

Next issue  
in 3 weeks –  
Sat., Apr. 8

# The Main Street **WI**RE™

26th Year as Roosevelt Island's Independent Community Newspaper



Politicians representing the Island joined with other Democrats on Sunday to endorse Attorney General Elliot Spitzer for Governor. Left to right: Rep. Carolyn Maloney, Spitzer, Borough President Scott Stringer, City Councilmember Jessica Lappin, and Assemblymember Pete Grannis, who introduced Spitzer at Maloney's 14th Congressional District Caucus meeting. Maloney will visit the Island today at 11:00.

## Endorsed by Island's Reps, Spitzer Calls Authorities Pataki's "Dumping Grounds" Pledges Reforms for Roosevelt Island at RIOC

Eliot Spitzer's candidacy for Governor received an enthusiastic endorsement last Sunday from the City's elected Democratic politicians representing parts of Carolyn Maloney's 14th Congressional District, including Maloney and three of the representatives of Roosevelt Island.

In answering a question put by former Residents Association President Matthew Katz, Spitzer

promised a pre-election meeting on Roosevelt Island problems. "If I'm fortunate enough to win," he said, "here's the most important point: I will appoint – because my understanding is it's a gubernatorial appointment to that authority – I will appoint people to that authority from Roosevelt Island, who understand Roosevelt Island, who will speak to the public purpose and who have the understanding and knowledge base to make smart decisions."

"What you are feeling," Spitzer continued, "and perhaps it's a little worse in terms of Roosevelt Island because you read about it and feel as though the colony is back, pre-1776, except that there's no tea to throw overboard... You've done that? All right. But we will address that. But what you are going through is symptomatic of the larger problem at the public authorities, where this [State] administration has used them, by and large, as a dumping ground for friends rather than as an opportunity to govern effectively."

"The authorities – and understand, there's a little schizophrenia here – the authorities were created based upon a theory that if you put smart people in charge, you could get decisions made, outside of raw politics, that perhaps would be better. The understanding was that you also lost something in terms of transparency and accountability, but with the right people in charge they said the trade-off may be a fair one. Now what you have is the worst of all possible worlds – no accountability, no transparency, and the wrong people in charge, and so you get bad decisions being made by the wrong people and it's somewhat akin to what I've said about the off-balance-sheet partnerships at Enron: You take all the bad stuff and hide it in these authorities and we're stuck with it. It's a real problem."

Earlier, speaking for about 20 minutes, Spitzer had contrasted Republican and Democratic attitudes about government, paraphrasing Rep. Carolyn Maloney, who represents Roosevelt Island: "I think it

goes back to what Carolyn has talked about for all these years – making government *work*. Certainly since Bush has been there, and... in my view, since 1976 when Ronald Reagan... began to speak to a different ethic than what most people in this room believe... His



ethic was "government is the enemy, government doesn't work, government can't help, there is no necessity of having a government that deals with our social fabric, invests in our communities," and so we have seen government wither over the last 30 years – wither in terms of its effectiveness, to the point where our intelligence agencies were fundamentally wrong in the most egregious ways, and that is because [they] didn't know how to run government because government didn't care.

"It wasn't a happenstance that FEMA couldn't respond to Hurricane Katrina. Government has withered because they've spoken about government in denigrating ways [so] that they can't recruit good people."

"If the CEO – of any product – at the top of the company denigrates the very purpose of the product, [saying] we want to have a bad product, of course the infrastructure of the product and the infrastructure of government will disappear. And that's why government – whether it's Washington... [or] See **Spitzer**, page 2

## Lappin Meets with Merchants and Promises Effort with RIOC on Leases

City Councilmember Jessica Lappin spent two and a half hours with several Island merchants on Monday, seeking information about the Island's mercantile situation – which merchants have leases, which do not; which ones have sought additional retail locations on the Island, and with what level of success or delay. A mixed picture emerged.

Meanwhile, Lappin and four other politicians representing Roosevelt Island sent a letter to RIOC President Herbert E. Berman. "We call on you to do what's right," the letter ends, describing that this way: "assure Island residents the continued availability of the local businesses upon which they depend by offering merchants the security of a lease."

Merchants had complained, both in conversations with *The WIRE* and in a February 16 RIOC meeting about real-estate planning, that without leases, they cannot invest in their businesses.

At the Lappin meeting Monday, Nancy Rodriguez of New York National Bank (which has a lease) told the councilmember, "We're just concerned about the merchants – those that have applied for loans – but we can't help them if they don't have a lease."

About half the merchants who rent from RIOC appeared at the Lappin session. None had good words to say about RIOC's current real-estate process, in which a Re-

quest for Initial Proposals (RFIP) has been floated to the real-estate community. One RFIP, which *Real Estate Weekly* described in a headline as "Roosevelt Island Space For Sale," seeks to consolidate the Island's retail spaces under a master tenant. Meanwhile, RIOC has not offered existing Island merchants new leases, and some have occupied their storefronts on a month-to-month basis for periods ranging up to four years.

Merchants also complained that they were "stonewalled" by RIOC's real-estate representative, Paul Mas of Jones Lang LaSalle, when they sought lease extensions or to rent additional storefronts that had become vacant, such as the bakery, which has now been vacant for over three years. Perhaps coincidentally, late last week Mas was observed showing the vacant bakery and pizza-parlor spaces to interested Island merchants, and Jones Lang issued papers listing available retail spaces (see separate story, page 8).

One merchant who had expressed interest in the bakery space shortly after it became vacant, even offering to pay the accumulated back rent on the space,

### Briefly...

There's **no F train service** to Manhattan this weekend (see *ComingUp*, page 3).

said that about three months after completing required paperwork, RIOC told him that the space had been turned over to "a real-estate consultant," Mas. "It was like they had never seen me," said the merchant. "Why do you need a realtor if you already have a tenant in front of you – a tenant who is up-to-date on his rent?"

Another merchant said RIOC referred him to Mas. "I spoke with Paul Mas at the urging of some of the people at RIOC who gave me his number, and said, 'Call Paul. He's the guy to speak to.' Initially, I was just stonewalled by Paul. He said, 'Well, you know, we're looking at a couple of propositions and changing the commercial space around a little bit. I said, 'I'm happy where I am,' and he said, 'Well, we'll have to see. We're going to be making some adjustments.'" The merchant still has no lease.

Lappin was explicit on the subject: "You should have a lease," she told the merchant. She has scheduled a meeting with RIOC President Herb Berman in an effort to seek resolution on some of the complaints.

[In general, merchants are not fully identified in this article because some apparently fear that being quoted will affect the way RIOC and Mas handle their cases. Those without leases fear a short-term termination of their leases, or rent increases they cannot afford.]

See **Merchants**, page 8

## Chamber of Commerce Revitalization Project Inspires Ideas for a New Look for Main Street



So far, the ideas are just conceptual, put forward by the architectural firm of Becker and Becker and architect Alyssa Klem, as part of a Chamber of Commerce consideration of how Main Street retail might be revitalized at some point in the future. The concept, shown at a meeting last week, adds awnings, business signs visible from the street, and lighting. It removes some or all of the partial walls between pillars. All the ideas are expected to be the subject of a good deal of consideration before anything is proposed in final form. There's another photo and a report inside, on page 7.

# Letters

## To the RIOC President and Board:

Regarding recent RIOC Requests for Initial Proposals (RFIPs):

**Regarding the RFIP seeking a master tenant for the Island's retail spaces,** I suggest that respondents to any RFP [Request for Proposals] be asked to describe how they plan to accommodate existing commercial tenants.

RIOC can, at a minimum, express a desire to accommodate current commercial tenants and cause potential retail operators to consider it. There may be no cost associated with such accommodation. Competing RFP responses that are otherwise comparable might be distinguished by how they serve existing commercial tenants.

**Regarding the Sportspark-Tram Plaza space,** I suggest RIOC commission a traffic survey of Main Street now to determine remaining capacity. Require RFP respondents to include a calculation of expected traffic impact on Main Street.

Main Street has limited capacity and must serve as both the public and service access to all development south of the Roosevelt Island bridge. Though "destination retail" will draw people via public transportation, it is hard to imagine such retail not having an extraordinary adverse impact on Main Street. The impact should be known to RIOC when it evaluates RFP responses, and not be left for the EIS (Environmental Impact Statement) phase of any future project.

**Regarding the Southpoint site,** I suggest you *not* put out an RFP. If you do, include Judge Wetzel's decision in the Octagon lawsuit. That decision strengthened the law's prohibition against development on Roosevelt Island parkland when it is not associated with rehabilitation of a landmark.

