

The Main Street **WIRE**

Saturday,
February 22, 2014
34:11





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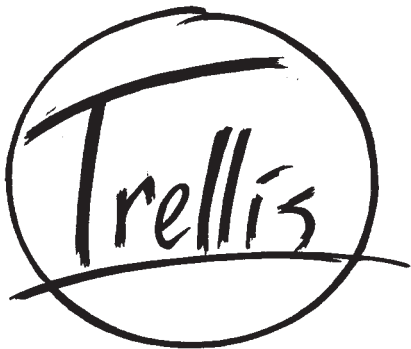
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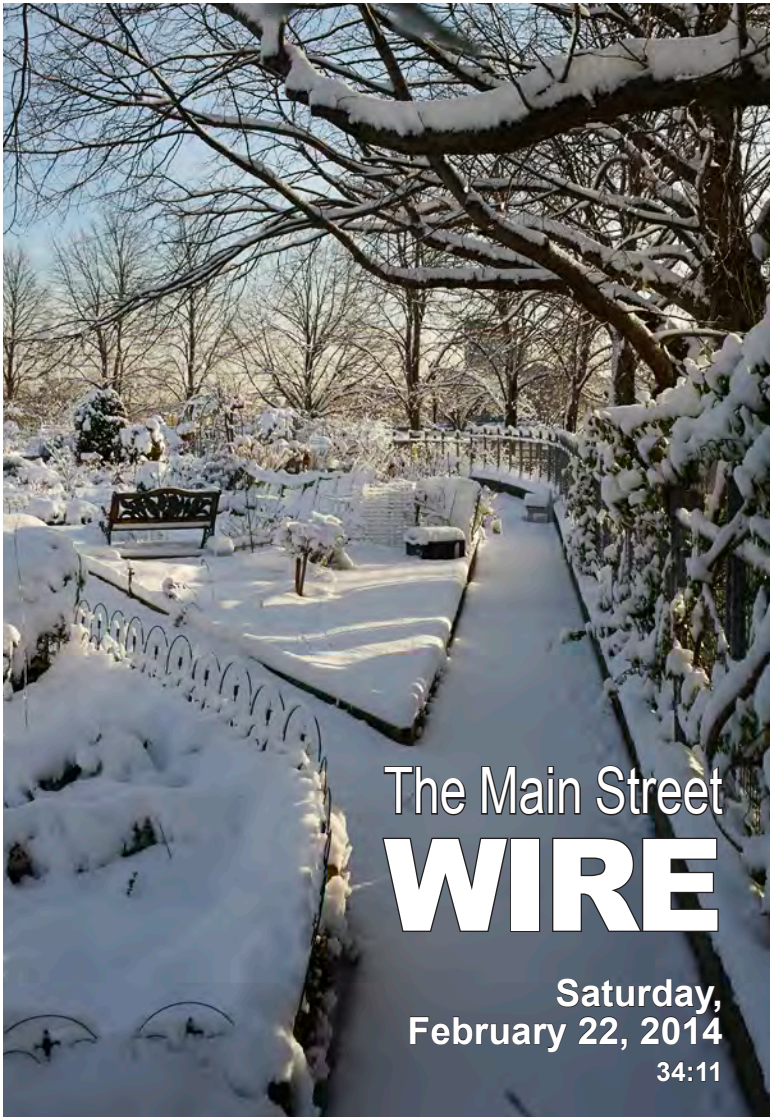
The Longest February

unless you happen to be nine years old, have sliding equipment or snowshoes, and don't mind the accumulations of that %\$@#*^ white stuff. Could we please have 2012 back? Well, no matter. Come on in to Trellis for a warm break, hot food, and good company.

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The Main Street WIRE

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The Island's Community Gardens rest in quiet beauty through a rough winter, awaiting the warmth of a spring sun.

Photo: Kurt Wittman

John Sheehan, an Early RIRA President, Recalls Battles for Its Recognition by New York State

by Briana Warsing

If you ride the Tram, you should thank John Sheehan.

While president of the Roosevelt Island Residents Association (RIRA) for one term in 1980-81, he led two fights to save the Tram. Now, this Island pioneer and his wife, Marge, enjoy a (somewhat warmer) Hawaiian winter while recounting those days via *FaceTime*.

"This is the way my presidency started," recalls Sheehan, "The Tram shut down for a scheduled maintenance. Several days into the repair, I was at my office and I got a call that the Tram had fallen down. I ran up-town [he worked at Random House on 50th Street and 3rd Avenue] and, in fact, the Tram had *not* fallen down, but the haul rope — one of the cables that pulls it back and forth — had dropped down onto 60th Street between First and Second Avenues, which was horrible. Thank God nobody was hurt. I immediately started calling UDC [the Urban Development Corporation, RIOC's predecessor] to find out what they were going to do, how this was going to be resolved, and people started calling me. It was non-stop. *What are you going to do? What's happening with the Tram?*"

During Sheehan's term in office, there was no Roosevelt Island Operation Corporation (RIOC). Roosevelt Island was run directly by UDC, a quasi-state agency. UDC

had no office on the Island. There was no subway; public transportation at the time consisted of the Tram, which Sheehan says was filled to its "125-person capacity" every morning.

Sheehan says UDC was not responsive to the Island community. Regarding the "scheduled maintenance" that went awry, Sheehan notes, "We tried to dissuade them [UDC] from doing it in the winter. But they wouldn't hear of delaying it. And they were providing only minimal bus service, which was inadequate from the very beginning.

"You had people jamming on to the Queens buses to get to Queens Plaza and they were pissing off all of the people in Queens who were the regular riders on those buses but could no longer get on them. We turned one of the mini-buses into a school bus so we could get the kids over, and adults took turns riding those buses as chaperones, coming and going. *And* it was a winter like this one, which was horrific — storm after storm, temperatures very bad. People were furious from the very beginning.

"And we had no way to communicate with people except landline telephone calls and big meetings in the church."

Sheehan muses, "These meetings were really very, very tough. There were very unhappy people. We didn't know when we would get

Booming Parents Network Passes 300-Family Mark

by Briana Warsing

Island parents wanting recommendations on the best books for toddlers, tips on potty-training, or even which sunscreen is best for babies, agree that the Roosevelt Island Parents' Network (RIPN), which recently passed 300 member families, is an indispensable Island resource.

RIPN is organized as a Google Group, which allows people with common interests to share information and expertise in a loose organization, while also creating a sense of community. Users participate in threaded conversations by email. RIPN member Nechama Duchman explains that participants can follow emails "as [they] come or [receive] one bulk email at the end of the day," making the process simple and convenient.

Of the coordinator of RIPN, Eva Bosbach, Roosevelt Island Explorers' Leila Vujosevic says, "Eva's commitment, transparency, honesty, and selfless care for Roosevelt Island's children and their families has created this following of parents who are now comfortable sharing/asking for a variety of things. The group maintains a level of trust not easy to achieve, which is essential for elevating the

Network into something else."

Of the network, Bosbach explains, "When you have a question, you can get a number of responses very quickly." Member Sabyrna Bejaoui affirms this. "The Google group is the best way for me to communicate. Indeed, I am connected to the internet 24/7 with my phone, so I receive all the communications. I have noticed people's reactivity is amazing. We get answers pretty quickly. I think this method of communication is the best because it doesn't matter where you are, you can always ask any question."

Issues percolating within the group these days are swimming lessons at the Sportspark, the Tram elevator, the Tram gate, creating a Family Guide for Roosevelt Island parents, and the new playground. As part of the Parents for Parents workshop series, Main Streets Sweets and RIPN co-hosted two panel discussions informing parents about kindergarten options.

Bosbach emphasizes the real-time impact of the group, as it relates to informing members when both elevators of the Tram are out of service, and providing timely updates on sudden Island incidents like the recent water main break. RIPN Member Moriko Motegi shares her experience, "When Sandy hit us and we experienced a six-day blackout in The Octagon,

the network emails were the first and most reliable source as to what was happening. They were much more reliable and quicker than the updates from our management office."

According to Bosbach, the most



Parents' Network
Coordinator
Eva Bosbach and
daughter Theresa

important resource the RIPN provides is a free information exchange platform for all member families. Member Sonal Bhatia says, "I am a working mom and away from the Island during the day, so knowing things as they occur makes me feel that someone is watching out for all of us."

Member Heart Sugimaya says, "I receive a lot of useful information. I know when the Tram elevator is broken, who is hosting a playroom share, where there are discounted or free children's classes, where to take passport pictures, and new developments for kids on the Island. Because of this group, I know a lot about the Island. Before I joined

See **Parents**, page 11

Longtime Islander Joyce Keating Memorializes a Sister and Her Famous Husband in a Book

by Jim Baehler

"If you can get through it, it will make you stronger." The *it* Joyce Keating refers to is personal tragedy, of which she has had an abundance. Joyce, a long-time Island resident, tells her tale in *Denholm's Wife*, the book she published about the marriage between her sister, Susan, and Denholm Elliott, the noted British actor.

The tale begins with the family of Ted Robinson, Jr., which included Peter, the oldest, Polly, Susan and Mark (twins), and Joyce, the youngest. It was a writing family, starting with a grandfather who wrote a column, *Philosopher of Folly*, for the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*. The father, Ted, was general editor of *Newsweek* until his death in 1966. Peter worked as a writer and reporter. Joyce studied creative writing at Georgetown University, and edited several theatre newspapers and newsletters in Washington, D.C.

The family's tragedies began when, at age 56, Ted Robinson leaped to his death from a 26th-story window in Manhattan. Unknown to his *Newsweek* co-workers, he had been a functioning paranoid schizophrenic for many years, sustained by antipsychotic medications.

