

The Main Street WIRE

Roosevelt Island's Community Newspaper

in association with Website NYC10044



Website NYC10044

The Tramway returned to full operation Saturday after the required test of rescue capabilities.

Next Target: Jerome Blue

The Tram Is Back RIRA Claims a Victory, But Warns: Much More to Do

Roosevelt Island's aerial Tramway was back in service Saturday, and the Residents Association (RIRA) was attributing its return to citizen involvement and the pressure created by Wednesday's Town Meeting.

"All indications are that RIOC (the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation) was looking for excuses to keep the Tram down as long as possible," said Patrick Stewart, RIRA President. "It's back because the community spoke clearly and loudly, and its voice was heard in Albany."

But Stewart points out there has been little gain. "We're right back where we were a couple of weeks ago," he said late Saturday. "We have the Tramway back in spite of RIOC's stalling, but we still have Jerome Blue and a bunch of other incompetents in charge at 591 Main Street, we still have no Console Operators on duty at the Tramway, and residents still have little voice in how this Island is run."

"We have to do something about those problems, and we have to do it now," Stewart urged residents to stay involved and committed. "We can't let up just because we've got the Tram back," he said. "There's a great deal more to do that's going to need constant pressure from residents. And remember - this is an election year for the Governor and Senator D'Amato."

Meeting Friday

Stewart has a meeting scheduled Friday with members of the Pataki administration who serve above RIOC President Jerome Blue: Joseph Lynch, Acting Commissioner of the State's Division of Housing and Community Renewal, Otis Jones, Deputy to Lynch, and Bradford Race, the Governor's Chief of Staff. This is a follow-up to a mid-December meeting in which Stewart, Audrey Berman of the Westview/Island House Task Force, and Linda Heimer of the Roosevelt Island Safety Coalition, laid out a list of con-

cerns over Blue's administration of the Island.

Stewart attributes involvement of the Governor's office to resident activity, ranging from a rally for independence held July 4, through an October 27 protest march from the Manhattan Tram station to the Governor's Manhattan office, to Wednesday's Town Meeting.

Goals Unmet

"We still have specific goals that haven't been satisfied yet," Stewart told *The WIRE*. Among them:

- Removal of Jerome Blue from the Presidency of RIOC. "Blue serves at the Governor's pleasure," Stewart pointed out Saturday, "and so far the Governor's pleasure appears to be to allow Blue to continue to ruin Roosevelt Island in every way possible."

- Restoration of Console Operators on the Tramway. Stewart, and at least some members of the Tramway staff, believe the

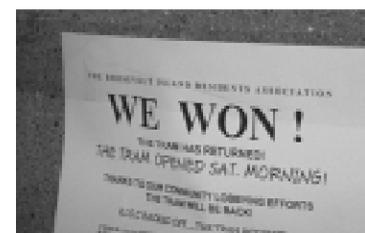


Patrick Stewart, speaking at Wednesday's Town Meeting

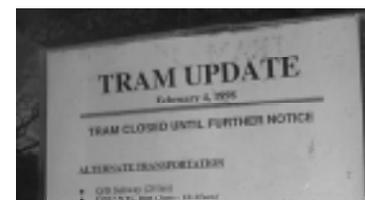
January 27 collision -- in which a barge-based construction crane being used in work on the Queensboro Bridge damaged Cabin #1 -- would not have happened if a Console Operator had been on duty in the booth above the Roosevelt Island platform.

"RIOC was warned, repeatedly, about eliminating this important position," Stewart said, "and Blue did it anyway, trying to save a few dollars at the expense of passenger safety. Now we know the results: No saving, and a dozen people injured unnecessarily." Stewart has accused RIOC of "gross negligence." There has been no satisfactory response from RIOC.

- Resident representation on the RIOC Board of Directors. The Governor appoints the Board, but Mayor Rudy Giuliani last week nominated Stewart and Susan Whitaker, who chairs the Roosevelt Island Council of Organizations, to serve on the Board. If the Governor accepts those



RIRA put a victory claim on Main Street kiosks Saturday after the Tramway resumed operation, even while RIOC's update informed riders "tram is closed until further notice."



nominations and the State Senate confirms both, there will be four residents on the Board -- unless the Governor terminates the terms of David Kraut and Ron Vass, whose terms have actually expired.

- In the longer term, the right to conduct an Island-wide election for members of the RIOC Board, or whatever replaces RIOC.

