

Next issue:
Saturday, Sept. 6
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The Main Street **WIRE**

Roosevelt Island's Independent Community Newspaper

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Another New York Experience Residents gathered on the sidewalk outside Trellis last week when the worst electrical blackout in U.S. history took their air conditioners, lights, water (for most apartments), and eventually telephones, out of service.

The Blackout of '03 – Some Worry, a Little Confusion, Long Walks, Then Conviviality

A sewage backup that threatened electrical equipment in the Westview basement, a lot of sweaty stair-climbing to non-working toilets and unproductive water faucets for high-floor residents...

A day off, outdoor barbecues and picnics, a Main Street happening, residents below the 7th floor of buildings opening their faucets and bathrooms to neighbors from higher floors – people helping people...

What the August 14-15 Blackout meant to Roosevelt Islanders, residents and workers, depended on viewpoint.

Many residents responded to *The WIRE*'s call for a recounting of their experiences (see page 8), some mildly perturbed over how officialdom handled the situation, but most pleased and proud that they coped, albeit with difficulty, and saw their neighbors not just behaving, but helping others.

When sewage pumps stopped

Briefly...

Two films about Roosevelt Island plus three other films about New York City are included in an outdoor showing at Southpoint, tonight at 8:30, sponsored by the Historical Society. The Society's new book of Island history photos will also be on sale.

The Renwick Ruin at Southpoint will be stabilized as the result of a RIOC Board decision August 7. The Board also approved funds for the showing of *Chicago* at Southpoint (editorial, page 2; photo, this page), and tentatively decided to defer replacement of Tram cabins after Board member Mark Ponton presented the views of metallurgists who raised doubts about the need.

Free mammograms will be available Thursday, September 4, 9-5, in a van next to the Chapel of the Good Shepherd (see *Coming Up*, page 3).

Non-Profit Organizations are being invited to adopt some furniture no longer needed by The Child School as it prepares for its move to the Island next month. Details appear in an ad on page 10.

cranking, parts of the Westview basement, including subterranean parts of RIOC, became a smelly mess. When water and sewage was pumped out of the flooded area to save electrical equipment, that brought a summons to Housing Management from the Department of Environmental Protection. And nobody yet knows when the Westview swimming pool will be back in service.

An instant controversy over whether Red Bus service should be diverted to pick up Islanders who had made it across the Queensboro Bridge was resolved, though not without a further wrangle, when RIOC Board member Mark Ponton commandeered a bus and started bringing residents home.

At least one Island merchant was reported as charging inflated prices for emergency supplies, but Trellis, the pizza restaurant, and the Deli drew praise for making supplies available. A week later, on Thursday, Doryne Isley expressed appreciation to Rene Bryan and Public Safety for a professional and helpful response to Islander's needs, and presented certificates of appreciation to some 76 members of the Public Safety force, her own staff, and RIOC staffers (photo, page 10). Some staffers worked 30 hours straight, Isley said. To Public Safety staff, she said, "You were shoulder to shoulder with us, side by side." To her own staff, she said, "I can't thank you enough. You have made me very, very, very proud."

On the street, a Housing Management generator was put to work providing emergency power, and residents charged cell phones in an attempt to keep communications going, though cell service failed when back-up power ran out or service demand overwhelmed the system.

One unfortunate side-effect of the gatherings outside Trellis was that eight tables and some 20 chairs have been "borrowed." Proprietor Kaie Razaghi is asking that they be returned. That particular variety of stacking tables, he says, are no longer available, and they're crucial to his outdoor-serving schedule on summer weekends.

New President, Pataki Choice Herb Berman, Starts at RIOC

by Robert Laux-Bachand

Herbert E. Berman took over this month as President and Chief Operating Officer of the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation (RIOC), a job that the Pulitzer Prize winner Barry Bearak of *The New York Times* described five years ago as being much like that of a "colonial governor."

The colony was restless in those days, squirming under the thumb of a taciturn neuroscientist, Jerome Blue. Blue was succeeded in 1999 by Republican Governor George E. Pataki's rough-and-tumble campaign manager, Robert H. Ryan, whose alleged indiscretions, oral and otherwise – which have yet to be officially disclosed – led to his firing by the RIOC Board on June 17.

Now it's Berman's turn. Unlike his immediate predecessors, he is a longtime public official, a Democrat and, as a lawyer, a practicing professional. He served for 26 years as a City Council member from Brooklyn and, for the last 20 of those years, he chaired the Finance Committee. At the end, he was helping to formulate a \$40 billion budget. RIOC's expenses, by contrast, were \$13.2 million in the year ending March 31.

Berman's fall from the big leagues was precipitated by the City's term-limits law, which forced many powerful Councilmembers to cast about for new opportunities. The Council's old war horses like Berman and Speaker Peter Vallone, from Queens, were out, and Roosevelt Island's young representative, Gifford Miller, now the Speaker, stepped into the Council's leadership.

Berman ran for City Comptroller and lost in a hard-fought 2001 primary to William C. Thompson, in a battle that closely adhered to the fault lines of the Democrats' splintered union and ethnic-racial consituencies. Thompson became the city's first black Comptroller.

Roosevelt Island was Berman Country. He won more than 58 percent of the vote in Manhattan's 65th As-

sembly District, the East Side area that includes the Island, compared to his 46 percent showing citywide.

Berman may have been cast aside by the Democrats, but he quickly recovered. At the end of February 2002, he had a new job in State government: as a special adviser to Pataki on community affairs, and as a liaison to the Jewish community, a key component of Pataki's voter base. As Berman told *The Jewish Weekly* last year: "The Jewish community knows damn well that George Pataki has been on the front lines in support of Jewish issues. They are not going to forget that support."

Pataki, a disciple of the former Senator Alphonse D'Amato (who was Blue's guardian, too), is renowned for his old-fashioned attention to patronage politics. At a time when Democratic legislators have questioned some of the Governor's payroll practices, Berman's move to Roosevelt Island, to a job with clear-cut functional responsibilities, has the advantage of nonpartisan civic duty.

Not that anyone is paying attention. Berman's changing allegiances might have attracted attention in a smaller state, but he managed to slide under the radar of the news media in New York City. His last mention in *The Times* was in December, 2001. His activities after the comptroller campaign have also gone unnoticed, it appears, in the other major newspapers, based on searches of their archives. This led one website, called *Throop's Scoop*, to declare in March 2002 that Berman was "Governor Pataki's Secret Agent Man."

See **Berman**, page 10



The transcript of a *WIRE* interview with Herbert E. Berman appears on pages 6-7.



Michael Sofia

A first-time-ever movie at Southpoint drew over 300 late last month for a showing of *West Side Story*. The crowd voted on possible features for a screening on Thursday (August 28), and chose the Oscar-winning *Chicago*, starring Richard Gere and Catherine Zeta-Jones (inset photo), Renée Zellweger, and Queen Latifah. Meanwhile, at 8:30 tonight (August 23) at Southpoint, the Historical Society is co-sponsoring the showing of a group of films about New York City, including a 14-minute film by Jeff Powers, *Roosevelt Island: Land Without Dogs*, and a two-minute film, *Tram Operator*.

The Editorial Page

Greenlighting Southpoint

Three weeks ago, in the public square of Ravello, Italy, on the Amalfi coast, a local arts group projected *Chicago*. Richard Gere, Renée Zellweger, and Catherine Zeta-Jones spoke a curious dubbed Italian, of course, though all the vigor of English lyrics was preserved in the winner of the Best-Picture Oscar.

A week later, outside Rome, a jazz group drew enthusiastic applause on the spectacular grounds of Villa Celimontana.

America's cultural exports are going strong. In the charged heat of a brutal southern European summer, crowds were out, enjoying ancient open spaces and, in them, the products of American creativity.

On Roosevelt Island over the past month, American creativity has been similarly applied: The magnificent open space of Southpoint creatively used to show *West Side Story*. And *Chicago* itself is coming up Thursday night (in English, we are assured). Tonight, too, a series of films on New York City.

When the RIOC Board met August 7, it gave a green light not only to Herb Berman as the Corporation's new President (we welcome him with a center-spread interview); it also greenlighted Public Purpose Funds for Thursday's movie event – a significant step that goes beyond the fun of a movie in the open air amid a stunning view of Manhattan. The real plus is that we are learning how to use Southpoint in ways that could, one day, make Roosevelt Island a genuine destination, rather than just another seldom-visited Manhattan residential neighborhood.

Speaking to the RIOC Board, Berman talked of just that – tourism to revitalize our merchant economy and put the City's greatest neighborhood in the frontal lobe of the public mind. We hope he can make it work – and one way to do that is to encourage efforts like *Movies at Southpoint*.

And next summer, how about offering Southpoint as a venue for some of the events of the *JVC Jazz Festival*? The Tram revenue alone would probably cover RIOC's costs.

Emergency Plan...?

Berman has also pledged to take a hard look at how RIOC handled the Blackout. Its generators went unused for too long, and it took far too long to get Red Buses off-Island to help those struggling to get home. But the most serious questions about RIOC's response center on how staff were deployed (or not), whether creative thinking can kick in on a moment's notice, and whether there is a *real plan* in place for such emergencies.

Ron Vass, a former RIOC Board member, has been calling for a published emergency plan for some time. It's a good idea. Residents need to know what they can expect, and how to get information about what RIOC's doing, when there's trouble of this kind.

