

# BROOKLYN *Courier*

SPECIAL  
16-PAGE WRAP

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November 16-22, 2012 SERVING GOWANUS, PARK SLOPE, PROSPECT HEIGHTS, WINDSOR TERRACE, BROOKLYN HEIGHTS, DUMBO, METROTECH, BOERUM HILL, CARROLL GARDENS, COBBLE HILL, RED HOOK, WILLIAMSBURG & GREENPOINT



## NEIGHBORS HELPING NEIGHBORS

Post-Sandy, Brooklynites come together



Photo by Stefano Giovannini



Photo by Stefano Giovannini



Photo by Elizabeth Graham

# Lending a hand

A juggernaut of grass-roots action in Brooklyn and Queens proves neighbors can come together during times of need

BY SHAVANA ABRUZZO

Disasters have historically united close-knit communities more than they have destroyed them, and the storm of the century proved no match for the resolve, neighborliness, and charity of New Yorkers — even in these immensely challenging economic times.

Hurricane Sandy annihilated large swaths of Brooklyn and Queens with crippling storm surges and whopping wind gusts that claimed 18 lives — 11 in Queens, seven in Brooklyn — yielded property damage in the millions, and left thousands of people homeless.

Tens of thousands more were incapacitated by widespread power outages that have yet to be restored fully in some areas.

Sandy battered coastal districts and inlands in both boroughs beyond recognition, including Coney Island, Brighton Beach, Manhattan Beach, Sheephead Bay, DUMBO, and Red Hook in Brooklyn, and the Rockaways, Breezy Point, Belle Harbor, Broad Channel, and Flushing in



Photo by Christina Santucci

neighboring Queens.

Many residents ignored the mayor's order to evacuate as the super storm roared up the Atlantic, but a number regretted their decision after the hurricane left behind a path of devastation.

Hundreds of homes burned to the ground as high winds pushed the flames from one block to the next in Breezy Point, while

raging floods and toppling trees brought down power lines in other parts of the borough.

At least eight people lost their lives in the Rockaways, which remained a dark hinterland nearly two weeks after the storm, with residents struggling to keep warm and find food. Elected officials blasted the tardy responses of the Long Island Power Authority and Con-

solidated Edison, prompting Gov. Cuomo to call for an investigation into the utilities' performance.

The fallout was as excruciating.

A Brooklyn couple walking their dog was crushed by a keeling hardwood. A Queens man was killed instantly when a tree crashed into his home. Uprooted students were sent to other schools. Voters were dis-

(Clockwise from top left) Volunteer Carol McDonald does not know where to put all of the clothing that has been collected at the Blue Star Mother's Hall on Seba Avenue in Gerritsen Beach. The group Occupy Sandy transformed the Church of St. Luke and St. Matthew in Clinton Hill into a supply hub for hurricane victims, but they had to clear the pews before Sunday. Whitestone resident Joseph Prisco carries supplies at a drive at Sullivan's in Bayside.

persed to new polling sites. Cars lined up for gasoline in numbers not seen since the oil crisis of the 1970s.

Yet the most alarming question left in Sandy's merciless wake was, "What happens now?"

Gothamites — an inspiring subspecies with a well-documented reputation for conquering cataclysmic events — responded with expected alacrity and attention to civic duty.

Men, women, and children — the ones we see every day walking along our streets, shopping in our stores, and seated next to us on the bus or train — channeled their own losses and despair into assistance and support for others.

The juggernaut of their grassroots action pierced through the darkness like a life-affirming ray of sunshine, and astounded, humbled, and indebted us here at Community Newspaper Group while we prepared this special section of "Neighbors Helping Neighbors" during one of the worst crises ever to hit these parts.

The desire of both boroughs' residents to reach out and help was as indiscriminately passionate as Sandy's chaotic path — from civic groups like the Madison-Marine-Homcrest Civic Association organizing a Thanksgiving food drive, and Lifebooker donating 100 percent of its proceeds to a





Photo by Steve Mosco

relief fund, to conglomerates like our parent company News Corporation pledging million-dollar donations to help ravaged New Yorkers regain their footing.

Spontaneous goodwill drives by community groups brought relief that the federal government wasn't able to provide.

Residents commandeered trailers to deliver supplies to besieged regions and conducted flashlight vigils to bring their neighbors out of the dark.

Donations also poured into the offices of lawmakers, who fielded a rush of calls from constituents wanting to help.

Civic groups put together dozens of carloads of items for storm victims, and as the pile of goods built up in churches and de facto rescue centers, the call went out for more volunteers to distribute the life-saving essentials — one that was answered in droves.

Junior's Restaurant, airline JetBlue, the Brooklyn Flea, and Rolling Orange Bikes were among the businesses that donated portions of their proceeds to relief or-



Photo by Elizabeth Graham

(Clockwise from top) A chain of volunteers pass boxes of supplies to each other as they set up to help those affected by Hurricane Sandy in Far Rockaway. Rep. Joseph Crowley unloads supplies off a truck with his family at St. Francis De Sales Church in Rockaway. Yoshi Reynolds of Coney Island collects desperately needed perishables from community volunteers Alfred DeSimone and Ismael Torres.

ganizations, while neighborhood groups like the John Malone Community Center in Bergen Beach collected and distributed clothing, blankets, cleaning supplies, toiletries, food, and water.

