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PAGE 11

NEW  
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# BROOKLYN Weekly

May 3, 2015

Your Neighborhood - Your News®

CNG

## Cops ticket cyclists on cellphones

BY NOAH HUROWITZ

Police in Park Slope lead the city in issuing tickets for breaking a law that might not exist.

Officers in the 78th Precinct wrote 151 tickets to cyclists for cellphone use in 2014, according to data released in response to a Freedom of Information request by The Brooklyn Courier, despite the fact that New York State's phone-ban law only applies to motor vehicles. Citing cyclists for an unsafe practice that is nonetheless legal puts an unfair and unlawful burden on them, according to a pro-bike lawyer.

"It means that hundreds of people are paying money they can ill afford," said Steve Vaccaro, a lawyer who frequently lit-

Continued on page 10



**SCHOOL OF HARD KNOXVILLE:** See dude-bro man-children perform dangerous stunts in three dimensions when the Brooklyn Academy of Music screens "Jackass 3D."

Paramount Pictures / Photofest

## OFF THE WALL

### BAM holds 3-D film fest

BY DANIELLE FURFARO

Talk about being out of your depth!

A Gowanus filmmaker will show off the first three-dimensional movie he ever made on May 16 as a part of an upcoming 3-D movie series at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. The director said he had no idea what he was doing when he made the short back in 2002 — but somehow it all

came together.

"I made it on a lark without any training," said Ben Coonley, who now teaches a course on 3-D film at Bard College. "I showed it to a couple dozen people in a parking lot, and now it will play for hundreds."

Coonley made his movie, "3-D Trick Pony," as part of a series of films where he used a talking

Continued on page 6

## Speed-cam shift

BY VANESSA OGLE

A controversial Sheepshead Bay speed camera that earned the city more than \$2.4 million in six months last year is being relocated, according to an elected official who called its lucrative location unfair.

The moneymaking speed camera at the Belt

Parkway exit ramp on Shore Parkway near a fenced-off location of Abraham Lincoln High School issued nearly 50,000 tickets to drivers between September and December of 2014 as part of Mayor DeBlasio's Vision Zero plan to eliminate traffic fatalities,

Continued on page 4



Photo by Stefano Giovannini

**SPEED IT UP:** Seven more L trains will run between 10:30 am and 2 pm on weekdays.

## MTA upping service on L line

BY DANIELLE FURFARO

It is throwing riders a line.

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority will add more trains to the L, M, and 2 lines starting in December, amidst surging ridership numbers. Straphangers say the news offers some light at the end of the tunnel, es-

pecially during the current round of weekend and overnight L train closures.

"It is clear that ridership statistics are at an all-time high, and the MTA needs to step up and add more trains so that people can get on trains when they need to and are not waiting on crowded platforms,"

said Nick Sifuentes, deputy director of transit advocacy group Riders Alliance. "We need all of this that we can get and they need the capital funding to do it."

The authority will add seven more weekday round-trip services on the L line between 10:30 am and 2 pm.

Continued on page 6



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and staff of York College/CUNY:



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**HOME SWEET HOME:** Nancy Mure, a health-conscious Bergen Beach resident, opened a farmer's market in her home to help her neighbors who want to live a healthier lifestyle but can't find fresh options in the local supermarkets.  
Photo by Steve Solomonson

# FARM FRESH

## Bergen Beach woman starts green market

BY VANESSA OGLE

A Bergen Beach woman who craved fresher food is sowing the seeds of healthier eating by turning her home into a green market.

Nancy Mure wished she had a farmers' market in her neighborhood — but instead of waiting for the city to organize something, she decided to do it herself by pairing up with a start-up that takes orders online then ships the farm produce to her home.

"I just started looking online and I said, 'Well what can I do to get better food here?'" said Mure, a holistic nutritionist.

