

Next scheduled issue:  
Saturday, August 24

# The Main Street **WIRE**

Roosevelt Island's Community Newspaper

News updates on **Website NYC10044** [www.nyc10044.com](http://www.nyc10044.com)

The historic fireboat John J. Harvey, as it passed under the Roosevelt Island Bridge last Saturday on a mission to aid the Historical Society in its Blackwell House project. (More photo coverage on page 6.)

## Cooling Off for a Cause – Getting Wet Aboard the Harvey

by Anusha Shrivastava

For each of the 200-plus Island residents who rode on the visiting fireboat John J. Harvey last Saturday, the ride had some special meaning.

For some, it was a fun thing to do on a hot summer day. For others, it was a channel to donate money for the restoration of a landmark building. For a third group, it was a different way of seeing the lighthouse at the northern tip of the Island from the East River.

But for every one of them, it was a unique chance to be on a historic

boat sailing around an Island with an intriguing past. "We are on an Island but we hardly ever celebrate the river," said Judith Berdy, president of the Roosevelt Island Historical Society, who had arranged to have the retired fireboat visit the Island as a part of the society's effort to raise money for the repair of Blackwell House. "We wanted to educate the people about the river and the boat."

The 130-foot fireboat, first launched on October 6, 1931 at the Todd Shipbuilding and Drydock Corporation in Brooklyn, served 63 years in the New York Fire Department. "It was named for the pilot of another fireboat who died in the line of duty," said Captain Robert Lenney, a white-haired seaman who has skippered the Harvey

See **Harvey**, page 6

## Briefly...

**Subway Service** is suspended again this weekend as the MTA does track maintenance work. Shuttle buses will operate to the N and R lines at Queensboro Plaza, and RIOCI is providing 24-hour Tramway service throughout the weekend.

**No takers for Tram ads** was the report Wednesday morning at the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation Board of Directors meeting. The idea attracted no reasonable bids, but RIOCI intends to pursue the idea further. Board member Leo Kayser urged residents to get into the act, spread the word about ads on Tramway cabins and stations, and try to bring in an advertiser as a way of stemming losses.

The **Fourth of July** Fireworks Fest at Southpoint was a booming boxoffice success – an unexpected complete sellout. RIOCI says over 4,500 people attended and Public Safety reports "no criminal incidents." Parcels and bags were searched, metal-detecting wands were used, and security was tight enough, says PSD Assistant Director René Bryan, to give those attending "a real feeling of security."

**FreshDirect** reports it's pleased with its Roosevelt Island-only shakedown of its on-line food store, with some 150 orders in the first 2-3 days. For both the service and its Island customers, the next question is whether the initial experience, stimulated by the offer of \$50 in free fresh food (and a free \$25 follow-up), will produce a long-term change in shopping habits. FreshDirect plans roll-outs soon in Queens and Manhattan.

Waiting – or Not – for Southtown

## Card Shop Changing Hands as Merchants' Hardships Continue

by Anusha Shrivastava

Fifteen years of seven-day work weeks did not yield the right numbers for Mohammed Ali Khan, so he has finally decided to sell his business. His 1200-square-foot Card and Gift shop saw no profits in the past five years. Instead, Khan says he took on a debt of \$25,000 as he scrambled to pay the \$3,500 monthly rent.

Plagued by poor sales and a distressing family situation – his youngest child is severely disabled – Khan tried to get a large loan to enable him to sign a new lease and pay off his debts. When all efforts in that direction failed, he gave up, selling his store to a buyer willing to pay one year's rent to the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation. "I had no option," said Khan this week, with a sad smile. "I tried very hard but my situation does not permit me to continue at this store."

The new owner of the store, Hasmukh Patel, has submitted his business plan to RIOCI and is awaiting approval before signing a new lease. Khan says Patel owns several stores in Manhattan, Queens, and Long Island and is eager to upgrade the store, introducing cellular service sales, high quality stationery, and gift items.

For more than a year, Khan tried to sell 99-cent goods in an effort to increase sales. He stocked inexpensive items like shoe-polish, extension cords, photo frames, plastic containers, and modeling clay. This last-ditch attempt was not very

See **Card Shop**, page 6

## Low Volume and High Rents Threaten Others, Says Palermo

Come fall, Roosevelt Island merchants will find their names listed in the Official Guide to New York City for the first time. Whether this will help boost business remains to be seen. "All the merchants on the Island have some financial problems," says Julia Palermo, president of the Roosevelt Island Chamber of Commerce and owner of Julie's Sports Bar and Café. "The rents are high and we do not have enough volume."

