

Next issue
in two weeks:
Sat., June 18

The Main Street **WIRED**

25th Year as Roosevelt Island's Independent Community Newspaper

The Island in Transition

Hundreds of Little Missions Accomplished (26 Years of Island Children), Sara Seiden Is Passing Along Her Guiding Torch

by Anna Duomnova

It is 3:00 p.m., the end of the day at the Roosevelt Island Day Nursery. Sara Seiden, the director, is in the hallway, chatting with parents, interrupting herself now and then to urge a child to put on his or her coat on an unusually cold May afternoon.

The hallway is full of children's voices as they greet their arriving parents. Amid the happy clamor, a visitor is struck by the variety of languages the children are speaking. A world map in the hallway has pins showing the countries the Day Nursery's children or their parents are from. In addition to the US, the countries include (to name just a few) Croatia, France, Japan, Mexico, Morocco, Serbia, Thailand, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam.

Sara opens her class lists. "In Room A we have seven out of 13

children who speak at least two languages. In Room C, 11 out of 17 children are bilingual. Our children can say 'good morning' in many languages." Parents of Day Nursery pupils underscore this. Marie-Pierre, who is French Belgian, says that her two daughters, Serena and Maïa, often say *ohayo* (good morning in Japanese). Masako, who is Japanese, says that her son, Taiyo, greets her in Spanish with *buenos días*. "The children sing songs in foreign languages, including a French song, which my daughters now sing with an English accent," laughs Marie-Pierre. The Roosevelt Island Day Nursery is as international as the Island it calls home.

Unmistakably, Roosevelt Island is a community in transition. After a full generation, there are changes coming in housing, housing density, leadership, land use, and – very likely – population and demographics. The first article in this occasional series dealt with the departure of Nancy Howe and Worth Howe from The Main Street Theatre (available on line at nyc10044.com/wire/2516/wire2516.html).

"Roosevelt Island has a wonderful community," Sara says. "Children come from all over the world and they endlessly enrich the environment by their different cultures." At the same time, the children quickly find common ground in the English language. "Many of the children born abroad don't speak English on their first day here, but after a few months with English exposure they understand a lot," Sara says. "After one year they are completely fluent in English."

Sara has a master's degree from Teacher's College, Columbia University, and says she always wanted to be a teacher. At first she taught music and art, but when her younger son was born she started thinking about working in pre-school, and decided to do so when he entered pre-school. "I like working with children of this age," Sara says. "If children like pre-school, then they'll like school. We help them to develop the skills that will be needed for the formal learning of reading, writing, math, science, and social studies".

Before coming to the Day Nursery, Sara managed her own pre-school
See **Seiden**, page 9



Briefly...

- The **Tramway** will be on an hourly schedule Tuesday and Wednesday (June 7-8) between 10:00 and 2:00.
- An effort is under way to assemble a **First Responder** corps for the Island – trained residents ready to respond to emergencies to fill the gap between a situation arising and the arrival of FDNY or other medical professionals. There's a letter on page 8.
- David Kramer of the Hudson Companies reports that Southtown building #3, **Riverwalk**, is now 80% sold, and the builders expect to close on lower-floor apartments by year's end. Construction on building #4 is likely to start early in 2006. In the meantime, construction of the Commons, over the subway between buildings #3 and #4, will begin in the next two to three months.
- There's **poison ivy** at Southpoint, on the Manhattan side of the walkway on the way past the Renwick Ruin, just three to four feet from the path. Watch out for a three-leaf ivy with slightly shiny leaves.
- In response to queries directed to *The WIRE*, a reminder that a list of residents interested in apartments at the **Octagon** project is being compiled by Becker and Becker; to get on that list, call Eileen Harrison at **888-292-4900**, or e-mail her at eileen@beckerandbecker.com. Specify size of apartment that interests you (studio through three-bedroom).
- During Roosevelt Island Day next weekend, RIRA Communications Chair Frank Farance will demonstrate **RI-311.org**, a web-based system for reporting and tracking issues on the Island, modeled after the City's Quality of Life Reporting Line (for which you dial 311 from any phone). The system is set up so that RIOC can respond to problem reports with information on when each issue will get attention, and first reports will be taken during the Roosevelt Island Day introduction of the system.

Tidal Energy Project Faces Delays

The Roosevelt Island Tidal Energy Project (RITE), which plans to sink a field of electricity-generating turbines in the east channel north of the Roosevelt Island Bridge, is facing another in a series of delays.

This time, according to Trey Taylor of Verdant Power, it's a sport-fishing charter-boat captain who has stepped forward to claim that the exact spot for the project's installation of a study field consisting of a "six-pack" of underwater blades is one of his primary fishing holes. "He has stirred up the striped bass fishing community of New York," Taylor says. "They are not particularly concerned about fish kills or fish migration problems. They are concerned about not be-

ing able to have access to their fishing grounds."

Taylor continues, reporting on a meeting held with some of the fishermen, "Their fear is that if our turbines are installed at this one spot, then it is only a matter of time before our turbines are installed in other spots around New York City and Long Island Sound."

The immediate issue is the Verdant Power plan for an environmental test that will involve monitoring the designated study field both before and after installation of the initial six turbines. The period for public comment on the plan, which had already been extended to the end of May, has now been extended – at Verdant's request as it attempts to show good faith – to the end of June. Presuming no further extensions, and presuming smooth sailing in getting permits from the Army Corps of Engineers and the State Department of Environmental Conservation, the group of six turbines could be installed starting no earlier than September and October. That would be followed by a period of up to 18 months of observation and study.

In the test period, power from the Verdant turbines would be fed into the electric power grid, but would be used for the power needs of Grinstead's market.

The allure of the project is low-cost power wherever substantial

quantities of water flow, in rivers and tidal areas. Taylor and his team anticipate the possibility of isolated communities along rivers in Africa and South America getting electricity for the first time. In coastal areas like New York City, the power generated by tides could reduce the need for fossil-fuel-powered generation. In the final field of about 100 turbines planned for the east shore of Roosevelt Island, about 1.4 acres of bottom would be used.

Nothing would appear above the water's surface; small craft could pass above the field.

While progress here is being held up, Verdant is looking at opportunities to test and demonstrate its technology in other countries. "We are working with the United Kingdom and Brazil for projects in their countries," Taylor says. "The UK has a five-megawatt site for us in Scotland, and we are currently putting financial packages together with the British to get us into Scotland by next spring."

He adds, "We will keep working on New York, but there will come a point where it will no longer make economic sense for us to do so, if the project continues to be delayed the way it has become delayed."

Verdant plans a meeting on the Island next week with some interested members of the community, in hopes of finding ways to move the project forward.



A Verdant Power turbine, destined for the east channel – maybe.