There is no landmark on the Southpoint area offered in the RFIP, so the Open Spaces Law prohibits development there. This clear statement is not subject to the kind of varying interpretations addressed in the Octagon decision which centered on a different issue – the *quantity* of development that's allowed when such development does include the rehabilitation of a landmark.

The best RIOC can say in an RFP is that respondents should seek their own legal opinion on whether their proposed development would be legal. But simply by requesting proposals for development, RIOC would be implicitly stating its *decision* that there's a reasonable chance that such development is legal.

RIOC chastised residents for wasting the Island's money in bringing the Octagon lawsuit. In the current situation, a RIOC decision to lease Southpoint for substantial development not associated with a landmark will be the cause of another lawsuit, both sides of which will be paid for by residents. RIOC should not offer the Southpoint site for development if RIOC cannot reasonably assume such development will survive a legal challenge. The Octagon decision also found that the Roosevelt Island Residents Association has standing to bring suit, and it advised the Residents Association on the proper time in the process to file a suit.

But RIOC directors should not base their decision on whether they'll lose a lawsuit, but rather on whether this is the right thing to do. RIOC's current financial situation, as expressed by Deborah Beck at the public meeting, does not trump the propriety of maintaining Southpoint as parkland, as it was originally planned, as the State Legislature recently confirmed, and for which New York City and RIOC itself have recently committed funds. Leasing that prized public land for a private development would imply a financial desperation that does not exist.

Development at Southpoint would be the easy way out. It would not be much of an accomplishment to earn revenue from Southpoint land. Any quasi-governmental quasi-competent agency could do it. The challenge is to be financially stable while still having use of your best assets.

Though it is reasonable to consider changes to the GDP, certain existing conditions resulting from the GDP cannot be changed. One example is the single street down the center of the Island. A development at Southpoint would not likely use the services of Motorgate or AVAC, and so would permanently increase the traffic burden on Main Street, which might be at or beyond capacity when Southtown housing is complete.

If thoughtful city planning were applied to Roosevelt Island today, it would again exclude substantial development south of the Queensboro Bridge. There are no valid arguments in favor of such development and many reasons to avoid it.

Marc Diamond

## To RIOC President Herb Berman:

When we spoke a couple months ago, you had stated that I should feel free to contact you with any comments or suggestions regarding Island concerns. I don't know if you have noticed, but the school buses in the morning on Main Street have long been a major problem on the Island. Traffic just comes to a complete standstill while school buses in long lines unload. Meanwhile, as a result, the Red Buses back up so that service is completely disrupted for the entire Island.

Have you considered having the school bus pickup points in the morning re-routed to the east and/or west access drives? I would imagine that this would significantly improve conditions on Main Street while also providing much safer points for children to load onto the buses without having to dodge traffic on Main Street. This traffic concern will only become more serious and impact more people as additional residents move onto the Island, especially to the north at the new Octagon Apartments.

Kevin Klesh

The writer supplied this response, received from Herb Berman:

## Dear Kevin:

I received your e-mail and gave it to James Fry, the director of our Public Safety unit, for investigation and action. By way of historical perspective, please note that there is a long history of issues with the bus companies and how they function, a history that has resulted in the issuance of numerous violations, etc. We have provided space for the buses to wait for their passengers on New Main Street; they are supposed to wait 'til they are summoned by the School and told that their students have been dismissed and are available to be picked up. As to delivery of the students in the morning, they are supposed to deposit them at the curb. That is the safest way. The access drives are off limits to vehicular traffic unless it is for official or emergency purposes. It should be left open in case of emergency.

We welcome your continued interest and we will continue to try to regulate traffic on Main Street. I can assure you that we continue to look to solutions.

H. Berman

## To RIOC President Herb Berman:

We are writing to urge RIOC to provide leases to merchants on Roosevelt Island whose businesses are in good standing. While some merchants are facing lease expirations this year, last week's *WIRE* story highlighted the unacceptable fact that others have been operating without a lease for two, three, and even five years, while continuing to pay rent and provide crucial services to Island residents.

While the Island's population continues to grow, local businesses serving residents' needs have been closing or scaling back. Without the security of leases, merchants are understandably reluctant to expand, much less invest in improvements to their establishments. Fearing the loss of their livelihood as the result of a serendipitous termination of a month-to-month arrangement, it is not surprising that Island businesses have left for other communities that are more business friendly.

Roosevelt Island's merchants have shown their commitment to this unique community through their years of faithful service. We find denying them the security of a lease, a standard business practice, unacceptable. RIOC's job is to manage the Island with the interests of the residents in mind. In our opinion, leaving loyal Island merchants without the security of leases is not fulfilling the agency's responsibilities.

We call on you to do what's right: assure Island residents the continued availability of the local businesses upon which they depend by offering merchants the security of a lease. We look forward to a favorable response regarding this issue.

Jessica Lappin, Member of City Council  
Scott M. Stringer, Borough President  
Pete Grannis, Member of Assembly  
José M. Serrano, Member of State Senate  
Carolyn B. Maloney, Member of Congress

## To the Editor:

Roosevelt Island is a super international community. What is important is that most of the Island merchants come from many other countries: China, Egypt, Mexico, Italy, Korea, Africa, Russia, Romania and Greece. This adds so much to the grand New York State plan of a diverse international neighborhood. Roosevelt Island is an Island of nations. People moved here because of this global quality of life.

A very important function of the merchant population has been overlooked. With happy thriving stores and places to get food, the population is happy and growing. Part of this growth and contentment is due to reasonable prices from a large variety of diverse merchants. Sensible, affordable rents promote population expansion, in part, as practical rents allow reasonable prices to customers. Some of these treasured international merchants are now gone because of the high RIOC rent pressures. The act of causing merchants to close is akin to the age old saying of "cutting off your nose to spite your face." An international face.

RIOC is pulling all the bright colorful flowers out of the Roosevelt Island garden, leaving the land bare. We need a bright colorful thriving garden so the land can grow, supply needs and attract more multi-hued flowers to take up

## To RIOC President Herb Berman:

More residential buildings to bring in the rich, out with the middle- and low-income, out with the mom and pop stores, let's take more parkland away and put up even more concrete. A Walmart, a K-mart maybe? Yes, please! After all, that's what the Island residents have been saying – that what this Island really needs is more traffic. Thank you so much for listening to us, your constituents. You must live life by the motto of "cha-ching cha-ching." Perhaps you would actually care about this Island if you *actually lived on it*. My wish is that, some day, you and your RIOC cronies will be faced with losing your own homes and the deterioration of your communities. And may your kids lose their ball fields, too.

Denise Larocque

roots here. Please help the garden grow tall.

A partial international list of diverse Island merchants are:  
**China** – Chinese Restaurant  
**Egypt** – M&D Deli  
**Mexico** – Bakery (closed)  
**Italy** – Capri Pizzeria (closed)  
**Korea** – Nail Salon  
**Korea** – Hardware Store  
**American-born** – Sports bar (closed)  
**Russia** – Beauty Parlor  
**Romania** – Flower Shop  
**Greece** – Trellis Restaurant  
Martin Atkins



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## Spitzer from page 1

here in New York State where George Pataki never had a good thing to say about government – government has failed."

"We believe government can help... We believe in the restrained, smart use of government. When you spend the dollars, do it wisely. Do it effectively. Invest in education because we know it is the fulcrum of economic growth. Invest in our infrastructure here because, if we don't, we will see New York City begin to wither."

Spitzer had mentioned Roosevelt Island as a missed opportunity earlier in his talk, perhaps responding to the relatively large delegation of Islanders who attended the meeting of Maloney's 14th Congressional District Caucus.

A full transcript of Spitzer's Sunday speech, with Grannis's introduction, and Spitzer's responses to the question about Roosevelt Island, is on *Website NYC10044* at [nyc10044.com](http://nyc10044.com) with this issue of *The WIRE*.

## Letters Policy

*The WIRE* welcomes letters to the editor, to the community, and to/from officials. *Name Withheld* publication 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](mailto: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, but allow extra time before deadline for typesetting. Clearly handwritten letters will be considered, if brief, but we are not able to take telephone dictation of letters. **All letters are 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.

## Letters deadline for Apr. 8 issue: Tues., Apr. 4

Letters received after deadline considered on a space-available basis.