Rent has been a major factor in the forthcoming exit of Mohammed Ali Khan, owner of the Card and Gift Store. "I hate to see him go," said Palermo. "His rent is high, so he can neither upgrade his store nor stock new wares." Palermo believes that the current rent is realistic for stores in Manhattan, but feels Island businesses are at a distinct disadvantage because they are not in the City. "We do not get street business."

As president of the chamber, she has advised the merchants to re-negotiate their rents, but that is easier said than done. Still, she believes the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation would be willing to listen, if

See **Palermo**, page 2

## City Budget Restores Youth Center Funds

### Historical Society Gets Blackwell Funds

New York City's new budget restores \$610,000 in capital funds for the Roosevelt Island Youth Program that was frozen after September 11. The funds could clear the way for the Program to take over the Blackwell minischool, a step the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation was unwilling to take in April, not wanting to move a paying tenant – the Lilies Christian School – from the space without some assurances about the Youth Program's funding for its renovation.

The funds are for the City's budget year running from July 1, 2002, through June 30, 2003, according to City Council Speaker Gifford Miller, who represents Roosevelt Island on the Council.

The Youth Program also gets \$30,000 in program funds.

The Roosevelt Island Historical Society will receive a \$65,000 capital fund allocation to assist it with beginning steps in rehabilitating Blackwell

See **City Funds**, page 2

## Islanders

### An Artist with Life, Death, and Work in Perspective

by Anusha Shrivastava

He pictures himself in a black tuxedo, greeting guests: "Hullo, how is it going, folks? There is food and wine at the back."

Somber folks pass by, ushered by Anthony



Copyright © Tony Vita

"Tony" Vita, but not really. The Vita look-alike will be an animated figure, most likely produced in collaboration with Disney Corporation. Vita imagines the scene to be enacted at his funeral. "I guess I won't be around for the reviews but this will be my best show," says Vita, 51, a tall man whose disheveled hair and two-day stubble make him look every bit the artist he is.

"We take death too seriously. We should take life more seriously." This from a man who once billed a client for a nightmare he had about a less-than-challenging project they asked him to complete.

On his time-sheet, Vita says he wrote: "Bad dream, two hours." How did he decide the dream lasted two hours? "It was a conservative estimate," said Vita as he sipped a martini at Trelis on a hot summer day. "After all, I didn't want to cheat them."

Half-smiling, he says he only did it because he had worked with the client for a long time and knew he could get away with the \$60 bonus.

"He is not a trickster or a trick-player," says Merle Joffe, a longtime friend, who admits it took her a while to figure out his sense of humor. "He is just funny."

Born and raised in the Bronx in a working class Italian-American neighborhood, Vita says it took a surprisingly long time for his father to realize that he could be proud of his artist son. "My dad and I were into building things. One time we built a bobsled that weighed about a hundred pounds so, I guess we were klutzy."

His mother, Mary Vita, now 90, was a seam-



stress who enjoyed screen-printing and encouraged Vita's artistic endeavors. She sent him to art school in the summertime and, having built a sizable portfolio, Vita was enrolled in the High School of Art and Design in 1969, followed by the School of Visual Art in 1970. He did not complete the course and never got his diploma.

See **Vita**, page 6

# Letters

**To the Editor:**

I am writing out of frustration and sheer bewilderment over the lack of consideration for Island residents *not* participating in the Fourth of July activities hosted by RIOC. I am a new Island resident with a toddler and two young children and was quite outraged when I tried to return home at 9:15 p.m. on the Fourth, but was not allowed to gain entrance to Motorgate to park my car because the bridge was shut down. I was told that we wouldn't be allowed to drive back onto the Island until after the fireworks were done. To add insult to injury, not only was the bridge shut down during the fireworks display, it was not reopened until well after 11:00 p.m.

Had I been forewarned through the security guards who stopped all vehicles to question us about where we were visiting, or some indication on the fliers left under my door about not barbecuing on the waterfront, or a sentence or two on one of the many fliers posted on Main street suggesting I come purchase tickets for \$15, or even a few words in *The WIRE* next to the front page solicitation in the June 29 edition, I would not have been infuriated. However, I cannot recount once being told indirectly or otherwise that the bridge would be shut down for hours.