Dwarf Giraffe Athletic League, based in Whitestone, motivated its network of families and sponsor-

ship organizations to drive truckloads of supplies to the Rockaways.

Brookdale University Hospital and Medical Center opened its doors to patients vacated from local nursing homes, while the Owl's Head Running club coordinated a benefit run to Broad Channel.

Flushing's Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation prepared meals and delivered them to residents in the devastated neighborhoods of Broad Channel and Breezy Point.

The Brooklyn and Queens chambers of commerce also stepped in to create helpful resource guides



Photo by Christina Santucci

with vital information and phone numbers for Sandy-shattered businesses to contact for help with emergency loans, disaster assistance and insurance assessment.

We hope these pages will provide our faithful readers with a glimpse into the Herculean endeavors mounted by generous and spirited

fellow New Yorkers, whose efforts to transform tragedy into triumph have been success stories of the most extraordinary kind.

We are also confident that our reports will make you as proud as we are to be part of a city that shows the world how to come together when calamity strikes home.



# Here's how to help in Brooklyn

Want to help neighbors who are suffering following Hurricane Sandy?

There are plenty of ways to get involved in the cleanup and recovery effort here in Brooklyn.

The city needs volunteers in all of its storm shelters. Most don't have phone numbers, so volunteers may need to show up and find out how they can help:

- Park Slope Armory (361 15th St. between Seventh and Eighth avenues in Park Slope).
  - NYC College of Technology (300 Jay St. between Tillary and Johnson streets in Downtown).
  - Brooklyn Technical High School (29 Ft. Greene Pl. between Dekalb Avenue and Fulton Street in Fort Greene).
  - John Jay High School (237 Seventh Ave. between Fourth and Fifth streets in Park Slope).
  - IS 136 (4004 Fourth Ave. at 40th Street in Sunset Park).
  - PS 249 (18 Marlborough Rd. between Caton and Church avenues in Prospect Park South).
  - IS 187, 1171 (65th St. between 11th and 12th avenues in Dyker Heights).
  - FDR High School (5800 20th Ave. at 58th Street in Midwood).
- A map of city shelter is available at [www.google.org/crisismap/2012-sandy-nyc](http://www.google.org/crisismap/2012-sandy-nyc).
- The New York Blood Center is hosting donation drives —



Volunteers with Red Hook Recovery clear ruined possessions out of a Beard Street warehouse.

Photo by Elizabeth Graham

check daily to find locations at [www.nybloodcenter.org](http://www.nybloodcenter.org).

The Red Hook Initiative is distributing hot meals and supplies to residents of the Red Hook Houses, who remain without power.

To assist those in need, drop off flashlights, batteries, soap, paper towels, and non-perishable food at the group's headquarters (767 Hicks St. between Huntington and W. Ninth streets in Red Hook), or call (718) 858-6782.

The Greenpoint Soup Kitchen (136 Milton St. between Manhattan Avenue and Franklin Street in Greenpoint) is looking for volunteers and donations.

NYCares is matching volun-

teers with service providers based on participants' skills and location. Potential volunteers should fill out the form at [newyorkcares.org/volunteer/disaster](http://newyorkcares.org/volunteer/disaster).

The Children's Movement for Creative Education is looking for art therapists to visit children in family shelters.

Contact Elana Haviv at (347) 846-0600 or [elana@childrensmovement.org](mailto:elana@childrensmovement.org).

PS 84 Jose de Diego School (250 Berry St. between Grand and S. First streets in Williamsburg) is collecting school supplies, food, and household items for the families of children who attend PS 317 in Far Rockaway. Donations can be made Monday-Friday from 7 am-6 pm.

Congregation Beth Elohim (274 Garfield Pl. at Eighth Avenue in Park Slope) is looking for volunteers and food donation for Red Hook. E-mail [info@cbebk.org](mailto:info@cbebk.org).

The New York City Coalition Against Hunger is looking for both volunteers and donations. See what kind of help they need at [www.facebook.com/NYCCAH](http://www.facebook.com/NYCCAH).

Occupy Sandy, the storm relief offshoot of Occupy Wall Street, is continuing its recovery efforts across the city.

Check [www.interoccupy.net/occupysandy](http://www.interoccupy.net/occupysandy) to see where they need help the most.

— *Danielle Furfaro*

# Donate items or service to these Queens groups

**Catholic Charities of Brooklyn and Queens**  
(718) 722-6001

Drop off goods at to these food pantry locations:

**St. Mary Star of the Sea Parish**  
1920 New Haven Ave.  
Far Rockaway

**St. Helen's Church**  
157-10 83rd St.  
Howard Beach

**St. Francis DeSales Church**  
129-16 Rockaway Beach Blvd.  
Belle Harbor

**Most needed items:** Toiletries, winter gloves and hats, thermal wear, new socks and underwear. Apparel will not be accepted at this time. Visit [ccbq.org](http://ccbq.org) for more information.

**Queens Chamber of Commerce**

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Disaster assistance resources available at [queenschamber.org](http://queenschamber.org).

**Visit NYCService.org for volunteer options:**

- Volunteer to cleanup Queens parks
- Pitch in on Queens disaster relief projects through New York Cares
- Volunteer at a soup kitchen and food pantry
- Give blood

**St. Virgilius Church**

Seeking strong, able-bodied men and women to strip watersoaked carpets and damaged furniture. 16 Noel Rd., Far Rockaway  
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**Flushing Town Hall**

137-35 Northern Blvd.  
Flushing  
Accepting essential toiletries, over-the-counter medicines, batteries, work gloves, cleaning supplies. No clothes.  
Donors will receive two tickets per person to any featured events.