About subscriptions: *The Main Street WIRE*, which is delivered free to every residential door on Roosevelt Island, does not normally solicit off-Island subscriptions but, as a courtesy, provides first-class mailing on day of publication. The cost is \$50/year (for about 20-24 issues, published fortnightly September-May, and less often June-August) to cover postage and materials. A check payable to *The WIRE* should be sent, with delivery address, to *The WIRE*, 531 Main Street #413, NYC10044. Note that most of each issue appears, with many archived back issues, on *Website NYC10044* at [nyc10044.com](http://nyc10044.com).

# COMING UP

## — This Weekend —

**No Manhattan-bound F train service** all weekend, from 12:01 a.m. Saturday through 5:00 a.m. Monday. Queens-bound trains running normally.



**<Representative Carolyn Maloney Visits the Island** to hear from residents, **Sat., Mar. 18, 11:00-1:00**, at the Senior Center, 546 Main Street.

**Vernissage 5** show, Gallery RIVAA, featuring the works of two dozen artists. Gallery hours Wed. & Fri., 6-9 p.m.; Sat.-Sun., 11:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. Exhibition continues to April 16.

**Springtime Speaks to Earth**, an installation in the Rivercross Windows Gallery by J. Wayne Olson and Deek di Salvo, continuing through March 31, presented by the Mother Earth Committee. >



## — The Coming Week —

**The Tex Allen Sextet** plays **Tue., Mar. 21** through **Sat., Mar. 25** in Dizzy's Coca Cola Room at Jazz at Lincoln Center, the Time Warner building at Columbus Circle. 11:00 p.m. Tue.-Thur., midnight Fri.-Sat.

**Book Discussion Group, Thur., Mar. 23, 6:30 p.m.**, at the Library. *Love* by Toni Morrison.

## — Future Events —

**Toastmasters** public speaking group, **Mon., Mar. 27, 8:00 p.m.** Visitors welcome. Information: **212-751-9577**.

Islander **Irene Clark** appears in *Mediterranean Voices* at La Mama ETC, **Fri., Mar. 31-Sun., Apr. 2, Fri.-Sat.** at 10:00 p.m., Sun. at 5:30 p.m., 74A East 4th St. \$15. Reservations: **212-475-7710** or at [www.lamama.org](http://www.lamama.org). >

**Community Board 8 Second Avenue Subway Task Force Meeting, Mon., Apr. 3, 7:00 p.m.**, New York Blood Center Auditorium, 310 E. 67th St. Information: **212-758-4340**.

**The Main Street WIRE** – Next issue, **Sat., Apr. 8, 2006**. (To receive e-mail bulletins between issues, send an *AddMe* message to [Bulletins@MainStreetWIRE.com](mailto:Bulletins@MainStreetWIRE.com).) **Advertising Deadline:** Ads in the paper, Thursday, Mar. 30; decision on circulars/inserts for *The Bag*, Mon., Apr. 3; they are due Thur., Apr. 6. **Future issues:** Apr. 22, May 6 and 20, June 3 and 17, July 1, July 29, Aug. 26, Sept. 9 and 23, Oct. 7 and 21, Nov. 4 and 18, Dec. 2 and 16. **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 in this column**, e-mail information to [ComingUp@MainStreetWIRE.com](mailto: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.

**Open Workshop Performance** by the Main Street Theatre and Dance Alliance musical theater workshop class, **Sun., Apr. 9**, time to be announced. Reservations, **212-371-4449**.

**Roosevelt Island Bridge Renovation Meeting** with the City Department of Transportation, **Wed., Apr. 19, 8:00 p.m.**, Chapel of the Good Shepherd.

**Book Discussion Group, Thur., Apr. 20, 6:30 p.m.**, at the Library. *Bodega Dreams* by Ernesto Quiñonez.

**Damn Yankees**, presented by the Main Street Children's Theatre, **Fri., May 5** through **Mon., May 8**, times to be announced. Reservations, **212-371-4449**.

There is no charge to list Island events here. E-mail information to [ComingUp@MainStreetWIRE.com](mailto: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.



To say we are proud of our Public Safety officers would be an understatement. The 29-member force, led by director Jim Fry, works around the clock to provide a safe and orderly environment on the Island.

Twice in recent months our Public Safety officers have encountered dramatic and dangerous situations, and performed with professionalism and even heroism.

## The RIOC Column

On December 15, 2005, a call came into the Public Safety office with a report of a two-month-old baby that was not breathing. Following long-established procedure, four officers responded to the call while an office dispatcher called 911. Two officers, Raphael Payne and Peter Simonovic, went directly to the apartment while two others stayed downstairs to direct arriving EMS crews. Upon arriving in the apartment, they discovered the baby was not breathing.

Following their training, Officers Payne and Semanovic immediately began to provide cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and the baby began breathing. They rushed the baby into the hands of the arriving EMS crew. The result was the baby is now okay, and the two officers are heroes.

On January 12, 2006, Officer Ingrid Veras stopped an individual while she was looking for the perpetrator of a past robbery. The individual fled, with Vera, calling in a description, giving chase. With the assistance of three other officers, the individual was captured. Officers observed the man throwing what turned out to be 52 bags of marijuana onto the ground, which is considered felony weight under the law, and the individual was arrested.

Just last month, on February 6, Deputy Director René Bryan, Sgt. Michelle Evans and Officer Rodell Lindsay combined to detain and arrest a man suspected of four burglaries on the Island. The man is now being held. It is worth

For the residents of Westview, Island House, and Rivercross, issues of privatization, affordability, and the amount that RIOC will assess to extend their ground leases are rightly the most important topic in local news. However, unless we are able to stop RIOC's awful plans to sell off much of their assets to private interests, this whole Island will be a significantly less desirable place to live for everyone.

RIOC plans to sell off:

- The area east of Coler Hospital (for a 28 story building),
- Motorgate garage (so our parking rates can skyrocket at the only garage on the Island),
- The commercial properties on Main Street (which is why no leases are being renewed and sites like the old bakery are being warehoused),

- A "parcel" including Sportspark, the tennis bubble, the steam generation plant and the Tram plaza (for a "big box" store – like a Walmart or a Target), and
- The top third of Southpoint Park (for commercial or residential – RIOC really doesn't give a damn).

In his column in the last issue of *The WIRE*, Roosevelt Island Operation Corporation President Berman was "as blunt as possible" about RIOC's "legal and ethical mandate ... on maintaining fiscal self-sufficiency." This is a refreshingly clear statement and I believe that Mr. Berman wants to conclude his career in public service on this note.

However, in the same spirit of bluntness, RIOC, under the Pataki administration, has had a disgraceful record of fiscal responsibility, and with only eight months to go before we elect a new governor, its mighty late to find religion. We'd be awash in funding if RIOC hadn't given away the first three buildings of Southtown for literally no net income. We could still have plenty of disposable income if RIOC would scrap plans to give away, virtually for nothing, the rights for the remaining six buildings. They also have destroyed Octagon Park in exchange for about a quarter of what a former (and more responsible) administration negotiated for Manhattan Park. But even after years of scandal and incompetence, and after selling off our precious open spaces, RIOC appears to have \$15 Million in the kitty, and last year's operating expenses matched revenues. So why are these people so intent on selling off five more chunks of property? If they actually wanted to run a surplus, they might consider axing the single AMEC "liaison" they pay \$350,000 a year for. For real bucks, they'd direct the outside attorneys that they hire for hundreds of thousands per year to find a way out of the loose agreement they have with Hudson and Related to build "Phase 2" of Southtown. This is an as-yet-unsigned deal which allows them to construct buildings 5 through 9 for virtually no income to RIOC. Watch RIOC railroad a final deal on this in the next few months – and keep it secret.

I have been asking these folks for years how much property they have to sell off before they are satisfied that we are "self-sufficient," but RIOC never answers that question. Now it's apparent that they want to sell off everything that they can.

In RIRA's recent position paper that forcefully rejects these plans, we repeatedly asked where was the long-term

noting that each of these burglaries appear to have been crimes of opportunity, occurring in unlocked, unsecured apartments. This is a good chance to alert everybody on the Island to what should seem obvious, that a locked door is a basic deterrent to crime.

Statistics from 2005 show our Public Safety officers have been successful in their mission.

While one crime is one too many – and the victim of a crime takes little solace from statistical good news – the data bear out the relative safety of life on our Island.