We can't let the subject of the Blackout go without a comment on the dedication and creative thinking exhibited by workers and residents. We won't attempt to name them (we'd leave too many out), but those who helped seniors climb stairs, those who provided water and rides, and those (including merchants, Public Safety, RIOC, and Housing Management staff) who helped in other ways, should take a bow.

Isn't it *great* to be a New Yorker?
Isn't it *great* to be a Roosevelt Islander?

DL



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Letters

To the Editor:

It has come to my attention that our store management team kept our Roosevelt Island Gristede's store closed during the Blackout.

I regret that we were not able to service the community better.

Our Manhattan stores, where we had better physical communications, allowed customers to shop with flashlights for cash.

Initially, I was angry at our management team, but phones and cell phones did not work, so there was a communications breakdown.

On behalf of Gristede's, I want to apologize to the residents of Roosevelt Island that our people did not do a better job servicing them during that 24-hour period.

John Catsimatidis
Chairman & CEO

To the Editor:

There are many things I would like to blame on the Governor. However, I cannot blame our sloppy, littering neighbors on him. Every day staff from all the Island buildings clean around their buildings, and RIOC staff cleans near the Chapel.

If, by 5:00 p.m., it is littered again, that is the fault of our neighbors.

Look outside Island House, especially near the Deli on a summer weekend afternoon. It is filthy with litter and trash. It is our neighbors, not our Governor, who do this.

Judith Berdy

To the Editor:

So Frances Salten feels George Pataki is to blame for the "ankle-deep papers" on Main Street (letter, July 26 issue).

Funny, I never have seen George Pataki in front of 546 eating take-out food and throwing the containers, chicken bones and cups on the street. I have never seen him dropping an empty snack bag on the ground two feet from a trash basket! Or eating on the bench in front of 591 and leaving the residue on the bench and on the ground.

However, I have seen Roosevelt Island residents do it. Lay the blame for the filth on Main Street where it belongs: the residents who treat it like a cesspool.

Stuart Chenkin

To the Editor:

Our Southpoint showing of *West Side Story* in July was a great example of teamwork among Islanders – a testimonial to what can be done when people work together.

The Youth Center was awesome, providing a major portion of the funding, plus fliers and posters, and the kids helped set up the area and erect and dismantle the screen; Coler-Goldwater provided a bus to transport elderly and disabled; Trelis sold food; the Boy Scouts sold candy; RIRA provided pre-show entertainment; RIOC got electricity to the site and provided transportation on "people-movers."

With the exception of the weather, everything went well. All who participated deserve a great big thank you for making this event successful. More than 300 attended, and we're hoping for even more at *Chicago* August 28.

Margie Smith, Vicki Feinmel
RIRA Social, Cultural, Education Committee



Photos by James Brock (see letter, right)



To the Editor:

For the past several years I have been trying to get RIOC to do something about the pigeon droppings that are a constant presence on the sidewalk alongside the Motorgate Garage, a main pedestrian path for Islanders and people using the garage. As can be seen in these photos, nothing has been done. I have sent at least five faxes to RIOC, and have made at least four telephone calls, both when Robert Ryan was the president and since his termination.

Fecal matter is a health hazard, and for the last month or so, a large piece of fencing, with a board attached to it, has been hanging down above the sidewalk, waiting to fall on someone walking under it or waiting for a bus. I have spoken to several RIOC workers about the situation, and am told that the people who make the money at RIOC don't care about the situation. I am beginning to believe this. Several weeks ago I received, in response to a fax about this health hazard, a telephone call from a RIOC employee, who told me Mr. Siconolfi wanted to arrange a meeting with me. I told her what days/times would be good for my schedule, and she told me she would call me back in several days. I have yet to hear from RIOC.

Here is the crux: If RIOC is not going to do what it takes to prevent the pigeons from roosting in the ledges above the sidewalk – bricking up the ledges permanently is the only solution – then Mr. Siconolfi must instruct his employees to daily clean and disinfect the sidewalks. All over cities across America, building owners and municipal workers take care of similar situations. What is wrong with RIOC?

James Brock

To My Fellow Residents:

You may know Paul Braucher, though perhaps not by name. He's been living here a long time.

You may have seen him at Trelis, playing basketball, or he may have fixed or painted something in your apartment.

Maybe you have one of his phenomenal paintings hanging on your walls. He may have given you guitar lessons, or you may have heard his band at a club downtown, or in the Halloween Parade in the Village. Or you may have had a conversation with him on Main Street.

Paul is one of the nicest and most generous people ever, and I've never met anyone with so much information in his head.

What you may not know is that Paul was diagnosed with cancer in December. It spread quickly. But there is good news. His family found a wonderful doctor in Denver, Colorado, endorsed by his surgeons at New York's Beth Israel

Hospital. The Denver doctor was able to remove the cancer early this month, and Paul is doing incredibly well. He is out of intensive care, sitting up and talking. They expect he'll go home in another week or two.

Medicaid will pay a portion of the cost of Paul's surgery, but operations of this nature are very, very expensive. Paul and his family are people of modest means, and they are reaching out for some help. I'm extending their request to Paul's friends and neighbors on Roosevelt Island.

There's a film about this at www.arcadiastreet.com/paulbraucher. The hope is that 1,000 people will come through with \$100 each to save Paul's family from bankruptcy. Checks should be payable to The Paul Braucher Medical Fund and sent to Virginia Braucher, 710 73rd Court, Willowbrook, IL 60527.

Please help.

Connie Tanner



Letters deadline for Sept. 6 issue – Sept. 2. Letters received after deadline will be considered on a space-available basis.

Letters Policy

The WIRE welcomes letters to the editor, to the community, and to/from officials. Publication on a *Name Withheld* basis will be considered, but the writer's name, address, and phone number must be provided for verification and for our records; anonymous letters are not considered for publication.

Preferred methods of submission: E-mail to Letters@MainStreetWIRE.com (E-mail format preferred, or use any wordprocessing software) to put a file on a PC-standard 3.5" floppy

disk left at 531 Main Street addressed to **The WIRE**.
Alternatives: Typed, double-spaced copy left at 531 Main Street or faxed to 1-212-755-2540 (call ahead to 1-212-826-9055). Clearly-handwritten letters will be considered if brief, but we cannot take telephone dictation of letters.

All letters are subject to acceptance, and to editing for length and clarity. Recommend maximum length, 300 words; longer letters will be considered if their content merits the required space.

Where were you when the lights went out? I was two subway stops north of Coney Island, having just witnessed a winning effort from the Brooklyn Cyclones baseball team, when the trains lost power. For those of us of a certain age, this is *Nightmare on Main Street, Episode III*, the third New York blackout in our lifetimes, and...enough already.

When I finally made it back home around 7:00 p.m. I was relieved to see our local merchants, especially Trellis and M&D Deli, pitching in to alleviate our food and drink problems. I noticed buses from Coler/Goldwater Hospitals cruising Main Street to ensure that wheelchair batteries and respirators were holding up and that our disabled neighbors were okay.

RIOC employees and Public Safety officers were checking infrastructure systems and, by the time I got home, were sending red buses to meet weary Islanders who had hoofed it to the Queens side of the 59th Street Bridge. Thanks to everyone who pitched in, especially RIOC Board Member Mark Ponton, who, I understand, was responsible for organizing the emergency bus service. Additional bus service should be automatic when there are transportation outages, and in this case, should have been available immediately after the blackout began just after 4:00 p.m. We need to ensure that contingency plans are in place for the next time and RIOC must make sure that the community is aware of their provisions.

My poor building, Westview, suffered the worst of it when a City sewage main backed up into our basement and newly renovated health facility. As a result, many of us didn't get our electricity back until after 11:00 Friday night, and by then, our swimming pool, closed for two years, was reduced to a steaming toilet. God only knows when it will reopen this time. We just can't get a break with that pool.

The question of having emergency responses in place came up a few days ago during my first meeting with newly-appointed RIOC president, Herb Berman. Our meeting was with several RIRA and RIOC officers at the soggy RIOC headquarters at 591 Main Street that was, along with the rest of Westview, trying to dry out from the flood. We touched on many of the Island's concerns: public safety, transportation, development, communication and cooperation, and so on. It was no surprise that our discussions often came back to the root cause of many of our problems – the lack of community participation in the decision-making processes here. I made it clear that a RIOC Board of Directors elected of and by the people of Roosevelt Island, empowered to hire a trained, experienced professional community manager, is my ultimate goal and, as evinced in two consecutive Island referenda, the goal of the vast majority of residents.

President Berman received us graciously, but was cautious in his responses to our questions and requests. I think it may take considerably more discussion to find solutions to mutually-perceived problems that will be compromises satisfactory to all parties. Herb seems anxious to do just that, and so I'm optimistic about our future.

This summer has been something of a washout for many of us aspiring outdoors people, and as we teeter down the dog days of summer, it's time to start thinking about the fall. For some of us, it means that the kids are soon to be back in school. For me, there's the new season of RIRA Common Council meetings and activities to plan.

In that regard, I've scheduled a meeting of your RIRA officers, vice presidents, and committee chairs to consider how best to use our time and the Common Council organization to further our goals and prepare for the future. To be effective, RIRA cannot simply react to events; we should be proactive in our planning. We have some talented people on the Council who have volunteered a little more time than their colleagues to head up a committee or fulfill some essential role. My hope is that we can share ideas and find synergistic ways of enhancing each other's programs. Life has been called "a series of habits disturbed by a few thoughts." If we are to be useful, we must transcend habit and do some serious thinking, and then follow through with action.

