

# The Main Street **WIRE**

Roosevelt Island's Community Newspaper

in association with Website NYC10044

## Like Island House, But Worse Westview May Face A Ground Rent Hike

Westview tenants face the possibility of a rent increase even more serious than the one RIOC seeks to impose on Island House (reported in *The WIRE* December 20).

While terms of the Island House ground lease put the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation in a position of asking for a seven-year catch-up on ground rent and tax payments on that property, the terms of Westview's ground lease call for an increase in tax equivalency to have been completed by 1989 - nearly a decade ago.

According to reliable sources, President Jerome Blue of RIOC now seeks to impose the full increase, from \$400,000 to about \$1 million, all at once, in negotiations now being conducted with the building owner. Should that happen, and assuming it is passed on to tenants, the resulting rent increase would average about \$140 per apartment each month. Whatever rent increase is authorized by the State Division of Housing and Community Renewal after Budget Rent Determination hearings now scheduled for February, \$140 of it would presumably go directly to RIOC - not to maintenance, improvements, or to the owner.

The matter will be a subject of discussion at Tuesday night's meeting of the Westview/Island House Task Force, to be held at 8:00 p.m. (January 13) in the Westview Lower Community Room. Task Force members have a meeting scheduled with Jerome Blue the next day.

The matter is critical for two reasons: First, a sudden increase of the amount being discussed - especially if coupled with a normal rent increase - would unquestionably be burdensome for the building's residents; second, Westview faces a bill of about \$1.5 million for repairs, over

the next two years, primarily to its facade and roof.

The Westview lease calls for a five-year span of increases in PILOT (payments in lieu of taxes) that was to have begun in 1980 and was to have been completed by 1989, going up about 20% every two years.

Commenting on both the Island House and Westview situations this week, Tim Johns of the Westview/Island House Task Force said, "This is incredible. Here you have one state agency selecting tenants based on their inability to pay rents, which nonetheless are then being demanded by another state agency. It makes no sense." Johns continued, "I'm worried about a rent strike. Once tenants get the word that their rents are going to be jacked up to plug a hole in Albany's budget because Jerome Blue has failed to seek out funding for the Island, they're not going to be happy." Johns indicated a rent strike is a full time job for somebody, with court appearances, accounting, collection of rents for escrow, and more.

"Housing Management would be put in a position of having to enforce leases," he said, "serving eviction notices and summonses. But nobody in the State power structure has the least clue what incredible anger at Blue is bubbling, right now, beneath the surface. People are seething."

Johns told *The WIRE* that 15 to 20 percent participation in a rent strike would put substantial pressure on the owners of Island House and Westview, and could force the buildings back into receivership, from which they just recently emerged under the stewardship of Charles Lucido of Dallas, the developer who represents the investors who own the buildings.



Website NYC10044  
Tim Johns

## RIRA Considers Options For Assaults on RIOC, State, MTA

Frustration and anger approached a rolling boil at Wednesday night's meeting of the RIRA Common Council. The elected representatives to the Residents Association body discussed a variety of possible actions against the RIOC administration of Dr. Jerome Blue.

Other than agreeing to an extra meeting in two weeks to attempt to settle on some approach, the Council took no action.

Flashpoints included RIOC attempts to increase ground rent for Island House and Westview (related story, this page), the Tramway/Metrocard issue, and lack of information from RIOC.

Along the way, there was discussion, and some disagreement, over just what the focus of any protest should be.

But there were abundant ideas on how to mount a protest against RIOC - and possibly get some action - ranging from an Island-wide rent strike to a Motorgate boycott, and from a tax protest to marches on Albany.

The last major protest, an October 27 demonstration at Tramway Plaza, led to promises to RIRA President Patrick Stewart that he would be hearing from Bradford Race, an aide to Governor George Pataki, and from New York City Deputy Mayor Rudy Washington. To date, Stewart has heard nothing from Race, and only a call from Washington's secretary saying "he hasn't forgotten."

### Transportation

The RIRA meeting first rose to an angry pitch over the expected February start of reduced subway service. Council member Malcolm Cohen decried the failure of the powers that be to integrate the Tramway into the Metrocard system: "We have to have the Metrocard. I don't care what it takes. If this man [Blue] doesn't have the chops to do it, if we have to go to Albany..."