**Local Supply Dropoffs**

The Queens Borough President's Office has announced that all fire departments, police precincts, Staples stores and Modell's now serve as supply drop points.



People visit a Federal Emergency Management Agency tent in Rockaway Beach. The city opened a one-stop restoration center in Far Rockaway and plans to open another in Breezy Point. Photo by William Thomas

# Here's how to apply for aid, refunds

You don't have to suffer alone.

City, state, and federal agencies as well as utilities are offering assistance to Hurricane Sandy victims who lost homes, suffered property damage, and remain without power as a result of the storm. Here's a sampling of the help you can receive.

•Residents who sustained property damage in Hurricane Sandy can apply for funds from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

To request federal aid, register at [disasterassistance.gov](http://disasterassistance.gov) or call (800) 621-3362. The agency asks that applicants have their address, insurance information, and Social Security

number ready.

After applying for help, assessors will visit damaged properties and survey the conditions. The agency won't give a timeline for how long residents must wait before receiving funds — it could range from a week to more than a year, officials said.

•The Red Cross is continuing to hand out emergency relief supplies to Hurricane Sandy victims throughout the five boroughs. Volunteers are also acting as a referral service, so victims can be connected to government agencies that can give them the most help. For more information one can call (877) 733-2767 or visit [nyredcross.org](http://nyredcross.org).

•The federal Small Busi-

ness Administration is offering merchants hit hard by Hurricane Sandy low-interest disaster loans of up to \$2 million to repair and replace damaged property and inventory. To apply, you can call (800) 659-2955 or visit [sba.gov](http://sba.gov).

•The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development has granted a 90-day moratorium on foreclosures and forbearances on Federal Housing Administration-insured home mortgages — with no paperwork required.

•Con Edison is offering refunds of up to \$450 for food spoiled during power outages that lasted more than 12 hours over a 24-hour period. Visit [coned.com](http://coned.com) to file a claim.

•Although the utility says gas has been fully restored to its Brooklyn and Queens customers, National Grid is continuing with its Emergency Residential Customer Assistance program to assist customers re-establish their natural gas service. For more information, call (718) 643-4050.

•Hurricane Sandy victims are entitled to receive credit for each day they did not have Cablevision's Optimum service as a result of the storm — even when your home had no power. Visit [optimum.net/credit](http://optimum.net/credit) to notify the company of the dates you didn't have service to get the credit added to your account.

— *Danielle Furfaro and Tom Tracy*



# MCU Stands with Our Valued Members

In the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, many of our members were severely impacted and are in need of emergency assistance.

**MCU's Member Assistance Program** is here to help members access emergency funds to assist them with their immediate recovery needs.

The following emergency credit solutions are available to eligible\* MCU members:

**Replacement Auto Loan** - Call 1-888-4MCU-AUTO if your car was damaged during the storm and you have suffered a total loss.

**Emergency Personal Loan** - Call 1-800-LOAN-MCU to apply for **\$1,500** to help cover emergency expenses. Higher loan amounts are available upon request.

**Emergency Credit Line Increase** - Call 1-800-481-7338 to receive an **instant \$500** credit line increase on your MCU VISA® Card.\*\*

\*Emergency credit solutions are subject to evaluation of individual member creditworthiness.

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# Occupy printers now pamphleteers

BY ELI ROSENBERG

When the power goes out, there's nothing more powerful than the printed word.

A group of Occupy Wall Street-affiliated activists in Gowanus became publishers after Hurricane Sandy left many New Yorkers without power, internet access, TV, or phone service.

"The word we were hearing from people is that there was real shortage of information because of the power situation," said Jesse Goldstein, a founder of the print and poster collective Occuprint. "There was a need for analog information to be disseminated for those people."

The collective — which previously made waves by publishing an all-poster edition of a mock newspaper dubbed the "Occupied Wall Street Journal" and creating much of the poster art for the social movement that swept the country in 2011 — sprung into action last Tuesday, producing more than 6,000 pamphlets filled with the vital information necessary for victims of storms like Sandy.

The 12-page bulletin included sections on how to apply for disaster-related unemployment benefits, how to clean floodwater, how to work with the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and how to stay warm — "heat up raw oats or rice in a pot (no water!) and then put them into a sock."

But the pamphlet, like any publication worth its salt, also had lighter material as well, such as a word search, sudoku, and a maze with Mayor Bloomberg on one side and the Rockaways on the other titled "Help Mayor Bloomberg Find the Rockaways."

Goldstein said the group, facing a tight deadline, originally thought they'd merely repurpose government information — but the content fell short of



Justin Wedes and Tess Cohen, both Occupy Sandy organizers, hold a copy of the information pamphlet created by Occuprint to help Hurricane Sandy victims.

Photo by Elizabeth Graham

their editorial standards.

"We originally thought we should just republish a FEMA booklet, but we looked at what they had and we realized that we had to make something ourselves that was better," he said.

Goldstein and partner Liz Knafo got to work on the content on Tuesday with the help of a few other Occuprinters, printed the pamphlet that evening, and picked it up early Wednesday from their printer in Queens, which charged them only for materials in the spirit of neighbors helping neighbors.

