosophical differences, but

there is one Torah. I'm part of the Chabad movement and Chabad is part of the Hasidic movement. The Hasidic movement is based on our European heritage. I think labels such as Orthodox, Reformed, Conservative are divisive. I am Hasidic, but I am also American and left-handed and many other things."

"Whenever there is a group, people feel that the group is closed, they feel intimidated. If a stranger walks up to a Hasidic person in Williamsburg and tries to strike up a conversation, he would feel intimidated. I feel that the best way to be inclusive is to open up our home. We want to provide a window or a doorway into our life style. The emphasis is conversation, enjoying each other's similarities. The discussion around the table could be religious or it could be about almost anything, politics, world events, children's education, what have you."

Nechama adds, "Our views are based on our Jewish heritage."

Pointing to two extensive shelves of books, Zalman adds, "This is a minimum Jewish library. The Talmud is the Torah with commentaries that have been compiled over many centuries, the writings of great Jewish leaders. The writings are in Hebrew, Aramaic, Yiddish, and English. As a yeshiva student, that is what one would study."

Zalman showed one of the books from his library with an unusual page layout. A Talmud page has, in the center, a short selection from the Talmud, and surrounding it on three sides are commentaries on that selection. Originally, written Jewish text consisted of the first five books of the Bible that are believed to have been given directly to Moses by God. Torah scholarship has expanded over generations to produce countless Jewish holy texts. The Torah and its commentaries provide guidance and instruction on how a Jew is to deal with the legal, ethical, and moral requirements of everyday life. There is hardly any aspect of life, no matter how minute, that is not discussed at some point in the Talmud.

Returning to the importance of the family, Zalman sees movies and television as a waste of time. "Anything that is a waste of time is against my principles." He is also concerned about the pernicious influence that movies and television, with their emphasis on sex and violence and their disregard for the value of family life, can have on the young. He sees the influence of movies and television as so pervasive that only a strong family connection is capable of overcoming it.

"In a home environment, there is no difference in roles. The wife as a bedrock and homemaker is just as, if not more, important and responsible for the Jewish experience that is transmitted to the children. There's no difference in responsibility between men and women. And that is our objective, to share with other people and permit them to come see and experience just that in a home environment."

"We want others to have an experience in our home that is beneficial to them. That is why our home is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Our door is always open. Our cell phones are always on (except on Shabat and Jewish holidays). We have people who come all the time, invited, uninvited, with problems they face and are having difficulties. I wish every person would do the same and open up their hearts and homes to others. There is a very strong sense of community here on Roosevelt Island, Jewish and non-Jewish. Our presence here is sort of an outreach, aiming at Jews who after their bar or bat mitzvah fell away from their Jewish education."

Zalman and Nechama Duchman are living a Hasidic life on Roosevelt Island, far from the large families and supportive communities in which they were raised. The focus of their lives is to live as God intended, to enjoy the presence of their children, and to share some of their experiences with others.

LEWIS JOHNSON INTERVIEW

by Jim Baehler

Lewis Johnson, the vicar of the Protestant congregation that meets each Sunday in the Chapel of the Good Shepherd, wears a perpetually cheerful countenance. At 62, he has an appearance of youthful vigor, an image maintained by vigorous regular walks and tennis sessions. That image contradicts the slight limp he has had since birth and the lung transplant he had just two and a half years ago. The lung transplant was the result of pulmonary fibrosis, a condition that caused his lungs to virtually cease functioning and dropped his weight to 125 pounds. Rev. Johnson's physicians could find no cause for the ailment, and the only solution was a transplant that came just in time to save his life. His survival may have something to do with his upbringing among Downeasters, who are known for their hardiness.

Lew's father was born in Maine, and he considers himself a son of the state, though he was born in Bethesda, Maryland. When he was two years old, his father, who worked for Bell Telephone, was transferred to West Virginia. At age 12, the family moved back to Maryland in a suburb, Kensington, where he attended high school. He became involved in student government, and was a member of the Key Club, a Kiwanis group for student leaders.

Lew's father was originally from Maine and, after high school, Lew attended Bowdoin College in Maine. "That's my real home," he says, adding that in Maine, the icy North Atlantic is referred to as *brisk* or *bracing* – by *swimmers*. Others would say *freezing*, and swimming would be out of the question. "Maine is where I feel most at home."

At Bowdoin, majoring in English, Lew was in a fraternity for the first two years. "But that got old and, by the time I was a junior, I dropped out. Before that, I was a typical frat kid. After that, it was mostly studying to get through. Bowdoin is a hard school. You had to work pretty hard for your grades there."