Letters

To the Editor:

In the spring of last year, Mr. Berman-Disney et al amply demonstrated their flagrant disregard for quality of life matters on RI, particularly the east side of Main Street. Little fish emulating DC behemoths. Last evening, June 1, 540, 510 and 516 were regaled by repeated ear-splitting feedback from a mishandled microphone system in the courtyard amphitheater, for well over an hour. I knew that Public Safety would tell me, "They have a permit," so merely hoped that I and my two felines would not go deaf or mad. We were pretty much confined to quarters due to my disability. And why must one flee one's own home to preserve health and sanity?

An unidentified neighbor did lose control, however. When I heard her ranting and cursing in the courtyard, then silence but for the screeching loudspeaker, I called Public Safety to ask if the woman had had a heart attack; and to explain her distress, which matched my own, in magnitude if not volume.

An officer admitted to "five calls of complaint," and further explained, "They have a permit from RIOCI" (to drive hundreds mad? I wondered) and, "We have her in house." No heart attack. "We're waiting for EMS and the police."

I attempted to explain the legitimacy of the crazed woman's grievance. "Her behavior is incorrect," he said. "She lost it," I tried to explain, adding, "I'm losing it, too. I still hear the ear-splitting noise."

I wonder if they carted this woman off to Rikers or Bellevue. What has become of civility and basic respect for the rights and welfare of neighbors?

Sharon Stern

Editor's note: The writer apparently has reference to amplification equipment used for a performance of the Roosevelt Island Free Theater.

To the RIRA Common Council:

I am not surprised, but I am disappointed by the court's decision in the Octagon case. The very agent of the systematic destruction of Roosevelt Island under its current administration was New York State, the chief architect since the beginning. I give each of you applause for the attempt. Without RIRA, there would be no representation of residents. I know how hard each of you worked to correct the shortsighted money-hungry RIOCI and its true "president," Governor George.

What *does* surprise me is the crowing RIOCI column in the April 30 issue of *The WIRE*. Shame on you, Herb Berman. There was no "true" victory for Roosevelt Island residents, nor was there a victory to preserve the historic Octagon Tower. It will be assumed into a building, rather than being used for the people of the Island – just another grand lobby for its rich tenants.

Berman writes of "soliciting input from the public." Well, *you weren't there* years ago when the project was first on the table, Mr. Berman. I was, and so were hundreds of other residents whose voices of concern and discontent fell on deaf and absent ears, with a project that changed so often there were surely cost overruns as architects drafted new plans every month, each time making the project bigger and less involved with the interests of the residents and more involved with money-making.

Herb, if you are really interested in affordable housing, then help the "WIRE buildings" (Westview, Island House, Rivercross, Eastwood) by protecting the current residents from having to leave the Island due to the sale of the buildings and rent increases, as I had to.

The worst outrage was your claim that they wasted \$300,000 of RIOCI's money. *It's not your money*. Remember the designation of your organization, "public benefit." If the Governor had not zeroed out the Roosevelt Island line in the State budget years ago, there would be more than enough money to maintain the Island.

Roosevelt Island will never be free of petty bureaucrats until RIOCI has a true, elected representation of Island residents or it is eliminated, and until the Governor moves on. Until then, thank you, RIRA, kudos, RIRA, keep fighting the great fight!

I may live 2,500 miles away now, but my heart and my love will always be Roosevelt Island.

Kenneth E. Diebner

To the Editor:

Now that the suit to stop development at Octagon Park has been dismissed, perhaps it is time for RIRA to step back and analyze what has occurred and what can be learned from it. There are now three residential complexes built on Roosevelt Island since the original four buildings. Each of the new projects – Manhattan Park, Southtown, and the Octagon Apartments – was opposed by RIRA and various citizens' groups. Each was delayed for years and lawyers were paid enormous sums without materially affecting the outcome. Today, as a consequence of the Octagon Park decision by Justice Wetzel, there is a distinct possibility that developers will approach RIOCI with plans for Southpoint. At that point, RIRA and the residents of Roosevelt Island will have three choices – to once again file a lawsuit to block any development of Southpoint, lobby Albany to have Southpoint declared an open space in new and specific legislation, or to sit down with RIOCI and a potential developer to work out an agreement that meets the needs of all.

The first choice, a lawsuit, would seem a fruitless exercise, given the past history of such litigation. The second option offers some hope of success, given the past efforts of Pete Grannis. Whether the Legislature will go along with Mr. Grannis a second time in enacting new legislation declaring an open space on the Island is a question no one can answer. As to the likelihood of Albany taking action, one must consider that any new development on Roosevelt Island brings additional tax revenues to Albany, and it is a rare occasion when politicians there turn their backs on a new source of funds for their pet projects.

One must also consider that one of the duties of our elected officials in Albany is to devise ways to utilize the public lands in the State in ways that benefit the most people. This means that the open spaces on the Island do not belong to the residents here for our private enjoyment; they are subject to the decisions of the State Legislature as to the best use of such spaces. To argue, as some have, that the open spaces are open to all residents of the City, and not just for our pleasure, is disingenuous. The time and effort it takes for residents of Manhattan and Queens to reach Roosevelt Island means that very few from other boroughs ever come to our parks specifically for that purpose.

Given the pressing need for additional housing in the City, it is not unlikely that Albany will now look at Roosevelt Island and decide that some measure of residential development should occur at Southpoint. If that happens, it would behoove RIRA to eschew its history of legal obstructionism and find a way to work with RIOCI and any potential developer to achieve a project that enhances life on the Island and does not detract from it. There is little hope that public funds will be found to transform the waste land that now comprises much of Southpoint. It is a depressing eyesore and will adversely affect the experience of those venturing through it to reach the FDR Memorial when it is built. The most realistic solution is to negotiate with a developer so that any project for Southpoint will include a substantial amount of parkland open to all. This will require extended negotiations by individuals from RIRA and RIOCI willing to compromise and not motivated by animosity or a desire

To the Editor, *New York* magazine:

I really took offense at the quotes attributed to Jennifer Connelly in the May 16 issue of *New York* magazine where she spoke about her starring role in *Dark Waters*, the movie that was filmed on Roosevelt Island. It is obvious that Ms. Connelly didn't spend enough time on our Island to really get to know it.

I've lived on Roosevelt Island for the past 29 years and do not find it to be in any way "spooky" or "freaky" or "lonely." We are a small-town type, close-knit community of friendly people from all ethnic backgrounds and nationalities who live together harmoniously on a safe, almost crime-free Island with lovely park space and breathtaking views of Manhattan. We are not "isolated" because we're a three-minute Tramway ride from the heart of Manhattan and have both subway and bus service to anywhere in the five boroughs and a bridge that leads into Queens for vehicular traffic.