"It was the quickest thing we've ever made," said Goldstein.

Occupiers working out of the movement's Sunset Park hub at St. Jacobi Church have been distributing the bulletin in Coney Island and the Rockaways since then — and another print run of 6,000 is on the way.

And Occuprint was able to fund the effort due to some money left over from its Occupy Wall Street-related efforts.

"We've been sitting waiting to participate again when there was something again," said Goldstein. "This is what's happening in our city. The relief effort seemed like a natural thing for us to plug back in to."



## Lending a hand – and a spoon!

Gerritsen Beach resident Margaret McDonald brings some hearty potatoes to neighbors without power congregating at Blue Star Mother's Hall on Seba Avenue.

Photo by Stefano Giovannini

# Gyro shop finds time for charity

BY COLIN MIXSON

Talk about some chicken soup for the soul!

Anatolian Gyro — a Sheepshead Bay Road staple — is still bouncing back from Hurricane Sandy, but workers now have a new mission: feeding hungry Gerritsen Beach residents left devastated following the Oct. 28 super storm.

Ever since Hurricane Sandy left the borough, workers have joined the growing group of neighbors helping neighbors by trucking gallons of hot lentil and chicken soup and fresh bread to the nearby community — which Anatolian Gyro owner Metin Turan has adopted.

"One hand washes the other, and both hands wash the face," said Turan. "Many of these people are my clients. They need help and I want to give some-



Get it while it's hot! Anatolian Gyro owner Metin Turan serves up hot soup on the house in front of the Blue Star Mother's Hall on Nov. 9.

Photo by Steve Solomonson

thing back."

Turan decided to help out after watching footage of a Federal Emergency

Management Agency meeting at Resurrection Church on Gerritsen Avenue, where more than

1,000 teary-eyed residents turned out to hear what the government can do to help them. The footage showed residents sleeping in buses just to keep warm.

"I'm used to seeing this on TV, not in reality," Turan said. "I've been here 25 years and I've never seen anything like this."

Anatolian Gyro was hardly spared from Sandy's wrath: Turan suffered about \$25,000 worth of property damage.

"We had three feet of water on the ground floor, and the basement was filled," Turan explained. "It took 12 people three days to get everything cleaned up."

The restaurant lost power for the second time during last week's nor'easter — forcing Turan and his employees to serve lamb and chicken gyros by candlelight, Turan said.



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# Feeding Sandy victims

## Red Hook Vendors gather to give out warm meals

BY NATALIE MUSUMECI

The *chalupas* and *tamales* are on us!

Red Hook's beloved food vendors were back on their home turf dishing out more than 1,000 complimentary hot meals on Saturday to residents in one of the neighborhoods hardest hit by Hurricane Sandy — and hungry Hookers lined up to get their free fill.

"It means a whole lot to come out and get a hot meal," Blee George, who has been without heat and power since the storm, said as she took a bite of a chicken *pupusa*, a traditional Salvadorian dish from the renowned Solber Pupusas truck. "It's a blessing."

And one that took an on-line community of neighbors helping neighbors to make happen.

Ten Red Hook food trucks were able to raise more than \$5,000 through an online campaign so they could feed the storm-ravaged residents.

Cesar Fuentes, the founder of the Red Hook Food Vendors organization, said that donations ranging from \$5 to \$500 rolled in from do-gooders



Hard-hit Red Hook residents (from left) Natalie Wilson, Monsey Rodriguez, Amalia Cordoba, and Carolyn Fortune were grateful to indulge in a complimentary warm meal from the Red Hook Food Vendors.

Photo by Elizabeth Graham

all over the country — and the globe.

"Every \$5 feeds a person," he said. "It's amazing that we were able to provide this food, which actually comes from the many people who cared."

Residents whose lives were uprooted by Hurricane Sandy had their spirits lifted as they indulged in a warm, truck-cooked meal from one of the vendors sta-

tioned at the Red Hook ball fields on Bay Street.

"It's encouraging to see the community helping out," said Monsey Rodriguez, who was displaced after the storm-surge inundated her Van Brunt Street home. "I'm grateful that I'm still alive and for all the help that everybody has been giving us."

Fuentes added that he even delivered dozens of

trays to several community drop-off centers like the Red Hook Initiative and Calvary Baptist Church to ensure that residents who hadn't got word of the free food wouldn't go hungry.

"We just wanted to make sure that all the food we brought was just distributed and enjoyed at someone's house or apartment that has no light," said Fuentes.

# Something Greek does something good

BY WILL BREDDERMAN

These Greeks are bearing gifts no one could be wary of.

The Mitilineos family — the family behind Hellenic Third Avenue hot spot Something Greek in Bay Ridge — has been trucking tasty Mediterranean treats across the Narrows to Hurricane Sandy-ravaged Staten Island ever since the storm hit.

Katerina Mitilineos said the idea to lend a hand — or a plate — to the recovery effort came from her mother, Pauline, upon witnessing the extent of the devastation that befell the neigh-

boring borough.

"A lot of people are hurt and we're trying to help," said Mitilineos, who lives on the Rock in mostly unscathed Bay Terrace with her mother and four brothers. "We've seen how bad it is. Staten Island was probably hardest hit, and nobody's gone down there, not the Federal Emergency Management Agency, not the Red Cross, and people there are hungry and cold."