The story of Susan and Denholm Elliott began when Susan was 19 years old and working in New York as a singing waitress in a play titled *Write Me a Murder*. Denholm was 20 years older than she, but was immediately attracted to her because of her outgoing, vivacious personality. Joyce says, "Denholm was extremely self-conscious and introverted when he wasn't on stage. At a social affair, he would sit in the background and hardly speak. When Susan arrived and sat next to him, suddenly the room came alive. She simply took over, and Denholm was relieved of any pressure he might have



felt earlier. Wherever she went, Susan was the life of the party — and she turned every occasion *into* a party. It's what we all loved about Susan."

By the end of the play's run, Susan and Denholm were engaged. he had previously been married to British actress Patricia McKenna. Joyce recalls, "Denholm told Susan that, being 20 years older, he'd had many women in his life. Susan wasn't at all surprised, but then Denholm went on to say that he had also had lots of men. There was a silence and Denholm asked Susan if she was shocked. She said she wasn't, but years later she told me that it felt like she had been kicked in the stomach."

Susan and Denholm got married and began a life that

See **Keating**, page 6

The Editorial Page

Speedy RIOC

After all, it only took seven years and *change*, in multiple senses of that word.

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The Editorial Page

Make the Red Bus Free

There was a day when the Red Bus was free. The notion was that folks who live here should get a single-price complete transportation solution. Just as the subway system is a one-fare-fits-all system in which distance is irrelevant in pricing, the Red Bus was distance-neutral, its costs folded into the Tram budget. That changed when RIOC was looking to charge residents for anything and everything in an effort to make the Island “self-sufficient” well ahead of targets envisioned in the early planning for a residential development here, and started charging for the bus. The charge is responsible for more than out-of-pocket costs for riders. There’s delay, too. Passengers often fumble at the entrance, looking for coins. Money sometimes drops to the floor. Visitors are rarely prepared. With no charge, passengers could board and exit through both front and back doors, decreasing time spent loading and unloading. Back-door boarding would make better use of space and decrease the delays involved in getting passengers to move toward the rear. The Red Bus will never produce a profit. RIOC figures show it loses over a million dollars a year (\$400,000 assigned to administrative overhead). The revenue of \$300,000 is almost a throwaway in the RIOC budget. The WIRE believes that Octagon residents should have the same economics in accessing the Tram and subway as do Riverwalk residents. It’s all one Island. Like New Yorkers who ride free on the Staten Island Ferry as a way of making Staten Island equal among the boroughs of New York, Red Bus riders here should ride free as a way of making all the Island’s buildings transportation-equal. There’s still the time penalty for living at a distance from transit access; there’s no reason why there should also be a financial penalty. When then City Council Speaker Gifford Miller made the deals that made the Tram part of a *One City, One Fare* approach to transportation, the once-extra cost of a Tram ride was largely wiped out as a penalty charge for living on Roosevelt Island; transfers to subways and buses became free. That leaves the Red Bus fare as the one remaining cost penalty for opting to live here. RIOC should do away with that fare, the annoyance it represents, and the delay it causes, and speed Islanders on their way.

From *The RIOC Column*, this page (continuation on page 14):
Red Bus Fare Elimination

Frequent travelers on the Red Bus are encouraged that beginning April 1, the fare will be eliminated. Travelers are encouraged to use any remaining balances on their fare change cards before this date. If a balance remains on the card after the cutoff date, refunds will be available at the RIOC Bus Garage (680 Main Street) until April 30. If you have any questions, please call 212-832-4540 for more information.

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Editor & Publisher – Dick Lutz
Copy Editor – Ashton Barfield
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Proofreaders – Vicki Feinmel, Helke Taeger
Reporters – Jim Baehler, Judy Buck, Andrew Gordon, Alex Marshall, David Stone, Briana Warsing
Photographers – Maria Casotti, Mircea Nicolescu, Kurt Wittman
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Krystyn Donnelley and students of Legacy High School; and students from the PS/IS 217 Beacon Program

As many of you know, RIRA President Ellen Polivy announced at the February 5 Common Council meeting that she was stepping down for personal reasons. RIRA is an organization whose heart, soul, and success lie with those who choose, via the Common Council, to use what little time they have outside their personal and professional lives to represent and advocate for the interests of those who live on this tiny Island that we all share. Much respect and appreciation are due to Ms. Polivy, not only for her past service and her continued work on behalf of this community, but also for her insight in recognizing her need to step down. Because I was elected RIRA Vice President, in a contested race in November 2012, I am now tasked not only to carry out the duties and office of the president, but also to right this ship. I have no illusions about the place that the Common Council has put itself in since the inception of this two-year term. Once a place where a sense of community lived with a sense of purpose and relevance, it is now rudderless, and a place where personal politics and past conflicts are carried under the delusional flag that it is saving the Council from its members. Some would rather have such strife prevail over the work that it should be doing. As its new President, I am not one of them.

We Can Do Better
Each Common Council member has had a hand in

The RIRA Column

Many thanks to everyone who braved this crazy winter weather to join us at the Cornell Tech town hall meeting earlier this month. Despite the slush and bitter cold, more than 125 Islanders came out to hear the latest progress on campus construction and to take part in a great discussion. We were also honored to be joined by our new Council Member, Ben Kallos, and Deputy Borough President Aldrin Bonilla. This week’s column is devoted to recapping the town hall, but first, I would like to acknowledge and thank Ellen Polivy as she steps down from the Roosevelt Island Residents Association. For more than two years now, Ellen has been a constructive critic and tireless advocate for Islanders, helping us understand what is important to her neighbors. She has always acted in the best interests of the community, while working with us constructively and collaboratively to ensure that our campus will be an asset to the Island. We will miss Ellen in her role at RIRA, but are grateful that she will continue to be an active member of the Cornell Tech Construction and Community Task Force. The town hall meeting was held on February 5 and was co-hosted by the Construction and Community Task Force, which was instrumental in putting together

The Cornell Column

Snow and Stormy Weather
RIOC would like to extend its thanks to Roosevelt Island drivers for responding quickly to the snow emergency advisories and moving their cars off the streets. Your cooperation has helped us keep the streets clean and safe throughout the consecutive storms that have affected Roosevelt Island. We thank you for your patience and for your kind words of encouragement to our staff members on the streets during this exceptionally stormy winter. We would also like to recognize the hard work of our snow removal crew for dedicating over 1,100 man-hours to snow preparations and removal since mid-December. As a reminder, in the event of a snow emergency, free 24-hour parking is available for Roosevelt Island residents inside the Motorgate Parking Garage in non-reserved spaces. If you have any questions or difficulty finding a parking space, please contact the Garage at **212-832-4585** or the Public Safety Department at 212-832-4545. You may also visit Motorgate’s offices, located on the fourth floor of the garage.

Sportspark Website
Sportspark is aiming to make information about classes, programs, and facilities more easily accessible online. To that end, we are pleased to announce the

The RIOC Column

the dismal state that RIRA is currently in. However, each Council member also has the choice of either rebuilding what was lost or continuing on the path that has led the Council to its present state. For the sake of the Island and those who call it home, we can and must do better. Respect. Civility. Relevance. Community. These four pillars are what should and shall be the bedrock of the Council. As the direct conduit not only to RIOC but also to the City and State at large, it is time that the members come together to be the voice of the community, to do its work, and to function as a group to address Island issues in a setting where all are invited. Isn’t that what this little ship in the middle of the East River has always been about? Eight months and six regular meetings remain in the current Council term. As I have indicated before and reiterate now, it will be up to the members who choose to remain how much, or how little, will

See RIRA Column, page 10



Jeffrey Escobar, President
Roosevelt Island Residents Association
president@riraonline.com

what proved to be a very productive and engaging agenda for the meeting. The task force is a critically important group, providing advice for our team, a forum for keeping the community updated, and a group of knowledgeable citizens to raise questions in real time. Our team made three presentations at the meeting. The first was given by Andrew Winters, Cornell Tech’s Director of Capital Projects and Planning. Andrew is overseeing the campus construction, and he gave a broad overview of the project phasing, timeline, and design, noting the arrival of the first barge on January 21. He reminded everyone that we are committed to using barges for all aspects of the demolition and abatement phase, which is scheduled to go for almost a year. He also described the fencing around the site and the need to close the eastern roadway and promenade

See Cornell Column, page 12



Cathy Dove, Vice President
Cornell NYC Tech
cathy.dove@cornell.edu

debut of our new parks and recreation website. Starting today, Sportspark patrons will be able to view a calendar of programs and available classes, register, pay for some classes, manage and update contact information, and access important forms and information. Online registration is currently available only for the upcoming session of Mommy & Me water safety classes. If you would like to try out the new site, you can visit rioc.recdesk.com. We encourage you to try out the new site and let us know what you think. You can report any questions, comments, or issues you have to eddie.perez@rioc.ny.gov. We look forward to receiving feedback from the community as we improve this new interface.

Sportspark Pool Repair
On February 14, a mechanical malfunction at the Sportspark pool required the temporary closure of the

See RIOC Column, page 14



Charlene Indelicato, President
Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation
charlene.indelicato@rioc.ny.gov

The WIRE publishes *The RIOC Column*, *The RIRA Column*, and *The Cornell Column* as a service to RIOC, RIRA, Cornell, and the community, and does not control or censor them.

Letters

To the Editor:

Ever since Ellen Polivy moved to Roosevelt Island, she has given great effort and time for the good of our community. We are fortunate to have her among us. Even though she resigned from RIRA for personal reasons, her plate is still filled with other projects for the good of this Island. For all the good that RIRA does, it has in it a group of deadbeats (the do-nothings) who complain, criticize, and interrupt at Common Council meetings. I have a feeling that this deadbeat group was happy to see Ms. Polivy resign. Such a sad situation.