Did you attend the Guyana Showcase on August 9 presented by Orphans International? If you didn't, you missed a helluva good party and a very worthy fundraiser. OI is the brainchild of your neighbor and mine, Jim Luce, and has resulted in the building of four orphanages (and counting!) around the world. This newspaper profiled Jim in its July 26 issue (on

the website at <http://nyc10044.com/wire/wire2321.pdf>). There were presentations of Guyanese theater and music, with dances performed by young Guyanese women of Indian origin, this being one of the five main ethnic groups that make up Guyana's population. And then, there was the food! Sherie and I ate and danced and sang along with the folk music and then ate some more. Jim announced that the evening had raised \$20,000 to sponsor the new orphanage in Guyana, and that one house would be the Roosevelt Island House, available for contributing Islanders to visit and stay in free of charge.

Roosevelt Island has many organizations, including the Residents Association, which are all parochial in their missions and local in their outlook. But this Island organization, Orphans International, is truly global. Its mission is not just to save unfortunate children in the third world, but also to make "global citizens" of them. Jim Luce's vision, energy, and audacity simply blow me away. It's a proud thing for all of us to have such an organization headquartered here. If you can help support one or more of the four orphanages in progress (in Sulawesi, Bali, Haiti, and Guyana) with a contribution, please make it your business to seek out Jim (call 212-755-7285) and offer him a check.

The first *Movies@Southpoint* outdoor screening was a tremendous success. The Youth Center, RIRA, and RIOC combined forces to produce a flawless event, and Trellis Restaurant and our Boy Scout troop sold refreshments. Over 300 Islanders and off-Islanders picnicked, admired the view, and enjoyed a presentation of the classic film, *West Side Story*. The logistics were impeccable, with our seniors and the disabled carried portal-to-portal in a variety of vehicles. Only the weather didn't "get with the program," and the last half-hour was canceled when the prevailing mist became a shower. If anyone needs a synopsis of the remaining plot, give me a call.

The attendees were given a choice of four films for the next screening, August 28, and we anticipate an even larger turnout, given the positive word-of-mouth that the July success will afford. The consensus was for the Academy Award-winning movie, *Chicago*. RIRA will go solo on this production, with technical support provided by RIOC. In addition, we requested Public Purpose Funds; monies made available to the community by the builders of Manhattan Park and doled out by the RIOC Board of Directors, to the tune of \$3,900. The Public Purpose Fund advisory committee, composed of resident members David Kraut and Patrick Stewart, made no recommendation to the Board, which, nevertheless, voted at its August 7 meeting to approve the outlay with five votes in favor and two, Mr. Stewart and off-Islander Leo Kayser, opposing.

The new RIOC president, Herb Berman, was approved unanimously at this same Board meeting. Regrettably, there were precious few Island residents who were willing to wait out the ninety-minute executive session that followed the RIOC agenda and preceded the town-meeting portion of the evening. I welcomed Mr. Berman to the Island on behalf of RIRA and wished him well, saying that his successes can be our successes. I invited him to address the Common Council during our Public Access period, and I hope he will visit us soon. Also, I hope that he will make a special effort to meet the residents on Main Street or at a special gathering for that purpose. This community is not concrete and steel, rather it is flesh and blood, and no RIOC President can understand its needs without mixing with us.

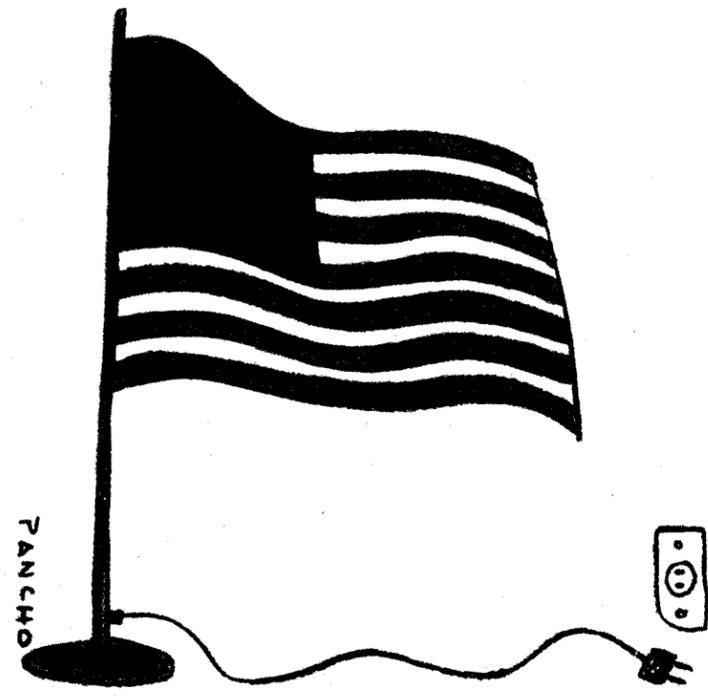
I tempered my greeting with the comment that his approval (rubber stamping some might say, given that RIOC presidents are gubernatorial appointees) was by a "rump" Board of Directors. What I meant was that two of the nine seats are unfilled and that the statute signed into law last September, requiring that this Board be composed of a majority of Island residents, has not been complied with, and therefore the Board is in violation of the law. This is not the RIOC Board's fault, of course, it's Governor Pataki's for not making the appointments required by Chapter 493 of the laws of 2002. Mayor Bloomberg must share in the blame, given that he is entitled to two recommendations to the Governor for the Board and has made neither. I suggested to the seven Board members that we all favor more participation by residents in the governance of Roosevelt Island and asked them to use their influence with the Governor to request his adherence to the law. Will they do it? What do you think?

The RIRA Column



Matthew Katz
Residents Association President
e-mail: matthewkatz@rcn.com

Editor's note: The President of RIOC has a standing invitation to provide a companion *RIOC Column* for publication here.



Le Monde

Paris, August 16

COMING UP

— This Weekend —

Open Views: Five Films on the City, tonight (Sat., August 23), 8:30, Southpoint, sponsored by the Roosevelt Island Historical Society, Rooftop Films, and the Van Alen Institute; films include *Souls of New York: Roosevelt Island Tram Operator* and *Roosevelt Island: Land Without Dogs*. Free. Bring a blanket. For more information, call 877-786-1912 or check www.vanalen.org.

Jazz at Trellis, weather permitting, outdoors on the plaza, **Fridays and Saturdays** through August, 6:00-9:30 p.m.

Will I Dream?, works of Island resident, artist Tony Vita, showing in the Rivercross Gallery Window through the end of **August**, arranged by the Mother Earth Committee (1-212-644-3966).

— The Coming Week —

OPEN: New Designs for Public Space, featuring Roosevelt Island's Southpoint, **Monday-Friday, 12:00-6:00,** through October 31 (closed Labor Day), the Van Alen Institute Gallery, 30 West 22nd Street, 6th floor. Additional information: 1-212-924-7000.

Movies at Southpoint, Chicago, with Renée Zellweger, Richard Gere, and Catherine Zeta-Jones, **Thur., Aug. 28,** at about 8:30 or sundown, preceded by recorded music. (Rain date September 4.)

Memorial Service for Hazel Lynch, Sat., Aug. 30, 2:30 p.m., Chapel of the Good Shepherd.

— Future Events —

RIRA Common Council meeting, Wed., Sept. 3, 8:00 p.m., Chapel of the Good Shepherd. Open to the public; public comments invited near start of meeting.

Free Mammograms will be offered for women 40 and older, by the American-Italian Cancer Foundation, **Thursday, Sept. 4, 9:00-5:00,** in Good Shepherd Plaza. *An appointment is required* – call 1-800-564-6868.

The Main Street WIRE – Next issue **Sat., Sept. 6.** (Get e-mail bulletins in the meantime; to subscribe, send an "Add Me" to nyc10044@rcn.com.) **Deadlines:** Advertising in the paper, **Fri., Aug. 29;** decision on fliers for *The Bag*, **Mon., Sept. 1;** fliers due **Thur., Sept. 4.** Future issues (normal twice-monthly schedule has resumed) – September 20; October 11, 25; November 8, 22 (Thanksgiving issue); December 13 (holiday issue), then every two weeks January 10-June 12, 2004. **Phone/fax** for news, 1-212-826-9055/755-2540; phone/fax for display and classified advertising placement and information, 1-212-751-8214/755-2540. **To list your organization's Island event here,** e-mail information to ComingUp@MainStreetWIRE.com, or leave it, addressed to *The WIRE*, at the desk at 531 Main Street; provide a telephone number for follow-up questions.