But in spite of the destruction of homes and lives, the atmosphere at cleanups where Something Greek has visited — includ-



Tommy Mitilineos of Something Greek in Bay Ridge has been bringing food to Hurricane Sandy victims on Staten Island for weeks.

Photo by Stefano Giovannini

ing a recent one in New Dorp Beach sponsored by Assemblywoman Nicole Malliotakis (R-Bay Ridge) — have been surprisingly hopeful and upbeat.

"They're so friendly down there. You'd think they'd be in shock, but people are laughing," Mitilineos said. "They're all coming together."

Mitilineos knows from personal experience how cooking can bring comfort in difficult times: she says her family opened Something Greek near 76th Street in 2010 after her father passed away.



Books like these at powerHouse in DUMBO got soaked.

Community Newspaper Group / Eli Rosenberg

# Cooperative lit

## Bookstore helps its rival after Sandy damages shop and novels

BY ELI ROSENBERG

Hurricane Sandy brought everyone in the borough together — and that includes business rivals.

When the proprietors of Greenlight Bookstore in Fort Greene found out that the storm flooded nearby powerHouseBooks in DUMBO, ruining merchandise and shop infrastructure, they sprung into action.

"When I heard about their news I reached out to see if there was anything we could do to help," said Greenlight owner Rebecca Fitting, who lent the inundated shop — which is a competitor in Brooklyn's tight literary market — enough electronics to get the storm-damaged register system back up and running.

Fitting said her Fulton Street bookstore wasn't using the loaned equipment — which includes a credit card swiper, a bar code scanner, and a receipt printer from Greenlight's kiosk at the Brooklyn Academy of Music — but she claims she would have handed over the goods either way.

"If we watched our business, that we built from scratch, get beat up like that, I would hope someone would do the

same for us," she said. "Bookstores work best when they're friends, not competitors."

And it was not the only good deeds the small store has done in the wake of the storm.

After a week of booming business after the hurricane, Fitting and co-owner Jessica Stockton-Bagnulo donated 10 percent of sales — \$4,000 — to two funds addressing the recovery in Brooklyn: Occupy Sandy and the Brooklyn Recovery Fund.

The folks behind powerHouse, which sustained tens of thousands of dollars of damage after 28 inches of floodwater ripped through the store, said that the equipment donations were integral to their speedy reopening last Saturday.

"It saved us a lot of time and made it so we could continue to conduct inventory," said powerHouse owner Daniel Power.

The owners of Greenlight said they believe it's important to help local businesses in addition to giving support to individuals hit by the storm.

"Small businesses are owned by people," Fitting said. "Helping small businesses helps those people."



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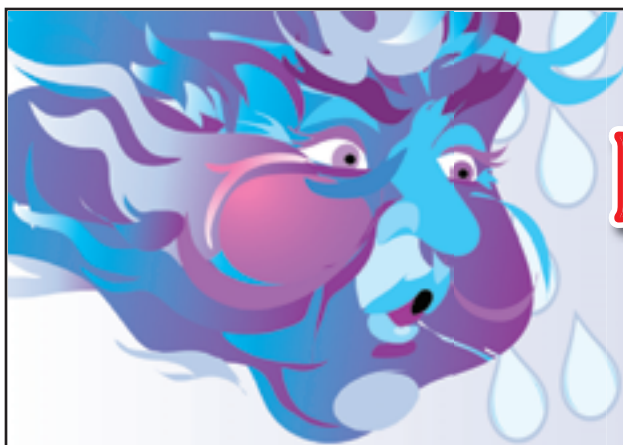


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(From left) Anne Welling, Charlie Gonzalez, his dog Jefe, and Kae Burke take the Green Bus to help cleanup operations around New York City. Photo by Elizabeth Graham

## Get on the magic, eco-friendly bus!

Gas rare, so green machine chips in

BY DANIELLE FURFARO

The Green Bus was tailor-made for Hurricane Sandy — and the fuel strapped borough it left in its wake.

With residents pining for a drop of petrol, Charlie Gonzalez's "mobile center for conscious living" — with its converted engine that can run on both diesel gas and cooking oil — became the best way to get Sandy relief volunteers around the city.

"With the gas shortage, nobody could get around," he said. "But the Green Bus runs off discarded cooking oil, and there's so much of it, it's ridiculous."

Gonzalez partnered with the House of Yes, a performance space in Bushwick. In the first week after the hurricane, he picked up a bus load of volunteers and took them to the hardest hit areas.

Since then, he's run a volunteer tour that leaves from the House of Yes every Friday.

"I've got other things going on full-time, so I have to balance," said Gonzalez. "But I want to take volunteers out as often as possible."

So far, Gonzalez has led cleanups in Red Hook, Coney Island, the Rockaways, and Staten Island.

He claims he never thought he would use the Green Bus for relief runs when he purchased it three years ago with the intention of running tours to music festivals and retreats — but he admits it's not a big leap from its initial purpose.

"It's meant to be a bridge to create sustainable infrastructures," said Gonzalez, who lives in Williamsburg. "We've lost our ability to interact with others."



## Boardwalk sweeper

Tusi Sesera helps push wayward sand dunes off the iconic Coney Island Boardwalk.

Photo by Arthur De Gaeta

## Construction crew fights to bring Coney Island businesses back

BY WILL BREDDERMAN

Surf Avenue won't remain a washed-up disaster zone for long — not if Alberto Rodriguez has anything to say about it.