Ms. Connelly and her movie crew came into our town, disrupted our way of life for weeks on end, changed the structure and appearance of one of our apartment buildings to look like a slum tenement,

To RIOCI President Herb Berman:

I want to report a serious problem. I was out riding my mobility scooter Sunday night, May 15 (man, it was warm). I noticed that all the lights on the river walkway behind the school and Manhattan Park were out. Who is responsible for these lights and, more important, who is responsible for making sure that the lights are in working condition? I would love to stay out later, but I feel it's too dark for me (an old-timer) to be scooting around without proper lighting. Will you take care of this and let me know who is responsible? I really don't want to bother a person as busy as you, if this occurs again.

Thanks.

Jim Bates

Editor's Note: The writer is a new member of the RIRA Common Council, representing 4 River Road.

accepted our hospitality, and then had the nerve to badmouth our Island.

Shame on you, Ms. Connelly. I thought you had more class.

Nancy Brown

To the Editor:

It is true that Roosevelt Island follows me everywhere I go. While in Barcelona last week, I was visiting this charming city with Nina Lublin. We decided to visit the Joan Miró Foundation Museum, where the artist Miró's collection is housed.

Outside the museum was a banner "Sert." Little alarms went off in my mind. This name was too familiar. Sure enough, there was a special exhibit on the architect José Luis Sert. Sert was the architect of the Miró Foundation Museum. Some interior features are the same as Eastwood's, such as the walls that have the imprint of the wooden forms on them.

There was a comprehensive exhibit about Sert's career and how he was influenced by Le Corbusier and designed many homes and municipal buildings in Spain prior to the Spanish Civil War. In 1939, he was exiled in the U.S. By the 1950's he was at Harvard and worked on urban planning. In subsequent years he worked extensively with Ed Logue and the UDC on many projects in New York, including Eastwood and Westview.

I must say that standing in front of a wall-size slide show on Eastwood and Westview is not exactly what I thought we would be doing on a sunny spring morning in Barcelona. Not only were there slides of the artist's conceptual drawings, there was a floor carpet designed with the

See **Letters**, page 8

to sabotage the process.

One of the axioms of negotiating is, "the threat is always more powerful than the action." In such future negotiations RIRA has one thing in its favor: It has not hesitated to file suit in the past to stop development on the Island. That the past litigation has been unsuccessful is of little consequence. A developer faced with the threat of litigation by RIRA will certainly be willing to negotiate some of the aspects of his proposal rather than

face a lawsuit that will drag on for years and add greatly to the cost of the project.

Such an approach also means that RIRA must reach an understanding with RIOCI beforehand as to the objectives of the negotiation and the strategy and tactics to be employed. As a first step, the name-calling and finger-pointing by RIRA officials should cease. The focus should be on fixing the problem, not fixing the blame.

Jim Baehler

Letters deadline for June 18 issue: Tuesday, June 14

After deadline, letters are 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; *letters submitted anonymously will not be published*.

Preferred method of submission: E-mail to Letters@MainStreetWIRE.com (plaintext e-mail format preferred, or attach a file), or on a PC-standard 3.5" disk left at the desk at 531 Main Street, addressed to *The WIRE*. **Alternatives:** Typed copy left at 531 Main Street. Clearly handwritten letters will be considered if brief, but we are not able to take telephone dictation of letters. **All letters subject to acceptance and to editing for length and clarity.** Recommended maximum length, 300 words; longer letters will be considered if their content merits the required space.

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COMING UP

– This Weekend –



Art from the Heart, an exhibition of works by Coler-Goldwater patients and residents, continuing at Gallery RIVAA, 527 Main Street,

through June 19; Saturdays and Sundays, 11:00-5:00; Wednesdays and Fridays, 6:00-9:00 p.m.

The Main Street Teen Theatre presents *Greater Tuna*, Fri.-Sat., June 3-4, 8:00 p.m.; Sun., June 5, 2:00 p.m. and 7:30 p.m., at The Main Street Theatre (behind the video store). See ad, page 4. Reservations: 212-371-4449.



Roosevelt Island Free Theater presents *Luv Is Luv* by Island resident Lila Gilbert (who produces the series), Sat., June 4, 7:00 p.m., Eastwood Amphitheater (behind 540 Main Street). Additional information: freetheater.blogspot.com.

Eastwood Fun-Raiser Luncheon, Sun., June 5, 2-4 p.m., 546 Main Street (Senior Center). \$10 at the door; \$7 in advance. Tickets: 212-755-4089.

Town Hall Meeting on Housing Issues, Sun., June 5, 2-4 p.m., Lenox Hill Neighborhood House, 331 East 70th Street (1st/2nd Avenues), sponsored by State Senator Liz Krueger, City Council Speaker Gifford Miller, and the East Side Tenants Coalition. Information: 212-535-5554.

– The Coming Week –

La Leche League meeting for pregnant and breastfeeding women, Mon., June 6, 10:00 a.m., Island Kids space at 536 Main Street. Free. Information: 212-832-1188.

RIRA Common Council meeting, tentatively rescheduled from June 1 to Wednesday, June 8, 8:00 p.m., Chapel of the Good Shepherd. Call 212-813-1515 for confirmation. Common Council meetings start with a period of public comment.

Roosevelt Island Free Theater presents *The Marriage Proposal* by Anton Chekhov, Fri., June 10, 7:00 p.m., Eastwood Amphitheater.

Roosevelt Island Day, Sat., June 11, all day, sponsored by Roosevelt Island Housing Management and the Roosevelt Island Youth Program. (See ad, page 5.)

River Music Concert for Roosevelt Island Day, Guitarist Eliot Fisk in a Carnegie Hall Neighborhood Concert, Sat., June 11, 8:00 p.m., Chapel of the Good Shepherd.

Roosevelt Island Free Theater presents *The Companion*, a one-act play, Sat., June 11, 5:00 p.m., Eastwood Amphitheater.

– Future Events –

Toastmasters Public Speaking Group, Mon., June 13, 8:00 p.m. Visitors welcome. Additional information: 212-751-9577.

End-of-Year Dance Concert at the Main Street Theatre and Dance Alliance, Tue., June 14, 5:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. (two performances), at the Main Street Theatre. Tickets at the studio in the theater Mon./Wed./Thur., 4:30-6:30, \$5 (chairs) and \$3 (mat seating). Information: 212-371-4449.

Don't Dream It, Be It, The Child School/Legacy High School adaptation of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, Tuesday and Thursday, June 14 and 16, Middle School Gym, 566 Main Street. \$10. Information and reservations: 212-223-5055.

Opening Reception for *Changing Tides II: Envisioning the Future of the East River*, Wed., June 15, 6:00-8:00 p.m., Municipal Art Society, 457 Madison Avenue (50th/51st Streets). The exhibition, which will include the Living Library proposal for Southpoint Park, continues through Aug. 10, Monday-Wednesday and Friday-Saturday, 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Roosevelt Island Free Theater presents *Homer Should Only Know* by Norman Weinstein, Wed., June 15, 7:00 p.m., Eastwood Amphitheater.

Community Board 8 meeting, Wed., June 15, 7:00 p.m., New York Blood Center, 310 East 67th Street (1st/2nd Avenues). Agenda at www.cb8m.com.