So a few months ago, Mure signed up with Farmigo, a company that delivers fruits, vegetables, and meat from farms in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Vermont to city residents who volunteer to serve as neighborhood pick-up locations for local produce orders.

Mure's Bergen Beach home is now a virtual farmers' market where

her neighbors who order through Farmigo come once a week to collect their farm-fresh food. Customers place their orders with Farmigo online — Mure doesn't handle any money — and the food arrives at her house every Wednesday.

Mure, who receives a discount on her own Farmigo orders but doesn't get paid, said that she operates the home-based farmers' market because she wants to promote healthier lifestyles for her neighbors.

"When you really want to do something, I want to do it for free," she said. "I find myself worried about what everyone is eating."

A customer who has been using the service for two months said the quality produce is a huge improvement over the food in the local supermarkets.

"The food is the freshest fruit and vegetables I've ever had," said Nicole Rose, adding that she is particularly impressed with

the potatoes. "It smelled like it just came out of the ground."

Mure said she has about 10 customers and they usually stagger their weekly pickups to avoid creating traffic.

"It doesn't create a problem for the neighborhood because you don't have people lining up down the block," she said.

Rose said the farmers' market gives residents a chance to have the health food that is available in other areas of Brooklyn but — until now — was nonexistent in the neighborhood.

"It is the only opportunity that we have," said Rose.

GrowNYC operates 54 farmers' markets throughout the city, but none are east of Bay Parkway. The nearest market to Mure's neighborhood is at 81th Street and 18th Avenue in Bensonhurst.

Residents interested in placing an order can contact Mure at [nancy@stellarhealthinc.com](mailto:nancy@stellarhealthinc.com).

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# Your guide to the May 5 special election

## Bay Ridge councilman, Staten Island district attorney vie to replace tax cheat in Congress

Voters from Bay Ridge to Gravesend will go to the polls on May 5 in a special election for New York's 11th Congressional District to replace tax cheat Michael Grimm, who stepped down on Jan. 5. Republican Staten Island District Attorney Dan Donovan and Democratic Brooklyn Councilman Vincent Gentile are the top contenders vying for the seat. Here's how the two stack up.

### Bona fides

Gentile is running on his experience as a legislator — first as a state senator representing both sides of the Narrows and later as a Brooklyn city councilman. Donovan is promising to use his position in a Republican-controlled Congress to bring home the bacon for his district.

### View from the other side

Donovan is painting Gentile as a tax-and-spend liberal who has voted lock-step with Democratic Mayor DeBlasio and would blindly support Democratic President Barack Obama's initiatives.

Gentile's camp is characterizing Donovan as an inexperienced of-

ficeholder who wouldn't have the brass to defy House Speaker John Boehner, a Republican, who gave thousands of dollars to Donovan's campaign.

### Cash makes kings

Donovan has raised more than \$600,000 — three times as much money as Gentile — and his political action committee donors gave him nearly as much as Gentile's \$195,000 fund-raising total.

Gentile missed a major boost when the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee declined to fund his bid. The committee had already blown \$5 million on former councilman Dominic Recchia's

failed November race against the now-disgraced Grimm.

### Backers

The national party wasn't the only blue booster to pass over Gentile. The Southern Brooklyn Democratic Club endorsed Green Party candidate James Lane on April 21, citing Gentile's refusal to meet with the club or fill out its candidate questionnaire, the Staten Island Advance reported.

The councilman did get the nod from health care, service, hotel, and utilities workers unions. Mayor Bill DeBlasio backed Gentile and helped raise money for him, and Democratic Gov. Andrew Cuomo gave the Brooklyn law-



**A VERY SPECIAL ELECTION:** Democratic Councilman Vincent Gentile, at left, and Republican Staten Island District Attorney Dan Donovan, at right, are vying to replace tax cheat Michael Grimm in Congress in a special election set for May 5.

Photos by Steve Solomonson

maker a late endorsement on Thursday.

