



His Priority for RIRA: A New-Attitude Agenda

news analysis by Briana Warsing

"I'm not going to stand for the yelling," he said.

Jeff Escobar, thrust into the presidency of the Roosevelt Island Residents Association (RIRA) by Ellen Polivy's resignation early last month, is facing the need to reconstruct an organization whose Common Council has been beset by rancor, distractions, and disarray.

In an interview before Wednesday night's Council meeting, Escobar described his objective: "To get RIRA functioning collectively, to inspire members' confidence in me, and to revitalize the Council and its program." He added, "It's up to the Council members how much or how little gets done. We have to gauge how long that will take — and if people are willing to do that."

That was the big *if*. By the end of Wednesday night's Common Council meeting, that *if* seems largely to have been resolved (separate story, this page).

Before Wednesday night, Escobar seemed to be feeling his way carefully but deliberately. He began last week, with an informal open meeting at The Octagon, billed as an opportunity to get to know him and to discuss the problems facing RIRA and the Common Council. Among those problems: a long-running challenge by Island House representative Frank Farance over the form and substance of a financial report on last April's Cherry Blossom Festival; and an effort to expel Farance from the Common Council, launched in response to his persistence and rhetoric on that issue, seen by many as "bullying," either in the Council's monthly meetings or in a closed email system available only to Council members.

That email system, *CCTalk*, is now closed. Of a future system, Escobar said, "We have a unique opportunity to reform, revamp, and take a new direction, [focus-ing] what technology works best in small communities. I am in no rush to find a solution. I'm a big believer in face-to-face and telephone calls." Those two issues had Common Council meetings descending

into personal rancor. Polivy's efforts to round up the votes to expel Farance fell short, and meetings often became chaotic in degrees ranging from mild to monstrous. At the February meeting, a handful of Council members resigned their seats, following an earlier handful who had left over previous months. "With everything that's been happening," Escobar said, I really thought people may have given up on RIRA. We were throwing away many years of legitimacy."

Polivy's resignation left Escobar with that set of problems.

Video of Wednesday's Common Council meeting at MainStreetWIRE.com

In his RIRA Column in the February 22 issue of *The WIRE*, Escobar cited "four pillars [as] what should and shall be the bedrock of the Council," listing, with periods after each for emphasis, "Respect. Civility. Relevance. Community."

Escobar wrote, "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... and to function as a group to address Island issues in a setting where all are invited."

The first half of Escobar's informal meeting last week ranged over several issues of concern on the Island — a pagoda for Southpoint Park offered by the Island's Korean Association, Cornell, and working with RIOC. But then he turned to the question of Council meetings and improving the atmosphere in

See **Priority**, page 8

Jeff Escobar Brings Order to a RIRA Council Meeting, Gains Respect in a Reorganization

by Briana Warsing

For those attending Wednesday night's meeting of the Common Council of the Roosevelt Island Residents Association (RIRA) who came expecting fireworks or fearing further dysfunction, it didn't happen.

RIRA successfully worked through a packed agenda without antics and with minimal disruption. New (and former) Westview Council member Sherie Helstein was elected vice president, replacing Escobar, in a close vote after a brief discussion of how the RIRA constitution should be interpreted

on the matter. Helen Chirivas (Island House) was elected secretary. Three vacant committee chairman-

ships were filled by new Common Council members, with newcomer Janet Falk (Southtown) to head the Communications Committee, returning Council member Susan Marcus (Westview) as Housing chair, and returning member Julie Palermo (Westview) as chair of the Social, Cultural & Educational Services Committee.

Falk and Marcus had both attended Escobar's informal sit-down last week, Falk to offer her services in public relations and Marcus to express her concerns about the Island's loss of affordable housing.

Following the Council meeting, Falk said, "I thought Jeff did a great job. I think that he has a lot of support for moving the community forward. I am very excited to be working with him, and to be able to contribute my communications expertise both to enhance communication between individuals and RIRA and among the individual organizations on the Island, and to promote the Island to off-Islanders."

Though there were doubts swirling prior to the

meeting about Escobar's approach, he seemed to successfully find a balance between ensuring a smooth process and fostering an atmosphere of civility. He began the meeting with no fanfare and went through the items on the agenda, resolving each and moving on to the next.

To streamline the meeting, he used a speakers' list and imposed time limits. Neither device received

any opposition or complaint. All votes were counted. And the room remained set up like a roundtable; it was not changed to an auditorium-style set-up with Escobar at the front as Council member Sharon Pope (Rivercross) had suggested at the sit-down session: "I recommend that the room be set up auditorium-style so that all eyes are on you, Jeff, so we are facing front and you are facing us and you can call on people and they can direct those comments to you."

In an interview with *The WIRE* after last week's sit-down, Escobar intimated that that suggestion was being attributed to him by someone who had not attended. "Just since the last meeting, I've been called an autocrat and a dictator, but during the sit-down, all of the suggestions about how to run the meeting came from everyone else. I just agreed."