Common courtesy for *all* Island residents is mandatory – not just for residents who patronize RIOC-sponsored events.

**Keisha Lawrence**



Holyoke Grad, Marion M. Ntiri, who



To City Council Speaker Gifford Miller

**Dear Speaker Miller:**

As long-time residents of Roosevelt Island and the owners of a small publishing company that has been doing business here for nearly twenty years, we have become increasingly aware of the noxious emissions being generated by the Big Allis plant across the river from us.

We first began noticing this on our short trips to our company's storage space on Vernon Boulevard almost immediately after the takeover of Big Allis by KeySpan. As you may already have been informed, at the corner of Vernon and the Roosevelt Island Bridge one can – any time of the day or night – smell and feel these new emissions without the need for any special equipment but one's eyes, nose, and mouth.

Currently, even though we live in Westview (595 Main Street) on the west channel side and – thanks to the prevailing winds – we escape most of the fumes that our neighbors in Eastwood constantly complain of, KeySpan has, for the past year or so, been using fuels that are dramatically more noxious. Lately – due to the city's wave of hot, rainless weather – these fumes have been leaving visible coats of oily dust on our furniture, countertops and computer equipment.

While this is particularly troublesome due to KeySpan's practice of releasing large emissions at night, while we sleep, we have now begun to smell this plant even during the day. Air purifiers, changed AC filters, and closed windows have been no help against this constant industrial pollution. We have therefore begun to have serious private – and public – health concerns.

We therefore add our voice to the growing number of Roosevelt Island and Queens residents who have expressed deep concern over KeySpan's practices, and we urge you to take immediate action to investigate and hold this utility accountable to its ultimate rate payers and fellow citizens.

**Eileen Gardiner, Ph.D.  
Ronald G. Musto, Ph.D.**

**To the Editor:**

Joan Christianson's letter in the June 29 *WIRE*, with its psychic report of how residents who did not vote in the RIRA election would have voted, had they voted, makes me wish she would analyze the Bush/Gore election so we could see if the Supreme Court guessed right.

One sentence has me puzzled: *I fear what we would get with a Republican Governor.* So do I – but isn't that what we have?

I know. Joan remembers excellent Thomas Dewey as a "Republican Governor" – completely different from Pataki.

But if not a Republican, what is Pataki? A dictator, of course. That's why no democracy for Roosevelt Island, which he rules through his puppets. And dictators don't obey laws, so the General Development Plan means nothing to him and he has violated it by robbing us of our legal subsidies for more than five years. What does he care if he may not legally withhold subsidies until our population is 16,000?

We constantly hear how RIOC is broke; they tried to shut the Tram down after 10:30 p.m., they threaten to wrap the Tram in nauseating ads (these overpaid, income-taxpayers hate us).

I don't understand is spineless submission. Our attorney-residents sue Pataki to remedy? Why are we obeying our State income tax, only to be robbed? This year we should deduct in an escrow account island bank, not to be until we've received the checks? If you, do you send the checks?

all, *no third term!*

**Frances Salten**

**To the Editor:**

A couple of weeks ago, my wife and I were walking past Octagon Park Sports Field, late in the afternoon on a hot weekend day, with the typical crowds around the barbecue grill, and kids playing ball in the park – a little baseball here, a little soccer there, frisbee, whatever.

Then, out of nowhere, a Public Safety car, operated by Officer Knapp, quickly came up through the trees next to the water, drove onto the field, and parked in front of some kids sitting on the benches. Then, out of nowhere, from the other side of the field, appeared Officer Fernandez from the bike patrol.

We couldn't believe it. They announced to everybody there that they couldn't play on the field unless they had a permit!

So all those kids packed up and left. I went back an hour later just to see if a football team had the field reserved for a practice or something, and the field was completely empty – not a kid in sight.

We don't know who makes the rules around here, RIOC or Public Safety, but it's wrong, wrong, wrong! Doesn't everybody nationwide assume parks are open to the public? I don't see cops booting people out of Central Park for playing catch. It didn't happen in the town where I grew up.

If they see you with a camera out here they'll do the same thing – tell you a permit is required to take pictures of people.

People here are not happy with the authorities. Just listen to neighbors in the elevator.