Donovan garnered endorsements from former mayor Rudolph

Giuliani and practically every police and fire union in the city, plus several construction unions and a slew

of Manhattan Chinese-American associations.

The special election is set for May 5.

— Max Jaeger

## Senate confirms Loretta Lynch

BY NOAH HUROWITZ

Lynch has clinched it!

The United States Senate last Thursday confirmed Loretta Lynch, Brooklyn's top federal law-enforcement official, as attorney general. Lynch will be the nation's first African-American woman to serve in the post.

Elected officials in Lynch's home district welcomed the confirmation with a flood of happy statements.

"She's an extraordinary prosecutor, possesses great integrity and will be relentless in protecting the interests of the American people," said District Attorney Ken Thompson, who previously served with Lynch in the United States Attorney's office. "I have no doubt that Loretta will serve our nation with honor and distinction. As the first-ever Af-



**APPROVED!:** Brooklyn's U.S. Attorney Loretta Lynch — President Obama's pick for the nation's top legal eagle — has finally been named attorney general.

Associated Press / Carolyn Kaster

rican American woman to serve as attorney general, this is also a proud moment in our country's history."

Lawmakers approved Lynch, the current United States attorney for the Eastern District of New York,

in a 56-43 vote, to replace former Attorney General Eric Holder.

President Obama nominated Lynch in November, but the confirmation process dragged on far longer than usual — in part because many Republicans objected to her support of Obama's immigration policies, according to a New York Times report. Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell (R-Kentucky) also refused to hold confirmation vote while the Senate was at loggerheads for weeks over an unrelated human trafficking bill. Senators finally passed the bill last Wednesday.

Lynch has served two

stints as top prosecutor for the Eastern District of New York, first under the Clinton administration from 1999 to 2001 and again from 2010 through today. She worked at a private law firm during the Bush Administration in between the two gigs.

Lynch's fans have championed her for holding law enforcement and public officials to account, citing her role in the civil rights prosecution of the NYPD officers responsible for torturing Haitian immigrant Abner Louima in the 70th Precinct station house in 1997 and the subsequent cover-up.

More recently, Lynch tackled several high-profile terrorism cases and made a point of pursuing crooked politicians including tax cheat and former congressman Michael Grimm, who resigned in January after pleading guilty to Lynch's charge of federal tax evasion.



### It's a mitzvah!

Former Marine Park councilman Lew Fidler, who made a public appeal for a new kidney six months ago, found two matching donors in one day last week. The politician said doctors have approved the donor that local transplant facilitator Chaya Lifschutz found for him and he hopes that the matching donor who registered with Renewal, a Borough Park-based organization, shares the gift of life with someone else in need.

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# CAMERAS

Continued from page 1

according to the Department of Transportation. But a local councilman who received hundreds of complaints about the camera said the camera's placement on an exit ramp behind the fenced schoolyard didn't protect pedestrians, but merely generated revenue.

"After hearing from countless constituents, it became obvious that this location was only serving to raise revenue for the city and was not protecting pedestrians since it was not placed near any crosswalks or intersections," said Councilman Mark Treyger (D-Coney Island), who lobbied the city to move the camera. Treyger announced over the weekend that the camera is now being moved further from the exit and closer to the Ocean Parkway crosswalks near the school to protect the pedestrians who cross the street.

"DOT Commissioner Trottenberg has agreed that the camera should be moved further east to-



**FAST CASH:** This speed camera on the Belt Parkway exit ramp of Shore Parkway issued nearly \$2.4 million worth of tickets in just six months last year. The city has now agreed to move the money-spinning speed camera after pressure from elected officials.

Photo by Steve Solomonson

wards Ocean Parkway, where it will meet the goal of the speed camera program by protecting the many pedestrians — especially students, seniors and families — who cross Ocean Parkway each day.