- A say in who replaces Blue.
- The Metrocard, with free transfers to and from MTA subways and buses, for the Tramway.

- An adequate State subsidy for operation of Roosevelt Island. Stewart disputes claims by Blue that Roosevelt Island has reached budgetary self-sufficiency. State subsidies were originally supposed to continue until the Island's population reached 20,000.

"For these objectives to be accomplished," says Stewart, "it's clear that the first step is to get rid of Blue."

Other Issues

At various times over the past several months, RIRA and other Island organizations have called for a real voice in development of Southtown (the area just north of the Tramway) and Southpoint, the Southern tip of the Island. While RIOC has held meetings of various citizen advisory boards, RIRA calls them "a sham." According to Stewart, "These meetings are scheduled at a time inconvenient for the majority of residents, and the way they are conducted makes it clear they're only for show -- something to put down on paper to claim the community has been consulted."

RIOC has, in fact, scheduled a "President's Meeting" for tomorrow (Tuesday, February 10), at 12:00 noon, a time when most Island activists are at work. A RIOC "inter-office memorandum" says "community invited" and lists these topics: Budget, Rivercross privatization, the Counseling in Schools program, and the Library. (Operation of the Library is about to be taken over by the New York Public Library, but has been delayed for several weeks, waiting for a lease agreement from RIOC.)

Over the weekend, no RIOC spokesperson was available to comment.

Island House Has Rent Hearing Today

There's a Budget Rent Determination Hearing for Island House today at Manhattan offices of the Division of Housing and Community Renewal. The hearing feeds into the process by which rent hikes are determined by the Commissioner of DHCR.

"It's not exactly a rational process," according to Tim Johns of the Westview/Island House Task Force. The issues, he says, "revolve around repairs and how much the tenants can afford for them, and around whether there is enough confidence in the managing agent to make those repairs and to spend the tenants' money [any rent hike] wisely."

Key Meetings

Westview/Island House Rent Determination Hearing

Today (February 9), 10:00 a.m., 25 Beaver Street (DHCR offices). A group will attend, and will meet in front of the Chapel at 8:15 for a free bus leaving at 8:30. Residents may call 644-9373 for information.

RIOC President's Meeting

Tomorrow (Tuesday, February 10), 12:00 noon, Good Shepherd Chapel. Community invited.

RIOC Board Meeting

10 a.m. Thursday (February 12), Good Shepherd Chapel.

MTA Board Meeting

Tuesday, February 17, 9:30 a.m., 347 Madison Avenue (between 44th and 45th Streets). Issues: Subway service cuts for repair work starting February 22, Metrocard for Tramway, and walking rail-to-rail transfers from Q-line station at Lexington Avenue and Lexington line station at 59th Street (and others).

Subway Cut Coming This Month

The Tram is back, but Island residents who rely on the subway are in for a long disruption in service.

Roosevelt Island service will go to a 24-hour shuttle February 22, boarding for Manhattan every 20 minutes at 18, 38, and 58 minutes past the hour. Trains will stop at 63rd and Lex, then terminate at 7th Avenue at 57th Street. There, riders can catch trains on the N and R lines.

Island-bound shuttles will leave 57th & 7th at 6, 26, and 46 past the hour, or 63rd & Lex at 10, 30, and 50 past.

The arrangement is scheduled to last 15 months, until mid-1999, while track work is done between 21st Street, Long Island City, and the Q-line station at 57th and 6th. The delay in the start of the shuttle service came about because prerequisite work had not been completed as planned.

This comes at a time when the Tramway is still not part of the Metrocard free transfer system, thus compounding the difficulties and increasing the costs residents will face.

	21 st St Queens	Roosevelt Island	57 th St & Lex Ave	63 rd St & Lex Ave
	To Manhattan →			
10:00	→	→	→	→
10:20	→	→	→	→
10:40	→	→	→	→
	← From Manhattan			
10:15	←	←	←	←
10:35	←	←	←	←
10:55	←	←	←	←

In addition, the MTA has yet to implement free Metrocard rail-to-rail walking transfers. Unless they are available by the time the cutback goes into effect, the station at 57th and 7th will be the only train-to-train transfer point for passengers who want to remain in the subway system after their shuttle trip.