The display builder from Surf Avenue's Je T'aime Flower Studio and his trusty crew of furniture movers and demolition workers have taken it upon themselves to clean out water-damaged businesses along the amusement district's main drag — free of cost.

"For me, the best part is to see people's faces and the end of the day — to see people happy," Rodriguez said.

Rodriguez had been creating intricate sets for Je T'aime flower arrangements for two months when Hurricane Sandy hit the People's Playground. The day after the storm of the century passed, Rodriguez showed up at the florist shop and was astounded at what he saw: water had destroyed most of the store's interior,



Contractor Alberto Rodriguez assembled friends, family, and local residents to help Surf Avenue businesses clean out the damaged buildings. Photo by Elizabeth Graham

and looters had come and picked off his tools.

Rodriguez quickly enlisted his brother and nephews to help him clean up the mess — but quickly realized Je T'aime wasn't the only business in desperate need of help.

"People in the neighborhood started asking, 'Hey,

can you help us out too?' And I said, 'Yeah, sure.'" Rodriguez remembered. "We're all one family here, one community."

In the next few days, Rodriguez and his eight-man team — which now included several Coney Island residents — hauled saturated mattresses and water-

stained shelves out of Lago Furniture, as well as Home Decor down the block from Je T'aime. They also gutted the interior of the children's party space Chill.

"We cleaned out Lago Furniture in seven hours, the girl there almost started crying," said Rodriguez.

Word quickly spread and Rodriguez took on more and more jobs — going as far as Gambrinus Restaurant at the corner of Ocean Parkway and Brighton Beach Avenue to clean out of the basement and repair the eatery's damaged plumbing and electrical work.

Despite the back-breaking work, Rodriguez was buoyed by the fact that he was helping neighborhood businesses dig out the hole Sandy left them in.

"This is a disaster. We're not looking for money, we need to get the neighborhood back together," said Rodriguez. "Sandy didn't bring us down. We're going to come back."

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## Registering for victims

### Occupy's 'wedding registry' floods church with supplies

BY ELI ROSENBERG

A group of volunteers has collected something old, something new, something borrowed, and something blue for Hurricane Sandy victims — by setting up an online wedding registry.

Three “Occupy Sandy” operatives working out of a Clinton Hill church have amassed 25,000 items worth more than \$650,000, and are distributing them in the Sandy-ravaged Rockaways and Coney Island — all thanks to an online hub they set up as an Amazon wedding registry on Nov. 3.

“We kind of tapped into this well of human empathy all over the country,” said John Heggstuen, 25, who moved to Crown Heights from Minneapolis three days before Hurricane Sandy hit.

Heggstuen, Alex Nordenson, and Katherine Dolan hatched Occupy Sandy’s soon-to-be-famous wedding registry and almost immediately began accepting deliveries to the church’s basement.

By the first few days of the next week, it was clear they were going to need some more space.



“I think it was when the four UPS trucks pulled up at the same time,” said Rev. Chris Ballard of the Church of St. Luke and St. Matthew on where the wears were being stored.

The delivery trucks are routinely showing up full, five a day.

On a recent visit, church’s pews had been transformed into supermarket aisles of vital gear — batteries, blan-

kets, diapers, toothpaste — all organized by type.

“Within two days we had such a response it just expanded,” said Rev. Michael Sniffen, the church’s rector. “It was five pews, then 10 pews, then 20. And then the entire church!”

Stocks are dished out to Occupy coordinators and volunteers in affected areas in the Rockaways, Coney Island and Red Hook, where a ground team has been tracking resident-specific needs.

And as more things become needed, the registry is updated.

To help out, the United Parcel Service had donated the services of its trucks and drivers to haul loads out to the the Rockaways last weekend, Heggstuen said.

The church’s leaders said they were happy to have their house of god stuffed to the brim with volunteers and relief items, but the pews must be clear on Sundays.

“This is our worship,” said Ballard. “There was no hesitation on our part. The volunteers here are really amazing and have been really accommodating.”

To purchase goods



(Clockwise from top left) Volunteers for Occupy Sandy move relief supplies — purchased by do-gooders all over the world through an Amazon.com wedding registry — into the Church of St. Luke and St. Matthew in Clinton Hill. Laurent Gabriel of Brownsville organizes supplies. The group transformed the church into a hub for supplies for hurricane victims — but they had to clear the pews before Sunday. Nicolette Carothers of Manhattan organizes supplies.

Photos by Elizabeth Graham

for the group’s relief efforts, visit [www.amazon.com/gp/registry/wedding/32TAA123PJR42/ref=cm\\_wed\\_vv\\_page\\_2?ie=UTF8&page=2&sort=stats](http://www.amazon.com/gp/registry/wedding/32TAA123PJR42/ref=cm_wed_vv_page_2?ie=UTF8&page=2&sort=stats).

Or, volunteer at the Church of St. Luke and St. Matthew [520 Clinton Ave. between Fulton Street and Atlantic Avenue in Clinton Hill (718) 638-0686, [www.interoccupy.net/](http://www.interoccupy.net/)].



# After Hurricane Sandy

## Tips on filing home insurance claims after a disaster

Insurers will be dealing with a crush of claims in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, which inflicted billions of dollars in damages. Once homeowners can assess the extent of their personal losses, many will have to brace for another ordeal: navigating the insurance claims process.