Roosevelt Island Free Theater presents *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare, Fri., June 17, 7:00 p.m., Eastwood Amphitheater.

The Main Street Children's Theatre presents *Getting to Know You*, a retrospective of 20 years of children's and teen shows, Fri.-Sat.-Sun., June 17-18-19; times to be announced.

The Main Street WIRE – Next issue, Sat., June 18. (To receive e-mail bulletins between issues, send an AddMe message to Bulletins@MainStreetWIRE.com.) **Advertising Deadline:** Ads in the paper, Thursday, June 9; decision on fliers for *The Bag*, Mon., June 13; inserts due Thur., June 16. **Future issues:** July 2 (Fourth of July issue), 30; Aug. 27; Sept. 10, 24; Oct. 8, 22; Nov. 5, 19; Dec. 3, 17. **News phone, 212-826-9055;** urgent matters 917-617-0449. **Phone** for display and classified advertising placement and information, 212-751-8214. **To list your organization's Island-related event here,** e-mail information to ComingUp@MainStreetWIRE.com, or leave it, addressed to *The WIRE*, at the lobby desk at 531 Main Street; provide a telephone number for follow-up questions. There is no charge for such listings.

There is no charge to list Island events here. E-mail information to ComingUp@MainStreetWIRE.com or leave information at the lobby desk at 531 Main Street, addressed to *The WIRE*. Please provide a phone number for possible follow-up.

I am pleased to announce, along with RIOC Chair and DHCR Commissioner Judith Calogero, the appointment of Carla Van De Walle as the new Chief Financial Officer of RIOC.

As many of you know, this position has been vacant for some time.

"Ms. Van De Walle brings a wealth of public policy experience and private sector know-how to RIOC. She will be invaluable in helping RIOC to sustain its mission of finishing this grand planned community and ensuring its continued stability and sustainability," Calogero said.

Van De Walle most recently was senior director of internal audit and special projects for the New York City Department of Finance. A graduate of Vassar College, Van De Walle holds a Master's degree in urban planning from Hunter College CUNY and a J.D. from Vermont Law School.

Carla Van De Walle was clearly the most qualified candidate to emerge when we began our search for a new CFO some time ago. Her urban planning experience, her knowledge of the law, and her government work

The RIOC Column



Carla Van De Walle

With the advent of summer, the East River has come alive with pleasure boats, kayaks and jet skis. This waterway is one of the best reasons to live on Roosevelt Island.

But it's difficult to enjoy the summer in this magnificent setting when so many residents are anxious over the uncertainty of what the future holds for their buildings. RIRA has given its moral and financial support in an effort to keep affordable housing alive and well on our Island and we'll continue to do so throughout the summer and as long as it takes.

On a more pleasant note, maybe Steve Marcus's meetings with RIOC have finally paid off. We're beginning to see some maintenance work being done around the Island. There appear to be some renovations starting on the elevators at Motorgate. I saw some workers on the West promenade replacing some broken stones, and the Meditation Steps are also being repaired. Let's hope this is a sign of good things to come. As your representatives we'll continue to try to work with the people of RIOC to attempt to hold them accountable for the upkeep of the Island.

In the meantime, please be careful if you go out for a late night stroll because most of the lights along the West promenade are out, and many along the East side. Some sections of the walkways are in need of repair so you need to be conscious of where you're walking. When you see this, or any other condition that needs to be fixed, don't hesitate to call RIOC at 212-832-4540 to tell them.

Roosevelt Island Free Theater presents *Ross the Mentalist*, with audience participation, Sat., June 18, 5:00 p.m., Eastwood Amphitheater.

Roosevelt Island Free Theater presents *Sing Along with Janet Dobre*, including *The Teddy Bears' Picnic*, for children, at the start of the show; melodic classical repertoire, Wed., June 22, 7:00 p.m., Eastwood Amphitheater.

PS217 Graduation, Thur., June 23, 10:00 a.m., PS217 auditorium.

Book Discussion Group at the Library, Thur., June 23, 6:30 p.m., *Seven Guitars*, by August Wilson. Copies of book available at the branch.

Roosevelt Island Free Theater presents *Bewitched*, an operetta by Islander Lila Gilbert (who produces the Free Theater series), Fri., June 24, 7:00 p.m., Eastwood Amphitheater.

Roosevelt Island Free Theater presents *A Magic Show* with a variety of performers from the Society of American Magicians, Sat., June 25, 5:00 p.m., Eastwood Amphitheater.

Roosevelt Island Free Theater presents *Much Ado About Nothing* by William Shakespeare, Wed., June 29, 7:00 p.m., Eastwood Amphitheater.

RIOC Board of Directors meeting, Thur., June 30, 9:30 a.m., Chapel of the Good Shepherd.

Roosevelt Island Free Theater presents *Patriot Games*, readings from the papers of the Founding Fathers, Fri., July 1, 7:00 p.m., Eastwood Amphitheater.

Roosevelt Island Free Theater presents *The Lion in Winter* by James Goldman, Sat., July 2, 5:00 p.m., Eastwood Amphitheater.

Roosevelt Island Free Theater presents *Private Lives* by Noel Coward, Fri., July 8, 7:00 p.m., Eastwood Amphitheater.

Roosevelt Island Free Theater presents *Drummers, Dreams and Family Matters* by Norman Weinstein, Wed., July 13, 7:00 p.m., Eastwood Amphitheater.

showed the Board that her skills were evenly matched with RIOC's business. We welcome her to RIOC as a distinct asset.

The CFO position had been vacant since Pasquale (Pat) Siconolfi left RIOC in 2003 to return to DHCR, from which he has since retired.

Van De Walle has also worked at the law firm of Ross & Cohen, the accounting firm of PriceWaterhouseCoopers LLP, as well as an independent business consultant. She is an expert in e-commerce and has lectured at the New York University School for Professional and Continuing Studies. Van De Walle lives in Manhattan.

On another note, I am pleased to announce that the new tennis courts at Octagon will be open for play on June 15. Please see the RIOC website rioc.com for rules and regulations.

Finally, tickets went on sale June 1 for the annual Fourth of July Fireworks extravaganza at Southpoint. This year, bigger and better than ever. Please visit our Website at rioc.com for more information or to purchase tickets.



Herbert E. Berman, President Roosevelt Island Operating Corp. e-mail: HBerman@rioc.com

The political arena is also beginning to stir. With the primaries approaching this September, RIRA will make every attempt to schedule some debates among the candidates. For sure we'll see most, if not all, of the candidates here on Saturday, June 11, for Roosevelt Island Day. Be sure to ask what their positions are on the issues most important to you. It's a perfect opportunity to find out what they stand for so you can make an informed decision come Election Day. And when you're done, if you're able to do it, stop by the Senior Center (546 Main St.) for the annual Icla da Silva Foundation Blood Drive. They'll be open from 10:00 a.m. until 3:30 p.m.