Cohen later continued, "This is the first thing I see that might bring this whole Island together. If you ride the subways and buses and you don't think you're getting screwed, God bless you. If anybody thinks that this administration here is taking care of us... This guy [Blue] should be bombarded."

Sherry Helstien, another council member, speaking of the MTA's plan for 15 months of shuttle service during subway track repairs, said "The current plan is absolutely unacceptable for a year and half." There was conversation about how to approach the MTA to ask for a shorter period of reduced service, or for an alternative to the one-way-at-a-time use of tracks between 21st Street, Queens, and the station at 57th Street and 6th Avenue or 7th Avenue, which has led to the shuttle approach.

But discussion of transportation ultimately focused on the Tramway and the Metrocard. While no resolution was passed, the sense of the Council seemed to be that since the MTA is largely controlled by appointees of the Governor, and Roosevelt Island is a state-operated entity, the subsidies necessary to bring the Tramway into the Metrocard free transfer system should not be a prob-

lem. "Whatever games they have to play, we have to have the Metrocard," Cohen said. "Nobody on this Island should be paying a second fare when nobody else (in the City) has to."

### How to Protest?

As often happens at RIRA meetings, there was disagreement on how to mount an action against RIOC, or against the State. Diedre Breslin, who in addition to her membership on the Common Council is a member of Community Board 8, said "We should ask people to seriously consider that RIOC is inefficient and unable to help us, and inequitable. I believe our attempts to get somebody on that [RIOC] Board are wrong-headed." Breslin favors boycotting RIOC and working to have it abolished as essentially undemocratic and inherently unresponsive to Island residents. Others



Malcolm Cohen

who favor an elected government for the Island advocate an intermediate step of securing resident appointments to the RIOC Board of Directors. (Mayor Rudy Giuliani has the right to name two Board members, but has not.)

Nneka Pope, a Council member and former President of RIRA, asked the delegates to focus: "We have al-

## Subway Service Cut

	21 <sup>st</sup> St Queens	Roosevelt Island	61 <sup>st</sup> St & Lexington	57 <sup>th</sup> St & 7 <sup>th</sup> Ave
	to Manhattan +			
12:00 - 12:15	12:15 - 12:30	12:30 - 12:45	12:45 - 1:00	1:00 - 1:15
12:30 - 12:45	12:45 - 1:00	1:00 - 1:15	1:15 - 1:30	1:30 - 1:45
1:00 - 1:15	1:15 - 1:30	1:30 - 1:45	1:45 - 2:00	2:00 - 2:15
	+ From Manhattan			
12:00 - 12:15	12:15 - 12:30	12:30 - 12:45	12:45 - 1:00	1:00 - 1:15
12:30 - 12:45	12:45 - 1:00	1:00 - 1:15	1:15 - 1:30	1:30 - 1:45
1:00 - 1:15	1:15 - 1:30	1:30 - 1:45	1:45 - 2:00	2:00 - 2:15

A subway service cut to start February 22 will offer shuttle service every 20 minutes to and from Roosevelt Island.

lowed the discussion of Roosevelt Island to be dictated, and not by RIRA. This Common Council has to remain focused on setting the agenda, and that agenda ought to be Pataki and D'Amato. If we allow the agenda to be expanded to include other agendas not of this body, in particular the racism issue, we are doomed. We won't make it. We will be divided. We should remain focused on those two people and those two people alone."

### Rent Strike

Council member Frank Farance brought up the idea of an Island-wide rent strike as a means of attracting some useful official attention. "The merchants (now) have a complaint in common with us," he said, referring to merchant concerns over new product offerings in the expanded supermarket. "We have in common that this whole community is being grossly misrepresented. We have no control over that organization (RIOC), so maybe through a rent strike we can make this somebody else's problem, too."

Joan Brooks responded by cautioning about the amount of work involved in a rent strike. "We really have to think about it. It's overwhelming. I agree with you wholeheartedly, but it's major. If you've never been on a rent strike, it's an overwhelming responsibility to take on. There are so many issues to focus on, we all have to be united and have to have people ready to do the work."

### Extra Meeting

Council members agreed to schedule an extra meeting at 8:00 p.m. Wednesday night, January 21, to work on specific resolutions and actions. (RIRA meetings, normally held at the Chapel of the Good Shepherd, are open to the public.) Judith Berdy proposed inviting DHCR Acting Commissioner Joseph Lynch, who has begun chairing RIOC Board meetings. "Get Joe Lynch here next (meeting)," she said. "This is ridiculous. We're spending a whole evening with no information. Get that Commissioner here. Let him hear a hundred questions. I've had enough with being nice to these people. He has to be here, in person. Enough with this stuff."