We need to replace these people, or change the rules. They have no common sense.

**Kurt Wittman**

**Denise Larocque**

I am a resident of Manhattan Park since 10 River Road opened currently being harassed by management, who claim that the rent in four months. The following is an e-mail which Sandra Holden, who is listed as the agent, at 30 River Road, sent for Non-Payment of Rent which I received this week.

*Being harassed about rent which I already paid? How can I pay 4 months rent? I pay my rent by electronic transfer every month, all of my bills are paid that way and you are the only one harassing me. I won't be paying my rent that way any more. You can't handle it. I have a printout from the online bank shows that the rent payments for May, June and July were made and the records don't go back to April. Please stop the harassment and contact my lawyer.*

I wish this in the next issue of *The WIRE*. I'd like to know if anyone else is being harassed in this fashion.

**Susan Ashford**

## City's Islands (Including RI) in an Hour-Long Channel 13 Program

Roosevelt Island gets a nine-minute treatment in *The Other Islands of New York*, a Channel 13 production airing Tuesday, August 13, at 8:00 p.m. A local preview screening will be held at 12:30 Wednesday, August 7, at the Senior Center.

The one-hour program, based on the book of the same name by Sharon



Al "Grandpa" Lewis and Island House doorkeeper Roland Rameshwar appear in *The Other Islands of New York*.

Seitz and Stuart Miller, treats the City's island communities, including City Island, Broad Channel, and Roosevelt Island, and looks at some of the 40 others that make up New York. It tells the story of Typhoid Mary, a cook who left a trail of victims behind her before being banished to North Brother Island along with a few other carriers of the disease.

There's a rarely-seen historic film of Blackwell's (now Roosevelt) Island,

taken from a boat in the earliest days of motion pictures. The documentary tells the story of reporter Nellie Bly's intentional commitment here as a lunatic in order to write an expose for Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World*.

The program is jammed with little-known facts – how Ellis Island was an internment camp for German- and Italian-Americans during World War II, and how Hoffman and Swinburne Islands evolved from use for quarantine of immigrants to nature preserves.

## Palermo from page 1

only because they would not want empty stores lining Main Street. "RIOC has helped businesses in some ways," she says. "They shared the cost of putting us in the guidebooks and brochures."

Another source of help might be the U.S. Small Business Administration, which has offered low-interest loans for businesses affected by the attacks on September 11, 2001. "People just stopped spending after 9/11," said Palermo. She says that even though Island businesses are located at quite a distance from downtown Manhattan, there is a ripple effect. "People are depressed and afraid of spending money. A lot of my customers are unemployed."

The building of Southtown has provided a glimmer of hope to the merchants, who say they are expecting a lot more business when residents begin moving in. "I am giving my bar a facelift," said Palermo. "New paint, a new ceiling, new barstools – it will be an upgrade. Eventually, I want a patio to attract more people."

Such changes might help but, before then, Islanders might just see more stores on Main Street shut down. "I don't want to single out any names but I know that two more stores are in deep trouble," Palermo said. "No one is doing very well, in any case."

## City Funds from page 1

House, while the Senior Center will receive \$35,000 to use for air-conditioning its quarters at 546 Main Street, as well as \$20,100 in program funds.

Other City funds earmarked for Island organizations include the Main Street Theatre and Dance Alliance, \$10,000; the Disabled Association, \$5,500; and the Day Nursery, \$7,000.

PS/IS 217 will receive \$190,000 to vent its art kiln, provide electronic cabling of the building, and support the music program. Another \$20,000 is budgeted for PTA programs.

In addition, the New York Junior Tennis League will receive \$14,000 in funding, which will help with a program conducted on the Roosevelt Island courts.



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I'm a summer person. Summers on Roosevelt Island are a throwback to life in a Booth Tarkington novel. My idea of heaven is settling under my favorite old London plane tree with a good book. The Mets are a million games out of first place, but the rallying cry of my beloved Brooklyn Dodgers still pertains, "Wait 'til next year!" Little League has ended for the year, but I've been watching our Island women playing some classy softball on Tony Capobianco Field. It was my years with a Central Park softball league that first brought me to Roosevelt Island and imprinted this place on my psyche, and so I have a warm spot in my heart for the game.