Don Semenza

To the Editor:

With warmer weather hopefully returning soon, many families are looking forward to using the playgrounds again. In the October 12 *WIRE*, we asked RIOC to *Please inform us about plans for the old [removed Southtown] tot lot structure and possibly let us use it for the younger children...* We are very happy to hear that RIOC plans to follow our suggestion and re-install the original tot lot structure in the spring. While awaiting details on timing and location (we suggested the former Westview playground space – walled, empty, and with a lot of stroller parking space – or the Island House courtyard), we would like to thank RIOC for this plan. Once realized, the new-old playground will be much appreciated by many parents and toddlers on the Island. Thank you, RIOC!

We are still waiting for a follow-up from RIOC and Hudson/Related on other suggestions we made with regard to the new Blackwell Park playground.

The most pressing issue with the new playground is that the main structure is currently not officially designated for toddlers, despite the goal to provide a replacement for the previous toddler playground. To many parents, the higher platforms of the main structure seem not safe for toddlers. Furthermore, the age-group label posted does not match the specifications we got from Hudson/Related in regard to the intended age group. The equipment on the main structure is designed for 2-to-9-year-olds, but the label permits 5-to-12-year-olds to use it.

Sara Willard from Hudson/Related stated previously that the intended target group of the entire playground is “6 months to 8/9 years old,” and specifically for the main structure that “there are several other features that are appropriate for the ages of 2-5 years.” Sara sent us technical information on exactly which parts of the main structure are designed and suitable for toddlers – but toddlers are currently not officially allowed to use those, according to the label posted on it.

The label should match the equipment it is posted on, and the intended age group. This is important in order to allow children younger than 5 years to officially use it, and to prevent liability problems if they do use it and something happens, as well as to give caregivers the possibility to refer to the signs in cases of older children using the playground and posing a safety risk to younger ones.

We appreciate that, after our exchange about the safety issue with Hudson/Related in October, a replacement (closed) play apparatus for the upper platform of the main structure has been selected and should be installed before spring. We hope this will make the large structure safer for toddlers once they are hopefully officially permitted to use it with the new label.

We also thank RIOC and Hudson/Related for the new sign at the main entrance stating that *This playground is for children under 50 inches in height*. We believe this will help with keeping some of the too-old children from the playground, but suggest a measuring bar to be added for caregivers to be able to refer to, instead of having to carry a measuring device with them.

Other suggestions we made included: adding more baby swings and/or converting at least one of the other swings in the new playground to baby swings (right now, there is exactly one baby swing on the whole Island); putting a *Please keep this door closed at all times* sign on the main gate; creating a visual barrier like a black stripe on the floor surface (which will not conflict with the intended fall zones) to separate the lower equipment for babies and toddlers from the main structure; installing an emergency call box close by; and considering public bathrooms as part of the renovated Blackwell Park.

We would be very thankful if these suggestions could be followed up by RIOC and Hudson/Related before families start using the playgrounds more frequently in the spring. Thanks to both for all their efforts!

Eva Bosbach
RI Parents' Network
RIRA Island Services Committee

To the Editor:

Thank you for pointing out Roosevelt Island’s 911 service difficulties. I have been aware of this problem and it concerns me deeply, as it affects the safety of everyone living and working on Roosevelt Island.

We have reached out to the company that currently holds the 911 system upgrade contract, and have requested data from the Mayor’s Office of Operations detailing ambulance service performance to Roosevelt Island.

I plan to work with Intergraph, Public Safety, and City agencies to improve emergency services, because no resident should have to worry that services will not reach them in time or will be unable to locate them.

Finally, I want all members of Roosevelt Island’s community to know that I am here to help and will always be accessible. Debbie, my Director of Constituent Services, is planning constituent hours on Roosevelt Island for the first Tuesday of the month, to begin shortly, and looks forward to meeting many of you. In the meantime, please call **212-860-1950** or email info@benkallos.com with any needs.

Ben Kallos
Member of City Council

Additional Letters on page 10

To Eva Bosbach:

Eva, thanks for your involvement and keeping us in the loop. I deeply think and feel that before any decisions are made in the name of the parents of the Island (and especially my family), these suggestions and agreements should come from the majority of the parents in this Google Group.

The history of the tot lot clearly shows that it has always been intended for pre-school kids, meaning ages 4-5 and under.

I disagree with the statement, “To many parents, the higher platforms of the main structure *seem* not safe for toddlers.” The truth is that those spots *are* dangerous. Many agree on this. We barely reach the top structure. You offered to help, but you are very tall, and the average height of the majority of the population is 5.5 feet. So it is a *fact* that the structure is dangerous due to fall risks. A child could fall from a height of 6.5 feet. With or without labels, the apparatus will never be safe for toddlers. The manufacturer could be sued if the labels are changed by RIOC and there’s an accident. What is needed is to restrict the playground to children under five.

I don’t want to thank RIOC, as you do, for officially designating that playground for children 2-9. According to the tables of the New York City Health Department, a six-year-old at the 100th percentile will be 50 inches. I certainly don’t want my two-year-old being pushed and scared by a bunch of 5-to-9-year-olds playing too rough for a toddler.

Children will not obey a black stripe on the ground, nor will they stop playing while babies are enjoying the sunshine or trying to cruise in the silly equipment next to the main structure. This idea was developed due to the failure of Hudson (and the laziness of RIOC) to have two completely separate areas for babies/toddlers and older kids. This playground should be for five years and younger.

I am sorry if this sounds too rough to you and any other parent. I have two girls. One is two, the other two months. My focus is to protect their well-being. And you, Eva, are about to give birth to a healthy, handsome boy in a few days. Have you thought about him trying to “play” in that playground while eight-year-olds are running around playing tag and while you are keeping an eye on Theresa? Wouldn’t you prefer to have some peace like we used to have in the previous tot lot, but improved? I would.

And the sign for stoller parking is ridiculous. In that spot, it is difficult to park a stroller because the land slopes. And families with several kids, like mine with a newborn and a toddler, can’t leave the babies unattended outside a gated playground, parked on a hill. I will definitely bring the stroller inside the playground, where I can watch both my kids. That’s just my situation. It applies to several families.

My suggestions are simple. Change the equipment to be suitable for toddlers to age four or five, and put a parking area for strollers with babies inside. Let’s get the previous tot lot a home near Blackwell House, where it has been for the last 33 years. Let’s gather the opinions of the families that have children in the range of babies/toddlers before suggesting something to RIOC.

Hudson saw an opportunity and took it when RIOC lost its president, and we ended up with a cheap, dangerous structure intended for school-age children rather than a playground with equipment for babies/toddlers.

Susy del Campo Perea

Add your comments at MainStreetWIRE.com

COMING UP

— This Weekend —

No direct F train service to Manhattan, Fri Feb 21 11:15pm to Mon Feb 24 5am.

Islander Roy Eaton plays a recital of Bach, Chopin, Gershwin, Still, Joplin, and Evans, **Sat Feb 22** 1pm, St. Peter’s Church, 54th and Lexington.

No direct F train service to Manhattan, Fri Feb 28 11:15pm to Mon Mar 3 5am.

Snapshots, exhibit of photos by Mircea Nicolescu, closes **Sun Mar 2**. Gallery hours 9am-9pm daily.

The Melanite Visions, second annual **Black History Month** art exhibit, closes **Sun Mar 2**, Gallery RIVAA, 527 Main St. Gallery hours **Sat-Sun** 11am-5pm, **Tue & Thu** 1-5pm, **Wed & Fri** 6-9pm. **Opening reception Sat Feb 8** 6-9pm; closes **Sun March 2**.

— Regularly Scheduled Events & Meetings—

See separate listing, page 10.

— The Next Two Weeks —

Town Hall meeting – Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus R. Vance, Jr., with State Senator Jose Serrano and Assemblymember Micah Kellner, **Mon Feb 24** 6-7pm, Good Shepherd Center.

Bridge Closures for testing, **Tue Feb 25** 10am-2pm, each 15 minutes, after which traffic queues will be allowed to clear.

African-Americans and the New Deal, a program in the *History Uncorked: Think & Drink* series, **Tue Feb 25** 4:30-6:30pm, New-York Historical Society, 170 Central Park West (76th/77th), co-sponsored by Roosevelt Island Historical Society and the Four Freedoms Park Conservancy. Panel includes Ambassador William J. vanden Heuvel and historians. \$20 (\$15 for members). Register at nyhistory.org/ednet.

RI Women’s Health Organization meets, **Wed Feb 26** 6:30pm, 546 Main St., 12th floor community room. Caitlin Goodspeed of BikeNY on biking’s benefits; Andy Reddick on chakras’ healing effects.

Mortgage Seminar, **Wed Feb 26** 7pm, Amalgamated Bank, 619 Main St. Info: 212-413-8775 or albertsalas@amalgamatedbank.com.

Public Safety Community Meeting with Public Safety Director Jack McManus, rescheduled from **Wed Feb 26** to **Wed Mar 12** (see below).

Informal Community Meeting with RIRA President Jeff Escobar and members of the RIRA Common Council, **Thu Feb 27** 7:30pm, Octagon TV Room, 888 Main St. (See *RIRA Column*, page 4, and continuation on page 10.)

First Sunday Jazz Salon, **Sun Mar 2** 5-7pm, Gallery RIVAA. \$5 donation; refreshments.

Community Board 8 Roosevelt Island Committee meeting, **Mon Mar 3** 6:30pm, 546 Main St. MTA update on Q102; Cornell presents design of its residential building.

Tramway shuts down early for maintenance work, **Tue Mar 4**, 10pm.

Roosevelt Island Residents Association Common Council meets, **Wed Mar 5** 8pm, Good Shepherd Center. Public session at beginning for brief resident/guest comments/announcements.

The Main Street WIRE– **Sat Mar 8**. **Advertising deadlines:** Display ads, **Wed Feb 26**; decision date for circulars/inserts, **Tue Mar 4**; 5,500 copies due **Thu Mar 20**.

There is no charge to list Island-related events in ComingUp. Email information to MainStreetWIRE@usa.net or leave it at the lobby desk at 531 Main Street, addressed to *The WIRE*.