With a population of about 9,000 residents, Roosevelt Island experienced 43 reported index crimes in 2005. (Index crimes are the most serious category of felonies and include murder, assault, burglary, rape, robbery, grand larceny and grand larceny auto.) That is similar to what happened in 2004 – there were a few more burglaries and assaults reported in 2005, though there was only one reported car theft in 2005, compared

to two the year before. There were no murders or reported rapes in either year.

Public Safety officers, who are considered peace officers under the laws of the State of New York and have the same arrest and ticketing authority as City police officers, aggressively enforce parking and other violations in order to establish and maintain the order necessary on our Island.



**Herbert E. Berman**, President Roosevelt Island Operating Corp. e-mail: [HBerman@rioc.com](mailto:HBerman@rioc.com)

planning? The transit plan? The financial plan? The plan to provide parks and recreational services? Where is the comprehensive vision for our community? Not a word from Mr. Berman on these questions, because he, and the rest of RIOC simply don't care.

Mr. Berman sought to "allay concerns... disseminated by some leaders of the Resident Association that RIOC is acting secretly to prepare contracts for development of some or all of the five sites." As a "leader of the Resident Association," I can tell you Mr. Berman has failed to "allay" my concerns or those of the overwhelming majority of the over 20 RIRA representatives that you have elected.

RIOC held a sham meeting a few weeks ago that was billed first as a forum to "ask clarifying questions" and later, when it was apparent that they were unwilling to actually answer any questions, to "share views on what residents want on the Island." But the real purpose of the meeting is so that, in future lawsuits, RIOC can claim that it held a series of "open meetings." RIOC couldn't care less about what the residents want. As for secrecy, these five proposals even came as surprises to more than one of their own Board members.

Developers paid over \$80,000 to respond to what Mr. Berman describes as innocent inquiries "as to how the sites would look in the future." There's nothing innocent about it. Mr. Berman wouldn't appreciate public bids auctioning off his kidneys to the

highest bidder or to friends of his doctors. Why should residents accept the travesty of auctioning off our open space and public lands?

The fact that RIOC is selling off their interests in Motorgate and Main Street commercial properties is an admission that they are either too incompetent or lazy to properly manage them.

Although RIOC has no interest in what we think, our elected politicians do. Unless you want your neighborhood to be a cement fortress with wall-to-wall buildings, an unaffordable garage, and no open space, please write to State Senator Serrano and State Assemblyman Pete Grannis. Tell them that this last-minute fire sale of precious property to the Governor's friends is outrageous and that you are tired of seeing Roosevelt Island as a dumping ground for Pataki patronage positions. Whenever you meet the resident RIOC members, Anderson, Beck, Kraut, Ponton, and Shinozaki, ask them: What's the great rush to sell off the Island to commercial interests?

On more hopeful notes, Rep. Carolyn Maloney will be at the Senior Center this Saturday, March 18, between 11:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. She's anxious to hear from Island residents. I urge everyone to take this opportunity to stop by, See RIRA, page 10



**Steve Marcus**, President Roosevelt Island Residents Assn. e-mail: [SteveAtRIRA@verizon.net](mailto:SteveAtRIRA@verizon.net)

## Senior Center

<b>Monday</b>	10:30, <b>Shoppers' Bus</b>
9:30, <b>Yoga</b>	5:00, <b>Healthy Body &amp; Mind</b>
10:30-11:30, <b>English as 2nd Language</b>	7:00, <b>Pokeno (RISA)</b>
10:30, <b>Blood Pressure Screening</b>	<b>Thursday</b>
12:30, <b>"Oldies" Movies</b>	10:00, <b>Get Stronger Bones</b>
1:00, <b>Computers</b>	10:30, <b>Creative Arts</b>
1:00, <b>Tai Chi</b>	12:30, <b>Movie</b>
<b>Tuesday</b>	7:00, <b>Dance</b>
9:30-1:00, <b>Free Tax Help</b>	<b>Friday</b>
10:00, <b>Get Stronger Bones</b>	9:30, <b>Yoga</b>
10:30, <b>Shoppers' Bus</b>	10:30, <b>Computers</b>
2:00, <b>Bingo</b>	1:00, <b>Bridge</b>
2:00, <b>Painting &amp; Sculpting</b>	7:00, <b>Games (RISA)</b>
6:00, <b>Ballroom Dancing</b>	<b>Saturday</b>
7:30, <b>Games (RISA)</b>	7:30, <b>Bingo (RISA)</b>
<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Special Events</b>
9:15, <b>Stay Well</b>	<b>Sat., Mar. 18, 6:00</b> , St. Patrick's Day Party
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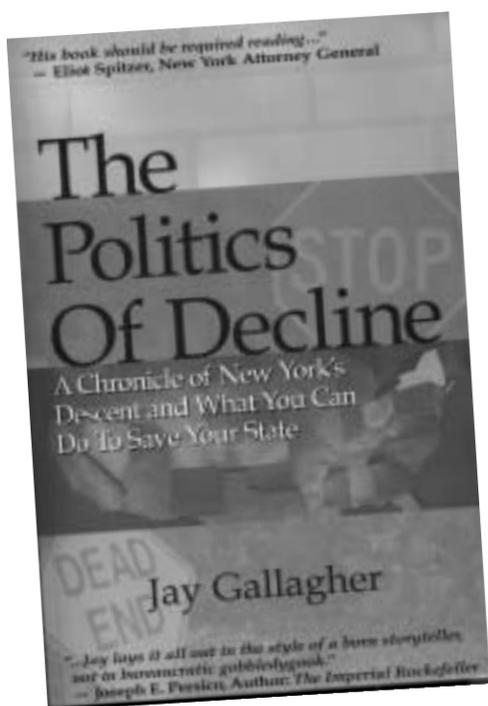
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*As always, Thank you for shopping with us every Saturday.*

OPEN LETTER TO

## EBC NEIGHBORS and FRIENDS

Thanks to those tenants, neighbors and friends who helped  
make the March 4<sup>th</sup> GAME NIGHT a success.  
This certainly was a huge measure of our ability  
to pull together as a group to effect change.  
The hard work has paid off. We reached our goal.

*The Result:* We were able to pay our legal fees in full.

Thank You!

**The Eastwood Building Committee**

**The Legal Fund Committee**

[ebc.rinyc@gmail.com](mailto:ebc.rinyc@gmail.com)

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# F-Train Crowding Leaves Rush-Hour Passengers on the Platform



8:40 a.m., Friday, March 10:

As an F-train pulls into the Roosevelt Island station, passengers waiting on the platform realize the cars will accommodate few additional passengers (1), and (2) the doors close. The train pulls out, leaving about 60 commuters waiting for the next train (3, 4).

As more residential properties receive tenants, crowding in the morning rush is becoming an issue of increasing concern. At Octagon, 500 apartments will begin filling in April and May; at Riverwalk, owners are moving into the new condo at 455 Main Street, and a second condo building is expected to be ready in a little over a year.

No plans have been announced for measures to ensure the Island transportation structure will accommodate more Manhattan-bound passengers, or to study the capacity problem. Including the Southtown condo for which ground has now been broken, another six buildings are slated for Southtown, and RIOC's recent RFIPs have offered space for at least one more residential building at the north end, just south of Lighthouse Park, and possibly another at Southpoint.

## Swimming Kids at Westview Pool Have a Fourth-Level Coach

Since December, 2004, a group of parents have provided coached swimming lessons for their children at the Westview pool. One of the kids, Milos Gak, interviewed his coach and provided the results to *The WIRE*.

by Milos Gak

Igor Shoukhardin is my swimming coach. I must say he is a great coach! He is also an interesting person, so I decided to make my first interview with him. I sent him e-mail with questions and here are answers:

*OK, dear Milos! I've got all your questions and try to tell you everything you need to know about typical way of life of swimmers who have dedicated whole their lives for this World – World of Competitive Swimming.*

**Where were you born?**

*I was born in city of Chelyabinsk (Russia) where my mom was evacuated from Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) in February 1942 - it was a war...*

**When did you start to swim and, what inspired you to start swimming?**

*The first time I showed up in swimming pool in 1952 after I almost drowned in summer pioneer camp. Some soldier occasionally saved my life pulling me out from under river's water.*

*After this incident I firmly decided to learn how to swim. And in September I joined swim classes in "Dynamo" Sports School in Leningrad.*

**When did you start competing?**

*When I was twelve I had my first-ever swim meets where I turned out to be the worst swimmer in breast stroke because I was not*

*able to breathe properly and coordination was helpless.*

*I even wanted to quit swimming but it's not so easy if you devoted two years to it. So, I just become more attentive, more persistent on practice... But at 15, I understood that I'm very weak physically and my mom bought me the weight lifting bar and I began having my additional exercises at home.*