Margie Smith, Vice President Roosevelt Island Residents Assn. e-mail: MSmith@quintennium.com

Changing Tides II: Envisioning the Future of the East River, is an exhibition that will be open from June 15 through August 10 at the Municipal Art Society. Among other areas along the river, the exhibit will show some possible uses for Southpoint Park. If you can make it, please stop by the Urban Center Galleries, 457 Madison Avenue at 51st Street.

Senior Center

<p>Monday 10-11:30, English as 2nd Language 10:30, Blood Pressure Screening 12:30, "Oldies" Movies 1:00, Tai Chi 7:00, Dance Class (Beginners)</p> <p>Tuesday 10:00, Chinese Massage 10:30, Shoppers' Bus 2:00, Bingo 6:00, Yoga Class 7:30, Games (RISA)</p> <p>Wednesday 9:15, Stay Well 10:00, Computers 10:00, Spanish Class 10:30, Shoppers' Bus 12-2, Painting & Sculpting 7:00, Pokeno (RISA)</p> <p>Thursday 9:30, Chinese Massage 10:30, Creative Arts 12:30, Movie 7:00, Dance</p>	<p>Friday 9:30, Yoga 10:30, Computers 1:00, Bridge 7:00, Games (RISA)</p> <p>Saturday 7:30, Bingo (RISA)</p> <p>Special Events Tue., June 7, 9:00-7:00, RISA election Wed., June 8, 7:00, Lion King trip Thur., June 9, 11:15, Stop & Shop trip Mon., June 13, MetroCard bus Mon., June 13, five-day motor coach tour to Niagara Falls. Wed., June 15, Atlantic City trip Sat., June 25, 9-5, RISA Flea Market Thur., June 30, 7:00, Induction of officers</p>
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The Public Safety Blotter

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STARRING (top, left to right) ANNA PEYSIKOVA as Thurston Wheelis, DAVID KIMBALL-STANLEY as Bertha Bumiller, JAMES BARNIKER as Phinas Blye, EMILY LEAVITT as Vera Carp; (front) ALISON WALTER as Petey Fisk, GIL ZAMFIRESCU as Stanley Bumiller; (not in photo) MATTHEW DAVIDOWITZ as Hank Bumiller

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"I'm movin' my ranch to Greater Tuna!"
Um, where is it, by the way?"—George W. Bush

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Saturday, June 11, 2005

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Characters – Dora, Elmo, Blues Clues, Mickey

Pony rides **Dancing**

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Free Summer Theater Series Has Begun

Mel Houghwout,
Artistic Director,
and
Producer-Playwright
Lila Gilbert



Roosevelt Island is getting a series of free theater performances this summer, courtesy of resident Lila Gilbert, a 90-year-old veteran of the performance world. Gilbert is expanding a series she has run in previous summers and adding state-of-the-art sound for the events in the Eastwood Amphitheater.

The performances are scheduled Wednesdays and Fridays at 7:00, and Saturdays at 5:00.

Today (Saturday, June 4), Gilbert's own one-act play, *Luv Is Luv*, will be performed at 5:00. An eclectic schedule will follow, with performances of Shakespeare, magic acts, music (a classical singalong), and readings from the papers of the Founding Fathers for the weekend preceding Monday, the Fourth of July.

Performances (listed on page 3 in *ComingUp*) will include an "Instant Shakespeare" production of *The Tempest*, an appearance by *Ross, the Mentalist*, Chekhov's *The Proposal*, a show of magic acts presented by the Society of American Magicians, and a Greek revival from the summer's Hellenic celebration.

"Theater originated in the great amphitheaters of the ancient world," Gilbert says, feeling the use of the Eastwood Amphitheater brings things full circle. She's the winner of six international playwriting competitions. Additional information about the series is posted, according to her press release, at freetheater.blogspot.com.



With the arrival of good weather, river-watching while getting some sun has become a viable activity for Islanders and visitors. On Memorial Day, these folks watched a Patapsco tug from the Port of Baltimore pushing the barge Dourleskin55, upriver under the Queensboro Bridge.

Meanwhile, the 2005 crop of goslings (left) have survived the tough weather and gained their wings; they'll be back next Spring for the breeding season.

River Music Concert for RI Day

Internationally known classical guitarist Eliot Fisk will present a free Roosevelt Island Day concert next Saturday under the auspices of River Music (which operates the Island Arts School of Music), courtesy of the Carnegie Hall/Citigroup Neighborhood Concert Series. Carnegie Hall will record the concert for use on its website. Fisk gives a "vivid, high-voltage performance," according to *The Los Angeles Times*.



Islanders

Poet Nina Cassian: "My Penthouse Is Still Working."

by Bill Raiford

Nina Cassian began a reading at Gallery RIVAA last month with:

Temptation

Call yourself alive? Look, I promise you that for the first time you'll feel your pores opening like fish mouths, and you'll actually be able to hear your blood surging through all those lanes, and you'll feel light gliding across the cornea like the train of a dress. For the first time you'll be aware of gravity like a thorn in your heel....

The audience was then treated to a cascade of poems that covered a life:

From **Part of a Bird**

...the feeling of a light unchained body, invulnerable, perfect, my head just a natural extension of it....

From **Kisses**

Our kisses, hundreds, thousands—... Oh, how jealous I am of the water you drink... jealous of those unjust partings of our mouths.

And the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) in its *Poetry in Motion* subway series used:

Please Give This Seat to an Elderly or Disabled Person

I stood during the entire journey: nobody offered me a seat although I was at least a hundred years older than anyone else on board, although the signs of at least three major afflictions were on me: Pride, Loneliness and Art.

Last month Cassian read her poems at the International Festival of Literature 2005 in Galway, Ireland. The success of her readings has won her many invitations to perform in Europe and the United States as well as here on Roosevelt Island.

Nina Cassian was born in 1924 in Galatzi, Romania. As a five-year-old, she became engaged in her lifelong passions for music and poetry. After she played Bach at a musical conservatory in Bucharest, one of the instructors asked if she had a voice. Nina said, "No."

"That's too bad," said the instructor. "You are quite musical, but your hands are too small to be a concert pianist."

"I was 11," she told her Roosevelt Island audience, "and my hands were even smaller then. Look, it's just a pinky."

Cassian did become a composer, and her most recent composition, *The Magic Clarinet*, was performed at Carnegie



Hall. When asked how music and poetry were related to each other, for her, she replied, "Surprisingly enough, they are not related except that both are creative activities. The disciplines are so different. One can say that Chopin has poetical music but that has nothing to do with poetry as such. Or one can say that Byron has a musical way of writing but writing has nothing to do with music as such. "The learning needed to write music is so immense, the task is such an ordeal. You have to know so many technical concepts to compose and orchestrate. It is far harder, in my opinion, to be a composer than a poet."