The tracks in the subway tunnel between 21st Street, Queens, and both 57th and 6th and 57th and 7th, Manhattan, are being replaced some 20 years after initial installation because they haven't held up adequately. The rails are affixed to the concrete roadbed, rather than to a buffering system of rail ties. The tracks went largely unused between completion of construction and the late-'80's opening of the subway, and were neglected during the City's period of fiscal crisis in the '70's. New technology is now available for affixing the track to the roadbed, so the repaired sections are expected to hold up longer than the original installation.

An Angry Noise

The quiet signals coming across the government/citizen barrier suggest strongly that Jerome Blue has few supporters in the Pataki administration. If they had their way, Blue would already be an unfortunate political footnote.

But the glue holding Blue in place is his relationship with U.S. Senator Al D'Amato. D'Amato controls the New York State Republican party, and the political debt owed to the Senator by Governor George Pataki is such that Blue has been untouchable.

The only way to get rid of Blue is to make it hard for Pataki to keep Blue at RIOC – harder than it is for him to bend the political relationship he has with D'Amato. That means a lot of noise is needed – the kind of noise that might threaten the ease with which Pataki expects to be reelected in November.

It is not easy for a New York City-based population of 8,000 to generate decibels at that level. But it can be done. The right clever notion – perhaps the *T'Amato for D'Amato* campaign outlined last Wednesday night at the Town Meeting – can eventually get state-wide attention if necessary.

The right positioning of Roosevelt Island as just another small town David facing the Goliath of State politics – can capture the imagination of the folks out Syracuse way.

It can be done. *The WIRE's* editorial position on all this is clear: We're in concert with RIRA in believing Blue should go as rapidly as can be managed. So to facilitate the loud sound that appears to be needed to get the attention of the folks in Albany, we've provided a coupon on page 3.

Please: Fill one out, then fax it and/or mail it, and add your voice to the attention-getting cacophony that needs to rise from this Island now.



Mo

In politics, they talk about momentum: *Who has the "mo?"* is the question throughout any political season.

As of Wednesday night, Roosevelt Island residents had it.

In the past, though, the anger of residents at Jerome Blue's RIOC administration has come and gone in waves that rise when somebody's ox is gored, then fall when the wound is healed.

But the community has always been able to coalesce around the Tram, whenever it has been threatened. And now that it's running again, there's a genuine danger that momentum will be lost – momentum that otherwise could nurture the campaign to remove Jerry Blue from the Presidency of RIOC, get a democratic hand in the governing of this Island, bring Console Operators back to the Tramway, or any of several other goals that significant segments of the community can embrace.

So if you feel satisfied that the Tram is back, and might consider relaxing, don't. The Tram, and the rest of the Island, are in continuing jeopardy from the inept and uncommunicative management at RIOC. The problem won't be solved until Blue is gone, and the only way to make that happen is to keep the pressure on and keep it building.

Hang in there. The job may nearly be done, so don't let minor maneuvers throw this community off its stride.

If you're wondering what you might do, specifically, use the *Dear Governor* coupon on page 3. Then call **935-7534** to register your interest in helping with the Residents Association's activities and campaigns, or use the *volunteer* coupon page 3. You'll find it a satisfying experience, and a great way to get to know your neighbors.

Pearls

I've been thinking a lot lately about my two friends named Pearl. Clarissa, too, and Sophia, Lawrence, David, Seif, Sherie, Matt and Myrna and many others who labor, virtually unacknowledged, to bring *The WIRE* to you every two weeks.

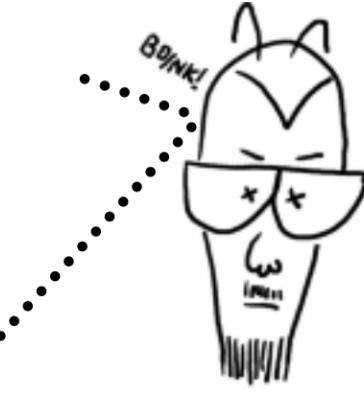
Those are names of just a few of many who might stuff advertising circulars into the paper when we have them, then deliver the paper to your door. Others, with names like Kay and Frances and Sharon, take on other tasks.

To my mind, they are the spirit of Roosevelt Island: Ready to pitch in and serve the community, have a little fun doing it, and *be involved*.

If you'd like to thank them, as I do, put your name on the volunteer form on page 3, and send it in. Join the Pearls.

-DL

Practice Shot



Al, the kid's gettin' better with that thing. Maybe we should pay attention.

Letters

To the Editor:

Hurrah, the Tram is back! But nothing has actually changed. Jerome Blue is still heading RIOC, and we are facing the same problems that confronted us prior to the Tram-crane accident.