"After graduation, I became a high school English teacher. I started in Maine, then moved to New Hampshire, then to Massachusetts. I taught in the western part of Massachusetts, almost at the New York border." While teaching in Massachusetts, Lew acquired a master's degree in education.

Religious Philosophy

Lew had been brought up in the Episcopal Church, but had not thought of religion as an important part of his life. "In my senior year in college, I started going back to church, and gradually got more serious about it. As an adult, I really had to confront a lot of questions. I had to think a lot about what I really believed. I went to seminary in large part to answer those questions. I figured I would come out of the seminary as a true believer – or I wouldn't believe in anything."

Lew attended Yale Divinity School and says, "About half way through, I had been staying up all night studying and I just came to the conclusion that *I'm just going to surrender to this* because it's too peculiar not to be true, too good a story not to be true. The whole Biblical story has to be true. No one could have made it up.

"After I surrendered, it felt like the Holy Spirit came flooding into me and said, *Don't worry about it, it's true*. After that, I'd say I've grown in my faith." He was ordained as an Episcopal priest in 1981.

Lew's first assignment was as curate at All Saints Church in Worcester, Massachusetts. "It was a big, downtown, urban church. As a curate, I was a lowly assistant. As a joke, I would say to my rector, 'That's not in my job description,' and he would say, 'There is no job description. You do what I tell you.'"

Much of Lew's work was with street people in Worcester, many of whom suffered from mental illness and/or alcoholism. Homeless, they were suspicious of anyone offering assistance. Lew decided that he needed more formal training to reach out effectively and help them. "I got very intrigued with the working of the human mind, so I came to New York to do training at an institute in New York City, and I've been here ever since." He specialized in psychoanalysis at the Blanton-Peale Institute, with the intent of becoming a pastoral counselor. "So I have a dual ministry as a psychotherapist and a priest, and it really works well together. I have worked with a lot of schizophrenics, bipolar types, that sort of thing."

At Blanton-Peale, Lew met his wife, Thea. She is originally from Germany, but since her mother was one-quarter Jewish, the family thought it best to leave when Hitler took power. At first, they emigrated to Turkey, eventually making their way to the United States. Thea is also a psychotherapist. She and Lew share an office, but have separate clienteles.

Lew and Thea have a son, Peter, who is 13. These days, they are engaged in the worrisome process of helping him qualify for one of the elite New York City high schools. Peter is an accomplished musician, and is also applying at the High School for Performing Arts.

For the future, Lew says, "I am thinking of working until about age 66 and then cutting back. I'd like to take some art classes. I'm good at drawing, and I'd really like to learn how to paint, and do that in my old age."

Lew Johnson's appointment with the Church of the Good Shepherd is half time, complementing the time he spends at his Upper West Side office, offering counseling for individuals and couples.

Lew says he has greatly enjoyed his work with the congregation on Roosevelt Island. He was asked by the Diocese of New York to do conflict resolution with other Episcopal parishes, and says he knows other churches very well. "The congregation here is the most welcoming church I've ever worked with. It's the nicest little church that I've ever worked in. It's a great group of people. They are congenial and very faithful, a very believing community."

The Johnsons live in the Bronx and like the quiet of Roosevelt Island and its green spaces. "I like the spirit here. Although the church is sponsored by the Episcopal Church, it's not an Episcopal congregation. We have Baptists, Lutherans, Pentacostals, what-have-you. and I love that. When we have a candlelight service, there are Jews and Catholics who attend. Everybody comes to our coffee hour after services on Sunday."

Lew is appreciative of the quality of life on Roosevelt Island and the wonderful views of Manhattan from many of the apartments, but he and Thea would not consider moving to Roosevelt Island, as they are content with their apartment in Bronx. With a laugh, he says, "We are in the Knightsbridge section, fairly high up, so we have a lovely view of the Bronx."

Gundula’s piece

From the Neighborhood to Distant Continents
These Islanders have Their Clients Everywhere

by Gundula Schmidt-Graute Nicholas Guan

Nineteen-year-old Nicholas Guan is the youngest entrepreneur interviewed for this article and he may be the youngest on Roosevelt Island. After finishing high school and before starting his studies in computer science at Manhattan Community College this spring, he is working at multiple freelance jobs.

“I had my first Mac at the age of five, and I’ve always wanted to know how computers work,” he says. He recalls taking computers apart to look inside them, then making his own out of spare parts. As he tried to solve computer problems for himself, it occurred to him that he could also help others.