Island Kids is gearing up for its Winter/Spring sessions, ranging from a mother/baby group to adult pottery classes, daytime activities for pre-schoolers and after-school activities for others. Last semester's Learning Group (ages 3 and 4) is pictured here, including Thomas Spitzer, Anthony Fallone, Assane Dessable, Adam Glenn, Baptiste Carrara, Shara Meltzer, Sara Stang, and Milos Gak. Registration information in *ComingUp* on page 3.

# A Gentle Man

When I was a kid growing up in Indiana, Pa., I learned a lesson that has stuck with me all of my life and one that I have tried to copy whenever the occasion arises. This lesson was taught by a neighbor, who by this time was starting to get some recognition in Hollywood and considerable fame in our little town. At the time, everybody in Indiana hung onto every word written about "our star" and watched the newsreels, as they were called in those days, at the movie theaters, for a glimpse of him amid the famous.

I was fortunate enough to be included in my grandfather's frequent visits to the hardware store owned by the celebrity's father, a longtime family friend. I would wander around the bins filled with nails and hinges and pretend to examine the horse harness, but really would be listening to the proud parent, detailing his son's latest adventures in filmdom. One time, I recall, the postal service was instituting airmail pickup in Indiana. Those days, the mail bag was hung on a hook of some sort that was suspended on a wire stretched between two poles. The plane would swoop down and pick up the cargo. For the occasion, our hero's mother baked his favorite dessert and it was picked up by the first mail plane coming in and flown non-stop to Hollywood.



One day my Dad decided that it was time for me to start learning how to play tennis. With my new racquet, I accompanied him to the local club where he was a member and had a match scheduled. While Dad went into the clubhouse to look for his partner, I started to take a few practice swings on the court, trying to just get the ball over the net. Suddenly, a voice I instantly recognized spoke from behind me. "Ah, Jim, ah, I think you'll do better holding the racquet a little bit closer to the end. Ah, here, let me show you."

I turned and, for the next 20 minutes or so, Jimmy Stewart took time out to teach a novice the first rudiments of tennis. That was the beginning of a friendship that lasted for many years, with Jimmy always asking for me and how my tennis game was going whenever he ran into my Dad at the hotel he managed in Indiana.

It even extended into the years after I came to Manhattan. I began writing for movie and TV magazines and, whenever Jimmy had a film opening and would come to New York for press interviews and parties, we frequently would run into each other and talk. Once I asked him what had made him take the time to show me how to hold my racquet that day so long ago.

"Ah Jim," he drawled as usual, "my dad stayed pretty close to the hardware store when I was a kid so there were a lot of times I couldn't ask him about things I wanted to know. That day at the club when you were trying to teach yourself, you reminded me of myself."

And that is why I always try to take a minute to listen to the kids. It's a tribute to an old friend who died this past year and, for me, Jimmy's advice has made for "a wonderful life." One can learn a lot from kids, especially the Roosevelt Island kids, for instance, who are a pretty savvy bunch. Try it sometime and try giving yourself "a wonderful life" by taking the time to listen and help our kids whenever you can.

# 1997

RIP

What an extraordinary year was 1997 for Roosevelt Island.

Jerome Blue, Ph.D., made news at every mis-step, cutting a wide and ugly swath across Island affairs, starting with an attempt to gouge Island organizations for use of playing fields, progressing to a unilateral attempt to cut Tramway hours, and ending with an attempt to hike ground rent for Island House and Westview in a way that would drive residents away.

Blue put Southpoint, designated parkland, up for commercial grabs. And nobody slapped him down.

Blue canceled the Day Nursery's fund raising carnival, saying the property traditionally used for it would then be a construction site for Southtown—demonstrating his absolute lack of grasp of the development process.

He found a way to kill off a swimming program for the Island's young people by charging the YWCA exorbitant Sportspark pool fees.

Blue carried obvious fakery to a new level of the absurd: He faked community input on Southtown by forming SHDAC, the Southtown Housing Development Advisory Committee. Then he rigged input on transportation by forming a stacked committee, whose assent to his blunders we may expect to see as documentation that he has "consulted" with the community. And he ran a "survey" on what Tramway hours should be cut vs a fare increase, a transparent move to divide the community.