Well, almost. Without the illusion of the Tram linking us to Manhattan, it is now obvious, even to those who had been completely oblivious to Blue's policies, that Roosevelt Island is a political no-man's land whose residents have no rights. Blue is merely a symptom of the real problem.

Sooner or later, Blue will be forced to resign. But he can be followed by another Blue, then another, ad infinitum. The real problem is the legislation that created the Urban Development Corporation and its "public benefit corporation" subsidiary, the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation. Note this excerpt:

The corporation's powers shall be limited to carrying out the development, management and operation of Roosevelt Island... to do and perform all other acts necessary to carry out the foregoing...

Translation: RIOC is empowered to do anything it deems necessary to carry out the mandate to develop, manage and operate Roosevelt Island. The only limitation is the mandate to develop, manage, etc.

This could be Blue's interpretation. It would explain why Blue and RIOC, since their appointment a year and a half ago:

- Disregard efforts by Pete Grannis, Gifford Miller and Carolyn Maloney to hold Blue and RIOC accountable to the Island's residents.

- Totally ignore Islanders' concerns expressed by RIRA and its elected president, Patrick Stewart, and most recently ...

- Blue's refusal immediately to institute emergency bus service for Island residents with allocated emergency funds according to precedents set before their tenure, when the tram was not able to function.

RIOC, and Blue as its CEO, are accountable to the governor that appointed them and to implement his policies. Not to the residents of Roosevelt Island or to their elected representatives. Because Blue's predecessors were generally responsive to community leaders and Islanders' concerns, their extremely broad powers went unnoticed.

As long as the legislation remains unaltered, Roosevelt Island will continue to be subject to arbitrary policies implemented by political appointees who will not hesitate to use despotic methods. Recent history has made this perfectly clear.

The time has come to amend the legislation.

The decisions made by RIOC and its president affect each resident and every aspect of daily life on the Island. We are entitled to a RIOC that is elected by its constituents. A RIOC that can appoint a professional city manager to operate, manage and develop Roosevelt Island. A RIOC that will finally achieve the original goal of the legislation:

...to create on Roosevelt Island a new community which would retain and heighten the benefits of urban living while preserving a sense of scale and open space for Roosevelt Island residents and New York City as a whole...

Fran Dym

To the Editor:

RIOC, despite its huge payroll, was unable to follow my February 6 suggestion that they put a notice on the outside of the Public Safety Office with the information (I didn't say this) that they failed to include in the long blue sheet (to remind us we're still stuck with Blue) called Tram Update. The sheet was so full of whining (and three examples of Blue's sexism, substituting "manned" for "staffed") that there was only misinformation about the Senior/Handicapped buses: "with return every half hour." Buses twice as often as the hourly buses in the past? What luck!

But there was no information as to when the buses would depart from the Island, and I'm not psychic - nor did I want to sit around for 29 minutes waiting for these half-hourly buses...

So I called. But it was after hours. The machine informed me that the Island has 147 acres and

I could leave a message if I pressed zero. I did; after a long pause, I was cut off. I repeated the call; same result. (Even the message machine is not interested in hearing from us.)

I called the next morning. There are no half-hourly buses. (RIOC didn't know how to say the buses left 59th Street on the half-hour.) Nor did they bother to say that buses leave the Island on the hour – nor, get this – they no longer exert themselves to stop at Gristede's for the Seniors and Handicapped on River Road. Too much of a strain on the bus driver! RIOC never fails to remind us that once Roosevelt Island was Eden – but not any more...

The notice did tell us that weekdays, between 4 and 8 p.m. there would be no buses.

On the 6th, I checked the Public Safety Office – no bulletin. On two concrete pillars at the bus stop there was a sign that a yellow bus would stop in front of the Public Safety Office at 552 Main Street. But – can you believe it? – no mention of when.

Why a yellow bus, I wonder? But at 2:00 I found out. It has only three seats, that can accommodate six. And maybe Blue could throw some of our money away on this strange bus – our own minibus would not only seat any number, but it would be free.

Each of us had to give name, address and signature. On the 4:30 return bus, there were seven of us. The driver would not allow standing. So a woman sat on a tire container! Blue's PhD must be in Originality. Who else would have thought of paying for a six-seater rather than using a free full-sized bus? Must hand it to him...

Frances Salten



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... More Letters ...