In addition to posting ads on Island kiosks, he relies on word of mouth. “People call me and explain the problem. Before charging, I give them a free diagnostic to see if I can solve their problem.”

Nicholas also teaches people to use computers or specific software – “from simple to sophisticated,” as he puts it. He represents the world of the “digital natives” – born and raised in the world of computers and the internet – as opposed to the older generations of “digital immigrants” who sometimes struggle to follow.

But computers are not the only way Nicholas makes money. He turned another passion of his into a business, this time rather low-tech. He says he loves dogs and knows how to handle them even if they are difficult, so he works as a dog-walker. “I started walking a friend’s dog here, and then other people asked me if I could do it for their dogs, too.” These days he walks five dogs, from a teacup-Yorkie to a German Shepherd. Interested in canine behavior, he educates himself by reading and following TV shows on the topic.

Nicholas spent his infancy on Roosevelt Island. His parents’ separation took him to Michigan and California. Four years ago, he returned to New York to live with his father. Here, helping with his father’s business was one reason not to start college right after high school. His father is a dance and fight choreographer on Broadway, and Nicholas helps him with videos and other technological aspects of this work.

Mark Chipman

Like any good bookkeeper, Mark Chipman prizes accuracy. He is meticulous in explaining his profession, keeping books for small businesses and charities. Until 2000, though, he worked as a retail-store manager. “I didn’t want to go on working six days out of seven,” he says. He quit in 2000.

To qualify for his new career, he took classes at a trade school and at the company providing the software he uses for his work. His clients need qualified bookkeeping, but can’t afford and don’t need a full-time bookkeeper. He serves institutions on Roosevelt Island such as the Historical Society and the Senior Center, as well as clients in Manhattan and out of state. Usually he works on his client’s premises, but sometimes it’s all online.

Depending on the size of his client’s business or charity, Mark works on a monthly or quarterly basis. He also does the tax filing for the charities applying for non-profit status. “A good bookkeeper saves time and money for both: his client and the CPA (certified public accountant) who does the audit,” he explains. Another part of his work is helping – small business owners or non-profit executives who thought they could do their own bookkeeping but found they couldn’t. “They procrastinate and I clean up,” he says, hinting that it’s a good idea to employ a bookkeeper from the start.

To make his services affordable, he charges a flat fee. His wife, Lynn Chambers, has a steady job in Manhattan, so he can afford to have small clients.

Lynn’s work is the reason that the couple moved to Roosevelt Island, in 1993. She did some work for RIOC and the couple liked it here. Mark was also involved in the community as vice president of the Residents Association from 2004 to 2006, after an earlier four years on its Common Council.

Richard Babat

“I worked on Wall Street for 30 years. But I liked it only for the money,” says Richard Babat, a carpenter and contractor on Roosevelt Island. After his employer, a Japanese investment bank, went out of business in 2000, he left with a large separation package. And he decided to turn his hobby, carpentry, into a second career. He recalls building model airplanes from scratch as a young boy, and later doing all the carpentry work in his own Westchester County house.

He returned to Roosevelt Island last fall to find the Island safer than when he left. “Cars would be broken into, at Motorgate, on a regular basis,” he remembers, “but I liked it here anyway.”

He offers services like installing kitchen and other cabinets, doors, and windows, framing, wall boarding, restoring floors, and remodeling bathrooms. Occasionally, he works on older houses, which he says is particularly challenging. “It is hard to match old stuff with new stuff. The lumber dimensions differ, and sometimes I have to make my own materials,” he explains.

Turning a hobby into a breadwinning profession is not easy, and he took his time to learn and to become more experienced. For two years, he worked as a handyman for

other contractors. He learned a lot about not only the technical and practical aspects, but also the financial considerations – how to write estimates that make sense, and how to handle the billing.

“The first eight years were pretty good,” he says. “But since October 2008, nobody seems to spend any money.” Most of his clients are in Westchester County, where he established his business and where more wealthy people live in houses they own, but he now has some clients in New York City. “Actually, it’s much harder working in the city than in the suburbs,” he explains. “First of all, where do you park your car? I’ve already gotten tickets! Having finally found a place, there is the schlep of the material. And they are picky in these condominiums: the times you are allowed to work, the insurance...”

Richard Babat works alone. Even in boom times, he never considered enlarging his business and hiring people. “The work I hated most in my former life at Wall Street was hiring and firing people!” He chose carpentry because he likes the craft. Only when it comes to demolition work might he hire handymen on a short-term basis. In order to be able to offer a whole range of services to his clients, he relies on a network of licensed plumbers and electricians.