Future issues: Mar 22; Apr 5, 26; May 10, 24; Jun 7, 21; Jul date to be determined; Aug 30; Sep 13, 27; Oct 11, 25; Nov 8, 22; Dec 13. **2015:** Every 2 weeks starting Sat Jan 10. **News phone, 212-826-9056; urgent matters, 917-617-0449.** Email press releases or feature-story suggestions to MainStreetWIRE@usa.net. **Advertising** (display & classified): **917-587-3278**.

— Future Weeks —

Public Safety Community Meeting with Public Safety Director Jack McManus, **Wed Mar 12** 7pm, Westview lower community room, 695 Main St., sponsored by the Public Safety Committee of the Roosevelt Island Residents Association. Open discussion; public and merchants welcome.

Book Discussion, *And the Mountains Echoed* by Khaled Hosseini, **Thu Mar 20** 6:30-8pm, Library.

Former Mayor David Dinkins signs copies of his new book, **Sat Mar 29** 12:30pm, Roosevelt Island Racquet Club. Open to the public.

Book Discussion, *The Silver Linings Playbook* by Matthew Quick, **Thu Apr 17** 6:30-8pm, Library.

Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney’s Spring Gala, **Thu Apr 24** time TBA. Campaign fundraiser. Champagne and conversation at the Water Club. Info: 212-531-2858 or darren@dynamicsg.com.

Cornell Construction & Community Task Force meeting, **Wed Mon Apr 28** 6-8pm, 12th floor meeting room, 546 Main St.

Pre-Mothers Day Fundraiser Spa Day, Sun May 4, sponsored by Women’s Health Organization. More info to come.

Book Discussion, *Proof of Heaven* by Eben Alexander, **Thu May 15** 6:30-8pm, Library.

Letters deadline for Mar. 8 issue: Tues., March 4, 5:00 p.m.

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 email text (or as an attached MS-Word or WordPerfect file) to MainStreetWIRE@usa.net or on a disk left at the lobby desk at 531 Main Street, addressed to *The WIRE*. If you email, expect a confirming response; if you receive none, resend and call 212-826-9056 to alert us. 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, in the judgment of the editors, merits the required space.

Keating, from page 3
involved much travel between London and New York. For her part, Joyce moved from Washington, D.C., to Manhattan, and took a job as the office manager for a toy company with headquarters in the Toy Building at Fifth and 23rd.

“I worked there for 15 years and really enjoyed it. Then I was offered the position as manager of the showroom in the building, and I eagerly accepted. I loved making sure each company was displaying its toys to their best advantage, and dealing with the multitude of problems that had to be solved every day. Best of all, at the end of the season, I would take all the now out-of-date toys and distribute them to centers where they would be passed on to children for their enjoyment.”

Five years later, the building was sold and slated for demolition so a new, larger structure could be put on the site. Joyce had to find other employment. “I took a job with a public relations firm and I hated it. The people were wonderful but I just didn’t like the work. I told the owner that I would have to leave, and he offered me the opportunity to take over a literary agency that he owned but had allowed to fade almost out of existence. I accepted the job and began the task of reviving the agency. I found I loved the work and the contact with authors and publishers. I still work part-time for the agency but now I have my own firm, JRK Literary. I am not taking on any new clients as I want to focus more on my own writing.”

During this time, Joyce acquired a cat she named Leah, who provided much joy for many years. Eventually, old age overtook Leah, and Joyce knew she was near death. Joyce had an important meeting in her office and was reluctant to leave Leah. “I hugged her and told her I loved her, and left



for the office. When I arrived home, I found Leah dead, lying on the towel where I had placed her nine hours earlier. I could hardly breathe as I looked at the lifeless body that had given me so much joy the past 15 years. I was deeply ashamed that I had left her to die alone.”

While Joyce was making her way in the world, marrying, having two children, and divorcing, Susan and Denholm were living a life of fame and luxury. Denholm was in constant demand as an actor and earning a great deal of money. They built a home on Ibiza, off the coast of Spain, which is famous for its parties and nightlife. The house was on top of a hill with a fabulous view and two swimming pools, one for adults and the other for children.

The combination of Ibiza and Susan, a famous partygoer, was a potent mix. Joyce was a frequent visitor. She recalls one visit with a party in progress. “As the guests arrived, we were all introduced by first names alone. I recognized Terry Thomas, with the famous gap in his front teeth. I was slightly nervous meeting Susan’s and Denholm’s friends, but the atmosphere Susan created made it so much easier. Everyone knew the rule of *No Rules – come as you please, wear what feels comfortable, and if you want to go for a swim, no swimsuit is required.*”

Joyce lost some of her nervousness and began to circulate. “I spent some time on the sofa with Larry, a charming, very distinguished older man, quite good-looking with a shock of white silky hair. I felt more comfortable with him than with anyone else in the room. Nevertheless, I knew it was time for me to be circulating again. I needed a convenient way to break away from Larry, so I got up and said I was going to the bar for another drink. He held up his glass and I took it with mine to the bar. As I was preparing the two drinks, I reminded Susan that she had said Sir Laurence Olivier was expected. Susan gave me an odd look and told me I had been talking to him for the past half hour.”

Of her siblings, Joyce says, “There were two traits that the five of us shared. Number one was a sense of humor, which saved each of us from falling apart a time or two, and, number two, unfortunately, a love for alcohol. Polly died of a brain aneurysm, but if that didn’t get her first, her several liters of red wine each day would have. At age 13, Susan’s daughter

Jennifer was eager to help clean up after parties. What we didn’t know was that she was drinking all that was left in the glasses she was carrying to the kitchen. She became an alcoholic and, eventually, a heroin addict. While still a young woman, she hanged herself from a tree outside the house on Ibiza.”

Sometime later, Joyce had two other blows to deal with. Her brother Peter died of alcoholism and, one year later, Peter’s son, Joshua, died of cancer. Those deaths were a prologue to Denholm’s confession to Susan that he had contracted AIDS. For some years, Denholm and Susan had not had sexual relations, which spared her from having the disease transmitted by her spouse. Joyce recalls, “Denholm told me he had cancer and, for two years, Susan kept his secret. Eventually, the other members of the family were informed, but no hint of Denholm’s actual malady ever came out until his death.”

Susan had entered a nightmare period of watching Denholm gradually decline, with nothing she or the doctors could do. Denholm’s last performance was in a London production of *As Life In the Theatre*, but his understudy had to take over soon after the play opened. Denholm spent the next two months in and out of London hospitals.

“Denholm was determined not to die in a hospital. He insisted on returning to Ibiza and the house he loved. To avoid the media, he was smuggled out a side entrance to a waiting Rolls-Royce. From there he was driven to the airport where a private jet waited.”

Denholm Elliott died on October 2, 1992. “I received a call from Susan at 5:30 in the morning here in New York. She and their two children were with him at the end. Soon after his death, Susan formed an AIDS hospice in Ibiza where people with AIDS could enjoy a holiday with their families. The hospice was financed by 16 paying guests and staffed by volunteers. The project kept Susan focused and curbed her drinking, which had dramatically increased after Denholm’s death.”

Gradually, Susan’s drinking became more and more of a problem. The hospice closed when the owner of the property refused to renew the lease. She returned to London and, with the help of a writer, published *Denholm Elliott: Quest For Love*. After the book was published, Susan returned to Ibiza. “She was a big part of the party scene in Ibiza, returning to London only for business meetings. Her drinking spiraled out of control. She drove home one afternoon and went around the back of the car to retrieve a straw basket filled with items from the market. When she stepped back to close the door, she misjudged the space between the car and a five-foot drop from her driveway. She fell head first onto the rocks below. Three days later, she underwent surgery to remove a blood clot from her brain.”

Joyce flew to Ibiza to be with her sister and stayed in the hilltop house for the eight weeks it took for Susan to be well enough to come home. “In the hospital, she refused to obey the rule against smoking, and hid cigarettes in an overhead beam on the balcony outside her hospital room.” Susan returned to London and a physician she trusted.

“Dr. Unger told her that there was some permanent damage to her brain and that it was essential she lay off the booze. She did for perhaps seven or eight months, but then began drinking wine and champagne, claiming that wasn’t really drinking. She insisted she only had one glass of wine a day. Silly me, I believed her at first.”

Finally well enough to travel, Susan began making frequent trips to New York, where Joyce had a chance to observe her excessive drinking first hand. “On one flight to New York, Susan refused to put out her cigarette and got into an argument with a flight attendant and the pilot. He radioed ahead and Security was waiting as Susan got off the plane, planning to arrest her for violating airline rules. But she was so likeable, so friendly and wonderful, that they let her off with a warning. Susan treated the matter as a joke, but to me, it was an indication that she was no longer thinking rationally.”

Susan began telling lies to her friends and family, raising great concerns about her mental condition. An intervention was proposed but Joyce vetoed the idea, certain that such a confrontation would only make matters worse. A succession of falls began, the first of which put Susan in



Susan and Joyce



Joyce and Susan

the hospital with a broken hip. A lengthy recovery followed, then another fall resulted in another broken hip. After the second fall, it was five weeks before Susan was well enough to return home. Susan’s son Mark, and his wife Rosie, took over nursing duties. Mark, Rosie, and Joyce decided that Susan needed to be in a home that could provide all she needed on one floor. They found a suitable residence and, after some protests by Susan, moved her there. Mark and Rosie would be living only a few blocks away.

On the second day in the new residence, Susan got up from the toilet at 10:00 p.m. and fell awkwardly. Joyce helped her to her feet. “I called an ambulance and Susan was taken to the hospital. It was not until the next morning that the doctors were able to put her hip back in place.”

Susan returned home and Joyce returned to New York. A few days later, Joyce’s phone rang at four in the morning. Joyce leaped out of bed, knowing it had to be bad news. It was Susan’s son, Mark. He cried, “It’s Mum, Aunt Joyce, there’s been a fire. She was in bed, maybe smoking, I don’t know. She caught on fire, Aunt Joyce. My mum caught on fire!”