*In a year I was able to do 20 pull-ups, which helped me to swim in City Championship 100 M Fly with time 1:04 and to be Third.*

**Did competing take up any of your daily life?**

*Before my 17 when I was accepted into the State Physical Institute N.A. P.F. Lesgaft – the oldest in the World, I was just once Leningrad Champion in 1500 Free (18:12,54), 400 IM(5:15,20) and 200 Fly (2:35,1).*

*Being a Lesgaft's student where a lot of other kinds of sports people were famous world athletes, I started swimming nine times a week and made average 85-90 km per week so, that in the USSR, I was steadily 1-3 on 1500 and 400 IM by my 20 year.*

**What was your best timing and on how many meters?**

*And only when I was 22, my best times became to be a World level high. 1500m - 17:07.44; 400 IM - 4:54.87; 200 Free - 2:01.27; 100 Free - 55.21 sec, and so on. Of course, my best event was 1500. And I had good chances to be in a National Team 4X200 Free relay. It gave me opportunity to participate in many European, world and Olympic contests. But it is already other long story.*

**When did you start coaching?**

*As a coach I started working along with studying in post-graduate school in my native Sports School – "Dynamo".*

**Were any of the swimmers that you coached very successful? Which ones?**

*I must say that I don't know any more or less good swimmer who is not successful in their life. It's impossible for swimmer to be a loser!*

*At the very first five years I grew up Olympic prize-winners in Montreal, 1976 – Andrey Smirnov (third on 400 IM and Second Place in Relay 4X200), Andrey Avtoushenko (third on 200 Fly), and Andrey Krylov (200 Free second place, 4x200 Free Relay Second Place). Now they are: Krylov is Professor, Head of Athletic Department in Transport Academy in St. Petersburg, has two daughters and very happy of them. Avtoushenko is a Swim Coach in Amsterdam (Holland), has boy and girl which already grew up and visited New York last year. Smirnov is a City Duma's Deputy now and very successful politician in Russia.*

*The very last my student – Vladimir Predkin – Olympic Champion in Barcelona - 1992, is now one of the best cardiologists in St. Petersburg in his 38! It is the answer on your last question!*

**Can swimming teach something other than just pure swimming?**

*Because, never yet regular swimmer made a mistake in his daily routine; never lost a minute from his day schedule; by his 18 swimmer already knows what he wants, how to reach it, when to do every step and how much efforts it takes. They are educated by swimming!*

**If you start your life over would you swim again?**

*Yes, positively! As I already said, it's the World! The world of challenges, the world of victories and defeats, the world of endless perfection, the world of wisdom and common sense, finally, the world of experience of life!*

*Thank you Milos, for touching the most sensitive aspects of sports life and particularly, swimming life. Yours, Igor.*



## Islanders

# Helen Roht: 31 Years on the Island, Living Long, Going Strong

by Cassandra Langer

Helen Roht is about as big as a minute and a sensational 90 years old. Actually she defies age and stage. In her bright-red jacket, embroidered in black, she looks twenty years younger and has the energy of a 21-year-old – an energy suggested by her wild silver hair.

Her Roosevelt Island connection goes back to its earliest days as a residential community – 1975 – when she got an Island House apartment despite the building being fully rented. Somebody changed his mind, and that paved the way for her family's move from Flushing, Queens. At that point, she was not quite 60. In short order, she became one of the Island's advocates and activists.

But the arc of her life story parallels the rise of modernism and the new woman. Born and raised in the Bronx, she is a member of that rare breed known as a *native New Yorker*. For her lower-middle class immigrant family, moving to the Grand Concourse meant they had arrived. Her father came from Lithuania, where he was considered a very learned man because he was able to read Pushkin. She remembers him as hard and bitter with a streak of vindictiveness. "I never knew what to expect. He once gave me the silent treatment for a whole year."

Her mother came from the Ukraine and loved people and food. Growing up, Helen recalls the sounds of Russian and Yiddish resounding throughout her home. Unfortunately, her father didn't have a head for business and he was unable to make a go of the various ventures he attempted. Finally, her mother's brother (Bella Abzug's father) Manny helped Helen's parents to set up a butter-and-egg stand in front of his butcher shop. Helen was both rebellious and brilliant, but she had a strong sense of family obligation, so she and her brother helped to sell produce when they weren't in school.

"I was a fat little girl who loved her mother, but I was ashamed of her because she seemed so subservient to my father. It took me years to appreciate her real strengths. I loved to write and at an early age I became obsessed with France. I thought all things French were beautiful and good, and I dreamed of living in France one day. I read everything that was French oriented." But Helen faced a lot of obstacles before she could make her dream come true because her love of all things French and European did not sit well with her parents who had fled from pogroms, racial laws, and anti-Semitism, and never wanted to go back to Europe.

Winning a Regents scholarship to Hunter College, Helen saw herself on the first step to realizing a long-held dream. When she graduated from Hunter at age 15, she took a job as a French translator, earning the enormous sum of \$40 per week, all of which went toward supporting her family.

But Helen's striking out on her own created a gigantic gulf between her mother's generation and her own. They now lived in two different worlds. She found that having a conversation with her mother was as if she was speaking a foreign language. Her mother was appalled at her taste in boys and even threw two of her French boyfriends out of the apartment. She wanted Helen to vacation in the Catskills where she could meet *nice Jewish boys*. She even forced a fur coat on her rebellious daughter. "I took revenge on her by going dancing at the Savoy Ballroom and purposely leaving my fur coat on my chair so that it would be stolen." She recalls going into the cold night in triumph, though shivering.

Helen was unconventional for her time. She took a job working in the subscriptions department of a French-American theater company and, eventually, was given small walk-on parts in dramas by Molière and Jean Anouilh. This fueled her hopes for travel to France, but that dream was destined to be put on hold. In 1940, the company's second

season, the French players were called home for the mobilization for war. She was confronted with a dilemma – to go to France or to stay in New York and fulfill her family obligations? Torn by her overwhelming sense of duty to her family, she stayed home.

She took the teachers examination and began a job at the Wadleigh School on 145th St. In its heyday, Wadleigh had been a girls finishing school but now, it catered to a population of African-American girls who, Helen knew, would end up on the mean streets of Harlem without any chance of realizing their dreams. During the year and a half she spent there, Helen tried to change all that by inventing games, a drama club and other activities to keep her students from being exploited by the unsavory types who hung around the school. As a result of her caring and nurturing efforts, several of the girls went on to fulfill their dreams: one became the head of a choral group and another had a successful career on the stage.

By this time, December 1941, America was in World War II. Helen got a job at *The Voice of America* and off she went to embattled Britain. She set sail for England in a convoy of 88 ships. After 28 days at sea, battling raging storms, being followed by U boats, having one of the ships split apart, and finally being driven so far off-course that they ended up in Scotland, the company traveled down the coast until they found themselves in a blacked-out Edinburgh. Days later, they arrived in blacked-out, blitz-scarred London.

Laughing, Helen says, "I did not see London in the light until 1944." But her job broadcasting to her beloved France, now Nazi-occupied, helped her feel that she was doing her part to fight fascism.

During this period she lived in a modern apartment, one of the first high rise condos to be built in London. The Luftwaffe hit this building directly and left it a hollowed-out shell. As a result Helen and a friend were left homeless amidst the rubble. The two young women were forced to sleep in the famous Bond Street Station immortalized in graphic works by the great British artist, Henry Moore.

She recalls having lunch with a young man at Lyons Chop House and naively asking him what he did. "I carry out the dead," he replied.

Ever rebellious, the 25-year-old Helen tried to get dropped behind the lines in France, but they wouldn't send a woman. At war's end, she finally got to Paris, the city of her dreams. She plunged right into the swift stream of French culture. She fell in love with a young poet who was a disciple of the Surrealist poet, Louis Aragon. Then, on a hunch, she called her former director from the French theater company, delighted to discover that he was now heading up a major Paris theater. He greeted her by saying, "High time you got here!"

Once the war ended, Helen was out of work. The State Department offered her a job in Berlin but, having seen prisoners returning from Prussia, she declined it. Now she had to make one of the hardest decisions of her life – to stay in France with her lover, Bernard, or return home. Realizing that he was just too French to live in the United States, she reluctantly told him she was going home to New York.