Friends and Neighbors:

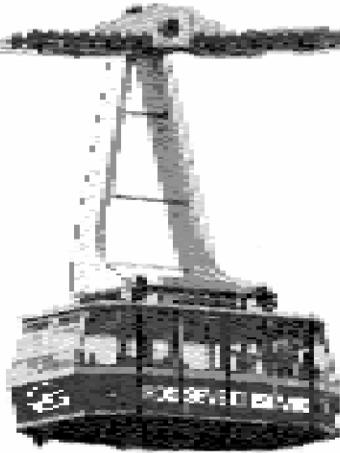
In 21 years, there was never such an outpouring of residents as in the Town Meeting last Wednesday, and on a dreary night with standing room only, and others stopped at the door. So *Bravo* to you, dear neighbors! Your response in the hall was so persuasive that its reverberation forced Dr. Blue to get the Tram running again, notwithstanding his statement in *The New York Times* that the Tram would be out "indefinitely" - "The Tram is going to be closed a long time, indefinitely," they said.

This statement was picked up by almost all TV stations, press and radio, and ran for days. Such negative statements, without any foundation, upset the whole community. When the President of RIOC can make such unbelievable statements, he loses all credibility!

Even as late as this past Friday afternoon, Dr. Blue's spokesperson, Mr. Greason, was still questioning whether he might be able to open on Monday because he was still expecting an "okay" from another agency... Presto... it opened on Saturday! Suddenly a magical transformation!

I would also like to point out that since day one, Dr. Blue has never recognized the Roosevelt Island Residents Association as the Island-wide duly-elected entity. He regards RIRA as only one of the so-called "60 organizations." Thirty-one representatives from almost all of the buildings have been duly elected to

represent the community and to him we are non-existent! In that



regard, we are on the march and already engaged in strong dialogue with many political authorities.

I would like to address some issues raised by Dr. Blue in his letter distributed at the Town Meeting:

1. Regarding his inability to restore the Console Operators, his letter claimed that the plan originated with the previous RIOC administration. But the truth of the matter is that two weeks before the previous RIOC administration was taking leave, I asked the then President of RIOC, Jean Lerman, what the status of the Console Operators was. She said it had been decided

to leave that decision for "the Republicans."

I begged Dr. Blue not to implement the plan, that it was against the overwhelming will of the community to eliminate the Console Operators and that it would be an accident waiting to happen. In fact, there was no saving under the plan outlined according to an auditor we hired. I pleaded with him to suspend his decision for 30 days so that he could study the matter and consult with official representatives of the community. He refused.

Our auditor was right. Dr. Blue subsequently stated that the savings turned out to be "Zero!"

2. Dr. Blue wrote about a decision rendered by the Industrial Board of Appeals in 1993 granting the right to remove the Console Operators. I originally informed Dr. Blue that the decision was completely "flawed," that the filing for a variance was kept secret from the community by the RIOC board and staff for over two years. RIRA had no possibility to render the residents' point of view at the hearings.

The original decision was rendered by a state official who never visited the Tram. The appeals hearing in Albany was also kept secret from the community so we had no chance to testify. The arbitrator told me that he would have been glad to hear us if we had been there. We were never notified. The decision was completely flawed.

3. Dr. Blue maintains that at the time of the crane-Tram accident, the console was attended by the Lead Supervisor who indeed had technical expertise. But he was in the control room attending to other duties and was not required to act as, nor was he acting as, a Console Operator. *Big difference!* A highly authoritative source has confirmed that there was no Console Operator in the booth.

I will conclude by repeating what I said at the Town Meeting on this subject: Dr. Blue or not, we are on a trajectory that is unstoppable: the force of the Roosevelt Island community that will indeed bring back the safety net of the Roosevelt Island Tram: *The Console Operators!*

Dear Neighbors, it was most uplifting to see your response. We are already engaged in a number of important political activities. *Upward and Onward!* We'll keep you posted!

**Al Weinstein, Chair
Tram Committee
RIRA**

"The tram is going to be closed for a long time, indefinitely, until we can get it inspected," said Michael T. Greason, the spokesman for the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation, the state-sponsored agency that runs the tram. "We do not have an

-New York Times Sat, Jan. 31

This is a great day for Democracy in America and New York. Earlier this week RIOC said that Tram service was to be suspended indefinitely. We all fought back as a united community against an inept and incompetent regime, and in the face of overwhelming resident and political pressure, Roosevelt Island's state appointed Jerry Blue was forced to reverse position Saturday and reopen the Tram.