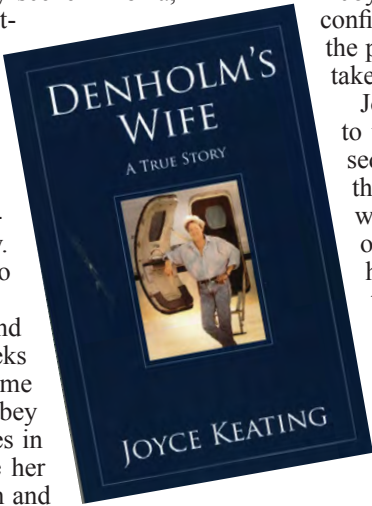
Joyce said, “She’s in the hospital, right?” Mark confirmed that Susan was in the hospital, but said the prognosis was not good. “I told them not to take her off life support until you got here.”

Joyce flew to London immediately and rushed to the hospital. Susan was comatose, heavily sedated with morphine. All anyone knew was that Susan had run screaming out of the house with her nightdress burned away and her skin on fire. A passerby put out the flames with his hands, sustaining severe burns as he did so. At the hospital, it was determined that there was nothing that could be done medically. The only question was when to withdraw the life support system that was keeping her alive. On April 6, 2007, Susan was removed from the equipment, and she died with her family around her.

Crushed with grief, Joyce returned to New York where Mike, her long-time companion, provided much-needed support. As a means of dealing with her grief, Joyce began writing an account of the sister she loved and who had brought so much joy to so many people. *Denholm’s Wife: A True Story* was published by Outskirts Press in 2012.

Today, Joyce has resumed her career as a literary agent and she shows no sign of the tragedies she has faced. She is upbeat, enthusiastic, and energetic, and one can see in her the qualities that made her sister Susan such a memorable person.

“If you can get through it, it will make you stronger.”



The Elliotts with Jack Lemmon



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John Sheehan is a Roosevelt Island pioneer and long-time resident, having lived here since 1976. He resides at 531 Main Street, and has served as president of the Roosevelt Island Residents Association. John has transacted over \$250 million in sales during a 30-year career as a real estate broker. Jimmy Brett, John's business partner, also has a 30-year career in real estate, successfully marketing, renting, and selling in New York City. Together, John and Jimmy bring more than 60 years of knowledge and experience to every transaction that they are involved in, and are backed by one of the best real estate companies in the city. Contact them for a free private consultation. Their service is just a phone call or email away.

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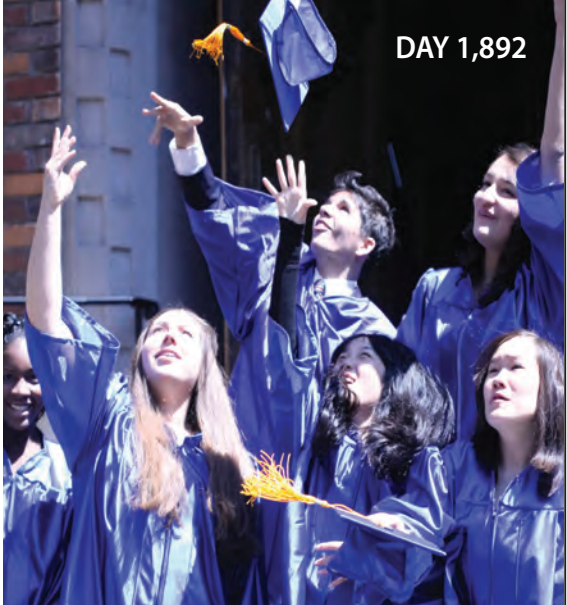


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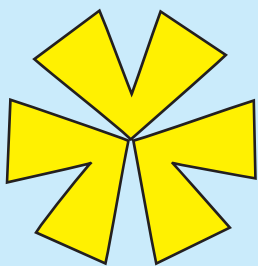
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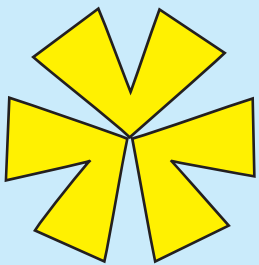
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COMING UP

A listing of repeating meetings & events
(See page 5 for events this weekend
and in coming weeks.)

— Continuing Events & Activities —
ART EXHIBITS

Snapshots, exhibit of photos by Mircea Nicolescu, closes **Sun Mar 2**.
Gallery hours 9am-9pm daily.

The Melanite Visions, second annual **Black History Month** art exhibit,
continues through **Sun Mar 2**, Gallery RIVAA, 527 Main St. Gallery
hours **Sat-Sun** 11am-5pm, **Tue & Thu** 1-5pm, **Wed & Fri** 6-9pm.

PARKS

Southpoint Park open **daily** 6am-10pm.

FDR Four Freedoms Park open **daily** (except Tue) 9am-5pm.

Lighthouse Park open **daily** 7am-9pm.

CLASSES (*alphabetical, then Sat-Fri*)

Art, taught by members of the Roosevelt Island Visual Art Association
(RIVAA), **Sat** 11am-2pm, Sportspark. Free

MUSIC

Jazz Salon, **1st Sun** (except Jul-Aug) 5-7pm, Gallery RIVAA, 527 Main
St. \$5 donation.

EXERCISE & SPORTS (*alphabetical*)

Basketball (all ages), **Sat** 2-5pm, Sportspark. Free.

Basketball (adults), **Mon-Thu** 8-10pm, PS/IS 217. Free.

Pilates with Karen, **Tue & Thu** 7:15pm; **Wed** 8:45am, 10am; **Fri** 9am,
10am; **Sat** 10am. Info 212-750-6223.

Ping Pong (all ages), **Tue Wed Fri** 6-9pm, Sportspark.

Sportspark extended hours (ages 16-25), **Fri-Sat** 9pm-midnight.

Swimming (all ages; no instructor) – **Sat-Sun** 12-3pm, **Mon-Fri** 6-10am,
Mon Wed Thu Fri 7:30-10:30pm.

(All **Sportspark swimming** \$5; free for disabled, seniors 60+, and ages 0-3.)

Swimming (18 yrs+) – **Sat-Sun** 4-7pm, **Tue** 7:30-10:30pm, Sportspark.

Swimming – Water Aerobics, **Mon** 12-1pm, **Wed & Fri** 9-10am, Sportspark.

Yoga (open-level), **Mon & Thu** 6:15-7:15pm, **Sat** 11:15am-12:15pm,
Sportspark. \$5. Mats available.

Yoga with Keren Messer, **Mon & Tue** 8-9pm. \$17; multi-session rates.
Location and other info: KerenMs@gmail.com or 212-614-9181.

Yoga with Jax Schott, **Wed** 7:30-8:40pm, Island Kids, 536 Main St. \$15.

Yoga (open-level) with Lauren Blankstein, **Thu** 7:30-8:30pm, PS/IS 217
Beacon. Free.

Zumba, **Mon** 6:30-7:30 & 7:30-8:30pm, **Thu** 8:30-9:30pm, **Sat** 10-11am,
Sportspark. \$5.

Zumba/Dance/Cardio, **Mon & Wed** 6:30-7:30pm, PS/IS 217. Free.

BIRTH THROUGH TODDLER (*listed Sat-Fri*)

Swimming classes (age 3-up), **Sat** 3-4pm, Sportspark. \$15 or \$100/10
weeks. Questions/registration, ryansherrill84@gmail.com or 917-261-2771.

Art for Kids with Connie Tanner (ages 3-8), last **Sun** of the month,
10-11:30am, Gallery RIVAA, 527 Main St. \$10 suggested donation;
materials supplied. No reservation required.

Baby & Toddler Swim classes (6-36 mo), **Sun** 11am & 11:30am (through
Mar 2), Sportspark. \$5. Info: eva.bosbach@amu.cz.

Baby Story Time (0-18 mo), **Mon** 10:30am, Library. Advance registra-
tion required.

Story Time with Olya (pre-school ages), **Tue & Thu** 9am, Main Street
Sweets, 559 Main St. Free.

Toddler Story Time (18-36 mo), **Wed** 11am, Library. Registration
required. Free.

Island Kids Baby Group (0-14mo), **Thu** 10am, 536 Main St. Info:
IslandKidsRI@gmail.com.

Read Aloud (3-6 yrs), **Fri** 3:30pm, Library.

Music with James (4 mo-4 yrs), **Fri** 4:30pm, 475 Main St. lounge. Info:
MusicWithJames@aol.com.

OLDER KIDS (*Sat-Fri*)

Tennis – New York Junior Tennis League (ages 5-18), **Sat-Sun** 6-8am,
Racquet Club. Free.

Tennis – Junior Tennis, **Sat & Mon-Fri** after school, Racquet Club. Info
212-935-0250.

Beacon After-School Program for 1st-8th-graders, **Mon-Fri** 3-6pm, PS/
IS 217. Free. Info: 212-527-2505 or RooseveltIslandYouthProgram.com.

Open Gym for high school students, **Mon & Wed** 6-8pm, PS/IS 217.

Games (5-12 yrs), **Tue** 4pm, Library. Free.

Teen Game Night, **Wed** 6pm, Main Street Sweets, 559 Main St.

Girl Scouts (6-13 yrs), **Fri** 6-8pm, PS/IS 217. Info: 212-527-2505.

SENIORS (*also see page 14*)

Lunch, **Mon-Fri** noon, Senior Center, 546 Main St. \$1.50. Menus outside
social worker office.

REGULAR MEETINGS (*Sat-Fri*)

Toastmasters, **2nd & 4th Mon** 7:30pm. Info: 212-751-9577.

Sci-Fi Discussion Group, **1st Tue** 6:30pm, Library.