Then, with \$400 she still had from her Regents scholarship fund, she took off for Mexico on a third-class bus. She shared space with 30 Mexicans, four chickens, and a young couple with two infants. The bus broke down three times on

the way to Mexico City. On the way, she used her French as a basis to learn Spanish and, between two young people who had some grade-school English and her elementary knowledge of Spanish, she managed to communicate. During this time she fell in love with the people and children of Mexico. She worked for one of the first UNESCO programs, teaching literacy to the population using *Dick and Jane* primers. She ended up staying a year and a half until her money ran out.

Romance always seemed to find Helen. She met Carlos, who worked for a conservative newspaper, and they had a hot affair. She became chummy with a group of intellectuals, writers and artists. She even met Diego Rivera and Frieda



Khalo. "Rivera was the ugliest man I ever met and she was a nervous wreck." Helen's money was running out when she received a cable asking her if she would be interested in working with the United Nations at Lake Success. The job was in the language division covering meetings and doing summaries of the proceedings. She jumped on it. "This is what I was born for!"

Helen married late, at age 38. She met her husband, George, whom she calls "a force to be reckoned with," at Tanglewood. It was a hot day and several attractive young men had taken off their shirts. They were all lying on the grass together and listening to Tchaikovsky. Helen ended up tapping out the music on the chest of one muscular young man. She didn't want to be tied down by a marriage, but George paid no attention to her agenda.

It was a whirlwind courtship. They had a titanic fight and she refused his phone calls. Finally, she relented and invited him over to her apartment where she proceeded to throw pillows at him and act out every drama she could think of. George just sat in a chair and watched the scene. This stopped her cold. Seeing it was having no effect, she asked, "What do you think?" He arched an eyebrow and replied, "Why do you have to know?" They were on again.

Commenting on her husband, Helen smiles and says, "He was the only one who cared enough to get behind my mask." Whenever she made a scene he would react by saying, "Curtain. Act two."

After five miscarriages Helen gave birth to a girl. For them, Naomi was a miracle. Having a family and raising a child did not prevent Helen from working. She stayed with the United Nations for 29 years and then took early retirement. But she enrolled at Columbia and took a full course in gerontology. She was the oldest person in the program and soon had a following of younger admirers. Despite having officially retired, Helen still worked as a consultant to the United Nations for the next twenty-eight years.

Once on Roosevelt Island, Helen immediately began organizing the Island's elders. She formed a consulting committee on aging for United Nation's retirees. The association consisted of U.N. retirees from all over the world living in New York. Over the past ten years, she has brought in 25 speakers from around the world to talk to the association, most recently just last month. In addition to all this, Helen has written three plays and numerous Ogden Nash style poems, mainly to her neighbors and their children.

No "ol' rocking chair" for Helen. Her latest career consists of writing 20-minute one-act plays. One is a whodunnit that features a wheelchair-bound individual who outwits two thugs. Another is a classic Molière adaptation that features a hypochondriac. "It is written in a Neil Simon vein; the maid's the hero," she says, laughing warmly.

The plays are for performance by actors over 70 – not about old people, but to show the younger set what elders can do.

Her motto? "Living long, going strong."

## Chamber Mulls Main Street Beautification

by Mary Camper-Titsingh

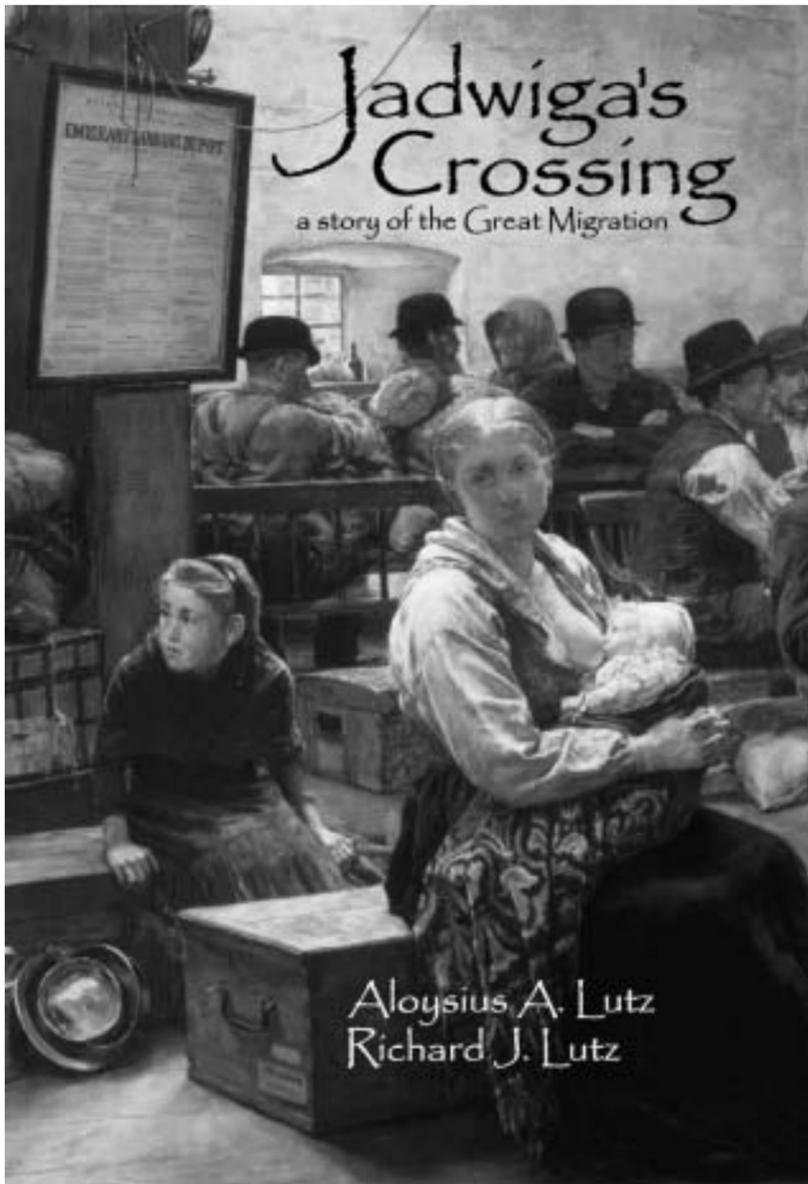
What can be done to revitalize Main Street's mercantile climate?

While RIOC has advanced the idea of a master tenant managing all the retail space on Main Street, the Roosevelt Island Chamber of Commerce has been working with the Empire State Development Corporation (ESDC) to seek grants and find other ways to help merchants. Part of the program is beautification of Main Street, and some tentative steps in that direction were shown last week at a Chamber legislative breakfast held in Gallery RIVAA.

Hector Santana of ESDC told gathered residents and aides to politicians representing the Island that increased tourism is a key objective – making Roosevelt Island a destination. He said beautification might include the sprucing up of storefronts and historical sights such as Blackwell House, welcoming banners all the way to the Tram, more trees and flowers, and replacing garbage canisters and street lighting. (The last two items are already under way, according to reports at RIOC Board meetings.)

Architect Alyssa Klem of Becker and Becker (the Octagon developer) presented a tentative plan – so far only in the theoretical stage – for an altered Eastwood collanade. Her plan involves improved lighting, removal of some glass panels, awnings, flower pots, and hanging shop signs visible from Main Street. (See panoramic photo, page 1.)





## Merchants from page 1

Pediatrician Dr. Katherine Grimm was at the Lappin session. Although her professional office is rented from Rivercross, not RIOC, she was present to express her support for the merchants. “Many of the merchants work very long hours, and it’s not as though they’re making a big killing financially. I’ve been concerned about the merchants not having leases, which I think they justly deserve. I’ve been concerned about spaces that are vacant for prolonged periods of time, which I don’t think makes any sense at all.”

Grimm continued, “I think there are some people in RIOC who have dollar-signs behind their eyeballs and think that all of a sudden they’re going to be able to make a lot of money on this space. But the important role for the storefronts is really to serve the community. The community needs these kinds of storefronts, like the pizza place and the flower shop and the DVD store.”

She expressed doubt that the retail spaces will increase greatly in value with



Councilmember Jessica Lappin listened Monday as Island merchants described problems dealing with RIOC on storefront leases, empty space, and other matters.

for the opening of new apartment buildings at the Octagon and in Southtown: “A lot of people go off-Island for services, and the people who are going to be in the condos [in Southtown] will go into Manhattan; the people at Octagon are going to take the bus right past the merchants and probably not stop very often, so I don’t think that those buildings, even though they’re expensive buildings, are going to bring that much in the way of money to Roosevelt Island.”