Have you tried FreshDirect yet? If not, beg, borrow, or steal a computer with a modem and sign up for \$50 worth of free food. Sherie and I were impressed with the quality and freshness of our free order. You will need to decide whether shopping online is your cup of tea in the long run, but an offer of so much fresh meat, seafood, and produce is not to be sneezed at. And if you do order from them, they will follow up with additional free offers, gifts, and surprises. What have you got to lose?

Were you inconvenienced by the subway outages of last weekend and this present one? With the Queens bus strike continuing, it's a stark reminder that we live on a tiny island with different transportation concerns than in the five boroughs. I thought that the Transit Authority covered the situation well with constant shuttle bus service and that RIOC anticipated problems with early and pervasive signage on Main Street as well as 24-hour Tram service. What do you think?

It's been a long time since the last issue of *The WIRE*, and I should share some skinny with you. I met with several representatives of the Keyspan Corporation who wanted to update the community on their Ravenswood plant upgrade. Tony Gigantiello, president of CHOC (Coalition Helping Organize a Kleener Environment), was present as well. RIRA joined the coalition some years ago to keep an eye on the inexorable growth of power-generating plants along this portion of the East River and to monitor the effects on our air quality. We learned that the work will continue through August with permits to operate from 6:00 a.m. to 2:00 a.m. six days a week. The work includes a noise mitigation plan, and none of us has received any complaints to date. This structural work will be followed by "steel work" which will allow Keyspan to have new buildings up and enclosed by winter. The first natural-gas turbine will fire up by October 2003, with full synchronization and production on the grid by the following month. This summer, the plant is still burning fuel oil and the quick-response units next to the Roosevelt Island Bridge still produce a shimmering yellow-brown pall that blows into our windows with the prevailing winds. Keep track of any noise and air pollution problems. You can call plant manager, Joe Vignola, in the control room at (718) 706-2753 with any noise or emergency questions. For general information, Community Development Director April Dubison, at the MetroTech Center headquarters, (718) 403-6960, is probably your best bet.

About a month ago, the Westview Task Force arranged a meeting with Housing Management general manager, Doryne Isley, to discuss building issues. Task Force President Opher Pail was kind enough to invite me as a concerned resident. In addition to internal building matters such as hallway carpeting, roofing, and energy-efficiency concerns, we learned that RIHMC is working with RIOC to provide a dog run for the use of "legal" Island dogs. The number of dogs living on and visiting Roosevelt Island has increased dramatically in the years we've been here. I've never understood how the rules regarding dogs were being enforced or whether Islanders are happy with the canine proliferation. I think a dog run will help to keep our sidewalks clean, given that pooches are present and part of Island life.

More disturbing, we learned at this meeting that the Westview health club and swimming pool, closed now for over a year, is not expected to reopen until the end of the year at the earliest. Doryne explained the red tape involved in obtaining the permits required to fix the pool, but I can't quite figure out why a botched paint job should require 18 months to rectify. The building has a cash reserve fund of over a million dollars, has a positive monthly cash flow, and the pool was specifically included in the 2001/2002 Budget Rent Deter-

mination. I've spoken to Elliott Ashrey, DHCR's Roosevelt Island liaison, who informs me that DHCR approval was required for a project of this size. He estimated that the pool would reopen "in a few months" although the method of repair has yet to be decided. Your membership dues will still apply when the pool reopens, although I've been unable to learn where those monies have been held and whether you have been earning interest in an escrow fund, as is usual when funds are frozen. I'm concerned as well that this June meeting, which included only about a dozen people, has not been reported to Westview tenants, either by Housing Management or the Task Force. Knowledge is power, and the powers that be have an obligation to communicate with their constituencies to keep them informed. I've learned that Mr. Ashrey has asked Ms. Isley to distribute an update on the pool's status, so you can expect it shortly. A newsletter on general issues from the Westview Task Force would be welcome as well.

Can you stand some good news? In the June 15 *WIRE*, I reported on my meeting with NYC & Company, the City's convention and visitors' bureau. While Island business isn't specifically a concern of the Residents Association, anything that will enhance Tram ridership and merchant viability involves us all. Since then, my contact has visited Roosevelt Island and met with RIOC VP Robert Antonek, and Chamber of Commerce President Julie Palermo. As a result of that meeting, RIOC has picked up the tab for a year's membership with NYC & Co. I see an opportunity

for bicycle rentals here among other Island-specific endeavors but, at the very least, there should be signage at the Tram and subway stations advertising Main Street shops. Perhaps you've noticed tourists getting off the Tram, looking around in confusion, and climbing right back on the Tram for the ride to Manhattan. There are opportunities here for Island merchants and for increased tourism if our business leaders will expend the effort and imagination to make Roosevelt Island a tourist destination.