Francisco Bozzano-Barnes

Francisco Bozzano-Barnes, who answers to the nickname “Paco,” looks back on a long career in two different fields that he has managed to relate. He is an interpreter of Spanish and an environmental economist. His colorful life led him from his native Spain to Canada and back to Madrid with assignments in Latin American countries such as Mexico and El Salvador.

“My business started in the 1980s in Canada. I worked on settlement patterns, organic agriculture, energy, green cities, and sustainable development.” He did research, published, lectured, organized conferences and wrote papers.

He also interpreted in related fields. When he moved back to his native Spain in 2003, he continued his consultancy and interpretation work.

After five years in Spain, the family now lives in New York. Paco decided to start a company to market his knowledge. In summer 2009, he officially founded Tenure & Ecology, LLC, with headquarters on Roosevelt Island. He offers research, organization of events like seminars, workshops and panel discussions, and interpretation and translation services. The target clientele is international public and private organizations and companies, involved in international transactions or working with linguistic minorities in the U.S. and nongovernmental organizations.

When he talks about his work, he becomes involved and passionate. For him, his new company isn’t only a means to earn money. He wants to be part of the solutions for the problems made evident by the current economic crisis. “All the institutions must change their attitude,” he asserts. “A holistic, sustainable approach to the economy is smart from a business point of view, not only for the sake of nature itself.” He insists that this new approach requires the participation of citizens and communities.

Is it different to do this kind of business in New York, compared to Toronto, Montreal, or Madrid? He says it is. “The business culture is more risk-oriented and dynamic, which helps innovative business ventures like mine. On the other hand, it is very competitive. You always have to be on the top. That makes it different to cooperate.” He also appreciates the international orientation of the city, its dense international networks, and the fact that New York is the site of the United Nations. In June, he helped organize a panel discussion on urban ecology and land tenure, a side-event of the United Nations Conference on the World Financial and Economic Crisis and its Impact on Development.

Asked if he is the typical “urban green” who only works on paper and at the computer screen, he responds, “I think you should also walk the talk.” To do so, he was part of a group that created the community garden at The Octagon. The members of this group plant and harvest organic vegetables and compost the waste. In November, he also organized a meeting on transportation improvements with different stakeholders from Roosevelt Island.

Adib Mansour

“I don’t live to follow templates.” This statement is Adib Mansour’s motto.

He is a small-boned, agile man who sports a distinctive blue goatee. He was born and raised in Lebanon, and earned a degree in advertising from the American University of Beirut. In 1983, he studied communications at Boston University, then worked in advertising and public relations before starting his own business in 1993.

The company is Bluebeard Creative, an advertising agency with clients and co-workers worldwide. Its headquarters is the dining table of the Mansours’ apartment at 575 Main Street. There, the family cat occasionally checks the design work on the screen of his laptop. Adib creates brochures and websites, packages, and slide-shows for clients in the United States, Europe, and Asia. His laptop, his smartphone, and his ideas are all he needs to run his business with freelancers in places as distant as San Francisco or Spain. “I have the privilege not to have overhead,” he says, smiling, visibly pleased to be able to focus on his work as a photographer and designer. When he shows a package that he designed for frozen pizza made exclusively of organic ingredients, or a series of website photographs that depict a caterer shopping at the Union Square Greenmarket, you can almost taste the food, and realize that the designer enjoys the culinary arts, too.

“I think I’m successful because I have done a lot of work in photography and related fields,” Adib says. His résumé includes having been vice president of an advertising agency and a job with the third-largest stock photography company. That company operated worldwide in 29 different languages, and was later bought by a larger company. That’s when Abib started his own agency.

Why the blue beard? Adib tells the following story: During a trip to northeastern Italy in the area surrounding Venice, he had an afternoon off. He had his beard colored “just for fun.” Then, “So many people invited me that evening, I was drunk and full.” After the decision for his own agency was made, all he needed was a company name and a logo, so he tied it in with his impulse in Italy. “My first client was the owner of an Italian Restaurant in New York. He told me later that he gave me the job because I was the only one to have the grit to wear my logo on my face.”

And what brought him to Roosevelt Island? He explains that when he and his wife, Kristen, decided to start a family, they opted for Roosevelt Island because they like the international and integrated community here. They consider it good for their children. He’s a dedicated baseball- and soccer-dad who appreciates the sense of community on the Island. “In 2007, during a vacation to see my family in Lebanon, we got stuck in the war between Israel and the Hezbollah. We managed to leave the country, and I was among those speaking to the press at the airport. When we finally arrived home, our neighbors had put up *Welcome* signs and done the grocery shopping for us,” he remembers.