114th Precinct Community Meeting, **4th Tue** 7pm, Riccardo’s by the
Bridge, 2101 24th Av., Astoria.

RIRA Common Council meeting **1st Wed** (except Jul-Aug) 8pm, Good
Shepherd Community Center.

Book Discussion, **3rd Thu** 6:30-8pm, Library.

OFFICE HOURS

RIOC’s Community Office Hours, **Mon** 3-5pm, 591 Main St.

Constituent Service Hours for Assemblymember Micah Kellner and/or
staff, **Mon-Fri** 9:30am-5:30pm, District Office (1365 First Av at 73rd
St.). Call 212-860-4906 for appointment.

Constituent Service Hours for State Sen. Jose Serrano and/or staff, **2nd**
Mon 4-7pm, Senior Center, 546 Main St. Info: 212-828-5829.

OTHER

Knitting & Crocheting Circle (adults), **Thu** 11:30am, Library.

Food Box Orders for Helping Families Help Themselves, ordering
period **1st-11th of month**. Menu online at jolinfoodbox.com. Info 347-
985-7540; pickup period at 546 Main St. **15th of month**.

MoreLetters

[Editor’s note: The following letter is published as
submitted.]

To the Editor:

Sadly, *The WIRE* is incredibly biased in its reporting,
it appears to protect certain people.

Instead of reporting that the Common Council, in
a democratic process by democratically elected rep-
resentatives, chose to reject the expulsion process for
three meetings, *The WIRE* blames in on “Council mem-
bers who have felt that RIRA’s potential for positive
action has been sabotaged by an excess of particularism
on what is, *frankly* (excuse the pun), the small stuff,”
but that’s simply not true. Unlike a book club, RIRA
is a NYS not-for-profit corporation. Common Council
members (as directors of the corporation) have legal
responsibilities, and money issues are *not* small matters
for not-for-profit corporations.

As for *The WIRE*’s reporting about the Cherry Blossom
Festival, I’ve contacted RIRA’s Auditor Geof
Kerr, who believes the CBF auditing is outside his
scope of work. Thanks to the poor RIRA administra-
tion, as aggravated by Ellen Polivy and short-lived
RIRA Secretaries Jeff Prekopa and Joyce Mincheff
Short, RIRA does not have minutes for most of its
meetings the for the past year-plus, including the recent
meeting asking the auditor to audit the committee’s
reports, such as the CBF financial report.

Instead of Lynne Strong-Shinozaki asking yet-again
for some exoneration, why ask her: If all this could
have been cleared up by her providing the details
on the Cherry Blossom Festival, then why has she
continued for almost a year now to refuse to provide
information or refuse to answer questions? And, if Ms.
Strong-Shinozaki got her motion passed to Postpone
Indefinitely at the Common Council meeting, then why
did she resign afterward? It seems that her intention
was to thwart the committee from enshrining her loss
by rejecting the expulsion motion for once and all.

Here’s my statement which was not printed in the
last *WIRE* issue after the RIRA meeting:

*Last night’s outcome was a victory in the ongoing
battle for openness, fairness, transparency, and the
whole community’s interests... versus the closed,
secretive, and unfair tactics advocated by an inner
circle. Even to the very end Ms. Polivy was disingenu-
ously asking for Executive Session purportedly
for the purpose “we don’t want to do to Frank in
public what he has done to us” – Ms. Polivy has
used her RIRA Column to advocate in public against
me, so this was yet another ruse for tactics that
they were attempting outside scrutiny of the press
and public. As for the Cherry Blossom Festival
and its finances, this could have all be solved had
Ms. Strong-Shinozaki and the RIRA SCE committee
answered questions forthcomingly and honestly,
but it became a cat-and-mouse game of hunting for
facts. Even with RIRA Auditor Geof Kerr’s interim
report, it’s clear the original SCE report that caused*

RIRA Column, from page 4

be done during this time. To those who wish to con-
tinue their past ‘work,’ which has veered the Council
off its course for the past year and a half, such past is
past, and should either be checked at the door or be
tabled to be undertaken in November, when the newly
elected Council is seated. Until then, it’s time to roll
up our sleeves, respect our neighbors, treat each other
with the civility that each person deserves, and make
RIRA relevant again. If the Council finally resumes
leadership, then the community will follow.

Community Events

As life continues, so do many community events. I
strongly recommend these two:

Town Hall Meeting with Manhattan District Attor-
ney Cyrus R. Vance Jr., New York State Senator Jose
M. Serrano, and State Assemblymember Micah Kell-
ner – Monday, February 24, at 6:00 p.m. in the Good
Shepherd Community Center. Voice your concerns and
questions about life on Roosevelt Island and the City at
large directly to them. This is a unique opportunity to
ask questions and advocate for solutions to problems
that affect us all.

Mortgage Seminar – Wednesday, February 26, at
7:00 p.m. at Amalgamated Bank, 619 Main Street.
For those who have questions and concerns about
buying a home, obtaining a mortgage, and financing
a purchase, Amalgamated Bank is offering an oppor-
tunity to ask such questions directly in a comfortable
setting. Please contact Manager Al Salas if you are
interested in attending: albertsalas@amalgamatedbank.com
or 212-413-8775.

Informal RIRA Sit-Down and Meet the President
– Thursday, February 27, at 7:30 p.m. in the TV Room
at The Octagon, 888 Main Street. I will be facilitat-
ing an informal session for the public and Common
Council members to express concerns regarding RIRA
and issues that are impacting our community. Join us

To the Editor:

Every winter, we try to light up Main Street because
it is so dark and dull. The Roosevelt Island Chamber
of Commerce would like to thank everyone – organi-
zations, residents, professionals, and businesses – for
their contributions toward the lights:

Dr. Jack Resnick	\$ 50
RY Management (Island House, Westview) . .	550
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M&D Deli	50
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PS/IS 217 PTA	150
RI Korean Association	275
RI Residents Association	275
RI Seniors Association	25
RI Visual Art Association	50
Rivercross Management	275
Roosevelt Island Cleaners	50
Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation . . .	1,100
Roosevelt Nails	50
The Child School	275
Urban American/Roosevelt Landings	825
Island Cats	80
Wholesome Factory	150

Julia Palermo, Executive Director
Roosevelt Island Chamber of Commerce

*the hullabaloo is now discredited and was worthy of
questioning – as I did at the time.*

*Ms. Short and Ms. Strong-Shinozaki complain of
“cyberbullying” (which just means someone dis-
agrees with them), but meanwhile Ms. Polivy is
threatening to Ruin On This Island member Susan
Marcus because she voted opposite Ms. Polivy’s lik-
ing. And speaking of double standards, the Ethics
Committee was completely reformulated because,
as Sharon Pope reported, its original incarnation,
with secret meetings done in Executive Session by
improperly appointed members, was created to tar-
get one or two members of RIRA (me and possibly
someone else).*

*Hopefully, RIRA can look forward to getting back
to the real business of addressing the needs of the
residents.”*

Frank Farance

Editor’s comment: *The WIRE* did not print the
comment that Farance submitted after the last RIRA
Common Council meeting because it amounted to
piling-on – kicking somebody when they’re down. *The
WIRE* chose not to abet Farance’s ungentlemanly be-
havior. Naturally, he considers his survival of an expul-
sion effort to be the headline news from that Council
meeting. It wasn’t; Ellen Polivy’s resignation was.

Now that two weeks have passed and people’s pain
is less immediate, we’ve allowed Frank his opportunity
to be a sore winner – possibly the only behavior more
egregious than being a sore loser.



RIRA President Jeff Escobar with daughter Madeline
and wife Elizabeth Erickson. Escobar, who will conduct
an informal public meeting on Thursday (see column
at left), wants to re-orient the Residents Association’s
vision to forming strong community bonds, with a focus
on quality of life and families.

for this session, or reach out to ask your local RIRA
representative to pass along your concerns.

Concerns & Questions

Do you have a community concern, question, or
initiative that you want to undertake or need help with?
Have an upcoming community event? Please do not
hesitate to email me directly at president@riraonline.com.



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CREDIT CARD & EBT WELCOME

Parents, from page 3

this group, I had no idea about this Island. Now I really feel like I am a part of this community."

RIPN members advertise when they want to sell or donate clothes or other children's or household items, and invite others to join when they are planning an outing or activity with their child, like a visit to a museum, concert, or demo class. Sugimaya says, "I have received a lot of items for free, thanks to this network. I have offered items for free, too, so I am sure other parents benefited as well."

Bosbach, like so many Islanders, gives freely of her time in support of RIPN, while also representing the Riverwalk buildings on the Resident Association's Common Council. She believes that beyond being a means for building community among parents, the group should perform an advocacy role.

According to Bosbach, "RIRA is here for all Island residents, so the interests and needs of families are only a part of RIRA's purview." Additionally, "I work on those topics on behalf of both groups. Some of the issues we [RIPN] are advocating for, such as swim lessons and improvements on the Tram gate and elevators, are also supported by RIRA, and are active agenda items on the Island Services Committee."

"I often collect opinions and wishes before writing to RIOC, to save them from too many emails, or to have a deeper understanding of members' views before going to a meeting," Bosbach explains. RIPN member Nally Hernandez is skeptical. She says, "Eva's response to the folks that are not okay with her decision or with a topic she supports is either (a) Everybody else is happy with this, or (b) Please address your comments to me only and do not email the whole parents' network and (c) Do not email RIOC or the contacts that I cc in the emails."

Bosbach sees RIPN and RIRA in a symbiotic relationship. "I have never encountered a topic where the wishes of the parents' community would go against the perceived well-being of the Island community as a whole." She notes, though, that various members of RIPN disagree about the new Blackwell Park

playground, with some parents loving it and others criticizing it, sometimes for basically the same reasons. She adds, "For the advocacy part, I listen to the majority of those parents who reach out to me." Sudhin Shah says, "Yes, I think my voice is heard and I like that problems are recognized based on how many other people chime in."