Council member Frank Farance (Island House) alluded to some of

the intra-Council discussions by saying, "I think the meeting went better than I expected. I was pleasantly surprised that some of the things that I consider to be essential for the social aspects of making the Common Council work — the round-table setting and so on — actually stayed. I heard some word that that might not be the case, so I was happy to see it. I was also concerned with how the voting was going to be taken, and the votes were counted, which I think is essential for maintaining the integrity. There are a whole lot of other things he [Escobar] needs to worry about, like past-meeting minutes and other records, but I was not going to even get in there because he had a lot of administrative work to get done."

"I thought it went pretty well," said Chirivas. "I thought Jeff did very well. The meeting went very smoothly. He seems to have a knack and a talent for running a meeting, and I think we are lucky to have Jeff running the meeting."

Escobar's President's Report was item number nine on See **Escobar**, page 8

Briefly...

• The Youth Program Beacon is offering drum and piano lessons for 5th-to-9th-graders. See *ComingUp* continuing-events listing, page 4.

• Bike New York needs a part-time bike mechanic for up to 16 hours a week. For more information, email CGoodspeed@BikeNewYork.org.

• Tax preparation help is available on Saturdays in March to individuals with adjusted gross incomes below \$20,000 and families below \$52,000 through the New York City Comptroller's office. Appointments via **212-669-3916**; see tinyurl.com/TaxPrepNYC for documentation required.



The Editorial Page

RIRA, Coming Back

At the end, there were congratulations. And applause. Not the standing-ovation kind of Broadway applause that arises almost involuntarily, when an audience has been transported by an inspired interpretation of a familiar Shakespearean character... No, this was the applause of a Common Council whose hearts and minds had been won by a firm and confident hand on a meeting – if not inspired, rather inspiring, because it suggested that the remaining five meetings of their terms in this body of the Residents Association will not be a waste of their time.

It means that, in this, Jeff Escobar has succeeded. Although his first Common Council meeting as RIRA president ran more than two-and-a-half hours, all of that time was spent on accomplishing business, at a brisk pace.

In the end, some of the old hands came back – notably Sherie Helstien, veteran of dozens of Council meetings run by Matthew Katz, who happens to be her husband. Helstien replaced Escobar as vice president and, as she amusingly put it, “the whip.”

Fortunately, Escobar had no major person-on-person squabbles to quash. Whether it was his firm control, or the mutual wish of all in the meeting that RIRA and its Common Council should survive to continue serving this community – that’s probably not important. Rancor took a holiday, and accusations of financial stumbling and bullying were becalmed, at least temporarily.

And most members got the notion of addressing their remarks to the president, as chair of the meeting, which precluded person-on-person bickering.

In short, the RIRA Common Council is back. And we need it back, because we have important concerns to manage, and a governor who doesn’t quite understand how democracy should work here, and a major university about to become the tail that wags the dog, and a serious transition of this community from an economically diverse all-incomes village into one that, over a period of years, will move up the money scale to become more like Manhattan.

The question that arises, then, is will we remain the village we are today, in all other senses? The Roosevelt Island Residents Association will be the key to that. It will need skilled leadership and dedicated Common Council members.

Fortunately, it’s on its way back.

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Krystyn Donnelley and students of Legacy High School;
Kim Massey and students from the PS/IS 217 Beacon Program

To the Editor:
In his February 22 letter to the editor, Frank Farance readily displayed his penchant for distortion, which is only one of the many issues that prompted Common Council representatives to submit a bill of particulars to oust him. In his second statement, after criticizing *The WIRE* for bias, Farance incorrectly states the status of the pending bill against him. He tells readers that the order was “rejected” when, in fact, it was simply side-lined.

He then continues his rant against Lynne Shinozaki’s running of the Cherry Blossom Festival because he simply can’t comprehend that when people donate their services, no money is exchanged. And Lynne had done an amazing job of getting world-class musicians and other contributors to provide their services free of charge. To Frank, the fact that cash flow from those contributions of time and talent were not placed on a monetary balance sheet, because no cash was exchanged, is what he calls “not a small matter.” That is what he’s harped on as “impropriety.” Russell Fields, not Lynne Shinazaki, is the RIRA treasurer, and if Farance has a problem with RIRA’s accounting practices, that’s who he should take them up with. Farance did everything possible, short of physically attacking Geof Kerr, to get him to state that there was a problem. Kerr, the CPA who conducted the audit, stated that he found no accounting problems with how the festival was run.

Although Farance states that Kerr said the audit was “outside his scope of work,” again, he fabricates. Mr. Kerr seemed obviously opposed to Farance’s obnoxious line of questioning, and felt that addressing unrelenting viciousness was outside his scope of work.

Throwing me, personally, into the mix of RIRA secretarial problems is nothing but a blatant attempt to defame me, as he does to anyone who disagrees with him. Farance is well aware that I had been elected to serve as the secretary at only that very meeting, and that I resigned, very clearly, before the meeting ended. I’d been asked to take the minutes for the prior meeting, and had turned over the completed minutes to the president promptly, before two days went by. As I am not the secretary, and did not even remain for the balance of the meeting, I am simply not in a position to submit minutes for the last meeting. Farance is aware of all of this, but heaven forbid that the truth should get in the way of his ‘facts.’ He was sitting right in the meeting when Helen Chirivas, my opponent for secretary, tried to condemn me for not having submitted last month’s minutes, and clearly heard Ellen Polivy correct her.