When Cassian was 15, she joined a Communist youth group. At that time, on the eve of World War II, Romania had a strong Fascist movement, which her idealism led her to resist. She had to publish her music and poetry under strict government guidelines from 1948 to 1956. Then, there was a thaw.

In 1985, New York University invited her to teach creative writing. She had no plans to stay in the United States but, at that time, a close friend in Romania was arrested and the diary he had kept for 40 years was found by the police. It contained many conversations with Cassian in which she had made scathing remarks about the authorities. Her friend was beaten to death by the police. Cassian realized she could not return to Romania. She asked for, and received,

political asylum. She moved to Roosevelt Island in 1987 and became an American citizen in 1994.

After she was wrenched away from her language and life work – her home and all her papers were confiscated – Howard Moss, then poetry editor of the *New Yorker*, said: "Nina Cassian strikes me as one of the best poets alive, who, through an accident of history, finds herself cut off from her native language and in a country where her work is mainly unknown."

After a lifetime of writing in Romanian, Cassian felt like writing her poetry directly in English. Many of these poems are in *Take My Word for It*, published in 1998 by W.W. Norton & Company. Norton had earlier published a book of her selected poems that had been translated into English by a host of poets including Dana Gioia, Richard Wilbur, Stanley Kunitz, and William Jay Smith.

Cassian is now completing the last of her three-volume memoirs. The first two were published in Romania, where Cassian returned to great praise. One reviewer wrote that the reader could learn more about the true nature of Communism from reading her memoirs than from reading a book-shelf of academic works on the topic.

Cassian indicates she is still battling with the language. "I can sing American pop songs from the 30's without an accent. Why? I learned them as an adolescent. But when I speak, I still have my accent. It's complicated to be reborn in a foreign language."

...Please God take pity on my tongue, on my glottis, on the clitoris in my throat vibrating, sensitive, pulsating, exploding in the orgasm of Romanian. (from *Licentiousness*)

Cassian has written more than 50 books, including some 25 of poetry. She published 12 children's books written in verse, many used in the school system in Romania. She has two volumes of short stories and also translated numerous works by such authors as Shakespeare, Paul Celan, and Bertolt Brecht, into Romanian.

"I enjoy being here," Cassian says of Roosevelt Island. "I enjoy Trellis. And I love the Thrift Shop. This is from there (holding her blouse). Almost everything is from there. I can't afford, as you do, the Gap. But I'm happy with this Thrift Shop. And, I'm getting poorer by the day. I don't know what will happen with the rent."

As she sips her beloved scotch and puffs on an omnipresent cigarette, Cassian speaks of a recent operation on her back: "It didn't help at all. The pain is still there. But I disregard my pain and act as if I'm OK." She smiles. "And do you know my big secret? I'm still young. Fortunately, my upper level, my penthouse, is still working."

Indeed, it is.



Art from Coler-Goldwater Exhibiting at Gallery RIVAA

Men Working in the Pit by Yvonne Smith (below) is one of the works hanging in Gallery RIVAA in an *Art from the Heart* exhibit of works by patients and residents at Coler-Goldwater. At left, *Man Playing Quatro* by Alfredo Hernandez.



MTA Promises Clean-Up at Subway

MTA reps have promised a clean-up of pigeon droppings at the Island station, according to Vicki Feinmel, who pursued the matter with nearly a dozen calls. Want to encourage quick action? Call Jerry Groschke, station manager, at 718-243-3222, to say thanks.



Teen Theatre Doing a Number on Texas: *Greater Tuna* Arrives

The Main Street Teen Theatre is presenting *Greater Tuna* this weekend: tonight (Saturday) at 8:00 and tomorrow at 2:00 and 7:30. Some of the "colorful" citizens of Tuna, Texas, include (top row, left to right) Chad Hartford (played by James Barniker), Hank Bumiller (Matt Davidowitz), R. R. Snavely (David Kimball-Stanley), and (front row, left to right) Jody Bumiller (Emily Leavitt), Aunt Pearl Burras (Anna Peysikova), and Petey Fisk (Alison Walter). Gil Zemfirescu is also in the production, in which most actors play multiple characters. Reservations are recommended – call **212-371-4449**.

The weekend of Friday-Sunday, June 17-19, The Main Street Children's Theatre will present *Getting to Know You*, a retrospective of 20 years of children's and teen shows, most directed by Nancy Howe, seen at right this week as she worked with the cast of *Greater Tuna*.



Letters

from page 2

architectural rendering of Eastwood. Two comfortable chairs were on the "rug" where you could sit and watch the slide show. Nina and I thought that this was a great way to see the Island, though we wanted to stay in Barcelona and not return home the next day.

The explanations are excellent and well written. All material in this museum is in Catalan, Spanish, and English. As with all of Barcelona, Catalan is the primary language. When the natives hear your Spanish, they immediately switch over.

I chatted with the two docents at the exhibit. They were fine arts students from the university who worked at the museum half days. They were thrilled to meet someone from Roosevelt Island. They

hoped to be able to visit the States someday and now have an open invitation to the Island.

The exhibition did not have a catalog, but a full 400-page book on Sert's life. I bought the book (also available in Catalan, Spanish, or English) and carried it home in the luggage.

Yesterday, when I finally had time to look through it, I discovered that "Images of America – Roosevelt Island" by J. Berdy and the Roosevelt Island Historical Society was quoted in it and credit given in a footnote. The chapter, written by architect Joan Ockman, tells the convoluted story of our Island's early development and Sert's work here.

Judith Berdy

To the Editor:

As a New York State First Responder, I've noted that an average response time for an ambulance to arrive on Roosevelt Island is between 15 and 25 minutes. The New York City Fire Department has the best response time, providing it is not already on another emergency call.

Anyone who has been involved in emergency medical training realizes that this response time is far too excessive. This is not the fault of Public Safety, hospitals, or ambulance drivers. The simple fact is that Queens hospitals are located 25 minutes from our Island.

The purpose of this letter is not to assign blame, but to offer a possible solution.

Presently, there exists on Roosevelt Island an organization, RISAR – Roosevelt Island Search and Rescue – headed up by Michael Acevedo, a State-certified EMT (see his web site, RISAR10044.com).

Mr. Acevedo is looking for volunteers to become State-certified EMTs and First Responders. To become a First Responder requires a 50-hour training course and passing a State examination.

For those individuals interested, please call Michael at **917-731-3732**, or e-mail RISAR10044@aol.com or RLissRealty1@att.net.

The function of RISAR will be to respond directly to Island residents. We should note that an ambulance and EMT personnel will still be dispatched from the nearest hospital; a Roosevelt Island EMT or First Responder, however, should reach the emergency within five to ten minutes of notification and proceed to stabilize the individual until an ambulance providing transportation arrives. New York State protocol requires that EMT or First Responders sign off the patient only to higher-rank medical personnel.

I am presently looking for 15 volunteers to be First Responders. We plan to have a course begin in September, with examinations taking place in December.