RIPN member and Island Kids Board Member Phoebe Flynn, while noting that RIPN is "very helpful" as a means of "disseminating information of interest to Island parents," says she is less comfortable with the use of the group as a "bully pulpit," adding "If you have only the input of 10 or 15 people, you can't claim to speak for 300. And I think that that line is continually blurred."

RIPN member Nerea Sanchez, who says she has benefited very much from the group, shares Flynn's concerns. "I think that sometimes the

group has gone in an uncontrollable spiral of negativity because no one was assuming the functions of a moderator. For example, I thought accusing a man of being a danger to the kids and asking members to take pictures of him and circulate them was on the verge of being illegal. In cases like that, I think some sort of formal moderation of the network would be positive." Another member who wished to remain anonymous agreed, arguing that, "For information sharing, the Google Group is fine. As an advocacy group, there needs to be a formalized process in place. The facilitation efforts on some of the topics that come up – for instance, the back and forth about a potential child molester roaming the streets – are handled recklessly, which puts the group's administrators in a precarious legal position."

Another parent RIPN member who

preferred to remain anonymous cautions, "I feel like the RIPN is a blog and a classifieds section. This is not an advocacy group. I bet many people would not be interested in becoming members [of the latter]." This member also echoes what many other members agree is one thing that the group could do better, which is to "promote Island businesses and family activities. Instead of trying to send everyone off-Island, try and make what we have here better." In fact, RIPN member Lauren Fitz-Gibbs, a founding member of the Island Babies Google Group (the precursor to RIPN), is concerned about the group having a deleterious effect on Island Kids.

Member Vanessa Morais postulates, "I do feel that, for such a large network, sometimes our voices are not heard in relation to issues such as the new playground, and the Tramway elevator/gate rule in relation to waiting for an attendant to open the gate for strollers," while also noting, "this is not a criticism of the group, but more of the organizations dealing with the group."

Of course, as the Blackwell Park kerfuffle demonstrated, there is an inherent difficulty in advocating with a unified voice on behalf of a loose community of parents.

Bhatia posits that, "If differences do arise, it is important to allow every member the opportunity to be heard," and proposes that "perhaps quarterly or annual or even ad hoc face-to-face meetings could assist in such situations to help seek resolution."

Nevertheless, even the dissenting parents agree with Tesy Mitchell, who says, "I like that it is an informal, casual way to ask for advice, offer used kids' clothes/toys, and be kept in the loop of local events and issues that are relevant to parents." Paulina Mansz concurs, "My family and I are sure that Roosevelt Island was the best choice to live, and the Parents' Network only reassures us about it."

Parents can join RIPN by emailing eva.bosbach@amu.cz. (The group cannot be found through an online search.) Once aboard, members can contribute to all discussions and browse all previous posts.

Comments welcome at MainStreetWIRE.com



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Sheehan, from page 3

liability in case of a disaster. There were people in the State and the City who would have been happy to see it go away. That was always the issue with the Tram until recently, when they did the renovation. I think that settled the question that the Tram was going to continue.”

In listing his efforts to get the Tram up and running again, Sheehan remembers, “I made phone calls to UDC constantly to pressure them. I talked to their lawyers. I met with every politician in the City who had anything to do with Roosevelt Island. We made calls to Pete Grannis, our Assemblymember. We made calls to Olga Mendez, our State Senator. We made calls to Charlie Rangel, our Congressman.”

Of that time, Sheehan recalls, “I spent most of my work days dealing with RIRA problems and very little time on Random House business.”

Things went from bad to worse when UDC announced that they were suspending repairs on the Tram to do an investigation of what happened. “I think they were embarrassed and it showed their incompetence in trying to do this work in the middle of winter, so they conducted an investigation to assess blame for the accident. They hired a high-powered lawyer, Charles Stillman, to determine the cause of the accident and write it up. Until that happened, they announced, there would be no more repairs to the Tram. So now, the Tram was just sitting there. The only thing left for me to do, as far as I could determine, was to go to court and see if we could force them to do the repairs while they did the investigation.”

UDC argued that it would be too dangerous to proceed with the repairs until the cause was assessed. The judge agreed with UDC. Sheehan said, “But we did get substantially better bus service. We got UDC to expand the schedule significantly. Buses were supposed to be leaving every half hour.”

Yet because it was still the middle of winter, Sheehan remembers, “The bus service was often interrupted because of the snow. Sometimes buses were two hours late. That winter was very hard on us. Imagine *this* winter with no subway or Tram.”

Ultimately, the Tram was shut down from November 7, 1980, through March 5, 1981. Before boarding the Tram for its maiden voyage along with RIRA Vice President Ray Frier, Deputy Commissioner Ed Davis, Councilman Robert Dryfoos, Councilman-at-large Henry Stern, Assemblymember Grannis and David Ozerkis, the New York Branch Manager of VSL (the owner/operator of the Tram), Sheehan told *The WIRE*, “There is a great feeling of relief. People were at the edge. They could not have waited much longer.” No representative from UDC attended the opening.

That lawsuit was not the first time Sheehan went to court against UDC to resume Tram service.

Sheehan’s service to the Island actually began a few months before his RIRA term. “The way I got involved in RIRA was because of the movie [*Nighthawks*],” he explains. “This is back in the beginning of time, and I feel like that a little bit,” he says by way of preface.

On a morning in the fall of 1980, walking to the Tram, his two young children Kristin and Paul in tow, they arrived to a lot of commotion.

UDC, with the blessing of RIRA, had agreed to shut down the Tram to accommodate the filming of *Nighthawks*, a Sylvester Stallone film.

“There were these kids who were production assistants handing out coffee and donuts to the residents, thanking them for their ‘cooperation,’” Sheehan recalls. “The

residents were pissed off as hell, yelling at these kids. This ‘thank-you’ gesture had the unintended effect of aggravating us residents boarding the Tram, as this shut-down had been forced on us, and we did not view ourselves as ‘cooperating.’”

Sheehan continues, “When I got to the Tram, I saw John Jager with his two boys who used to go across with me because our kids all got the same bus. He asked me if there was anything we could do. I was a young lawyer in those days, so I said, ‘It’s possible that we can bring an action, but I’m not going to do it unless there are a substantial number of people to support it.’”

After dropping off his kids in Manhattan, Sheehan arrived at his office. Not long after, Jager called. “He had been standing at the Tramway all morning,” says Sheehan, “and he had gotten a petition signed by a very substantial number of people.”

Sheehan left work and came back to the Island to meet with Jager and Rev. Oliver Chapin, the Island’s Protestant minister. He said, “I had been thinking about the legal issue from the time I got to the office to the time I got back to Jager’s. We went up to Arlene Stock’s apartment. She was a court reporter. She agreed to help us get the papers together. She had a very sophisticated typewriter and she knew what the papers needed to look like. We had to put together an order to show cause, with affidavits signed by the plaintiffs in the action, Chapin and Jager. I had sketched out in my head what I thought we needed. Arlene sat at her desk with her typewriter. I talked and she typed. She was the fastest typist I had ever seen.”

Once they got before a judge, the judge admonished Sheehan, “You can bring the named plaintiffs [to the hearing] and no one else. I’m not allowing you to bring in 100 to 200 residents to fill up the courtroom and make noise.” The judge gave the same order to UDC.

That night, there was an emergency RIRA meeting in Good Shepherd Chapel. According to Sheehan, “Hundreds of people were there, including the producer or director of the movie, and Sylvester Stallone. The residents were up in arms and they shouted down the director and Sylvester Stallone. Stallone left and the director got up and said that if this is the kind of reception he was going to get, they were cancelling the shoot and



they’d shoot it somewhere else. People were happy, they cheered and everybody went home.”

The next day, in court, despite the judge’s warning, the courtroom was packed. Sheehan recalls, “It was packed with people from the movie company, representatives from the mayor’s office, representatives from every union involved in the shoot, UDC and their lawyers, and the then President of RIRA [Lou Carbonetti], who actually testified against us despite the sentiments of the residents the night before. I believe the judge had been gotten to, because there were even people from the television networks there, and a sketch artist. It’s framed on my wall.”

Sheehan sighs, “You know how it turned out. The movie got made.” For all of the hardship that the movie created for Islanders, *Nighthawks*, which was critically panned (“moronically written and directed,” said *Time* magazine), earned RIRA a mere \$20,000.

Nevertheless, Sheehan believes that standing up to UDC effected a necessary change in the way things were done. “I think the lawsuits we brought got UDC’s attention. After that, they did make attempts to reach out to us when things were going to be happening. That was a positive outcome of those very negative occurrences.”

Sheehan’s instinctive response on the community’s behalf was fresh in everyone’s mind at election time, soon after the *Nighthawks* suit. “The same people who had spearheaded this effort against the movie approached me, including Rev. Chapin and Ray and Irma Frier, who were early community activists, and asked me if I would

stand for election and run for president. Having had the experience of going through this and seeing what the state of the residents’ association was like, I agreed to do it, but only if I could attract a group of people to run together with me so that I wasn’t coming in as an individual and having a constant battle.

“We worked to put together a slate with representatives from each building – people we knew. Someone knew a good person in 560, someone else knew a good person in 580, in Island House and so on. We wound up with a dozen candidates, including me, and 11 of the 12 of us were elected.

“We were eager to change the way things were done, and take it from there,” he says. This included a significant revision of the RIRA Constitution. “There were some changes we thought we needed to make. That document was how the Common Council was created.”