Farance simply looks for stuff that he can delude the community with so that he can look like a hero. And he finds plenty of paranoid folks who swallow his bait. He operates his crazy-making machine under the guise of “transparency” and “fairness,” when it’s actually all about him seeking self-aggrandizement. The Garden Club had a similar issue last summer. They were wiser about how they dealt with it – they ousted the offender.

I have resigned from the Common Council because I will not serve on a committee that allows someone to defame and emotionally torture its members. An internet search provided 950+ pages of

Letters

Ms. Sheila Redula
R-Y Management, 545 Main Street
Dear Sheila:

I am taking this somewhat unorthodox method of communicating with Westview management by letter as my several emails to you have gone unanswered. Having read *The RIOC Column* in the February 22 issue of *The Main Street WIRE* containing an update (see below) on the Sportspark recreational facility, specifically the swimming pool, it occurred to me that R-Y Management might learn something useful from this example about communicating important information to your constituents.

The Westview swimming pool and health facility has been closed since January 2013. The notice to members and residents of this closure consists of a moldering notice, mounted on a lobby bulletin board, stating that the facility is closed “until further notice,” and that information will be disseminated when available. In the subsequent 14 months, there has been no further notice, neither as to the nature of the problem nor an estimate as to when it might reopen.

When asked for updates, staff members clearly are as much in the dark as tenants and club members. Your office has had no response either to individuals or to the Westview Task Force.

My wife and I introduced ourselves to you when you took over the job of on-site manager from Jennifer Jones. We suggested that you introduce yourself to residents with a door-drop that never materialized, with the result that most tenants have no idea who you are. When I asked the 45-or-so tenants at the Westview Task Force annual meeting if anyone recognized the name Shiela Redula, only three hands went up.

Perhaps that is intentional. Perhaps the interminable repairs to our pool, now extended into some ill-defined future as new plumbing problems have been found more than a year since work began, are some form of punishment or retribution as the privatization negotiations between the Westview Task Force and the building’s owners continue into their second decade.

Regardless, I hope that our valued Westview Health Club is not allowed to become a giant planter in the same way the Island House facility has. And, oh yes, the favor of a reply is requested.

Matthew Katz
cc: Westview Task Force

To Shiela Redula (RY), Darryl Towns (HCR), Jose M. Serrano:

The Westview Health Club has been closed for over a year and a half for repair work that realistically should have been done in several months. As has happened in the past, we were lied to about a re-opening date, with no agency admitting accountability. The newest problem with the swimming pool could be handled responsibly, or slowly with more suffering for tenants. I personally have suffered physically, and urgently need the health club.

At this frustrating juncture, I believe Westview tenants should stand up and demand a huge rent discount – retroactive – for loss of services promised in apartment leases and paid for by tenants. At the tenants’ meeting February 26, it was clear that those who were present agree.

Sandra Zwerling

**Letters deadline
for March 22 issue:
Tuesday, March 18, 5pm**

spiteful, vicious attacks spewing from Farance, which showed an obvious pattern of wrongdoing. Since the Common Council cannot and will not address this issue, they have totally lost my respect. I am by far not the only person who resigned over the problems created by Farance. Lynne Shinazaki and Nicole Walden resigned at that meeting as well. And a number of others preceded us. None of us will sit on a committee with a man who seems to want to harm his colleagues in order to enhance his reputation.

Joyce M. Short

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

To the Editor:
I was wondering if *The WIRE* could help find out whether the Westview gym will ever open again.

Ever since January 2013, when the remodeling started, my neighbors and I have been trying to get a clear answer from Blackwell Management and/or the door persons at Westview (who shouldn’t be blamed for the lack of information). The only reply we got and continue to get is “We don’t know.”

Is it possible to find out who does know what’s going on? And, if the health club is indeed destined for permanent closure, what are the alternatives for the residents of Westview or of the buildings that used to have access to the Westview gym?

Thank you.

Mirella Menglide

Editor’s note: RY Management is now in charge at Westview. Perhaps the Westview Task Force could help.

To the Editor:
I just wanted to thank you for the February 22 article on Joyce Keating’s immensely powerful and touching book, *Denholm’s Wife*, about her sister, Susan, and their extraordinary relationship. While the family was plagued by an unbelievable series of tragedies, Joyce tempers her narrative with humor, a mechanism that I’m sure helped her to survive these events.

This is a must-read for everyone! It is available in paperback at both barnesandnoble.com and amazon.com.

Susan Cina

**What’s your view?
MainStreetWIRE.com**

This winter, heavy snow and freezing temperatures have kept our staff busy plowing the roads, clearing the sidewalks, and maintaining the Island’s facilities during the harsh conditions. As the weather begins to warm up, we’re getting ready for work to move forward on new and existing capital projects. Our Grounds Department has already begun preparations for the athletic fields to re-open in early April, a new session of Mommy & Me classes is beginning soon, and other activities on the Island are picking up. We are looking forward to a warm and productive spring on Roosevelt Island.

Spring Construction Projects

Work resumed last Friday on the West Pier, after a wave of cold and snowy weather. Weather permitting, construction is projected to be completed by the beginning of April.