Preparation and planning well before a storm arrives can help homeowners avoid potential pitfalls. But how they handle the details when it comes time to file can help ensure receiving an adequate payout. Here are five tips to weather the claims process:

### Understand the scope of your coverage

Knowing what your insurance policy covers and what it doesn't is essential to getting through the claims process quicker.

You don't want to have to rely only on what claims adjusters tell you, especially as they go through the process of evaluating how much of a payout you're going to get.

When it comes to hurricanes and other major weather-related damage, it's important to remember that standard homeowners' insurance does not cover flood damage. And if you haven't purchased that separately, you will not be able to get reimbursed for dam-



Richie Bennick of Gerritsen Beach says he "lost everything" in Hurricane Sandy. When this paper asked him for his cellphone number, he replied with tears in his eyes, "I lost that, too."

Photo by Steve Solomonson

ages caused by flooding.

Flood damage is defined as water rising from the ground up, unlike, say, if you have a hole in your roof and rain is spilling in.

In addition, New York, New Jersey, Rhode Island, and 15 other states let insurers include deductibles in their homeowners' insurance policies in the event of a hurricane.

Such deductibles vary from one to five percent of the insured value of the home. But each state makes its own determination on

whether a storm will trigger those deductibles, so check with your state department of insurance to see if that will be a factor in your coverage. You can find links to New York's insurance department at [www.naic.org/state\\_web\\_map.htm](http://www.naic.org/state_web_map.htm).

### Note damage and make short-term repairs

After the storm, once it's safe to move about, it's important to take photos of the damage right away. Comparing these photos to the ones taken before the

storm can be used to establish the value of items that are damaged or destroyed.

If holes have been torn in your roof or windows are broken, cover them quickly to prevent further damage, but don't make any permanent repairs. Take photos or video of the damage before you start working.

And don't throw out damaged furniture or other expensive items until an adjuster has seen them.

### Contact your insurer right away

Call your insurer

quickly and get the claims process rolling, regardless of how much damage your home has sustained.

You can contact your insurance agent for information on how to file a claim. Or, if the agent can't be reached, contact the company directly via the Internet or phone.

Even if you've been evacuated and have yet to return to your home, but it's in an area that may be flooded or known to have been damaged in the storm, call your insurer and tell them, says Jeanne Salvatore, a spokeswoman for the Insurance Information Institute.

Doing so can help establish that you have to spend time in a hotel, something you may be able to get reimbursed for later.

Also, note the name and number of everyone you speak with during the claims process. That can help clear up any confusion that may arise along the way.

### Be prepared to negotiate

Once insurance adjusters look over the damage, they will determine the size of your payout.

But if that figure seems too low, there are ways to voice your disagreement and try to work out a better settlement.

You'll want to ask the adjuster to show you the contract language and justify the proposed amount.

If you're still dissatisfied, get a second or even third opinion on the cost of repairs from independent contractors.

You can use that to ar-

gue for a bigger payout.

Ideally, you can work it out with the adjuster, but if not, you can try to make your case with someone at the company's regional or national office.

"You need to be ready for a fight and be tough working with your insurance agent," says Jeff Blyskal, senior editor at Consumer Reports.

Another option to help bolster your case for a better settlement is to hire a public insurance adjuster. They are experts on the insurance claims process and can assess the damage to a home and help build the case on behalf of the homeowner.

The insurance industry argues that public adjusters charge homeowners for services that homeowners can do themselves. Public adjusters typically charge 10 percent of the settlement amount.

Credited adjusters can be found at the National Association of Public Insurance Adjusters' website, [www.napia.com](http://www.napia.com).

### Watch out for scam artists

Many homeowners want to immediately get started on repairing the damage to their properties. This makes them targets by unscrupulous contractors looking to overcharge for repairs.

"Con artists will demand large cash deposits, or push you to sign a contract that might not be in your best interest," Salvatore says. "Don't be rushed into anything."

— Associated Press

## Tap House donates funds from beer sales

BY DANIELLE FURFARO

Make that one for my baby, and one for the hurricane victims!

The Brooklyn Tap House in Bedford-Stuyvesant is offering its customers a post-Sandy special that's bound to make beer lovers who want to make a difference buy a round for the house: for every beer sold, the owner will donate \$1 to the Red Cross.

"The other manager and myself wanted to help, but we are here all the time, so we started thinking about how we could help from where we are," said Brooklyn Tap House manager Stephanie Sabelli. "It turned out that the owners felt the same way."

The bar started collecting donations three days after the storm, and have so far raised more than \$2,500,

turning brew-lovers into philanthropists in the process.

"People come in here really excited," said Sabelli. "And when the transportation was down and they couldn't go anywhere, they were more than happy to come in and help out."

But you don't have to be a drinker to get in on the giving.

The Tap House also has

an ongoing food drive, and has collected hundreds of cans of food and delivered them to donation centers across the borough.

"It's great to see people being so generous," Sabelli said.

*Brooklyn Tap House* [590 Myrtle Ave. between Taaffe Place and Classon Avenue in Bedford-Stuyvesant, (917) 202-1801, [www.brooklyntaphouse.com](http://www.brooklyntaphouse.com)].



Every beer you buy at the Brooklyn Tap House results in a one dollar donation to the Red Cross.

Photo by Bess Adler



## Pulling together disaster relief poses challenge

BY JOE ANUTA

The relief effort organized by the government is carried out by a vast network of organizations where well-intentioned neighborhood groups often prove hard to incorporate and sometimes hamper relief efforts.