Senior Center

Monday
10:30, **Blood Pressure Screen**
12:30, **"Oldies" Movies**
7:00, **Dance Class** (Beginners)
Tuesday
10-11, **Latchhook Class**
10-11, **Dance & Relax**
1:00, **Bingo**
6:30, **Yoga Class**
7:30, **Games** (RISA)
Wednesday
9:15, **Stay Well**
10:30, **Beading Class**
7:00, **Pokeno** (RISA)
Thursday
10:00, **Tai Chi**
10:30, **Creative Arts**

12:30, **Movie**
Friday
9:30, **Yoga Stretch**
7:00, **Games** (RISA)
Saturday
7:30, **Bingo** (RISA)

Special Events

Fri., Aug. 29, Birthday party
Sun., Aug. 31, Champagne Brunch (for Labor Day)
Sept. 1-4, Ocean City trip (reservations required)
Tue., Sept. 16, RISA General Meeting, 7:00 p.m.
Wed., Sept. 17, Atlantic City trip

Home-delivered meals available: 1-212-744-5022, ext. 1203

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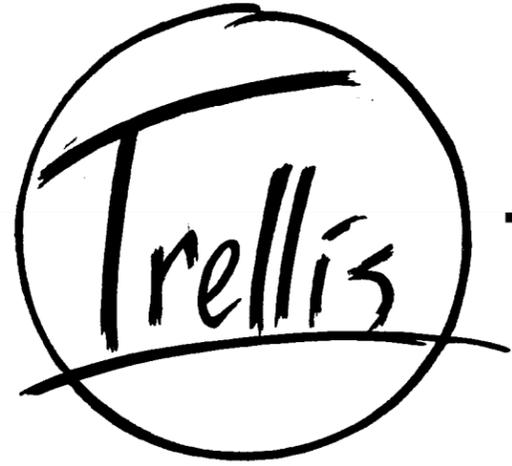


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Stepping In as President of RIOC, Herbert E. Berman Says He'll

Herbert E. Berman sat for an interview with *The Main Street WIRE* on Monday, just seven working days into his tenure as President of the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation (RIOC), though several weeks after the Governor's decision to tap him as replacement for Robert H. Ryan, who was fired by the RIOC Board of Directors in June.

The interview was conducted by Robert Laux-Bachand and Dick Lutz of *The WIRE*. Also present were Sari Dickson of the State Department of Housing and Community Renewal, who has been on assignment on Roosevelt Island since Ryan's suspension in February, and John Melia, RIOC's spokesperson.

Robert Laux-Bachand: I read the transcript from the [RIOC Board] meeting, and I've read your stump speech from the campaign for Comptroller where you give some of your background. We know basically who you are, what your experience is, that kind of thing...

Herbert E. Berman: I'm glad someone read my stump speech. I worked on that a long time.

RLB: I also read your comments that you made at the RIOC Board meeting, and I guess the first question is to ask you to reconstruct for us how you came into this job – what your interest was or how it was that you got chosen for this particular assignment.

HB: I was chosen probably as a consequence of my experience of some 26½ years in the City Council where, for the most part, certainly for the last 12 years, it was my function to chair the Finance Committee, and in doing that I had to basically create a constant consensus in order for us to attain the appropriate legislation to attain budgets. I dare say, during my tenure, we might look back upon it and call it the golden age of City budgets, because not only did we manage to reduce taxes and balance the budget but we had some major initiatives and advances in the City of New York during that period of time. And we managed to do this by bringing together all the disparate parts of the Council and the disparate geographical differences, etc., and we were able to create a consensus that gave us the strength to be able to have an impact on the outcome of the budget. The budget therefore reflected the sense of the Council.

When I first came into the Council there were a lot of people who looked with disdain upon the City Council. By the time I left, anytime there was a vacancy, it became a hard-fought battle because there was major competition to get into the City Council. I don't claim that I'm the sole reason that that turned around, but I was a major part of the process that brought respect and that level of competence to the City legislature. I was very proud of that, and I think that that leadership ability, the ability to be able to bring everybody together, more than anything else caused me to be able to have an interest in this position and also caused people to think about me as a possible leader here.

Dick Lutz: Did the Governor approach you?

HB: I don't know who approached who first. I will say that I was looking to have something challenging to do. I could have retired and I could have gone into joyful obscurity...

DL: Really joyful?

HB: Well, presumably, but I wanted to do something that [would] cause me to be relevant and to be able to do something that was important.

DL: So you would not have gone joyously into that obscurity.

HB: No, no, I would have found something else to do. But somewhere along the way somebody had mentioned that there was a possibility that there would be an opening here, and would I be interested, and I thought about it, and I came back and said, "Yes, I think it would be a terrific challenge."

RLB: You actually became a State employee as of about March of 2002, after the election. You went to work as an economic assistant to the Governor...

HB: Special Adviser to the Governor and the Director of Community Affairs.

RLB: Did you have to resign from that position to take this? Or are you still...

HB: No, I resigned from that position. As a matter of fact, I just received the document at my house and I have to sign it and return it. This is a full-time position and there is no other position.

RLB: One of the other things you were doing was serving the Governor in terms of [liaison with] the Jewish [community]...

HB: I've also resigned from that position.

RLB: So we have you full-time.

HB: Yes. I can't conceive of anybody doing this part-time. I also... I no longer practice law. I am a lawyer, and during my time on the City Council I was affiliated with a litigation law firm. I gave that up when I went to work for the Governor and I certainly have continued to have no connection with

the law firm – other than the fact that I still have clients who call me because they're accustomed to asking me questions. These are people who, for the last 30 years or so, are accustomed to calling me, so they still do. The difference is I don't charge them.

RLB: What's your date of birth? You don't look like you're 69, or 70, or whatever you are right now.

HB: That's being in politics... You feel worse but you look younger. [I was born] October 8, 1933.

DL: I'd like to know about your plans for Roosevelt Island – how you see yourself serving here? What are your goals?

HB: Well, the goal obviously is to make Roosevelt Island just a better place for people to live. I basically was shocked – not shocked, but I was surprised – when I came here to find a place as beautiful as it is, and the fact that this really great place to live was really a secret even though everybody knows about it. And it's surprising. It seems to me there ought to be competition off the wall for people to live here. It seems to me that we should have an opportunity to shout from the rafters that we have this great place and everybody should take a look at it.

As I said the night that the Board voted on me, I was kind of surprised when I got here. I mean, I lived in Brooklyn all



my life, and within like two and a half miles you have five landmarks. As a kid from the streets of Brooklyn, the closest landmark to me is the Cyclone. You can go for several miles and not see anything. Particularly where I live, it's a neighborhood that was built in the '60's – Mill Basin. So I was just amazed by it. I love landmarks; I think they're great.

I think that you have an opportunity to do some creative things. I'd like to do it. I'd like to do it.

DL: You talked a bit in your – not "acceptance speech" because you hadn't been voted on yet, but...

HB: Anticipation speech.

DL: Good name for it. You talked about tourism, and I'm curious about what economic component you see tourism contributing to Roosevelt Island's budget.

HB: Well, I think that tourism will add a major benefit to the commercial enterprises on the Island, which I believe are in need of a boost. A few short years ago – prior to September 11 [2001], the City realized about \$17 billion a year in



tourism dollars, of which the City got a certain amount of revenue, the State got a certain amount of revenue; the rest of it went to shows, theaters, restaurants, etc. So tourism is kind of a benign way of enhancing the commercial community.

So I think that it's important, and the reason why I was struck with the possibility of tourism as a way of helping the commercial part of the Island is that everybody who I speak to says, "Gee, Roosevelt Island. You know, I've always wanted to go over there. I've always wanted to take that Tram ride." [I ask them] "Well, have you done it?" "No." I

never did it. So, I'm not surprised. But there is an instinctive statement that people make immediately, "I've always wanted to go there." You know, the idea is to try and get the landmarks in good condition so that they can be visited, create the appropriate atmosphere, and hopefully, ultimately, we'll be able to benefit from tourism. It helps everybody.

DL: In terms of its fraction of RIOC's overall budget and its contribution to the Island, do you see tourism as being a major factor?

HB: I haven't begun to even think about that. I think that, no matter what the fraction is, it's worth striving for, because it can't cost that much as to not warrant the effort.

RLB: In terms of your own get-acquainted process with the Island, what's your approach to... have you set up some meetings with different community groups?

HB: Yes, we've been meeting as we can with people. It's been kind of hectic. I was here less than a week when we had the blackout. One of the things that I want to do and I guess we'll do it in September in honor of the appropriate weather – is I'm going to just have an open house where I'll have, I guess, some donuts and Gatorade. We'll ask the people, perhaps in sections, to come in and just stop by, say hello, shake hands, answer any questions, just get to know me.

In the meantime, I've met with some of the advocacy groups on the Island, and as we can, we meet. John is setting some up, Sari sets them up, and it's a slow process.

I'm very impressed by the volume of things that I have to learn. It's a huge, huge undertaking. You know, from the outside, it seems moderately straightforward. But there's an extraordinary amount of complexities that have to be dealt with, and it's a tremendous learning process.

DL: What advocacy groups have you met with?

HB: We met with the Historical Society, the Van Alan people [co-sponsoring the films at Southpoint tonight]. We had the...

Sari Dickson: We have RIRA coming in this week, and I believe we have RISK already set up, but I'm not 100% sure about that.

DL: So a couple of groups so far, with more to come.

HB: And I also told people that my door's always open, unless I'm trying to cop a few winks of something, you know. My door is open and I want people to come in and talk, as long as they're reasonable. If they're not reasonable and they yell, then I yell back.

RLB: There are some people that yell here on the Island.

HB: Then I yell back.

RLB: As a manager, how would you assess your task here at RIOC?

HB: Well, let me first start by telling you what my management style is. I place great faith and confidence in the people who work with me. I don't pretend to be all-knowing or to be all-powerful, and to have an instantaneous ability to understand all the technical and non-technical issues that face management. So I rely upon people like Sari [Dickson]. I rely upon John [Melia]. I rely on Pat [Siconolfi], etc., until I have reason not to, and so far that has not happened. I mean, they've been extraordinary.

It's my function to try and cause people to become creative, and that's what I did when I was in the City Council, with the Finance Committee. We had a group of about 60 people that... We caused them to exert their creativity and that's what ultimately happened. I had to convince them that being wrong, as long as it was a consequence of creative effort, was going to be rewarded, and not diminished, and therefore our people felt secure in that and they started

becoming creative and we did some good things. It's the same thing here. We have some really good people who work here. The idea is to cause them to become creative. The idea is to cause them to use their creativity in a positive way to help the Island and the people on the Island, and that's basically what I'm going to try and do.