At the Good Shepherd Community Center, the ceiling and doors of the northern section of the west entryway are undergoing restoration off-site. Restoration architects and the NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission are reviewing samples of the proposed rehabilitation work to ensure its quality. The work, which is projected to be completed before this fall, will also include cleaning and restoration of the entrances’ walls and lighting.

Two meetings regarding the Good Shepherd streetscape project have been conducted with the community, during which designs were finalized for the plantings and positioning of the benches. A Request for Proposals (RFP) for the work will be issued upon the completion of the final construction drawings. We would like to extend our thanks to the community for their valuable input during this process, and are looking forward to the next phase of this project.

April will mark the beginning of several important construction projects. The Octagon Tennis Courts will be resurfaced, work will begin on the Lighthouse Park footbridges, the sidewalks near the Roosevelt Island Tram station will be repaired, and the Tram stations themselves will be repainted. While all of these developments are scheduled to begin in the first week of April, the work is weather-sensitive and will require warm temperatures to proceed. We will continue to keep the community updated as work progresses.

Eight responses to the Cultural Center’s construction RFP were received by the submission deadline (February 28). RIOC is currently evaluating the responses and beginning the rating and ranking process. A

contractor will be selected, and construction will begin within the next few months.

In mid-to-late March, a crane will be transported by barge to the Riverwalk Building 7 construction site. While the crane is being moved onto the Island, the east promenade will be closed for approximately half a day. An advisory will be issued to notify the public of the specific time and date of this closure.

Mommy & Me

Registration for the March-May session of Mommy & Me water safety classes is available online at RIOC’s new Parks & Recreation website (rioc.recdesk.com). With the assistance of a parent or guardian, participants aged six months to three years will learn basic swimming skill sets that include submersions, blowing bubbles underwater, and movement in the water. Classes are available on Sunday and Wednesday mornings – check online for times and other details. This eight-week session runs from the week of March 16 to the week of May 4, with makeup classes during the week of May 11. While four time slots are currently available, each time slot must have a minimum of six families preregistered in order for that class to take place. The maximum is 13 families per class. Online enrollment ends this coming Wednesday, March 12. Any classes that do not meet the minimum number of participants will be combined with another time slot. If you have any questions or if you prefer to register in person, please email Eddie.Perez@rioc.ny.gov or call 212-832-4569.



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

Red Bus Fares

As a reminder, Red Bus rides will be free beginning April 1. The decision to eliminate the fare was made in order to encourage the use of mass transit, keep traffic on Main Street moving as a result of faster boarding times, and reduce operating costs by eliminating the need to collect fares from the buses. If you have a fare change card, please be advised that March is the last month these cards will be accepted on the bus. Once the fare is eliminated, refunds for any unused value remaining on the cards will be available at the RIOC Bus Garage (680 Main Street) until April 30, 2014.

The RIOC Column

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.

The biggest show on the Island Wednesday night was a performance in the basement of the Good Shepherd Center. Just like the Oscars Awards show, the attendees came dressed in their best behavior. In attendance were former presidents of the Roosevelt Island Residents Association (RIRA) – Sharon Pope, Matthew Katz, Frank Farance, Ellen Polivy, and likely others whom I don’t know due to my comparatively limited time on the Island.

Many former RIRA Common Councilors attended, some of whom had recently resigned or retired, and now sought to regain their seats at the table. There were likely skeptics in the room as well.

The person they all came to see was Jeffrey Escobar, the new RIRA president. Early on in the meeting, I was reminded of two of our many musical icons, Frank Sinatra and James Brown. Yes, in the spirit of Sinatra, who told us *I Did It My Way*, so did Escobar. The meeting was superbly orchestrated and, for the first time

in a long time, the agenda items were well covered and the elected Common Councilors were orderly.

I personally think a touching moment that sealed the deal was when Mr. Escobar gave his President’s Report and shared a very touching family story with the audience. Glancing over the audience, I saw an attentive quietness in the room, and it was suddenly followed by a round of applause that rivaled the decibel levels created during that Hollywood extravaganza previously mentioned. At that moment, for the first time in a long time, the Council session showed respect to the chapel in which we meet, and to the leader, now humanized, who stood before us.

Jeffrey Escobar had unknowingly and with aplomb awakened James Brown’s *I Feel Good* spirit in all of us.

The bar has been raised, and I hope we, the RIRA Common Council, can help him keep that bar at a suitably high level as we serve our Island constituents.



Dave Evans
Member, RIRA Council
evansDE@hotmail.com

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 MSWord 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 and, 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.

COMING UP

– This Weekend –

Registration Deadline for Specialized High School Admission Test (SHSAT) Test Prep, Tue Mar 11. Register at bit.ly/PSIS217SHSAT2014. Class offered **Tue Mar 18** 3-5pm, with follow-up classes in the next several weeks at the Youth Center. Free.
Mommy & Me Water Safety Class online registration available at rioc.recdesk.com, **now through Mar 12.** Ages 6-36 months. Eight-week sessions from wk of March 16 to wk of May 4: **Sun 11** or 11:30am; or **Wed 10:30** or 11am. Info: EddiePerez@rioc.ny.gov or call 212-832-4569.
Snapshots, exhibit of photos by Mircea Nicolescu, extended through **Sun Mar 16**, 9am-9pm daily, Octagon Gallery.