Grimm described the conversion of the Sloan’s Supermarket at Motorgate into a Gristede’s Megastore as a period of crisis for Island merchants. It effectively ended the era of no-compete clauses in Island commercial leases. “When Gristede’s Megastore opened up, that became competition for a number of small businesses. Bigelow Pharmacy shut down because of Gristede’s, which was very sad, because it was right next to the professional suites and it was much easier for patients [leaving medical offices] to fill prescriptions. The card and gift shop [newstand] suffered because of that. The flower shop is hanging by a thread. We do like to have competition, but sometimes competition drives people out and you end up with a ghost town... Sometimes I think it was useful to have what the original [non-compete] plan was. It was totally violated when Gristede’s went into business, and that was the beginning of a decline.”

The politicians’ joint letter to RIOC (see page 2) tried to make the case for

RIOC matching merchant loyalty to the Island with loyalty to the merchants: “Roosevelt Island’s merchants have shown their commitment to this unique community through their years of faithful service. We find denying them the security of a lease... unacceptable. RIOC’s job is to manage the Island with the interests of the residents in mind. In our opinion, leaving loyal Island merchants without the security of leases is not fulfilling the agency’s responsibilities.”



## Realtor Lists Available Shops

Jones Lang LaSalle, the real-estate firm working for RIOC on commission to market Island properties, last week gave interested Island merchants a listing of retail properties now available for rent. Prices range up to \$35 per square foot per year, a figure that many Island merchants have said is unrealistic, given the state of the Island’s mercantile economy.

But spaces are available at lower rates. The Gallery RIVAA space is on offer, for example, at \$4,716.25 per month for ground-floor space of 1,617 raw square feet (RSF) on the ground floor and 817 RSF in the basement. That works out to \$23.25 per square foot per year. Other properties being offered are:

- 532 Main (Capri Pizza, now vacant), at a “monthly base rent” of \$3,409.58. With more than half its space at the basement level, the space works out to \$17.26 per square foot per year.

- 546½ Main (the vacant bakery space) is listed at \$2003.83 per month. With about two-thirds of its space on a mezzanine level, it is priced at \$12.23 per square foot per year.

- The vacant Montauk Credit Union space at 559 Main Street, with 568 RSF ground and 286 RSF basement, works out to \$23.28/year/

square foot, or \$1,656.67 a month. USAlliance Credit Union, which had expressed strong interest in the space for over a year, recently gave up seeking to rent it when it could not get a waiver of a provision in RIOC’s lease to New York National Bank. The provision prohibits location of another financial institution on the Island.

Two other spaces are in the offering:

- 503 Main, which is at the southeast corner of Rivercross, at \$29.22/year/square foot, or \$5,769.17 per month for 1,978 RSF ground and 283 RSF basement.

- 615 Main (in Westview), with 776 RSF at the ground level, at \$35/year/square foot, or \$2,263.33 per month.

In the papers supplied by Jones Lang, prospective tenants are asked to make a proposal for any space of interest, supplying such information as proposed rent increases, the term, amount to be spent in improvements, and hours/days of operation. The papers call for a description of the proposed tenant’s experience plus exterior and interior renderings. The papers provide no address for submission of the papers, but e-mail addresses for RIOC real-estate consultant Paul Mas and others are provided.

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–Dr. Deborah Anders Silverman  
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## Website Seeks Homes for Abandoned But Adoptable Cats

by Jennifer Dunning

Communities are like mosaics, made up of the vivid fragments of everyday lives and memories. The small black-and-white cat that lived behind the bushes near the subway, called Princess by some and YinYang by others, was such a fragment. A surprising number of Roosevelt Islanders knew her because she accompanied them to and from the subway, poking her head out when she saw or heard them coming.

After her death in September, 2004, a memorial was held, organized by Cheryl Tyler, near one of Princess's favorite bushes. Attended by about 15 people, including a corporate consultant who had postponed a trip to Boston and an actress who had rushed from work in Manhattan to sing *All Things Bright and Beautiful* in the drizzling dusk, the memorial inspired the idea of a website to try to help cats like Princess and let Roosevelt Islanders know about them. And now that website – [www.islandcats.org](http://www.islandcats.org) – is up and running. Suggestions are welcome for this work in progress. (We are thinking of including Island children's cat drawings and stories, which can be sent to [rippy@care2.com](mailto:rippy@care2.com) or mailed to Jennifer Dunning at 531 Main Street.)

Princess was full of curiosity but also fear. She would not let even familiar humans come too close, and she didn't seem to care much for other cats. But she made many of us smile with her funny, fastidious, crotchety habits. A Red Bus driver once slowed to watch her flinging herself repeatedly into a high snow drift. He worried she was having fits, but quickly realized she was playing.

Acutely aware of danger though she was, she slept deeply in a small Styrofoam shelter admirers had built for her. She loved to leap after fireflies in the summer and went through a nightly ritual with her feeders, eating her dinner only if she had her own non-communal bowls of food and water and only if she could watch each being filled. Her death was caused, indirectly, by cat-dumping, for she was chased into the path of a truck by an aggressive cat allowed to run loose.

Cute kittens grow up and their owners don't want to spend money neutering them. Some newly abandoned cats found wandering on the Island have been old, with terminal illnesses. But there is no excuse for abandoning inconvenient pets. Imagine a world suddenly without boundaries, a totally unfamiliar world of freezing cold in winter, of starvation and dehydration, of slow and painful death by illness or injury, of attacks by other cats protecting their small turf.

Living outdoors is not the way of nature, as some say, for domestic animals that have spent their entire lives within four reassuring walls, fed and cared for. It is no more natural than a seagull, squirrel or possum – yes, we have possums on the Island! – being brought indoors to live. If another

home cannot be found, it is kinder to euthenize an unwanted or inconvenient pet than to abandon it outdoors.

The idea of the website, which was put together by Roosevelt Island Princess YinYang Project (RIPYY), an ad hoc group of residents, with the help of web designer Gretchen Peters and consultants Ann Hallowell and Rossana Ceruzzi, is to let people know about the serious problems of stray cats and cat-dumping on the Island, and to find homes for those that are adoptable. (Messages may also be left at **212-593-1054**.)

The website contains a page with photos and biographies of cats that are ready for adoption, all of which have been neutered and tested negative for feline AIDS and leukemia.



Foster homes are needed, too, as are committed volunteers to help with feeding one or more of the approximately seven colonies scattered around the Island. Even once a week would help. And we welcome ideas, especially for our Kids' Page, and about how to curb dumping, some of which is done by Islanders who throw pets out or leave them behind in vacated apartments. In time, RIPYY hopes to help owners before they abandon their pets but resources are now limited.

Formal animal rescue actually began on the Island around 1977 or 1978, when Marjorie Marcallino, Linda Egan and Pat Lyons got together and began to feed strays and trap, neuter and find homes for as many as possible. "Bicycling around the Island, you saw them," Marcallino said, "particularly near the two hospitals, the Tram and the old nurses' residence. We were all seeing them. Pat put out a notice and

we had a meeting at her apartment to which Linda came." The job was eventually handed on to second-generation rescuers. Over the years, many rescued cats have found loving Island homes.

Construction on the Island and the recent temporary suspension of the only affordable spay-neuter clinic in the City have made things worse. Formerly hidden cats have fled into new areas like the community gardens, where some have been dismayed to find cat feces in their plots and to see the bird population dwindle. Individual gardeners are exploring mechanical and topical deterrents.

What can be done? Poisoning is a felony in New York State, punishable by two years in prison and/or a \$5,000 fine. (Two City animal groups offer rewards of \$1,000 for information leading to arrest and conviction.) Relocation and formal extermination programs are other options. Rescue specialists say that there are few reputable sanctuaries with room and that locally relocated animals almost always return. Even specialists who consider euthanasia to be a kinder alternative to living outdoors say that extermination doesn't work. Vacuums tend to be filled, often by newly dumped cats.

The most highly recommended approach to the problem is Trap Neuter Return (TNR), a nationally recognized program in which the cats are trapped and neutered, on an individual and mass basis, and then returned to their colonies to die out naturally. Some wily survivors will always escape the first time or two. But TNR has been recognized by the Mayor's Alliance for NYC's Animals ([AnimalAllianceNYC.org](http://AnimalAllianceNYC.org)) and its member rescue groups as the most effective way of cutting back stray cat populations over time. A group of Roosevelt Islanders has been exploring the idea of an Island-wide sweep to be conducted by Island rescuers working with Neighborhood Cats and the ASPCA, which donates its services to groups that can provide a few days' warm shelter for recovering cats. An off-Island rescuer has volunteered the use of her horse trailer.