The Governor's only statement was to make it a better place to live. And he's been very supportive, and I think that that type of support... And, by the way, Gifford Miller, who I met with, and I'm accustomed to working with him, has been very supportive. I have yet to meet with the other legislators, but I will, and I have every reason to believe that they will likewise be very supportive. The common goal is to benefit Roosevelt Island, and that's what we'll try to do.

DL: You had your first real test in this emergency that came about as a result of the Blackout. Any major lessons learned?

HB: Oh, yes. One of the things that we have to yet do – we were talking about it this morning – is to assess what went right and what went wrong, and how we can improve things. We know that we have to have some better coordination in certain areas. But, you know, the good things were that we immediately reached out to the hospitals. They supplied us with beds and oxygen and told us that if there were any emergencies they could take them in. We had our Public Safety Officers visit people that are homebound and couldn't get out, so they were visited right away. We do

Stimulate Creativity and Leverage His Political Background

know that we need to have better use of our generators. We released them right away but we figure they could have been put into service faster [and that's] one of the things that we have to improve on. We have a couple of restaurants on the Island that were terrific – Trellis and M&D Deli and the pizza place, where they gave out water... As a matter of fact, the poor Trellis restaurant gave out chairs, and [now] about half of them are missing. They were absolutely terrific and they should be commended.

John Melia: Residents were calm. We were out here at 11:00 o'clock Thursday night. The residents were calm...

HB: There was medical availability, there was water. We had this office open for bathroom facilities for some of the seniors, so there was a lot that went right.

Thank God nobody was stuck on the Tram. Coincidentally, that afternoon we met with the Tram people and I was just questioning them on emergency evacuation procedures if something like this happened. Luckily, nobody was on the Tram when the lights went out, so that was something – that it was safe.

RLB: Were you out here on Thursday and Friday?

HB: I was here Thursday, into the evening, then John stayed over, Sari stayed over late that night... Sari became the Florence Nightingale of Roosevelt Island.

DL: How many other staff members did you have...

HB: We had quite a few... It depends. In sections... We had a lot of our maintenance people, we had... Public Safety Officers were here in force – whoever we could reach.

There was a lot good that happened... There were a couple of stores that kind of pissed us off because of their lack of cooperation. I don't want to mention who they are, but we're going to deal with that at another time.

DL: You ordered the stores to close, right?

HB: No, to the contrary, people were trying to get certain supplies and we wanted the stores to stay open as long as they could.

But the point is that they were being cooperative and they were being helpful, and they're small stores but they contributed to the sense of well-being. They were good neighbors, and... I think it would be important for you fellows to write about it and let the people on the Island know that



DL: To wrap up on the emergency and the Blackout, you feel generally that the Island in general and RIOCI in specific came through...?

HB: Yes. There were certain problems because you never know where the weaknesses are until it's tested, so now we can assess what has to be corrected.

DL: [On another matter:] You're probably aware that your two immediate predecessors were not well-received on the Island, that each left under difficult circumstances, that at one point in 1998 residents voted, I think it was 92%, to ask the State to essentially leave Roosevelt Island, turn it over to local residents. What is your assessment of how you deal with that kind of situation? You're walking into what some people would describe as a difficult environment, made difficult by your predecessors, and whether you want to comment on their performance or not...

HB: Well, my immediate predecessor was a very talented, very bright person who had tremendous breadth of knowledge and understanding. The unfortunate details as to how it ultimately went down is something I'm not going to comment on, but as far as his knowledge, he was a very knowledgeable individual and a talented individual.

I don't know much about [Dr. Jerome Blue], who preceded him. I can't comment on that.

Look, the reality is that currently, under the current process, the State and the City have an interest in Roosevelt Island. If in fact that was to be totally removed, I think it would have a very negative impact on the Island.

DL: In what way?

HB: Well, there's support, there's infrastructure support... Can it ultimately happen? Yes. Should it ultimately happen? Probably so. I haven't really studied the issue that much, but I remember during my tenure in the City

Council, on a number of occasions we spent a lot of time debating whether New York City should become the fifty-first state, or whether Staten Island should secede from New York.

DL: Both have come up again recently.

HB: That's right. Well, let me tell you something. If Staten Island were to secede from the City of New York, the cost to Staten Islanders for that secession would be enormous. It would be absolutely enormous. It's not something that you just blindly run into. I think it's something that, in the back of everybody's mind, maybe ultimately that's what should happen and will happen, and if we learn how to really work together perhaps we can accelerate that process.

RLB: The process of... What are we talking about here? You mean like just folding the Island back into the City...

JM: No, you'd need legislation...

HB: Major legislation, right...

JM: ...to dissolve the [Roosevelt Island Operating] Corporation. It's a big, involved process, and at the end of it... The Operating Corporation is now financially, structurally, in balance. If it were just turned over wholesale, I think Herb is saying it would be bad for the residents [UNINT] in terms of services or anything else.

DL: Some of the activity that's been going on has been focused on keeping RIOCI in place, but having an elected Board as opposed to an appointed Board, [with the] Board empowered to hire a President with municipal management background. You might fit that description quite nicely, but that seems to have been the general trend, rather

than a trend to simply go back to being part of the City. Can you comment...

HB: Look, I'm not here for the purposes of perpetuating either State or City control or leadership of Roosevelt Island. I'm here to try and make it a better place to live, and an Island that's more productive. It's not for me to decide or determine whether they should go to [an] elected Board or non-elected Board. Right now you have a pretty wide distribution of interests on the Board of Directors, and as a consequence, you have, I think, a good, healthy make-up. You have a Board of Directors here that, on paper, should be at each other's necks, but they work incredibly well together, despite their differences in views and opinions, so I think that's a good example of how it constructively works.

I don't know that it's necessarily my job to spend time to determine how we should change that process. I have to

conserve my energies for what I can do to lead this Island and lead the people who work here and live here, and that's my function.

DL: Along those lines, any ideas on development?

HB: Look, you know, development is something that you kind of have to try to strike a balance between the interests of the government, the interests of what's best for the Island. It's something that we have to look at, we have to examine, we have to talk to a lot of people, and we'll see what we advocate.

DL: So you're open on all of that.

HB: Absolutely. I'm not for or against anything.

RLB: Do you feel that, as the President here, you're kind of running the show, or do you feel that in your role here you're basically answering to the State – [DHCR]? How do you see the chain of command?

HB: I think it's a combination of factors. I think I was put in here because the Governor has confidence in me, and it's the same as when I was a member of the City Council. A certain amount of confidence is vested in you as an elected official or as a person appointed in this position, and if there's disagreement or you don't like the job you do, then, you know, OK, thank you, and goodbye, or [you are] vote[d] out.

But I think for the most part the Board has vested their confidence in me. That doesn't mean that I become dictatorial or exercise omnipotence to a fair-thee-well. What it does mean is that – which is my style, to always try to get a consensus – the people find out what their diverse views are and, after a while, make a decision, and try to convince other people that it's the right decision.

DL: Do you think it helps that you have a Democratic background and you're serving in a Republican administration?

HB: Doesn't hurt.

DL: How's it going to help?

HB: Well, I mean, I know a lot of people. I've... The City government is, for the most part, a government of Democrats, many of whom I've worked with over the years, and I also have during my time that I advised the Governor, I had the pleasure to meet a lot of people in the various State offices, so both have to be a plus. They both have to be helpful.

JM: I think that's it, gentlemen.

HB: You'll come back again. We'll talk some more.

RLB: Welcome to Roosevelt Island.

HB: And you know, while I appreciate the test, you could have done something less than a Blackout.

The WIRE has extended an invitation to Herbert E. Berman to write a *RIOCI President's Column* to run as a companion to *The RIRA Column* (page 3).



Trellis and the Deli and the pizza place...

RLB: The Island was almost idyllic in certain respects. There were whole families, like a big Chinese clan, camped out in Manhattan Park. They were out there all day, playing cards, eating...

HB: That was a classic New York response, and the remarkable thing about New York is that that was replicated throughout the City.

RLB: It was. I think that that's, you know, it's like the Island in that respect fitting in with the rest of New York City. I don't know what all the other problems and things that were involved...

HB: It was a frightening experience. I think [for] the people who were homebound, [and for] some of the senior citizens, it was frightening, and the one thing that happened was that the Public Safety Officers had a list of all the homebound people and in some instances they had to walk a lot of floors.

We also asked people on the first six floors – your water pumps up to six floors [by gravity feed] and generally doesn't go above it because they need electricity to carry it... So we asked them to open up their apartments to people living above them, and people used bathrooms, got water, whatever.

RLB: We had no water. We're on the second floor of Manhattan Park. We had no water, and I'll tell you where we found water, plenty of water pressure, and maybe it would have been a good help to people to know this. [At] the garden the hoses were running full-blast all the way through this. We just filled up a bucket.

HB: We tried to get the Public Safety Officers and everyone to spread the word between the older buildings that they would probably have running water and usable bathrooms on the first six floors, and we opened up this office in case they wanted to use it. We had water.

RLB: There was a sewage spill here...

HB: Yes, [in] the lower part of the office... It's in bad shape...