– Regularly Scheduled Meetings and Events –
See separate listing, page 4.

– The Next Two Weeks –

Hart Island – Secret Island of New York, Tue May 11 6:30pm, Library.
Loom in the Noon (ages 5-12), **Wed Mar 12** 3pm, Library. (Also see Wed Mar 26).
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.
Anime Club (ages 13-18), **Thu Mar 13** 4pm, Library.
RIRA Ethics Committee meeting, Thu Mar 13 8pm, 425 Main St. rooftop party room. Open to the public.
Opening Reception for Vernissage XIII, RIVAA members annual group exhibition, **Sat Mar 15**, 6-9pm. Gallery hours **Wed & Fri** 6-8pm, **Sat-Sun** 11am-5pm.
One-on-One Computer Help (ages 50+), **Tue Mar 18** 10am, Library. First come, first served.
City Councilmember Ben Kallos’s office open house, Tue Mar 18 5-8pm, 244 E 93rd St.
Book Discussion, And the Mountains Echoed by Khaled Hosseini, **Thu Mar 20** 6:30-8pm, Library.
The Main Street WIRE– Sat Mar 22. Advertising deadlines: Display ads, **Wed Mar 12**; decision date for circulars/inserts, **Tue Mar 18**; 5,500 copies due **Thu Mar 20. Future issues:** 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 **Advertising** (display & classified): MainStreetWIRE@usa.net. **917-587-3278.**
Spring, RIVAA members group exhibition, Octagon Gallery, **Sat Mar 22** through May 11. Gallery hours 9am-9pm daily.

– Future Weeks –

Bridge closing for tests, Tue Mar 25 starting 10am, each 8-12 minutes.
Movies at the Library – All Is Lost, Tue Mar 25 6pm, Library.
Loom in the Noon (ages 5-12), **Wed Mar 26** 3pm, Library. (Also see Wed Mar 26).
Former Mayor David Dinkins signs copies of his new book, **Sat Mar 29** 12:30pm, Roosevelt Island Racquet Club. Open to the public.
Monthly Constituent Representative office hours start City Councilmember Ben Kallos, **Wed Apr 2** 4-7pm, Senior Center, 546 Main St.
Roosevelt Island Residents Association Common Council meets, **Wed Apr 2** 8pm, Good Shepherd Center. Public session at beginning for brief resident/guest comments/announcements.
Historical Lecture, Tue Apr 8 6:30pm, Library, presented by Roosevelt Island Historical Society.
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 to be announced. Campaign fundraiser. Champagne and conversation at the Water Club. Info: 212-531-2858 or darren@dynamicrg.com.
American Cancer Society Relay for Life, Sat Apr 26 time to be announced. For information on how to join a team or put a team together, contact Patty Fallone at pfallonecrg@yahoo.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.
Bike New York Spring Kick-Off Party, Sat May 17, 11am-4pm, Capobianco Field (north of 580 Main St.). Learn-to-Ride for Kids, bike mechanic pop-up shop, face-painting, prizes, food, bike decoration.
R&R Concerts presents Islander **Roy Eaton**, pianist, performing selections in *A Marriage of Chopin and Joplin*, **Sat May 17** time to be announced, Good Shepherd Center.
Child School/Legacy High School Annual Founder’s Dinner, Thu May 22 6pm, Terrace on the Park, 52-11 111th St., Flushing. Info: 212-223-5055, ext 1007.
Book Discussion, Mom & Me & Mom by Maya Angelou, **Thu Jun 19** 6:30-8pm, Library.

There’s more at MainStreetWIRE.com

COMING UP

— Continuing Events & Activities —
A listing of repeating meetings & events
(See page 3 for events this weekend and in coming weeks.)

ART EXHIBITS

Snapshots, exhibit of photos by Mircea Nicolescu, extended through closes **Sun Mar 16**. Octagon Gallery hours 9am-9pm daily.
Vernissage 13, RIVAA members annual group exhibition, beginning **Sat Mar 15** with opening reception 6-9pm. Through May 4. Gallery hours **Sat-Sun** 11am-5pm, **Wed & Fri** 6-9pm.
Spring, RIVAA members group exhibition, opens **Sat Mar 22**. Runs through **Sun May 11**.

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 Apr 6 and Jul-Aug) 5-7pm, Gallery RIVAA, 527 Main St. \$5 donation. Resumes May 4.
Drum lessons for 5th-9th-graders, **Tue & Thu** 3:30-5:30pm, Youth Center, 506 Main St. Info: Call 212-527-2505 or email info@RooseveltIslandYouthProgram.com.
Piano lessons for 5th-9th-graders, **Wed & Fri** 3:30-5:30pm, Youth Center, 506 Main St. Info: Call 212-527-2505 or email info@RooseveltIslandYouthProgram.com.

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.
Pilates, **Wed & Fri** 6:30-7:30pm, PS/IS217.
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, **Sun** 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. (Replaced with Pilates until new instructor is found.)