Robert Liss

To the Editor:

I have been a Roosevelt Island resident for six years but only recently have I uncovered what the abbreviations in *WIRE* stand for.

For unknown reasons, the editors have decided to remain faithful to the original four buildings (**W**estview, **I**sland House, **R**ivercross, **E**astwood), rejecting the possibilities that the industrious Island developers are offering to enhance this overly simple abbreviation.

As the U.S. Flag added stars every time a new state joined the Union, I suggest that we continue to incorporate new letters and reshuffle the name to the amusement of Island residents who can read.

To begin with, we can include Southtown and become *The WISER*.

But construction at Octagon Park gives us a useful "O," the long-forgotten Manhattan Park an "M," and don't forget the unlimited possibilities of future Blackwell House Park condominiums and the Cherry Tree Esplanade luxurious high rises.

Vojislav Psoncak

The Main Street WISER?

Editor's note: There's also an extra "R" available at Riverwalk. All together now, anagrammers: **EIMORRSW** (and other letters, too, if you can make the case for them!)



Photo: Website NYC10044 nyc10044.com

To the Editor:

I offer some comments on various issues affecting the Island:

Extension of 50-year tax abatement: *The WIRE* reports (May 14) that "earlier statements affirming applicability [of the 50-year extension] to four Mitchell-Lama Island buildings were incorrect" because the statute and implementing City Council resolution refer only to buildings that pay "real-estate taxes" imposed by the City and not those that make "payments in lieu of taxes" (PILOT). I would point out that since the City owns Roosevelt Island's land, there can be no "real-estate taxes" levied by it onto itself. Nor can the City levy taxes against the Island's lessee, the State's Urban Development Corporation (UDC), since it is exempt by statute from taxes. UDC leased land for the four buildings to housing companies that pay the "equivalent" of taxes called PILOTs. They are "equivalent" because the IRS has ruled that they have the same legal status as real-estate taxes; both are deductible from income under the Internal Revenue Code.

The reason the Council resolution may not be applicable to the four Island buildings is that their leases with UDC provide for a 30-year tax abatement, which is about to expire. Without extensions of the tax abatements, owners are more likely to withdraw from the Mitchell-Lama system. Hence the Legislature acted in 2003 to "permit" tax abatements to be granted for an additional 50 years. But, due to the leases it can be argued that it is up to UDC, not the City Council, to extend those abatements by modifying the leases.

This calls into question whether the four Island buildings enjoy tax exemptions because of their inclusion in the leases or because of the Mitchell-Lama law. I believe UDC was required to provide for tax exemptions in the leases since the Mitchell-Lama law states that all housing companies "shall" be entitled to tax exemptions set at 10% of their annual shelter rent (total rent or maintenance less utilities). But what is not so clear is whether UDC "must" now modify the leases so that each building is granted the additional 50-year abatement. Since the statutory language is "permissive," it can be argued that UDC has discretion to let abatements end next year and not extend them. But, since it is a State agency, I would argue it "should" grant the extension so as to be in accord with the new law's purpose, which is to encourage Mitchell-Lama housing companies to remain in the system.

Should UDC nevertheless choose to collect real-estate taxes from the four buildings under the leases once the 30-year period of abatements ends, it will frustrate the new State law and the Council's resolution to provide a substantial tax incentive to remain in the system. Ironically, the City as the ultimate recipient of these taxes, will have decided to forego those payments yet find its lessee, UDC, collecting them. This is not what the statute or Council resolution intended. Indeed, UDC's failure to modify the leases to extend tax abatements for another 50 years invites a lawsuit by any of the four buildings that wish to remain in the system to challenge any effort by UDC to collect such payments. Finally, to conform to the new statute and Council resolution, the City for its part

must amend its lease with UDC so that only the tax abatement amount (10% of annual shelter rent) is due for each housing company that remains in the system.

Implications of the Octagon decision: The May 14 news analysis points out that Southpoint Park is at risk of commercial or residential development in areas surrounding the Renwick Ruin, but notes "the Residents Association doesn't have the funds to keep a lawyer on standby." There are, however, some things it can do. It can raise funds now for such a contingency from Island and Sutton Place residents facing the Island who previously showed concern for its southern end when plantings were financed by them; it can use the Octagon legal papers to now prepare the Article 78 suit and application for a temporary restraining order and injunction needed in the future. Since it needs a lawyer to represent it in any suit, it can also now seek counsel willing to take this on a reduced-fee basis; it can also now seek representation from law-school clinics and other public-interest organizations who are able to do this on a *pro bono* basis. In other words, it should not wait for development to happen. And, if construction were to begin, it cannot wait to seek a court order to stop it.

Tim Johns' commentary and letter: In his commentary (April 2), Johns raised doubt about whether the 50-year tax abatement applies to the four Island buildings. In support of his view, he referred to the building leases which grant only a 30-year tax abatement. As noted above, I believe the statute's purpose should take precedence over the existing lease provisions and that UDC should modify the leases to grant an additional 50-year abatement. (Incidentally, while I disagreed with his views, I did not claim he had not read the statute or resolution; inexplicably, in his May 14 letter of response, he asserts that "clearly" I have not read them.)

I also disagreed with his statement that, "Under the Mitchell-Lama law, a building loses its property-tax exemption once it pays off its mortgage." This is not correct. While the statute provides that a tax exemption "continues and operates so long as the mortgage" is in effect, it does not state that the exemption ends once the mortgage is paid off. How else could the legislature have extended tax abatements for another 50 years, a period beyond every Mitchell-Lama building's current mortgage?

There is a requirement under the Mitchell-Lama law that if a building decides to *withdraw* from the system, it must both pay off the State mortgage and notify the City of its withdrawal so that its tax exemption will be ended immediately. But, so long as it stays in the system with its limited profits, a building can enjoy tax abatements after its mortgage is paid off. That is a significant aspect of the 50-year extension: it provides a substantial savings in building's costs for those owners who choose to remain in the system. This savings is in addition to the reduction in costs resulting from retiring the mortgage.

Robert Chira

Editor's note: Robert Chira, a longtime resident, is an attorney practicing in Manhattan.

Seiden from page 1

in Forest Hills, Queens, and ran a daycare center with Kingsborough Community College. She decided to work for the Day Nursery because "Roosevelt Island is a very open community. There are many people in New York City who come from other countries and speak several languages, but not everywhere do you find people who are as friendly as on Roosevelt Island. Parents here make friends and they become a support system for each other. They arrange baby playdates for their children. They help each other."

The Day Nursery was organized in 1975 by a group of Roosevelt Island parents. It is run by a Parent Board of Directors and it was incorporated as a not-for-profit corporation in 1979. That was the year Sara joined the Day Nursery. She was the fifth director in four years. "I have been here for 26 years, so I guess I was the director it needed," Sara says, smiling.