When the Lights Went Out, Roosevelt Islanders Showed They

The WIRE asked subscribers to its E-mail Bulletin Service (sign up by sending an "Add Me" message to nyc10044@rcn.com) to recount their experiences of Blackout Thursday and Friday. At press time, these residents (and a former resident) had responded with their stories of how New Yorkers take this kind of thing in stride. Photos are by Vicki Feinmel.

I was in my office in midtown. My computer and lights went out. I looked at the building across the street and down at the street lights and saw they had gone out too. People on the sidewalk were pointing up, so something big was happening. I thought, "Is this a terrorist attack?" It was near closing time, so my game plan, just as on 9/11, was to walk over the 59th Street Bridge, and keep on walking till I got home. I took off my tie and headed out.

Back on 9/11 I did not actually walk over the 59th Street Bridge. Oddly enough, I got a ride over the bridge in a van from a stranger who happened to be Arab. This time, however, I joined the massive body of humanity walking to Queens. On the way, we could see a subway car filled with stranded passengers and, realizing there was nothing we could do to help them, kept on moving.

I purchased a cold drink in Queens, and kept on walking. As I walked, I thought it might be a good idea to buy a bag of ice when I got back home, but both our Megastore and our convenience store had closed their doors. The next day I ate steak for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

Neal Weissman



I don't know how much faith we can have in radio reports. I had taken an elderly friend from the upper Westside shopping in New Jersey. We heard that no traffic was being allowed to come in over the bridges or through the tunnels. By 6:30 p.m. we decided to give it a try. The cars and trucks were rolling smoothly inbound on the George Washington Bridge. We sped down the Westside highway – no problem. I dropped her off, traffic was light uptown. Wonderful civilians were directing cars and pedestrians wherever police were not available. I decided to believe the news reports, avoided midtown and the 59th St. Bridge and drove home via the Triborough without much difficulty. Then I climbed 19 flights.

After a movie, which let out at 4:00 p.m., on to Pax (59th & 3rd) for coffee. "Small coffee, please" (me to the server), and then the lights went out! Throngs leaving Bloomies, traffic more hectic than usual etc., etc., etc.

On to the Tram – which was not running, of course. People milling around, great confusion. And there was Isabel Bartley – hairdresser supreme, Thrift Shop maven, and other good things, trying to rustle up a taxi to no avail. Then a white commercial van stopped in front of her and she went into action. She rapped on the window, implored the drivers in Spanish and English to please drive these senior ladies to Roosevelt Island. Hold your breath... They said okay and eight of us scrambled into the back of the van (pretty agile "seniors," eh?) and we were off on a bumpy ride home! They were rewarded with a contribution of at least what we would have spent on the Tram, hopefully more.

The moral of the story is that if it weren't for Isabel's initiative, I dread to think of the alternative. So three cheers for Isabel – long may she wave!

Tess Langeveld



As usual for a Thursday afternoon, I was making house calls in 546 Main Street. I had just turned down a hallway when a fire-door swung away from the wall and stopped just short of my nose... the electro-magnet holding the door open had failed. The lights went out, and my next patient came out into the hall wondering why her TV had turned off. Soon, Big Allis started roaring and belching clouds of dark exhaust and it became clear that the electrical problem was widespread.

I checked with Public Safety to make sure that the people on respirators were having their batteries charged up and started the long walk home to the Upper West Side. It was the best trip I've taken in years. The 59th Street Bridge was a party – thousands of people streamed past me, returning to Queens, and everyone was smiling. When a column of NYPD cadets marched by, the crowd broke into applause.

Numerous Manhattan intersections had self-appointed Cops-For-a-Day directing traffic at the signal-less intersections – and they were clearly relishing their work. Although most businesses were closed, some bars and restaurants were jammed as they hurried to get rid of their thawing perishables. Cold beer and softening ice cream were the hottest-selling items.

As I approached the end of my hike, I passed a Catholic High School where a group of twenty-somethings were crouched around a large cooler passing out cups of much-appreciated water to passers-by. At home, a stranded visitor from Boston joined us for a candlelight dinner, and we searched for Mars in the darkened skies.

We were in luck the next morning. Our neighborhood had the lights on early and the streets were full of people taking the day off.

Dr. Jack Resnick

About an hour after the electricity went out, most of the people fortunate enough to have remained on the Island began to congregate out on the street. Many noticed that the Red Buses were circling futilely up and down Main Street, empty because there were no passengers coming from the subway or the Tram.

We wondered why these buses could not be much more usefully employed by directing them to the foot of the Queensboro Bridge, where our friends and neighbors were beginning to arrive, so that we could spare them the last two miles of their trek home. Mark Ponton, RIOC's most-recently-appointed Board member, a resident, was engaged in a spirited discussion with the remaining RIOC employees, when I approached them and asked why there was no pick-up of residents in Queens. Patrick Stewart, another Board member, responded gleefully that walking is healthy and the people "can use the exercise," while Ponton was quite adamant that the buses should be redirected. Then Stewart, apparently amused by the exchange, hopped into the back of one of the little electric vehicles, all smiles and joy, and aimlessly toured the street.

While the debate continued, Joann Grimm and I decided to transport pedestrians in our cars. We were incredulous to see the Red Bus arrive, with Mark Ponton standing by the driver. We directed Island residents to the bus, and offered them water. The bus filled quickly with exhausted, overheated passengers, soaked with perspiration. The drivers picked up others along the route home, even on the 36th Avenue Bridge. These hard-working and kind drivers worked until 10:00 p.m., shuttling our tired neighbors back home. I salute Mark's dedication and common sense, and I wish we had more like him on the Board.

Nurit Marcus

Joan Pape

Personally we were lucky. We had been paying our visits to medical people again but got home at 3:45. I sat down at my favorite computer and began to find out what was happening with the stock market. At 4:20, plus or minus, the computer stuttered and the lights went out.

From our vantage point, at nearly eye level with the Queensboro Bridge, by five o'clock the bridge began to fill up with a lot of people heading east and an increasing number heading west. Vehicle traffic into Manhattan was cut off. The only public transit was being provided by buses and they were hurt by the traffic jams caused by the traffic lights being out.

The folks who were hurt most were the people who work in the skyscrapers. Vicki Feinmel, for instance, came from the 43rd floor down to Broadway using muscles she never used before and then encouraged them to walk over the bridge and then back a couple of miles to Main Street on the Island. And Bob Laux-Bachand, who works for *The Times*, got home at 1:30 in the morning, taking the same walking route.

So it could have been a lot worse for us. Being on the seventh floor, the cold water continued to come through from normal system pressure. Our gas stove worked fine whenever we wanted to heat something. We had a small battery radio with a scratchy sound with which we were able to hear our Mayor tell us to go home and open our windows. Mickey went through our part of the building passing out candles she had purchased after the last blackout. And the almost full moon was a help. The next day, the folks on Roosevelt Island acted as though they were used to all this stuff. Trellis put tables under the street trees and served a basic menu of two sandwiches (cold) and three varieties of canned soda (warm).

At any rate, now we have still another problem for our excellent President, who stepped right up to the challenge, promising to get to the bottom of the great grid failure. I am sure he will be as forthright and effective in acting on this problem as he has been in solving the drop in employment, health care concerns, the deficit, the restoration of a civil society in Afghanistan, and freeing the Iraqis from their assorted problems.

David Bauer

I would be delighted to regale you with a great story either in Manhattan or on the Island, but I was with my dad, after walking up 16 flights of stairs to his apartment. It is not that great a story. As I write, I am actually leaving town in a little while to see some trees, lakes, mountains – and not smell NYC.

The real story is that the Blackout happened on Mr. Berman's fourth or fifth day, when he was still learning his way around (and I mean that in both ways) and he was not here on Friday (he did stick around for a while on Thursday, but his wife was ill, so he went to be with her, which is quite understandable) and besides which, Sari was the real hero, along with consultant Scott Weiss, most of Public Safety, and Kaie at Trellis.

The real story is the absence of leadership at Gristede's and a few other Island vendors.

Judy Berdy was here, very proactive, helpful, and, along with a few other Island leaders, led the way. I have heard some horror stories about some RIOC Board members and other Islanders, but I really missed everything.

The Blackout again points out our vulnerability, lack of emergency preparedness, the fact that we are not on State or City radar. I do not know what the 114th Precinct did to help us out; I do know the FDNY was helpful.

Nina Lublin

I am currently working on the 35th floor of a building in midtown and had to walk down those 35 flights as the first leg of my trip home. After giving my legs a chance to stop quivering like jello from the downward part of my hike, I began my walk from 51st and Lexington across the Queensboro Bridge and towards 21st Street at about 5:15 p.m. I was walking with a strained knee and was as hot and sweaty as everyone else. But I saw that most everyone moved along with great courtesy and generally good humor while being very determined to get where they needed to go. When I saw the unexpected, a Q102 bus parked at a bus stop, I was at first unbelieving at my good luck and then very grateful. I picked up my gait to make sure I'd get on the bus. Lo and behold, there were a goodly supply of my neighbors! What a *pleasure* to see familiar faces *and that bus!*

I was exhausted, my knee really hurt, and I was concerned about where Matthew was with our house guest, George Rubin. They'd gone to a Cyclones game, and I was hoping they might have just missed being caught, or at least caught closer to home. Turns out they managed to hook a ride with several others in a limo with a very nice Sikh driver. He brought those who needed to go to Queens to that borough and then brought Matthew and George straight to our door! Poor guy was worried if he'd be able to get home on a very low gas tank... I hope good fortune was with him! We all met in the Westview lobby at around 7:00 or a little after. We knew that once we climbed the seven flights we would not be coming back down, so we meandered over to Good Shepherd Plaza, and what a wonderful sight to see a table filled with containers of water being doled out to anyone who had need, by a couple of neighbors, as well as sliced fruit! Trellis was selling whatever pastries it had but, without electricity, the kitchen was closed. The pizza shop had run out of cheese, so no more pizzas! So much for an easy evening. We went home after about a half hour and made a large mixed tuna and greens salad. By 10:00 we were all beat from the "exercise," heat, and effort of the day, and we all fell into a great, solid sleep.