Blue lent his office to distribution of Jesse Rademaker's "walks like a duck" papers, which (incidentally) made her the first human being ever to admit to that particular gait in print. While that claim was amazing for its self-deprecation, another was amazing for its total absurdity: that Patrick Stewart is a racist, along with anybody who wants democratic home rule for Roosevelt Island.

Rademaker also did her best to damage the Island by arranging for activist Joyce Mincheff to be eased off the RIRA Common Council on a technicality.

Blue short-circuited the approval process for public purpose funds, and handed over a significant chunk to Rademaker's Young Adult League to provide services offered elsewhere under competent auspices.

Completely nonpartisan in handing out woe, Blue attempted to take over scheduling of the Chapel of the Good Shepherd. Whether he'll succeed remains to be seen, but as a 1997 grab, it's a shining Blue moment.

George Pataki found a way to reward all of New York City for the financial success of its transit system—while simultaneously punishing Roosevelt Island, whose Tramway he left out of the largesse, despite an clear-cut opportunity to put it into the Metrocard system.

In a fairly obvious move, Coler and Goldwater merged, at least administratively.

The Main Street Theatre had a remarkable year, culminating in a stunningly bright production of *Edwin Drood*.

Developers were chosen for Southtown, including The Related Companies, owned by heavy GOP contributor Steve Ross. Related and Hudson were handed a blank slate by RIOC, with a promise that Island powers will work for the changes necessary in the arrangements between City and State as to development of the Island.

Sloan's became a Gristede's MegaStore in a long-promised move that produced a real shopping experience for Island residents. Unfortunately, many other merchants on the Island feel threatened by RIOC's failure to protect them from competition, as promised in original leases some years back.

Trellis changed hands to our culinary advantage. The Chinese Restaurant changed hands twice, but the latest owner seems to have it right.

Montauk Credit Union arrived to give Islanders a welcome choice in banking. And the Island didn't lose Chase Bank after all, as had been feared at one point.

The Island's movement for democracy landed a few punches in the form of a July 4 rally and an October 27 demonstration.

Three residents (Virginia Ewald, Karen Puritz, Barbara Packer) wrote George Pataki, on his invitation, after encounter-



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...until election day.



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# Letters

Joseph B. Lynch  
Acting Commissioner  
New York State Division of  
Housing and Community Renewal  
Hampton Plaza  
38-40 State Street  
Albany, New York 12207

December 18, 1997

**Dear Commissioner Lynch:**

On behalf of Patrick Stewart and Audrey Berman, I am writing to thank you and Otis Jones for meeting with us yesterday. We are grateful that someone in a position to do something is finally listening.

Living on Roosevelt Island, we see and sense serious and unfortunate changes in progress, but we came away from the meeting believing you have a sincere interest in our concerns and in doing what you can to help Roosevelt Island. We were gratified to learn that you do not take everything RIOC claims at face value and that you are taking measures to institute procedures and controls to assure proper assessment and accountability.

There are two topics I personally addressed at the meeting that I feel warrant further discussion.

Regarding your comment to me about requests vs. demands, it may be the first time you are hearing about much of this, so it may seem extreme. But we have made numerous requests, for 18 months, to no avail. We have made innumerable requests of Dr. Blue and RIOC, eventually resorting to FOIL only to find that Dr. Blue is using the FOIL process to delay and avoid providing information, rather than treating it seriously. Patrick Stewart has repeatedly requested meetings with the Governor, with Bradford Race, and with Senator D'Amato. Not one has responded to his requests to date (although yesterday you said he would be hearing from Mr. Race).

Requests haven't worked. Our politeness, our desire to cooperate, our attempts to go through proper channels have been thwarted at every turn. One and a half years of this has resulted in anger and frustration culminating in the October 27<sup>th</sup> demonstration. In short, we are long past asking politely, and while I regret that you encounter us in this state of frustration, as a matter of policy we have moved from requests to demands, with a concomitant action orientation.

The second matter involves my statement that the Governor is interested in the future development of Roosevelt Island, specifically Southtown, but has written off Roosevelt Island and New York City when it comes to re-election support. That, frankly, is the attitude we feel he has shown us. Both the City and the Island have a history of voting for Democrats. All things being equal, I vote Democratic. But all candidates (issues, platforms, performance records) are rarely equal, and I cross party lines. Roosevelt Island is a hotbed of ticket-splitting. Here, there are many voters, like me, who would cross party lines if it was clear that the Governor took the right actions with regard to Roosevelt Island — financially, as well as through fair resident representation.