Disaster relief is a complicated beast, according to John Berglund, who manages disaster relief efforts for The Salvation Army in New York and has experience running operations all over the world.

"Every disaster is different. They are extremely organic, which is part of the challenge," he said.

In New York City, the mayor's office and the city Office of Emergency Management take a lead role on how federal aid is used.

In addition, local officials have been helping direct where aid is needed,



A New York Cares volunteer hands off water to a table manned by a member of the National Guard outside the Hammel Houses.

Photo by Christina Santucci

while the American Red Cross and The Salvation Army work closely with all levels of government, including the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

But the two nonprofits also have another network to draw from.

They currently preside over a coalition known as the New York City Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster, which is comprised of organizations with special skills.

For instance, when a shelter in Manhattan's Chinatown was in need of food, Berglund called on the Taiwan Buddhist Tsu Chi Foundation, whose regional headquarters is in Flushing, to deliver hot meals, one of its specialties.

Conversely, they can call on the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which specializes in warehousing and storage.

ing and storage.

But one aspect of relief that can never be properly planned for is the grassroots efforts of other residents.

Some groups will collect clothing or food and either try to distribute it to affected residents themselves or will drop it off at a sorting center, which can sometimes put an extra burden on volunteer workers, especially if the items are not needed.

"In some ways, they are actually hurting the process, and in some cases they could even be delaying the delivery of aid," said Berglund.

He is aware that most of the donations are well-intentioned, but he would rather have donors give cash to fund the organized effort.

But elected officials like Councilman Eric Ulrich

(R-Ozone Park) blasted the Red Cross for its slow response to his district.

And state Assemblyman Phil Goldfeder (D-Ozone Park) and U.S. Rep. Gregory Meeks (D-Jamaica) complained that the city was not well organized in delivering resources to the coastal neighborhood.

In some cases, outside groups are forming effective chains of their own to pick up the perceived government slack. Occupy Wall Street has set up a distribution system of its own, called Occupy Sandy, using a network of social media and a vast organizing prowess to deliver aid to areas where the city, state and FEMA have been slow to respond.

Reach reporter Joe Anuta by e-mail at [januta@cnglocal.com](mailto:januta@cnglocal.com) or by phone at (718) 260-4566.

## Far Rockaway residents find help and hope after storm

BY STEVE MOSCO

The hardship rises when the sun goes down in Far Rockaway.

"It gets cold, real cold," said Latesha Williams, as she dug through rows of donated winter coats in the parking lot of the Thrift Way strip mall, at 20-52 Mott Ave. "The floor feels like ice when the heat's not working. It gets so cold it's all you think about."

Williams' house in the seaside community was one of many still without power Saturday, when hundreds of residents lined up to browse through all sorts of donated items as young and energetic volunteers guided them through a maze of wares. Powerless in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, residents filled bags with paper towels, cleaning products, bathroom items, baby products, canned goods, children's toys and clothes.

The event was organized by Reshma Saujani, the deputy advocate for Special Initiatives at the city public advocate office and executive director of the Fund for Public Advocacy, in conjunction

with We Care NYC, a city agency that helps people on public assistance. Donations came from New York Tech Meetup, I Love My LIFE, Flavorpill, Pencils of Promise and other nonprofit organizations, small businesses and advocates in the city.

"We've been spending a lot of time here in Far Rockaway checking on residents," said Saujani, who handed out sandwiches with singer John Legend. "It's been close to two weeks since a lot of these people had power — all that time with no heat and no hot food — so we are here to give them what they need."

Aside from volunteer-donated household items and clothes, food trucks provided hot meals to the storm-weary residents. City Councilman James Sanders (D-Laurelton), along with U.S. Rep. Gregory Meeks (D-Jamaica) and Councilmen Ruben Wills (D-Jamaica) and Leroy Comrie (D-St. Albans), listened to the plight of the people while dishing donated food.

"Far Rockaway caught hell in the hurricane, but what we gained from this is a new appreciation



Singer John Legend (second from left) hands out sandwiches with City Councilman James Sanders and the Queens Borough Chamber of Commerce executive director in Far Rockaway.

Photo by Steve Mosco

for being alive," said Sanders. "And we are seeing the American people pouring their hearts out to our community."

Those visiting the community also expressed concern for business in Far Rockaway, with Jack

Friedman, executive director of the Queens Borough Chamber of Commerce, advocating for business improvement following the storm.

"Some businesses may never reopen following the storm and

we might have to think about starting over and supporting the future of the neighborhood," he said. "We want this to be a viable area for business."

Sandy's sting is seen throughout the Far Rockaway neighborhood in shuttered businesses and debris-cluttered sidewalks. Streetlights on Mott Avenue remained dark as drivers cautiously navigated busy intersections manned by dedicated police officers.

But despite the daily challenges they have grown accustomed to dealing with, residents embraced the opportunity to stock up on supplies, fill their bellies with grub and dance with their neighbors in defiance of Sandy's shadow.

"This is the best I've felt since the storm," said Devon Ridgley, who went from resident in need to impromptu volunteer. "It's good to see so many smiling faces under a bright sun and blue sky."

Reach reporter Steve Mosco by e-mail at [smosco@cnglocal.com](mailto:smosco@cnglocal.com) or by phone at (718) 260-4546.



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