We have to thank Mark Ponton, the newest RIOC Board member, for having the courage to stand up for his fellow residents and get the buses moving into Queens to pick up exhausted residents. I understand that Nurit Marcus and another resident provided much needed water for those riders. Kudos.

On the other hand, I noticed another resident's complaint, posted on kiosks, about how the Red Bus was finally directed to Queens by Ponton. An odd perspective, I thought, when redirection of the Red Buses should have been automatic.

So, three cheers for Mark Ponton and our other neighbors who pitched in to help the rest of us that Blackout Thursday!

Sherie Helstien

Are True New Yorkers: It Became an Occasion

On Blackout Thursday I was sent to court at 80 Centre Street for an Order to Show Cause for a Temporary Restraining Order. Although I was not dressed properly for court, I luckily was dressed properly for the five-mile-plus that was ahead of me.

At first, after hearing that the power was out City-wide, I was very afraid that the power plants on the East river had been bombed, and that Roosevelt Island was, too. That would mean not only no home but no family. The 20 minutes it took me to get in touch with home were the worst of my life. But once I was able to contact my babysitter (thank you, Faouza, for taking care of my twins under such terrible conditions) I felt better and headed north.

It was an interesting experience, though not pleasant. There were hundreds and thousands of people just walking. I noticed people much worse off than myself, which helped me keep a positive attitude. I saw very pregnant women, people in casts, wheelchairs, with canes, with stroller, and with small and not-so-small children. I felt lucky to have two legs and comfortable shoes! I did not see any trouble or problems other than traffic jams. People were directing traffic where there were no police.

I wanted to get home before dark, so I kept a good pace and limited my stops. The second moment of relief came in the East 30's. I found a bar that was escorting people (women mostly) to the restrooms in the basement. They had lantern-type flashlights, which were much needed. The last leg of the walk was hotter and stickier and I wasn't sure I could do it until I saw the 59th Street Bridge and realized that, while there was a long way to go, the end was near.

The third moment of relief for me came at the Queens side of the 59th Street Bridge. I had just gotten onto 21st Street at about 7:45 p.m. (I left lower Manhattan at 4:30) when I saw the Roosevelt Island Red Bus and Mark Ponton! *What a thrill!* An air-conditioned bus with a seat to take me to my door! I was never so happy to see a bus before. Then Nurit Marcus came on board with *cold water* and cups! Thank you, Mark and Nurit, and all those at RIOC who got the buses out there!

I'm just glad that we all got through relatively unharmed and no worse for the wear.

Marguerite Camaione

My office is on the 43rd floor of an office building on Broadway. Last week there was a major water leak that affected about four floors of my company. We had fans blowing everywhere and big thick cable wiring hanging from our ceilings.

When my computer and the lights went dead I assumed it was because of all the extra electrical stuff going on in my office. There was then an announcement that all lights in the Times Square area went out. A few minutes later it was announced that all of New York had lost lights.

Luckily, since 9/11, I have kept a pair of sneakers in my desk in case of such an emergency. I hooked up with a few office friends and walked down the 43 flights. I never realized how difficult that would be. By the time we reached the bottom, my legs were like jelly. When I got outside, there were thousands of people in the streets. People were just socializing, having a good time. I was wondering where all these people were going to sleep. We rested a while and then started our walk east to the 59th Street Bridge. I left my two friends there. They were going to try to get a bus to Queens. I decided to just keep on going. Thousands of people and cars were converging onto the bridge. I was a little concerned about the crowds, but all was peaceful – and very hot. I ran into another person from my office, we walked and chatted awhile to almost the end of the bridge, and then I spotted two people from my building on Roosevelt Island. We made plans to meet on the Queens side of the bridge and walk to the Island together. We were hoping that when we got to the other side, we would see the Red Bus. We were terribly disappointed that RIOC wouldn't think to get buses to the 59th Street Bridge as soon as possible. We just kept on going until we got to the 36th Avenue Bridge, where we asked a "neighbor" for a lift. They looked at us as though we were crazy and told us we only had a short distance to go.

The person in the next car was a lot nicer and took us over the bridge. When we got to the 36th Avenue Bridge, I did see a Red Bus leaving the Island to pick up residents.

When I finally got to the Church, it was wonderful to see all my friends and neighbors, chairs, and a water station. I'm glad someone thought about their neighbors. The rest of that day and the next, it was wonderful to be living on Roosevelt Island. I mostly saw people helping each other. People were walking their neighbors up to their apartments. Cookie Lugo and Fay Vass arranged for a barbecue for the maintenance workers. Our pizza place gave away ice cream; at Trellis, Kaie had coffee and bagels ready the next morning.

I have to ask: *RIOC, when are you going to get what Roosevelt Island is about?* Even one of our resident RIOC Board members didn't think the Red Bus should pick up Islanders at the 59th Street Bridge. It should be normal operating procedure that when the Tram and subway are out, the Red Bus should meet the residents at the 59th Street Bridge as soon as possible.

Vicki Feinmel

We all have stories about the Blackout of August 14, 2003. I was with Matt Katz. We had gone to a Brooklyn Cyclones game at Coney Island, stopping for lunch at Nathan's. When the game ended a little after 4:00 p.m., we expected to take a leisurely ride back to Manhattan. It was not to be. After one stop, the train was dead and we learned, as we disembarked, thanks to the conductor manually opening the doors, that the entire City was in a Blackout. So what are we to do? Go back to Coney Island and sleep on the beach? No, as intrepid New Yorkers we decided we would get back home. After a short walk, we found a limo service and now, with two others, a college student and a nice Italian woman, added to our little group, the service said they would take us to Queens. After a hot, tiring two-hour-plus journey, we were at the Roosevelt Island bridge. On Main Street everyone was outside. Chairs were set up in front of the dark Trellis and volunteers were giving out cold water. As darkness fell, we – Matt, Sherie, and yours truly – climbed the seven floors to the apartment. A good Samaritan with a flashlight led the way.

Sherie put together a great meal, by candlelight. The next day, on the street outside Trellis, people were eating breakfast and lines had formed for water and ice – but how to get back home to New Jersey? The mayor had said that the Port Authority Bus Terminal was open. After getting through on my cell phone to the local car service, I was taken to the Port Authority. The mayor lies! The terminal was closed tight and police were guarding the entrances. Buses were on every side street, and thousands upon thousands of people were trying to find whatever would take them to their destinations. I finally succeeded and, as the bus pulled away, I looked back on this refugee-camp-like atmosphere. It had all been quiet chaos but people were wonderful to other people. Matt, Sherie, and the cats were wonderful to me. I know that Matt, as President of RIRA, has the power to turn out the lights to keep me on the Island for another day, but he didn't have to overdo it – I mean, the *whole east coast!*

George Rubin, Medford Leas, NJ (former Roosevelt Islander)



I work in an office building on West 27th Street between Sixth and Seventh, on the fifth floor. Four of us decided to just spend the night in the office (Christian lives in Flatbush, John lives uptown, Wayne lives in Connecticut, and me!). I had an old telephone that did not need electricity to operate, which I hooked up to a direct telephone line, and we were eventually able to reach our families to check on their status and to let them know we were fine. Two of us went outside and purchased batteries, flashlights, and candles. I also happened to have a radio which runs on batteries, so we tuned in to 1010WINS. We later made another run to pick up provisions: grapes, cheddar cheese, crackers, orange juice, lemonade (and a little something to go in the orange juice). We had bottled water and sodas in the office. We also had a couch and a love seat. Our little ice machine was full, so we had ice throughout the night. Several times, we went up to the roof. There was a whole community of New Yorkers on different roofs. People had flashlights and were calling to each other. Many said they were more comfortable up there than in their overheated apartments. And for the first time I was able to see stars clearly above the City.

Our office has a lot of open space, and because the building is well-insulated, the temperature remained at a very comfortable level throughout the night. We had a great time telling stories and laughing. At one point, Christian even did some stand-up comedy. Now, I have always been teased about being a pack-rat, but this was one time that it came in handy. I had a shirt in my desk which served as something to sleep in. I also had toothpaste, a toothbrush, deodorant, soap, and a spare pair of slipper/shoes. I was set!

The next morning we listened to the radio to make sure that Wayne could get a train to Connecticut. We decided that we should have a "Survivors' Breakfast," so we walked up to 32nd Street, and we were able to get on a bus heading uptown. We got off at Grand Central, but the lights were still out there so we decided to go to the Penn Club (Wayne is a member). It was now almost 11:00 a.m., and they had run out of cereal but said they would be serving again at noon. We went across the street to a hotel called Sofitel. They were only serving their guests, but were nice enough to say we could stay. So we had a nice breakfast of fresh-squeezed orange juice, English muffins, coffee and tea. Fully refreshed, we said our good-byes and went our separate ways. I walked over to Third Avenue and was able to get on a bus that got me to 59th Street. I walked over to Second Avenue hoping to be able to get on a Queens bus. A charter bus came along, and the driver offered to get those of us waiting across the bridge. From there I got on the Q102 and made it home by 2:30 p.m.