The work of rescuers has long been fodder for jokes about cat-feeders and solemn talk about ecosystems and random kindness. There is no solution for the problem of homelessness, for humans or for animals. So why bother?

Asked that question, the animal-rights lawyer Jane Hoffman, who directs the Mayor's Alliance, told the following story: A man picking his way along a beach strewn with debris after a violent storm saw another man in the distance, laboriously bending over to pick up stranded starfish, one by one, and fling them back into the sea. "The beach is covered with starfish," the first man said. "You'll never get them all. What does it matter?" The second man looked at the starfish in his hand. "It matters," he said, "to this one."

## State Comptroller Says DHCR Doesn't Do Enough to Protect Tenants in Exits from Mitchell-Lama Program

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The New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal (DHCR) should take additional steps to protect tenants when housing companies "buy out" of the Mitchell-Lama Housing Program, according to an audit released by State Comptroller Alan G. Hevesi.

Auditors found that DHCR is effectively ensuring that housing companies follow buyout requirements, but outlined changes to improve the buyout process.

"For half a century, Mitchell-Lama developments have provided vitally needed affordable housing around New York City and elsewhere in the State. When housing companies buy out of the program, some residents may find it economically impossible to stay in their homes," Hevesi said. "It is reasonable and fair to make sure that residents are informed of the buyouts as early as possible in the process, especially in the New York metropolitan area where affordable housing is hard to find."

The Mitchell-Lama Housing Program was created in 1955 to stimulate the creation of affordable housing in New York State. Under the program, private housing developers agreed to regulate rents and limit profits in exchange for low-interest, long-term loans from the State and real property-tax exemptions from localities. Developers may buy out of the program after 20 years by prepaying the mortgage. As of April, 2004, nearly 35 percent of the 211 State-supervised Mitchell-Lama developments – including 23,465 individual residences – had bought out of the program (60 developments) or had informed DHCR that they intended to do so (13 additional developments).

Housing companies that intend to buy out of the Mitchell-Lama program must inform DHCR of their plans at least one year prior to the effective date of the buyout, but do not have to inform tenants of the plan until DHCR authorizes it. Notification of tenants must take place at least 90 days before the buyout.

DHCR is responsible for 211 Mitchell-Lama developments around the State, including 92 in New York City. The New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (NYCHPD) supervises an additional 126 Mitchell-Lama developments in New York City. Developments occupied before 1974 that buy out of the program are subject to rent-stabilization laws. Those occupied in 1974 or later – as well as developments in localities not subject to rent-stabi-

lization laws – are not, and rents may rise to market rates.

Auditors found that, at the eight Mitchell-Lama developments they studied where buyouts had taken place, an average of eight months elapsed between when the housing company informed DHCR and when tenants received notice of the buyout. Buyouts were completed in an average of 15 months.

"Our auditors found that notification of tenants was well within the required 90-day period, but earlier notification would give tenants more time to evaluate alternative housing options," Hevesi said. "This would be particularly helpful to tenants in New York City – where City-supervised Mitchell-Lama developments already have earlier notification requirements – because vacancy rates for affordable housing are extremely low, and it is more likely that rents would increase to market rates."

NYCHPD requires housing companies to notify tenants

*The security of the Nation is not at the ramparts alone. Security also lies in the value of our free institutions. A cantankerous press, an obstinate press, a ubiquitous press must be suffered by those in authority in order to preserve the even greater values of freedom of expression and the right of the people to know...*

*In the last analysis it is not merely the opinion of the editorial writer, or of the columnist, which is protected by the First Amendment. It is the free flow of information so that the public will be informed about the Government and its actions.*

Judge Murray Gurfein, June, 1971  
as quoted by Floyd Abrams in *Speaking Freely*

of buyouts at the same time the agency is notified – at least one year before the effective date – and auditors suggested that DHCR should consider implementing a similar rule. DHCR officials responded that earlier notification could be premature, since a housing company could withdraw its buyout application, and said that letting tenants know about a buyout plan too early could cause them to vacate their homes before they have complete information.

DHCR is permitted to waive any of the requirements of the buyout process, but auditors noted that housing companies are not required to document the reason for their waiver request, and that DHCR does not always document its response to these waiver requests.

Auditors determined that three of the eight Mitchell-Lama buyouts examined were completed in less than the one year usually required by DHCR. In two of the three instances, the housing companies had requested and received waivers from DHCR. In the third instance, there was no documentation that the housing company had requested or received a waiver.

Housing companies must hold an informational meeting for tenants before any Mitchell-Lama buyout. A DHCR representative is required to attend the meeting and prepare a report on tenant comments made there. However, auditors found this report in the files for only one of the eight buyouts studied.

Under current regulations, DHCR has no jurisdiction over housing companies after buyouts are complete, despite the fact that housing companies must meet certain post-buyout conditions. Representatives from the housing companies in seven of the eight buyouts studied by auditors indicated that agreed-upon repairs to the buildings were or would be made, but none could provide supporting materials or other verification. Auditors recommended the formulation of legal documents to set out agreements regarding post-buyout actions, and DHCR agreed with the recommendation.

DHCR's complete response is included in the audit.

The eight Mitchell-Lama buyouts studied by auditors were: Cosgrove Gardens (Rockland County), Hillside Hospital (Queens), Huguenot Towers I (Westchester), Huguenot Towers II (Westchester), Marble Hall (Westchester), New York Eye & Ear (Manhattan), Phipps Plaza West (Manhattan) and Tower Apartments (Erie).

The audit is available on the Internet at [www.osc.state.ny.us/audits/allaudits/093005/04s5.pdf](http://www.osc.state.ny.us/audits/allaudits/093005/04s5.pdf).

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## RIRA from page 3

meet Representative Maloney and let her know your feelings on issues that are important to each of you, whether on a local level or a broader scale. In the past, Congresswoman Maloney has worked with residents on the public safety RISK task force and on better security in our subway. Two more Roosevelt Island issues that we're hoping can be addressed on a Federal level are getting some grants for the Tram and the seawall. If you have some time, stop by, even if it's just to say hello.

The first Community Emergency Response Training (CERT) session was held at Sportspark last Thursday. While not everyone who signed up actually came, there still was a large enough group for the class to be productive. Representatives of the FDNY conducted the ses-

sion along with trainers from the Office of Emergency Management (OEM). The entire process consists of eleven weeks of training, after which Roosevelt Island will have its own certified CERT group, which will be available to aid first responders in times of emergency. This is just the start of what we all hope will be an increased preparedness on the Island. Concerned residents are stepping up and may be calling on more people to participate in this and other programs that will get us on the road to self-sufficiency if the time ever comes when we need to function on our own in an emergency situation until outside help arrives.

City Councilmember Jessica Lappin was on the Island last Monday night, meeting with our local merchants to address

the problems described in the last issue of *The WIRE*. Several merchants are without leases, others have a short amount of time left and want answers about what's going to happen when their leases expire, and others had concerns about the empty storefronts, wanting to rent them either to expand their current businesses or to open additional stores. Ms. Lappin and our other politicians have expressed their concern for the plight of these merchants, and have already written to RIOC about the situation. By the time you read this, a meeting between RIOC and some of our political representatives should have already taken place at which the politicians will be advocating for better treatment for the merchants. I'll report on the outcome in my next column.

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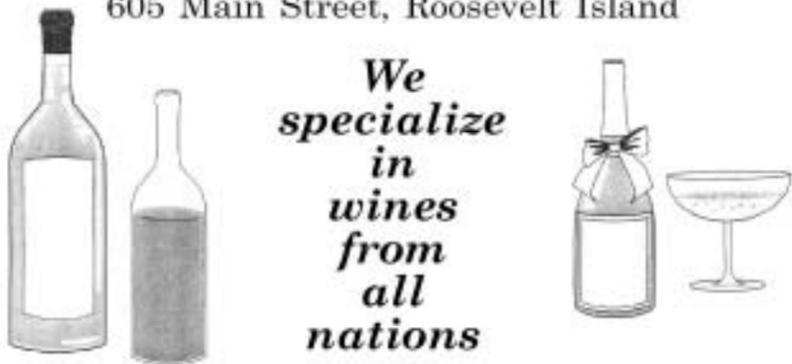
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