At the end of his term, Sheehan declined to run for another. He said, “I enjoyed being President very much, but it was very time-consuming and I was lucky because I had a very understanding employer. I spent quite a bit of time on RIRA stuff, going back and forth to court, all during my daytime employment hours. I didn’t want to push that any further. Plus, I think my wife was ready to divorce me. I was out every night of the week, sometimes until the wee hours of the morning, and I am talking *every night of the week*. I thought I had done my duty to the Island. We accomplished what we had set out to do in putting a group in place that was much more responsive and professional in how they ran things. It was an incredible year. It was an amazing time. We were sort of under siege but we all survived, and there are lots of people who are still around who will remember this. With the passage of years it’s gotten less painful,” he says, a big grin transforming his face.

After being subject to UDC, Sheehan opines, “RIRA must be closer to RIOC than we were to UDC because RIOC is here on the Island. You can walk into the office and sit down and talk to someone. Even that is a huge improvement over what our situation was. The best that could happen to the Island is if RIRA is recognized and brought into the decision-making – the big decision-making that RIOC has to go through. If that’s happening now to some extent, that’s good,” Sheehan says.

As for what lies ahead, Sheehan maintains that, “Transportation is still our biggest worry on the Island. I worry that the infrastructure, which is pretty strained as it is, is going to be very highly impacted by bringing another two or three thousand people, or however many it is going to be once the Cornell project is finished. Look at rush hour today and just add some more

people. Add any number of people and don’t do anything to better the infrastructure, and you’re going to have problems. The Tram will be overworked; the F train is overworked as it is.”

Sheehan explains why he helped save the Tram all those years ago. “There are people who are doers and people who are not doers. Some of the doers of my generation are still doing. They’re moving slower these days, but they’re still moving.”

Relying on them to do all of the work indefinitely is not a solution, so Sheehan believes the answer is that, “We have to encourage people of my daughter’s and son’s age to get involved in these organizations. As ineffective as these organizations may be at times, they’re the only vehicle for us to have any impact on the powers that control everything that goes on here.

“When I started, I was young. I was idealistic. I had some skills and I thought I could make a difference. I made less of a difference than I hoped,” he says, smiling. “Nevertheless, I spent the time and effort to do it and so have many others. You need people who are willing to do the work, and you need people who have skills to put forth their best [for RIRA].”

Sheehan describes his feeling for Roosevelt Island as “proprietary.” He says, “We very much feel like pioneers because we were here first.”

Sheehan moved to Roosevelt Island in 1976 with his wife and two small children from a Mitchell-Lama coop in lower Manhattan near the Brooklyn Bridge. He was a teacher back then, and got invited to a presentation about Roosevelt Island seeking to attract teachers. The developers of the Island described the planned population for the Island as diverse, both ethnically and socio-economically. Sheehan says, “It sounded attractive to me. I put my name on the list and we got to move into a four-bedroom in Eastwood. The following year, my in-laws moved to Rivercross. We had built-in babysitters. And the year after that, we moved to Rivercross.”

Sheehan reflects on the affordable-housing question. “It’s hard to do it well. But Eastwood was successful at it. The apartments there were decent apartments at affordable rents for young growing families. There were a good number of apartments set aside for the elderly and disabled. Manhattan Park did it poorly. Manhattan Park has one building set aside for subsidized housing. It isn’t integrated into the development. I don’t think that was a good idea. To do affordable housing well, you have to make sure that it’s integrated into the community, so people don’t feel stigmatized. You avoid a lot of problems that way.”

Looking to the future, Sheehan says, “I hope Roosevelt Island will remain a place that you can bring your young family to and grow up the way we did.” He qualifies that: “Affordable doesn’t only mean the poorest of the poor. It’s that great middle – young people who are having children, who have jobs that don’t pay them as much as jobs used to pay. Those are the tough years. You don’t have money but you have a lot of things you have to do. I remember what those years were like. They were years that you were not considered upper-middle-class or middle-class. We were scraping by just like a lot of other people were scraping by. I hope that they continue to at least have Roosevelt Island be a place where there are a substantial number of units that are affordable in the broader sense of what affordable is.”

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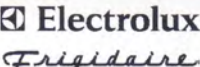
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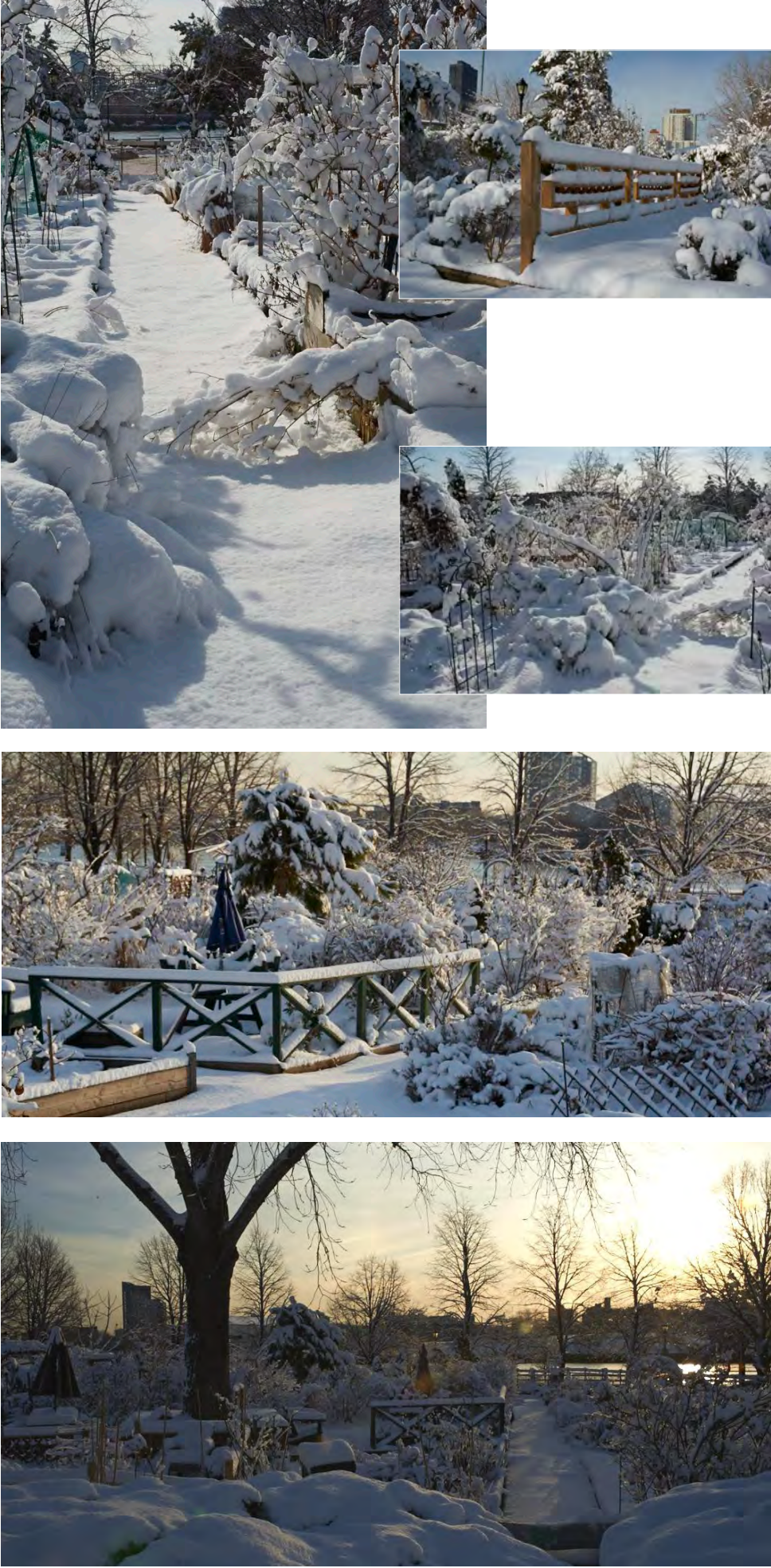
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The Community Gardens By Winter’s Light

Photos by Kurt Wittman



RIOC Column, from page 4

facility. Emergency repairs were performed and the pool is now open. We apologize for the inconvenience caused to the community, and thank you for understanding that in order to keep the pool in good condition, closures are sometimes necessary. We will continue to do our best to maintain the pool, and ensure that it is open and available as often as possible.

Tram Maintenance

Weather permitting, the Tram will be undergoing scheduled repairs on Tuesday, March 4. In order to lessen the impact on travel plans, the work will begin at 10:00 p.m. and take place overnight. The Tram will resume operations at 6:00 a.m. on Wednesday, March 5.

Blackwell Park Playground

New signs stating playground rules and regulations have been installed at the Blackwell Park Children’s Playground. Based on the concerns and desires expressed by the community, the playground has been designated for use by children under 50” in height.

This maximum height is based on the average height of a nine-year-old child, the upper age limit that was agreed upon during discussions with concerned residents. This will effectively address one of the primary issues brought to our attention by Island parents – that of larger children playing alongside very small children. We are grateful to the community for working with us on this project, and are hoping to provide a safe, fun experience for all who will use the playground.

Red Bus Fare Elimination

Frequent travelers on the Red Bus are reminded that beginning April 1, the fare will be eliminated. Travelers are encouraged to use any remaining balances on their fare change cards before this date. If a balance remains on the card after the cutoff date, refunds will be available at the RIOC Bus Garage (680 Main Street) until April 30. If you have any questions, please call 212-832-4540 for more information.



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Friday, February 21 at 5:19 pm

Friday, February 28 at 5:27 pm

Friday, March 7 at 5:35 pm



Blessing: Boruch A-toh Ado-noi E-lo-hei-nu Me-lech Ho-olom A-she-er Ki-de-sha-nu Be-mitz-vo-sov Ve-tzi-vo-nu Le-had-lik Ner Shel Sha-bos Ko-desh.

Translation: Blessed are You, Lord our G-d, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded us to kindle the light of the holy Shabbat.

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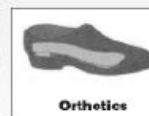
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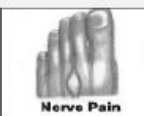
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