However, after 26 years as director, she is leaving. She will step down after classes end in June. "Oh, I do love this job. I do love children and their parents. I do love

Roosevelt Island," Sara says with emotion. "But this job requires a lot of time, and now I want to spend time with my family, with my three grandchildren. I also want to play my piano." However, Sara will not sever all relations with the Day Nursery. She will remain as a consultant. The new director will be Diana Carr, who has been assistant director for five years and a head teacher for more than 10 years.

Sara praises the Day Nursery's teachers. "Most of the teachers have been with us for a very long time," she says. All head teachers at the Day Nursery have master's degrees and are certified by New York State in Early Childhood Education. "Many people think it is easy to work with little kids, but it is not true," says Sara. "Little children are not just little adults. They are very special, and our teachers understand them, so they relate to children on their own level. Children are also each very different. Some are energetic, some are shy, so teachers need to pay attention to that."

In 2004 the Day Nursery received accreditation from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). "This accreditation is a relatively new requirement, which has raised the standards for early childhood education centers," explains Sara. Parents agree that the standards at the Day Nursery are high. "Some of the graduates have gone to Harvard and Yale, which is very important for us parents to know. I call the Day Nursery a school, not a daycare center. The teachers are good, and open-minded," says Marie-Pierre. "The classes are very well organized," says Masako.

Sara says the Day Nursery's goal is to help children grow emotionally, socially, and intellectually. At the Day Nursery, she says, "children learn to cooperate and get along with other children and adults."

The Day Nursery offers programs for children from two and a half to five years old. There is a special program for two-and-a-half-year-olds, introduction to preschool, in which they come to the Day Nursery with



Assistant Director Diana Carr will move up when Sara steps down.

their mothers. Overall, there are now 52 children in full- and part-time programs at the Day Nursery.

"The local public school [on Roosevelt Island] also has pre-kindergarten programs, but it is half-time (two and a half hours)," Sara says. "We offer a full-time program (seven hours)." The public school, however, has pulled some children away from the Day Nursery. There used to be about 100 children there, but when the public school started its own pre-kindergarten program in 2000, the number of four-year-old children dropped. "There are families with nonworking mothers, whose children don't need to attend longer programs, so two and a half hours is enough for them. The pre-kindergarten program at the public school is free." Sara expects more children to come to the Day Nursery when the new Southtown buildings are completed and occupied.

Sara walks with a visitor into Room A, the classroom for three-year-olds. A big window offers a view of the Manhattan side of the river. Like the rest of the Day Nursery, the room is bright and sunny.

One wall has a display of baby clothes. "There was a special occasion for that," Sara explains. "Our children brought their baby clothes and talked about what they can do now compared with what they could do when they were babies. They were very proud of how much they can do now." She picks up a photo album titled "My favorite book." It features pictures of children "reading" their favorite books. "Of course, three-year-olds don't know how to read yet," Sara says. "They just re-tell stories from their favorite books, but they know the stories so well that it looks like they are really reading." All children have "jobs." "One child, for example, feeds animals" — there is an aquarium and a hamster cage in the room —

"another helps set the table, another collects library books, and so on. This helps children to be responsible for themselves and their room." In this class, children also work on puzzles and materials that help develop language and mathematical skills.

After graduating from the Day Nursery, many children will go to kindergarten. Getting into a good kindergarten can be difficult, so the Day Nursery not only prepares children to meet the requirements, but it also helps parents find the right kindergarten for their children. Marie-Pierre is one of the parents who is grateful to Sara for her help in what Marie-Pierre calls this "very stressful" process. "Sara knows many directors of kindergartens. She also knows my daughter and what she really needs, so she helped me to choose the right kindergarten for my daughter."

Sara has also worked hard to help raise money for scholarships. "The Day Nursery is private and we try to make tuition as affordable as possible," Sara says. "Providing scholarships to lower- and middle-income families has always been one of our main concerns. There is a mixed-income community on the Island, and we want to help those who can't afford to send their children to the Day Nursery without financial assistance."

In addition to scholarship programs, assistance for children from low-income families can be obtained from the New York City Agency for Child Development (ACD), which provides vouchers that parents can use to pay for their children's tuition in any pre-school they like. "Unfortunately, there is a long waiting list to get this voucher and some parents don't get them," Sara says with a sigh. Twenty-five percent of the Day Nursery's children receive financial aid in terms of grants or vouchers.

To raise money for scholarships, the Parent Board that runs the school stages

fundraising events as well as direct appeals to all residents, family of alumni, and Roosevelt Island merchants. Sara has been so active in fundraising that the Parent Board created a scholarship fund in her name. "I am flattered about that," she says.

Recently the Day Nursery sent letters to parents of Day Nursery alumni informing them that Sara is leaving as director and asking them to make contributions to the Sara Seiden Scholarship Fund. In their replies, many parents wrote about what their children are doing now and what the Day Nursery has meant to them.

Sara delights in the news about the children and their accomplishments. She shows a stack of letters. "This one is from the mother of a boy who could not say goodbye to his mother without crying. He now goes to sleep-away camp. This letter is from the mother of a girl who used to be extremely shy. She is now in the third grade and is a very good artist."

Sometimes Sara unexpectedly meets her grown-up graduates. "There was an exhibition at the local art gallery of local children's painting and drawing. I was delighted to know that the art teacher at the public school is David Klaw, who was at the Day Nursery," Sara smiles.

It is clear that Sara would much rather talk about the Day Nursery, and especially the children, than about her own achievements in making it what it is. This seems due in part to modesty, and in part to the fact that the Day Nursery has, for 26 years, been a labor of love for her. So a last question to Sara is about the Day Nursery: What are her hopes for its future?

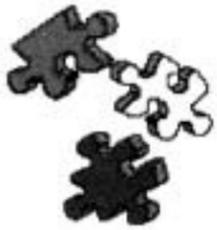
"I hope the school will continue to serve the community and to thrive," she says, "and that new families who are coming to the Island will find a happy home for their young children."





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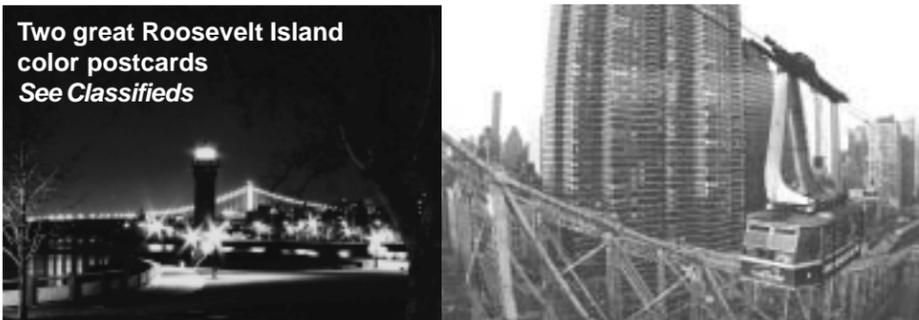
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