Jerry Blue is only here because of his longtime connections to D'Amato. His complete failure to respond to the crisis caused by the Tram accident - the kids, seniors, and disabled who became virtual prisoners on the Island - is just the latest in a 20 month tenure where the hallmark has been a callous and total disregard for our welfare. He is running our Island into the ground.

Blue has already inflicted tremendous damage. We cannot rest until he and his administration are gone, and accountable and effective government is restored to Roosevelt Island.

We are taxpayers and voters - we want and deserve responsive, accountable, well-managed government, and we cannot rest easy until the Governor removes Blue and appoints someone who deserves our confidence and commands our respect, and who has the professional skill to run our community.

We cannot afford to rest on our well-earned laurels just because we won this round. The urgent imperative is to gain a permanent and officially-recognized strong resident voice in our own affairs. Just because we are a small community, we do not have to continue to sacrifice our right to democracy in order to live here.

At the very least, the RIOC Board of Directors should have as many members elected by the community as it has State-appointed seats. In any other community in New York, we would have elected officials whom we could hold responsible for their performance. We should have them here as well.

The State of New York is still intimately involved in our affairs because they have failed to provide the infrastructure to grow our community to the size they define as making us self-sufficient. Their failure does not give them the right either to abandon us or to penalize us by withholding from us the same voice in our affairs that we would enjoy in any other community.

We have proven we can capture the public's attention. This is an election year for Governor Pataki. If we do not continue to press loudly and adamantly for our rights, then we will get just what he thinks we deserve.

We've seen what he thinks we deserve in Jerry Blue. We must continue to fight with the same energy and commitment that got us our Tram back until we have regained the same rights as any other citizens of New York.

RIRA President's Column



Patrick Stewart

Volunteer?

Help the Community?

Yes, I can do that. Depending on the time of year and the cause, I have time to contribute to the community. If I have a special interest or skill I'd like to put into the mix, I've described it on the attached sheet. Otherwise, contact me to talk about what sorts of jobs I can take on, and what sort of time commitment I can manage.

Name _____
Phone _____
Address _____

Send to: Sherie Helstien, 20 River Road #16J, Roosevelt Island
Or fax to: (212) 755-2540

Letters Policy

The WIRE welcomes letters to the Editor, to the community, and to or from officials, and will consider publication on a *Name Withheld* basis, but the writer's name, address, & phone number must be provided. Submit on 3.5" floppy disk left at 531 Main Street for *The WIRE*; by ASCII text email (72260.20@compuserve.com); or typed, double-spaced copy left at 531 Main Street. All letters are subject to editing for length and clarity.

Dear Governor Pataki:

Please give your attention to the items I have checked below:

- I ask that you remove Jerome Blue from the Presidency of the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation (RIOC) immediately.
- I ask that RIOC be required to give formal recognition to the elected representatives on the Common Council of the Roosevelt Island Residents Association, and I ask that the Common Council be consulted in replacing Jerome Blue and in future appointments to the Board of RIOC.
- I strongly support maintaining the operation of the Roosevelt Island Tramway at full schedule throughout the year as a facility needed by the Island's disabled, elderly, and children, and by all residents as an alternative to the subway.
- I ask that immediate action be taken to put the Tramway into the MTA's Metrocard system, to make Roosevelt Island a one-fare zone like the rest of New York City.
- For the safety of passengers, I ask for restoration of Console Operators at the Tramway.

Signed: _____

Print name: _____ Address (optional): _____

My comments (optional): _____

Mail to: Governor George Pataki, State Capitol, Albany, NY 12224
Or Fax to: (212) 681-4643 Telephone: 518-474-8390 or (212) 681-4580

The Roosevelt Island Historical Society
presents

WINDOWS ON WELFARE

A PHOTOGRAPHIC MEMORY OF ROOSEVELT ISLAND IN 1968
by Danielle B. Hayes



Roosevelt Island Cultural Center
548 Main Street
February 12th to March 15th, 1998
Opening Reception Thursday, February 12th, 6-8 p.m.
Exhibit Hours: Fridays 8-10 p.m., Sat.-Sun. 1-5 p.m.

Welcome Back to our Tramway

And congratulations
to the residents
of Roosevelt Island,
and to RIRA,
the Roosevelt Island
Residents Association



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-NY Daily News



(212) 223-9115