I'll report on the ongoing effort to bring the MetroCard to our Tramway. New York Transit Authority sent a contingent here last month to meet with RIOC and with me. I must say, I've detected a sea change in the tone of the meetings. Where once the question was, "Should we do this?" the attitude now seems to be, "How do we make this happen?" RIOC CFO Pat Siconolfi has been pivotal in offering solutions to the financial barriers that impede final resolution and implementation. The good news is that City Council Speaker and Roosevelt Island friend, Gifford Miller, has asked to be included in the negotiations. With his support (and, dare we hope, sweetening of the pot) this puppy may have legs!

You may recall my comments on the RIOC Public Safety Advisory Committee's stalled survey report in the last issue. This week, I spoke with Dr. Joan Dawson, RIOC director and chair of that committee. She reiterated that the report released last March was a draft and not for public scrutiny. She stated that the committee had agreed to turn over the responsibility of preparing a final report to RIRA Island Services Committee Vice President Ron Schuppert. When I spoke to Ron, he said that, in his opinion, it was unwise to have a single member of the committee speak for the group, and that he would not prepare the report alone. He said that he would attempt to bring the Island members of the Advisory Committee together to complete the project at long last. The Committee is composed of representatives of RIOC, Housing Management, and the residents, and this approach makes a lot of sense to me. Unfortunately, Dr. Dawson was again unable to attend this month's RIOC Board of Directors meeting, and so Ron will be obliged to press forward without the input of the committee's chair. I'm still anxious to read the conclusions reached by the Public Safety advisory committee based on the survey questions to which many of us responded, and I expect you are as well. Good luck, Ron.

I'm told that *The Village Voice* will run an article on Roosevelt Island in their next issue, appearing Wednesday. A young reporter who grew up here is writing it, and I expect it to be complimentary (unlike their previous work!) or I'll tell her mother.

And finally, I understand that Sister Regina Palamara will be relinquishing control of the Thrift Shop. Sr. Regina has been caring for her parish and this community for umpty-ump years, and I know I'll miss seeing her at the Thrift Shop when I'm dropping off unwanted stuff or looking for bargains. I expect this will give her time to devote to her many other duties. You go, Sister girl!

## The RIRA Column



**Matthew Katz**  
RIRA President  
e-mail: [matthewkatz@rcn.com](mailto:matthewkatz@rcn.com)



**Off to Toronto** Ten members of the Cabrini Parish will return to Roosevelt Island Monday after a trip to World Youth Day in Toronto. This group photo includes three from the Cabrini Shrine in Denver. Left to right, back row: Sandra Neis, Juliana Son, Pauline Rigos, Paul Benson, Sr. Regina Palamara; middle row: Heather Rubin, Emily Mure, Natalia Ortiz, Nassima Codderrens, Sr. Bernadette Casciano (Denver); front row: Elizabeth Stortreon (Denver), Aniela White, Allison Nickless (Denver).

## COMING UP

Compiled by *WIRE* staff – Fax information to 755-2540  
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or click on the e-mail link at [www.nyc10044.com](http://www.nyc10044.com)

**Mon.-Fri.**, 1:00-4:00 p.m., **New York Junior Tennis League** instruction and play for ages 7-18, Octagon Park courts. Ages 5-7, 2:30-4:00 p.m. Wednesdays. Equipment supplied. Free.

**Wed., July 31**, 10:30 a.m., **Summer Films for Children**, Library. Free. (Also Wed., Aug. 14, and Wed., Aug. 28.)

**Wed., August 7**, 12:30 p.m., **Preview Screening of *The Other Islands of New York*** (see description below), Senior Center. Free; open to all residents.

**Tue., August 13**, 8:00 p.m., ***The Other Islands of New York***, WNET, Channel 13. Roosevelt Island is featured along with some of the other 40 islands that make up the majority of New York City's land mass.