The Governor has a chance, in fact, to become Roosevelt Island's hero. Instead of more battles and protests, we would love to be able to work at endorsing the Governor because of his help and recognition of Roosevelt Island.

In meeting with us, Commissioner, you have taken an important step toward restoring our trust in State government and the Pataki administration. But, as you heard, there is far to go, and much to be done. We eagerly look forward to hearing what positive developments you will report to us at our next meeting.

On behalf of my colleagues and all the Roosevelt Island residents we represent, I extend my warmest wishes to you and Mr. Jones for a wonderful holiday and a new year of promise and renewal.

Linda Heimer, President  
R.I. Safety Coalition

New Year's is a time for many kinds of renewal, and amongst my own top priorities for 1998 is a renewal of commitment to the community. The holidays themselves have regenerated my faith that a strong sense of community does much to counterbalance the frustration of today's life in New York City. This is home.

There is not much we can do about our daily experience on the subways, or at work, or shopping or dealing (when we have to) with the government, or hospitals, or banks or other institutions. We can monitor our own behavior, as we should, but, unfortunately, we're pretty much powerless over the behavior of others.

But Roosevelt Island is home. If we don't take care of our home and insure that this community offers the best it can to all its members, then whom are we supposed to ask to do it for us? A community exists for the support of its members. If we neglect that support, we have no right to complain about the outcome. And those of us who are adult, and healthy, and are blessed to be able to make the effort are directly responsible for the effects of the results on our children, on the elderly, the not fully able-bodied, the disadvantaged, or anyone not entirely able to make the same effort themselves.

The State of New York has disenfranchised us in regard to the normal control any US citizen has over their local government by their replacement of the usual elected officials with RIOC. The citizens of Roosevelt Island have been fighting for more than 20 years to rightly obtain full representation on the Board of RIOC, or better still, to have RIOC removed, or its powers severely limited by advice and consent of the residents. This is how it is done in every single other community in the US.

Our most pressing concern here on Roosevelt Island for 1998, an election year, is to strive to accomplish those things, and to continue to press, urgently and ardently, for the removal of the current management of RIOC, and for their replacement with competent, honest managers who have the concern for the well being of the community that is appropriate for a Public Benefit Corporation.

If Pataki and D'Amato aren't enough embarrassed by Jerome Blue's administration, it can only be because they are not paying close enough attention. It's our job at RIRA to make sure they are paying attention.

We are going to need your help.

## RIRA President's Column



Patrick Stewart

## COMING UP

Compiled by Claire Friedland • 317-8523

**Tue., Jan. 13, 8:00 p.m. Westview/Island House Task Force**, Westview Lower Community Room. Planning for Budget Rent Determination and briefing on issues surrounding ground rent.

**Thur., Jan 15, 7:30-9:00 p.m. Island Kids, Registration** for the semester starting Jan. 26. 536 Main Street. Booklets and registration forms are now available at the Public Safety Office. There is a display currently on view in the large Main Street window of Rivercross.

**Wed., Jan. 21, 8:00 p.m. Extra meeting** of the Common Council of the Roosevelt Island Residents Association, Chapel of the Good Shepherd, 8:00 p.m. Open to the public. Island residents may address the Council during the public session at the beginning of the meeting. Information 371-2332.

**Friday, January 23**—Next scheduled issue of *The WIRE*. **Deadlines** Jan. 17, 19 for copy; for ads, Wed., Jan. 14. **Future issue dates:** Feb. 6, 20, Mar. 6, 20, and generally every two weeks through 1998.

**Tue., Jan. 27, 3:00 p.m. South Point Advisory Committee**, Chapel of the Good Shepherd. Open to the public. Briefing on RIOC's planning for South Point development.

**Sun., Feb 1, 10:00 a.m. Roosevelt Island Art Association** regular meeting, Art Studio on the 12th floor, 546 Main Street. Live model sessions being planned. 421-5939.

**Wed., Feb. 4, 8:00 p.m. RIRA Common Council** meeting, Chapel of the Good Shepherd. Public invited.

Fax or phone event information to 317-8523. Please provide a phone number for follow-up.