The speed camera, which was only in operation dur-

ing school days, racked up millions of dollars of tickets in a matter of months, according to data obtained by this paper from the Department of Transportation last year:

- July: 1,931 tickets were issued.
- August: 6,169 tickets were issued.
- September: 14,535 tickets were issued.
- October: 14,604 tickets were issued.
- November: 6,350 tickets were issued.
- December: 5,586 tickets were issued.

But instead of keeping the roads safer, multiple elected officials argued that the camera was causing more chaos. Treyger said that drivers were braking abruptly on the parkway when they realized there was a camera, which disrupted the flow of traffic and potentially increased the likelihood for accidents.

"This location protected no pedestrians and actually made it unsafe for drivers," said Treyger.

Treyger said the department made the right choice by moving the camera.

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# Under the covers

## Sloper Brooke Borel launches 'Infested' at BookCourt

BY NOAH HUROWITZ

This book is not a horror novel, but it will strike fear into your heart.

A Park Slope science writer has published a book on one of the most frightening things in New York City: bedbugs. The author, who has had plenty of her own brushes with the pests, said writing the book was a coping method for dealing with the creepy crawlies.

"I found that the more I learned, the less scared I became of them," said Brooke Borel, who will launch her book "Infested: How the Bed Bug Infiltrated Our Bedrooms and Took Over the World" at BookCourt in Boerum Hill on May 7. "The more I researched, it became my way of controlling the situation. I don't really worry about them anymore."

Borel, who is a writer for



**CREEPY CRAWLIE:** Borel is an expert in bedbugs.

Photo by Elizabeth Graham

the magazine Popular Science, said she first became interested in the insects after living through a couple of infestations herself. The beasties first struck when she was living in Manhattan in 2004, and then again in 2009 in Greenpoint. The second infestation came amid a period of tremen-

dous cultural awareness — and panic — about bedbugs, and Borel said she started to write about the maddening mites and the larger story behind their resurgence.

During her research, Borel said she discovered that bedbugs have not always been the scourge they are today. Use of pesticides after World War II made the pests extremely rare — so much so that when Borel found her first infestation in 2004, she said she thought of the bugs as nothing more than the stuff of nursery rhymes.

But the bugs never truly disappeared, and the ones that survived gradually returned from their isolated pockets — now with a resistance to bug-killers and a fabled hardiness that saw them to spread like crazy, particularly in cities where

they could easily jump from apartment to apartment. That is when the country lost its mind, Borel said.

"The high point of the media freak-out was 2009 or 2010, when CBS named 2010 the 'Year of the Bedbug,'" she said.

Fortunately, the hysteria has since gone down a few decibels, she said. But most New Yorkers still flip out when they see one — or think they have. And now that she has written a whole book on the topic, Borel said her afflicted friends consider her something of a bedbug sage.

"I get a lot of frantic texts and e-mails from friends, and I try to help as best as I can," she said. "I'm not really an exterminator or anything, so a lot of it just ends up being like their bed bug shrink. They feel good knowing they



**SCARY STORIES:** Brooke Borel has written a book about the infestation of bedbugs in America.

Photo by Elizabeth Graham

have an expert."

Brooke Borel and "Infested" at BookCourt [163 Court St. between Dean

and Pacific streets in Cobble Hill, (718) 875-3677, [www.bookcourt.com](http://www.bookcourt.com)]. May 7 at 7 pm. Free.

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# Revolving recital

## Bards to recite poems on Wonder Wheel

BY VANESSA OGLE

What an a-muse-ment park!

Local bards will take their verse to new heights by reciting Coney Island-inspired poetry to thrill-seekers on the Wonder Wheel at Deno's Wonder Wheel Amusement Park on May 8.

"Poem-a-Rama: Poetry on the Wonder Wheel" features more than a dozen poets who will read poems at the very place that has inspired many troubadours over the years, according to the curator of the event.

"What better place than Coney Island to have site-specific poetry?" said Amanda Deutch of Parachute Literary Arts, which is hosting the event to raise money for poetry workshops and community poetry libraries in Coney Island. "Many, many poets have been inspired by Coney Island."