**Sat., August 24**, next scheduled issue of *The WIRE*. **Deadlines:** Advertising in the paper, Fri., August 16; decision on staffers for *The Bag*, Mon., August 19; materials due Thur., August 22. **Future issues** every two weeks through December 14, with an extra post-election issue: Sept.

7 and 21, Oct. 5 and 19, Nov. 2 (pre-election issue), 9 (post-election), and 23 (Thanksgiving issue), Dec. 14 (holiday issue), then every two weeks starting in January, 2003. **Phone/fax** for news, 826-9055/755-2540; phone/fax for advertising inquiries, 751-8214/755-2540; to list your organization's Island

There is no charge to list Island events here. E-mail information to [Editor@MainStreetWIRE.com](mailto:Editor@MainStreetWIRE.com), fax to 755-2540, or leave copy at the lobby desk at 531 Main Street, addressed to *The WIRE*. Provide a telephone number for possible follow-up.

events here (no charge), fax information to 755-2540, or send it by e-mail to [ComingUp@MainStreetWIRE.com](mailto:ComingUp@MainStreetWIRE.com).

**Wed., Sept. 4**, 8:00 p.m., **RIRA Common Council Meeting**, Chapel of the Good Shepherd.

**Tue., Sept. 10**, all day, **Primary Election**, polls at PS/IS 217.

## Senior Center

**Monday**  
10:30, **Blood Pressure**  
12:30, **"Oldies" Music**  
7:00, **Dance**

**Tuesday**  
1:30, **Games (RISA)**

**Wednesday**  
7:00, **Pokeno (RISA)**

**Thursday**  
10:00, **Tai Chi**  
10:30, **Creative Art**  
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*The WIRE* welcomes letters on a *Name Withheld* basis. **Number must be provided** for our mailing list. **Mission:** By e-mail to [Letters@MainStreetWIRE.com](mailto:Letters@MainStreetWIRE.com), wordprocessing software, disk left at 531 Main Street or 531 Main Street or faxed to 755-2540. **Length:** Brief, but we cannot take more than 300 words, but will consider longer letters if they are of interest to the community and to editing for *The WIRE*.

Letters

Editor's note: The President of the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation has a standing invitation to provide a companion *RIOC President's Column* for publication in *The WIRE*.

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**Vita** from page 1

but became an art director at New York University in Vita built a home studio and produced a CD. He calls *Songs from the Blue Room* his finest achievement to date, even though the disk sold very few copies. "Nobody asked me to do it," Vita said. "It was not something I was required to do. It was the beginning of me as a true artist, doing what I really wanted to do."

The next step in this personal renaissance was to create computerized poster art. Vita said he felt as if technicians rather than artists were producing commercial art. He believes that, while artists can and should be technicians too, the terms are not interchangeable.

To make his point during a conversation at Trellis, Vita points out one of the many posters he has made for the restaurant's weekend jazz offerings. It's hanging in the window behind him. Even though he has lived on Roosevelt Island since the summer of 1978, it wasn't until 1999 that he displayed his art in the form of these posters in this community.

The posters, in turn, became an advertisement for his work, resulting in some contracts, including the designing of the 9/11 memorial plaque on the Island. "Tony had been unrecognized for too long," said Paul Katz, a photographer friend who has known Vita for over three decades. "He is a genius whose art is intuitive, enlightening, and compositionally correct."



Copyright © Tony Vita

Vita says he finds poster art liberating because he can show his work to people across the city, cover a wide gamut of styles, and experiment with animation for websites. "Tony has the ability to characterize life in a simple, graphic way that transcends the social levels of all classes," Katz said. "His work appeals even to those who are not artistically sophisticated."

One of the latest in his series of experiments is a digital camera picture touched up in Photoshop to create a watercolor-like effect. An example of this art is his digital "painting" of the Chapel of the Good Shepherd, proudly displayed on the menu at Trellis. "Tony is getting better artistically," Joffe said. "He is patient and very focused on what he is doing."

For his part, Vita says his gallery space is widened as he pursues poster and digitized art. "I feel I am at the beginning of what I'll do the rest of my life," Vita said. "Make art."

On Roosevelt Island, Tony Vita's most-recognized work is probably in the posters he's done for the weekend jazz at Trellis.

# Classified

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# SPORTSWIRE

by Seth Kaufman

**SOCCKER** Registration for the Youth Program's 2002 Fall Soccer Season is going on now and will close July 31. Registration forms are available at the Youth Center, at 506 Main Street, and at the Beacon Program at PS/IS 217. Late registrations will only be accepted if space is available.