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**, 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, **Wed** 10:30 & 11:00 (starts Mar 16, ends wk of May 4), Sportspark. Drop-in rate \$7. Info: Eddit.Perez@rioc.ny.gov or 212-832-4569.
Baby Story Time (0-18 mo), **Mon** 10:30am, Library. Advance registration required.
Baby Playtime (0-18 mo), **Mon** 11am, Library.
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.
Toddler Play Time (18-36 mo), **Wed** 11:30am, Library.
Island Kids Baby Group (0-14 mo), **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.
Teen Time (ages 13-18), **Mon-Fri** 3pm, Library.
Beacon After-School Program for 1st-8th-graders, **Mon-Fri** 3-6pm, PS/IS 217. Free. Info: 212-527-2505 or RooseveltIslandYouthProgram.com.
Reading Aloud (children), **Fri** 3:30pm, Library.
Open Gym for high school students, **Mon & Wed** 6-8pm, PS/IS 217.
Board 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.
Constituent Service Hours for City Councilmember Ben Kallos, **1st Wed** 4-7pm, Senior Center, 546 Main St. (Starts April 2.)

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 joinfoodbox.com. Info 347-985-7540; pickup period at 546 Main St. **15th of month**.



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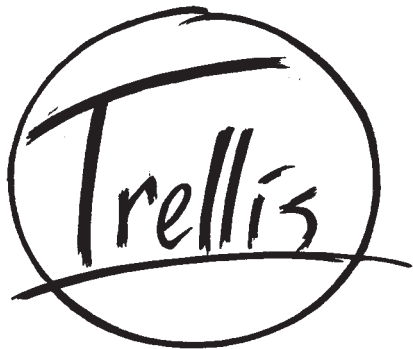
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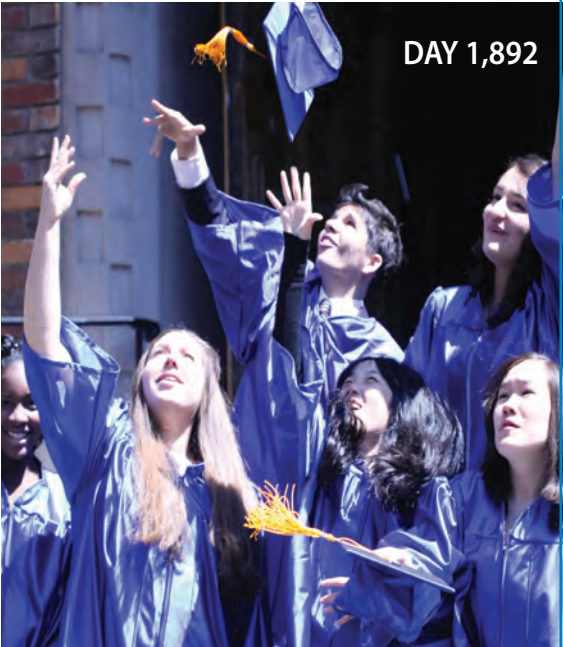


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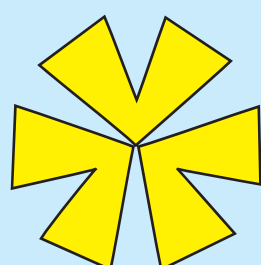
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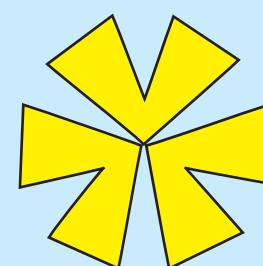
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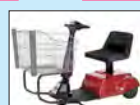


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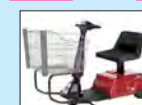
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Escobar, from page 1

the agenda and came at the 90-minute mark. It served as the emotional heart of the meeting. Escobar started with, “I have written a very long report. Because of how it’s [the meeting] going, favorably, I don’t see a need to read my thoughts.”

He put his notes down and spoke, “All I can say is that, back in November a year and a half ago, I was elected by the majority of Roosevelt Island residents in a contested election against a colleague I respect greatly, Sharon Pope, to do exactly what I am doing here today, to fill the seat of the president should there be a resignation or a vacancy, and that has occurred. There have been a lot of back-and-forths and, quite frankly, everyone can have their own opinion of everybody else, myself as well. I don’t think people’s opinions should be discouraged. I do have issues, as we finish out the remaining months [of the Council term] and meetings, that we work to serve the community, that we try to respect each other as individuals, and refrain from personal attacks, bringing other family members into these attacks, and making references to them.”

The personal piece of Escobar’s address followed, “I’ll be frank

because my wife asked me to. My wife was diagnosed with breast cancer last year. And for the last year or so, I apologize if some of you felt like my absence was for any other reason except for the fact that my wife was going through – and she asked me to say this, because she’s read and is aware of everything that’s been going on – a double mastectomy, reconstruction, chemotherapy, radiation. We’ve undergone [procedures] to preserve [the possibility of] future children, all the while maintaining and continuing to have our own jobs and continuing to serve, so it was really disheartening to see people jump down each other’s throats.

“All of us, not just myself, have our personal things that are going on, so before we all talk about what should or should not have been done, let’s remember why we’re here, and it’s to serve the community – to advocate the best you can and to finish out the remaining months.