## At the Senior Center

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**Bingo**, Tuesdays 1:30

**English Classes**, Mon. 12-1 p.m., Wed. 9:30-10, Fri, 10-11

**Citizenship Classes**, Fridays 12:30-1 p.m.

**T'ai Chi** (exercise), Thursdays 10-11 a.m.

### Scheduled activities & events:

Wed., Jan. 14, **Medical Alert Workshop**

Wed., Jan. 21, **Atlantic City**

Thur., Jan. 29, 10:45, **Blood Pressure Screening**

## Public Safety Blotter

**December 16—DOA, Oil Dock 3.** At 2 p.m., a worker on the 59<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge reported seeing the body of a male lying on the dock below. Public Safety Department officers, NYPD and EMS personnel responded. The corpse was removed to Bellevue Hospital. The cause of death and identity of the deceased are unknown at this time.

**December 18—Larceny, Motorgate 4D.** A non-resident reported that someone had shattered the front-passenger side window and removed a cellular phone, camera, and suit from his car.

**December 18—Criminal Mischief, Motorgate 3D.** A PSD officer on patrol spotted a shattered side window on a car.

**December 29—Larceny, Motorgate 4A.** Two vehicles of an Island resident and a third, belonging to an off-Islander, had windows shattered and cellular phones taken from each one.

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a Target at  
Motorgate

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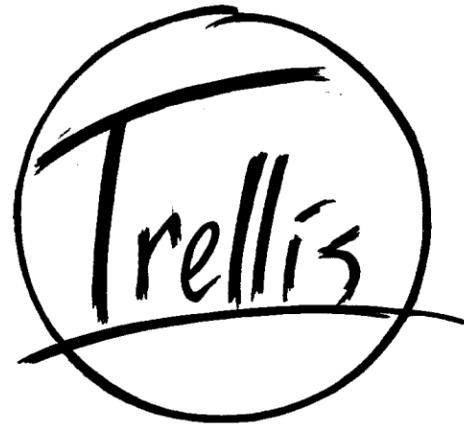
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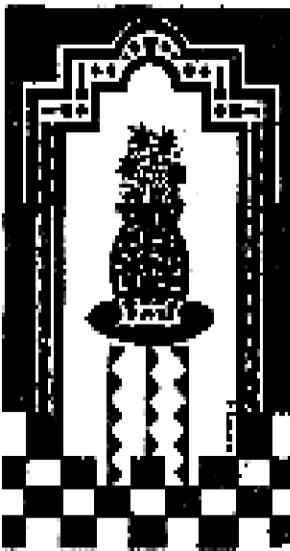
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ing him on the beach, to complain about RIOC and Jerry Blue. Amazingly, the Governor's response, obviously from the pen of Michael Greason of RIOC, was signed – apparently unread – by DHCR Commissioner Joseph Lynch, and it turned out to be a parroting of the thinnest Blue line ever to make print.

As though to make his disdain for Roosevelt Island crystal clear, Pataki dismissed a resident, Willard Warren, from the RIOC Board of Directors, and – without consulting any Island resident we know about – appointed a non-Islander to the Board.

Lynch tried to reverse field, though, when faced with an angry letter from another resident (Linda Heimer), by meeting with Heimer, RIOC President Patrick Stewart, and Audrey Berman of the Westview/Island House task force. His newfound interest in Roosevelt Island has yet to pay off, but it is nonetheless welcome as a balance to Jerome Blue's thoughtless bungling.

Edison Parking and RIOC, acting separately or in combination, found a way to offend every Island car owner by offering Motorgate parking to *non*-residents at less than half the price charged to Islanders.

City Councilmember Gifford Miller brought good news for the Island's library, which will soon become part of the New York Public Library system. The bad news wrapped in this good news may be a cutback in the Library's evening hours.

It took a chopper crash for the Mayor to move against the 60th Street Heliport. 1997's gift to the ears of 1998 may be a cessation of all but emergency flights within earshot of Roosevelt Island. More remains to be done, and the Helicopter Noise Coalition is on the case.

Mayor Rudy Giuliani managed to get re-elected, claiming to have visited every New York neighborhood – without ever setting foot on Roosevelt Island. His Island constituents were left wondering: *What will it take for the Mayor to move on nominating Roosevelt Islanders to the RIOC Board?* His appointments remain unfilled, and RIRA President Patrick Stewart still hasn't heard from Deputy Mayor Rudy Washington, whose call – promised in that late October meeting with several Island residents – is now seriously overdue.

-DL

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