**Correction:** In the June 29 issue it was reported that Thomas Herlihy closed out Green's victory in the Major League championship game by pitching one inning with three strikeouts. He actually pitched three innings with eight strikeouts.

## Card Shop

successful. Margins on the low cost items were barely 10 cents apiece. "These goods take up a lot of space and don't yield enough profit," Khan said.

But the downward spiral for Khan began three years after he first moved to the Island. In 1990, the bus stop located in front of his stationery store was moved to another location. The batches of people who came in to pick up a newspaper or a pack of cigarettes every morning as they waited for the bus, stopped coming. Newspaper sales dropped from 700 a day to 300. Cigarette sales fell by half. "When people buy a newspaper, I get just 20 cents a paper, but the real profit is from the soda, the candy, the magazine or the stationery they purchase. The profit margin on those items can be as high as 50 per cent," Khan said.

In 1992, when a newspaper stand opened at the entrance to the subway stop on the Island, Khan's sales were further hit. He complained to the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation, stating that he had exclusive right to sell newspapers as per his lease. He was told the stand was on MTA property. But the MTA said it had issued no license to the newcomer. Petitioning did not help. Khan gave up, realizing he was wasting time and effort.

A contract with Carlton Greeting Cards gave Khan a 70 percent profit margin. In 1994, he began selling his cards at half-price, hoping to beat out the newly-remodeled Gristede's. That brought in more customers but sales remained sluggish. "Chain stores sell everything at lower prices and offer more variety. My strategy failed," he said.

Khan is not alone in this struggle. "Gristede's is like a big fish and could swallow us any time," said James Ahn, who runs a small grocery store on the Island.

Next, Khan brought in video-game machines, but children got into fights. To avoid unruly scenes, he removed the machines. While dealing with children, he noticed that some were stealing candy and stationery, so he was forced to invest in a surveillance camera. This did not prevent a 1996 break-in, when Khan lost over \$6,000, a large sum for his small business.

In a business based on impulse purchases, Khan saw attracting customers as the primary goal. He tried to stock what he saw as everyday use items, but business did not pick up. "I was not able to give the store as much time as I wanted to," said Khan, who has spent all his spare minutes at hospitals, tending to his child, now 20 months old.

"Another one bites the dust," said Kaie Razaghi, owner of Trellis. "It is a shame to see anyone leave this neighborhood. I talked to Ali about sticking it out until Southtown is built but he didn't think he would last until then."

Like the other merchants on the Island, Razaghi is waiting for Southtown to provide Island businesses with a much-needed boost. "This is a sad finish to Ali's story and I wish it were different," Razaghi said. "Ali is a nice guy and everyone likes him."

Khan plans to drive a limousine after the store is sold. "Time was running out for me," Khan said. "I was scared of an eviction notice."

## Harvey

Retired from active duty in 1995 due to budget constraints, the fireboat, now listed on the National Historic Register, was due to be scrapped. It was saved when a consortium of New York boat buffs decided to buy and convert it into a floating museum with the help of a volunteer crew.

Docked at Pier 63 in Manhattan, the boat found itself in the midst of unexpected action on September 11, 2001, when it was reincarnated into its older version, Marine Company Number 2, rescuing survivors at Ground Zero and then pumping up to 16,000 gallons of water a minute to put out flames where the municipal fire hydrant system had crumbled.

On Saturday, its mission was considerably less agonizing as it circled Roosevelt Island thrice, blowing its sharp whistle as it shot pistols of water high into the air, dousing riders. "We resent dry passengers," Lenney joked.

"I've been re-baptized," said Sister Regina Palamara, soaking wet as she stepped off the boat onto the oil dock behind the Tram station. "They gave me a shower," said Joan Matula, even as the "I like being wet" sticker on her shirt fell off. "It was an adventure," said Naomi



Vicki Feinmel

Imbrogno, who rode the boat with her son. A visibly-pleased Berdy thanked the crew of the boat, the Islanders, and Gristede's, which donated eight cases of Snapple and two cases of water to be sold by the Historical Society at the pier. "We made good money on the refreshments," Berdy said. The Society's next fund-raising event for the Blackwell House project is planned to take place in mid-September at the RIVAA Gallery on Main Street.

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