“Having said that, I will update the Council and say that last week was a very good week in a sense of the outreach. We have had a town hall meeting, with State Senator Jose Serrano, Cy Vance, the Manhattan District Attorney, and [Public

Safety] Chief Jack McManus, where many community members came out and expressed their concerns. The fact that electeds came to the Island directly to hear our concerns is a big step forward. Last week, I also convened a listening session at The Octagon where approximately 15-20 people came. It ran for over 90 minutes. During that time, there were a number of initiatives that people expressed. The message that became very clear in these two sessions is that people want RIRA to work. People want RIRA to come back to the table and to remember why they were elected.

“I want to close by reminding members not only to have respect toward one another but also that we are here for one purpose only, and it is to be representatives of the Island.”

Escobar’s address was followed by appreciative applause and, soon after, the next agenda item.

The Meeting

On a night when several resolutions were passed, vacancies were filled, and new members seated, the highlight of the meeting was the meeting itself. It did last well over two hours – closer to three. But as Farance said after the meeting, “It’s not about the actual time; it’s

Public-Purpose Funds Fall Well Short of Need

The Public Purpose Funds Committee of the RIRA Common Council has completed its recommendations on distribution of \$100,000 in Public Purpose funds. The proposed distributions, which will be presented to the Board of Directors of the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation (RIOC), were approved by the full Council on Wednesday night. They are:

	<i>Recommended</i>	<i>Requested</i>
Day Nursery	\$ 4,000	\$ 35,000
PS/IS 217 PTA	15,000	32,000
Visual Art Association	16,000	39,500
Life Frames, Inc.	3,000	19,900
Historical Society	5,000	25,000
Seniors Association	13,000	15,000
Island Kids	10,000	15,000
R&R Concerts	7,000	11,250
Disabled Association	9,000	9,000
Main Street Theatre	15,000	27,250
Island Cats	3,000	3,000
Total	\$ 100,000	\$ 231,900

In the Common Council meeting, several minutes were devoted to the question of the inadequacy of the amount made available for public-purpose funding by RIOC and its Board of Directors. With requests totaling over \$230,000, Council members commented that it’s clear that the needs of Island organizations are not being met by RIOC’s “allowance.” More than one member advocated putting a request before RIOC for a larger sum next year.

about the perception of how the time is used. If people are perceiving things moving along speedily, then you can get them to stay until 10:30 without a problem. Overall, I think the meeting was conducted better than the past year and a half. And I think that when you do that and give people the expectation that’s what you’re going to do, then 95% of the people are responsive to it and I think that’s what we saw here tonight – not all, but 95%, were responsive. I shook his hand and I said, ‘Congratulations, good job.’ As a critic of a lot of past stuff, I was pleasantly surprised by a lot of the key organizational points.”

The agenda included an item forwarded by Southtown representative Mickey Rindler that was a resolution of support for the president. However, given the well-run meeting, and after Escobar’s moving personal story in his president’s report, the motion was deemed unnecessary and was withdrawn.

In the end, motions were made, votes were taken, Public Purpose

Funds were allocated, and perhaps most importantly, RIRA took a positive first step toward restoring legitimacy. The meeting ended jubilantly, with Council members feeling hopeful and accomplished. They applauded Escobar again.

Council member Dave Evans gives credit to, “I am very pleased with how Jeff conducted the meeting tonight. I think he exceeded expectations, quite frankly, but more importantly, the reception he received was well beyond what was anticipated from all of the private discussions that went on in advance. I think that Jeff humanized himself tonight when he shared a personal story. He didn’t have to do it, but he did and I think it humanized him.” (See *Island Observer*, page 3.)

Council members were deferential to Escobar even when they weren’t deferential to one another, and he accomplished what many felt had been recently lost – a well-run, efficient meeting. In those two hours plus, Escobar earned the Council’s respect.



A veteran of the RIRA Common Council, Sherie Helstien, was elected by its members to replace Jeff Escobar in the vice president’s role.

Priority, from page 1

them. “How could we better RIRA, and how can RIRA better serve the community than it has for the past year and a half?”

Common Council member Helen Chirivas had said, earlier, “We mustn’t be consumed with our factions.” In his interview with *The WIRE* this week, Escobar described that set of problems as “personal, inter-relationship issues, and the inner machinations of RIRA.”

Escobar believes running these meetings and managing these processes is the real work of the RIRA president. “At the end of the day, I have my own opinions, but as the chair of a meeting, it’s up to me to lead that process. *Maybe we should talk about [a particular item] right now, for example. Or maybe we can have this talked about in committee and come back.* The full meetings should be the final discussions. That’s been one of the biggest criticisms of the last administration. I really don’t have any agenda other than moving the meeting, and that was getting kind of lost.”

Escobar planned a time limit on speeches at Council meetings, and a “speaker’s list” to move things along. He delivered on both Wednesday night. “I really don’t have a problem interjecting and asking, *Is there a question in what you’re saying?* or, *Is there any statement you’re making?*, and a two-minute or one-minute time limit helps.”

On the question of using or dropping *Roberts Rules of Order*, which was raised at the informal session by Southtown representative Mickey Rindler, Escobar said, “The rules are meant to be guideposts. If we make an error, we make an error and we move on,” he said, emphasizing his role and responsibility as chair in doing so. “The reality is that it is the influence and exertion of the chair who is presiding over the meeting, both in the confidence of [his] interpretation of the rules and [his] exertion in assuring everyone else’s,” he explained.