Linda Jones Easton

I was on the 14th floor of the Grace Building when the lights went out and the emergency lights started flickering, so I ran down 14 flights of stairs and headed out to Third Avenue to try to catch a bus to the 59th Street Bridge, so I could cross over somehow (I had no idea how).

But the buses were packed, so I hitched a ride to 59th St. and got out. As I was walking by the Carriage House on 59th, I saw a group of my neighbors having a "Blackout party" in that establishment, so I joined them for a couple of hours and had a blast until it got darker and it was time to cross the bridge.

Once on the bridge, six of us women clambered onto the back of a Toyota pickup truck and that's how we crossed over. (You haven't lived until you've seen the 59th St. Bridge on a summer night from the back of a pickup truck).

Once in Queens, we hitched another ride to Roosevelt Island, and when we got here, we found a lot of our neighbors partying in the street (and commenting that "we should do this more often." I think not.) A lot of Island folks just partied on through the next afternoon, until the lights came back on. Everyone I met was in great spirits.

So in all, it was an interesting experience – almost fun except for the heat and the inconvenience of having to grope around dark hallways for one night.

Patricia Duarte

Moving up from our third-floor apartment to the 19th seemed like a good idea – until the evening of the Blackout, when I had to trudge up after a long walk back to the Island from midtown. I thanked my stars that my office wasn't downtown as my husband's was on 9/11.

When the lights flickered briefly before all went dark, there wasn't any panic at my workplace – people left as and when they thought fit. I called home, asked my son's caregiver to stay with him until I got back and then simply walked with the hordes crossing Queensboro Bridge. I saw a Red Bus leave the Island just as I was getting back – there had been none when I reached the Island bridge a little before 7:00 p.m. Our doorman Jimmy's welcoming line that an air-conditioner was running in the community room of Island House did not help too much, only because the thought of walking up those 19 floors, picking up my son, Dhruv, walking down and then, at some point, back up again, was simply dreadful. So, there we were, tired mom, bewildered child, and captive babysitter on that famed high-floor apartment with a great view.

The darkened city was not a pretty sight. The glitter was gone and looking at streams of people walking over Queensboro Bridge made us feel sorry for them. Perched high, we had sandwiches, milk, and a tub of fast-melting ice cream, and went to bed.

The next morning, since no Red Buses seemed to be taking people across to Manhattan, I hitched a ride with a kind lady from Long Island who had come to check on her daughter, an Island resident. My son and his caregiver came along since there were no signs of when milk and fresh food would be available on the Island. At work, we had all the facilities one takes for granted – air-conditioning, chilled water, working elevators. A special bonus – free food!

Dhruv and his caregiver made themselves comfortable in the cafeteria while I worked. By the time we got back home in a colleague's car, power was back on and my husband had driven down from Hartford, milk carton in hand.

Anusha Shrivastava

Berman from page 1

His appointment to the State administration was not announced to or reported in the mainstream media and, to date, his Roosevelt Island commission, and Ryan's dismissal, have also gone unnoticed.

This could be interpreted in several ways, the most obvious being that Roosevelt Island is a tiny enclave – smaller in population, really, than a number of high-rise housing complexes scattered throughout the boroughs. In addition – given the absence of any public relations effort – it could be a reflection of the State administration's penchant for secrecy.

At any rate, Berman is on the job now and he appears to be fully engaged in an effort to understand the Island and to put his considerable experience and connections to work.

"The Governor's only statement was to make it a better place to live," he told *The WIRE* in an interview this week.

"The common goal is to benefit Roosevelt Island, and that's what we'll try to do," he said. (A transcript appears on pages 6 and 7.)

Berman, who turns 70 on October 8, lives in a far corner of Brooklyn, Mill Basin, not far from Jamaica Bay. It is a former "grimy industrial area," according to the *Encyclopedia of New York*, that has been transformed into one of the borough's most exclusive residential neighborhoods. But, as Berman noted in the interview, "you can go for several miles and not see anything," whereas Roosevelt Island is loaded with landmarks and scenery. "I was surprised when I came here to find a place as beautiful as it is," he said. He offered similar comments to the RIOC directors on August 7 – the night he was appointed on a unanimous vote – expressing admiration for the Island's historical resources, natural beauty and potential for tourism.

He was here for the Blackout a week ago Thursday, helping to direct RIOC's response. It was a rude introduction to Island life, and he said this week that he's still in the beginning stages of mastering the various issues that are in the mix here. He also admitted that he had yet to ride the Tram.

"I'm working up to it, gentlemen," he said. "I have a pronounced fear of heights – open heights."

Berman presents quite a contrast with his predecessor. He is buttoned down, carefully groomed, and quite scripted in his answers to most questions. He projects a feeling of vigor, good health, and decisiveness, and does not, at first glance, appear to be on the



Thursday afternoon, Doryne Isley, General Manager of Roosevelt Island Housing Management, presented certificates ("get out of jail cards" for her own staff) in appreciation for long and hard work during last week's Blackout. They went to Public Safety Officers, members of the RIOC staff, and Mike Acevedo of Goldwater Hospital. Those cited (not all were present) included: **From Public Safety:** Officer Ramon Azular, Sgt. John Banberger, Rene Bryan, Officer Malcolm Chavis, Officer Steven Cohen, Officer Wanda M. Coleman, Officer William Dentone, Officer Monique Hines, Officer Wayne Jones, Sgt. James Knapp, Sgt. Anibal Ortega, Officer Michelle Santiago, Lt. Estrella Suarez, Officer Lisa Williams, Youth Officer Michelle Williams, Officer Alan Wright, Sgt. Gary Yee. **From RIOC:** Chris Baker, Sari Dickson, Carol Rubino. **From Housing Management:** Charles Abdul Jr., Charles Acquista, Eduardo Acquista, Guilcamo Andrade, Angel Batista, Jesus Bracero, Robert Buckley, Phil Burns, Elvin Candelario, Glubys Carrera, Alfredo Cornejo, Pat Cupolo, Manny De Guzman, Elba De Jesus, Leandro De La Cruz, Cornelius Dingle, Lorenzo Dominguez, Orlando Espada, Marcelo Eugenio, Freddy Fernandez, Matteo Gambino, Hector Garcia, Hector Genao, Gus Georgios, Yamilet Gonzalez, Peter Graff, Vivian Hines, Maleeka Jailall, Narine Khan, Matilda Klimpacher, Vincent Lomanto, Yamil Lopera, Oasis Marchena, Anthony Marino, Marcos Miller, Goordat Misir, Brian Morgan, Robert Mulligan, Juan Penafiel, James Pontrelli, Ralph Ramirez, Franco Rizzi, Mark Robles, Juan Rodriguez, Angel Salas, Michael Setari, Ana Siddiqui, Danny Signorella, Pepe Thomas, Robert Tween, Osiris Vargas, Rainer Velardo, Steve Volpe, Carlos Zazueta, Mark Zeltser. A selection of Islander experiences in the Blackout appears on pages 8-9.

threshold of his 70s. He signaled his intention to work past a more typical retirement age by his run for comptroller two years ago, and he shows no sign of slowing down now.

If one were to guess at his motivation for sustaining a heavy workload, a clue might be found in his published stump speech for Comptroller, when he reminisced about his boyhood in Brooklyn. His comments seemed to reveal a drive that may be born more out of a sense of economic survival than of political ambition.

"When I was a kid in Brighton Beach," Berman said, "my dad had just lost his business in the Depression and, in order to make a living for the family, I would spend weekends walking up and down Brighton Beach selling ice cream. And at nighttime when the sun would go down we would take sand sifters and we'd go to the beach and we'd sift sand in an effort to find loose change. Because the 50 cents or a dollar that we'd find would make a difference between eating and not eating on that particular day. Nobody should have to go back to that."

Berman's story undoubtedly resonated with a certain age group – heavy-voting senior citizens – but it could also have been aimed at any of those who were struggling to make a go of it in the City. His own children appear to have had more advantages. His son, Russell, is a cancer surgeon and researcher at New York University, and his daughter, Shari Springer Berman, is an award-winning film writer and director. Berman's wife, Frances, is an assistant principal.

Springer Berman and her husband, Robert Pulcini, are the creative force behind *American Splendor*, a semi-animated docudrama and critics' favorite that is now playing in several Manhattan theaters. The doting dad professed himself to be "extraordinarily proud" of his suddenly-famous daughter, and showed signs of having a flair for selling movie tickets, not just ice cream.

Mary Beth Labate, the State housing official who chairs the RIOC Board, took note of Berman's family accomplishments in presenting him to the board on August 7. "I think both professionally and personally we're

getting a real star in Herb Berman," she said. "He has been known as a man of great bipartisanship, able to bring people together."

In response, Berman thanked Labate and other officials with the State Division of Housing and Community Renewal, and paid a special tribute to Patrick Siconolfi, who was Acting President from February until August – from the time of Ryan's suspension until

his own appointment.

"I want to congratulate Patrick Siconolfi," Berman said. "I want you to know that I think he's done a great job. He will be our Chief Financial Officer, he will be my second, he will be working with me, alongside me, and I look forward to Pat and myself and the others being a great team to lead the Island."

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Liza Konner, a 27-year-old California native who is fresh from Peace Corps duty in El Salvador where she worked in municipal development, is Annie Peña's replacement at the Senior Center in the role of Caseworker.

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