Escobar added, “Having said that, procedurally speaking within *Robert’s Rules*, there is a provision that if you don’t agree with a decision the chair makes, two-thirds of the members present can overrule the position of the chair. If it gets to that point, it gets to that point. If there is strong opposition, I will remind everyone that they can overrule me by two-thirds.” A moment of levity followed

when Escobar’s wife Elizabeth shared, “Jeff’s really good at *Robert’s Rules*.” She turned out to be right about that.

“I’m not going to stand for the yelling,” Escobar said point-blank. “If it gets out of hand, I have no fears in adjourning the entire meeting... If I ask for someone to call for an adjournment and to second it, it is because I am not going to allow things to devolve as they’ve devolved in the past,” he elaborated.

A First

Escobar is the first president from The Octagon, or any building other than the original WIRE buildings (Westview, Island House, Rivercross, Eastwood). “I never even really thought about that,” he told *The WIRE*. I mean, I really have not given much thought to that distinction. It’s just because there shouldn’t be a distinction.”

But it set him to thinking about his building. He said that The Octagon has been trying to find its footing on the Island and in RIRA, and called it *frustrating* that people still protest the fact that The Octagon was built, and that it has an express bus.

“Only are you now seeing the fruits of the long-term families who are living in the building. For a long time, we were a new building. The investment in the community was just beginning. Now, there are families, ourselves included, who have no intention of moving, just like in any of the other buildings, including the rentals and the WIRE buildings. I don’t think [the fact that there has never been a non-Norhtown president] is necessarily tied to affordable housing. I think it’s a natural merging of the population. The same thing could be said for Southtown. It’s a little surprising that there’s never been a Manhattan Park president. They seem to always have a strong contingent. There are people who sit on RIOC who live in Manhattan Park.

“Things are changing,” he continues. “The population is changing. For RIRA to remain relevant, RIRA has to be responsive to change.”

Comment at MainStreetWIRE.com

State of the Organization

As things stand some 16 months after the last RIRA election, many buildings are short of representation on the Common Council. Escobar says he intends to recruit representatives for the empty seats, and expects to deal with that in a future *RIRA Column*. But at the start of Wednesday night’s Common Council meeting, RIRA also lacked a vice president and a secretary, and several committee chairs were vacant.

Escobar planned a fresh start for the meeting – a kind of reset. “No discredit to the prior administration, but I have to kind of treat everything as ground zero and start fresh. That will be impressed upon Council members at the March 5 meeting.” He pointed out that there are no reliable attendance records, and a lack of meeting minutes in some cases. As part of the reset, he said, the RIRA website (riraonline.com) will become informational about the association, rather than an attempt to keep up with the rush of events.

“I was in a difficult position as vice president. A lot of what I was doing had to be counseling in the background and not breaking from the president, because the president is the executive in that sense and making final decisions.”

A “huge issue,” according to Escobar, is the fact that Governor Andrew Cuomo is ignoring the community’s nominations to the RIOC Board of Directors. He saw the recent town meeting held by State Senator Jose Serrano and District Attorney Cyrus Vance as promising, and demonstrating an awareness from the outside world that we exist and that we have issues. But the question that Escobar wants answered is, “How do we get the governor’s office here and, if the governor is not listening, what should we be doing?”

“RIRA is not my organization,” says Escobar. “It is not a single member’s organization. It is not a single building’s organization. It is an Island-wide organization. Its success will come from all parts of the Island, all buildings and all councilors coming together to do work collectively.”

The vibe at last week’s informal sit-down was sedate, serious, and cooperative. There was a lot of head-nodding. There were no side conversations and no raised voices. The session ended at 9:00 p.m. with applause.



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unClassified deadline for April 5 issue: Tuesday, April 1

Please see ComingUp, page 3, for other advertising deadlines

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1:00 Paint & Sculpt
6:00 Nutrition Workshop

Wednesday
9:00-1:00 Tax Help
9:30 Yoga Stretch
10:20 Shoppers’ Bus
10:30 Salsa
10:45 Spanish
12:00 Bridge
1:30 Scrabble
6:00-8:00 Computer Lab

Thursday
9:15 Pilates with Ivette
10:30 Zumba
10:45 Ping Pong
12:00 Movie
1:00-2:30 Theatre tickets at discount prices; see Rema or Annie

Friday
9:00 Building Strength
10:30 Computers
10:30 ESL
10:30 Tai Chi
12:00 Korean Exercise
1:00 Korean Games
2:00 Art with John
2:00 Pokeno with Dolores
7:00 Games (RISA)

Special Events

Metrocard Bus, Mon Mar 10, 11am-12:30pm



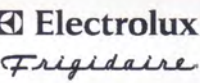
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Friday, March 7 at 5:35 pm
Friday, March 14 at 6:43 pm
Friday, March 21 at 6:50 pm

Blessing: Boruch A-toh Ado-noi E-lo-hei-nu Me-lech Ho-olom A-sheer 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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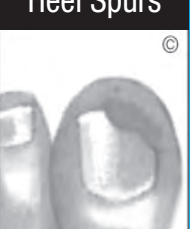
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