Poets and participants will together ride in the stationary cars of the Wonder Wheel for soaring sessions that last seven minutes apiece. The cars provide an intimate setting that will break barriers between the sharers and the spectators, said Deutch.

"The boundaries between audience and performer aren't so defined," she said, adding that the cozy quarters will help put the audience at ease. "Often, people are intimidated by poets and they don't need to be."

Poets include Coney Island local Michael Broder, plus Matthea Harvey, Penny Arcade, Amber Atiya, Brenda Coultas, Ian Dreibratt, Jen Fitzgerald,



**HIGH IN THE SKY:** Amanda Deutch, the founder of Parachute Literary Arts, is the curator of "Poem-a-Rama" where poets will recite Coney Island-inspired poetry on the Wonder Wheel on May 8.

Photo by Steve Solomonson

Amy King, and others, including Tim Cusack, who will come dressed as Walt Whitman to pay tribute to the poet who loved the nautical neighborhood, according to Deutch.

"Walt Whitman actually said Coney Island was one of his favorite places," she said.

If participants feel inspired after their wild ride, Deutsch said they can try their own hand at some Coney-inspired rhymes.

"There will be a table with vintage typewriter where you can make your own poems about Coney Island," she said.

*"Poem-a-Rama: Poetry on the Wonder Wheel" at Deno's Wonder Wheel Amusement Park (3059 Denos Vourderis Place, entrance on W. 12th Street in Coney Island, www.parachuteliteraryarts.brownpapertickets.com). May 8 at 7 pm. \$20 in advance, \$25 at the door.*



**HANDS ON:** These hands from the 2009 animated feature "Coraline" are going to slap you in the face.

Focus Features / Photofest

## 3-D FILMS

Continued from page 1

mechanical hobby horse as a sort of ventriloquist dummy. In the film, Coonley and his talking horse discuss Russian filmmaker Lev Vladimirovich Kuleshov and his "Kuleshov Effect," an editing technique that is often taught in film school, he said.

"I was into films that gave some kind of workshop-style lesson on an esoteric topic," Coonley said.

Filmmakers traditionally created three-dimensional films by layering two images on top of each other. The viewer then dons a pair

of glasses with one red lens and one blue lens, so that each eye catches the light from the moving image differently, making it seem like the picture is coming out of the screen. Coonley said he managed to fudge this effect by using two standard definition video cameras side by side.

But modern Hollywood 3-D films use more sophisticated technology, which is too fancy for old-school cardboard glasses made with blue and red cellophane, so the theater will have two different styles of specs on hand for different films. Major films in the festival, which runs May 1-17, will include "Avatar,"

"Gravity," and "Coraline." Coonley's film will play right before a screening of "Jackass 3D."

"Thus will be the only time in my life that I will get to show a movie right before 'Jackass,' which is a wonderful honor and also totally terrifying," said Coonley.

*"3-D Trick Pony" at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, BAM Rose Cinemas [30 Lafayette Ave. at Ashland Place in Fort Greene, (718) 636-4100, www.bam.org]. May 16 at 2 pm and 7 pm. \$14 (\$10 students, seniors, and veterans). The "3-D in the 21st Century" series runs May 1-May 17 at various times.*

## L TRAIN

Continued from page 1

The additions will reduce the average wait time to five minutes during the periods between morning and evening rush hours, according to the agency. Weekday ridership on the L train grew by 4.7 percent — more than 5,600 riders — last year, according to agency figures.

The M line will add one more train between 9 am and 9:30 am on weekdays,

which should reduce the wait time to seven and a half minutes, while the 2 line will add two more weeknight trips between 8:30 pm and 9:30 pm.

In other L train news, the authority has agreed to once again offer a free transfer between the G train at Broadway and the J or M trains at Lorimer in Williamsburg — but only while the L train is out of commission overnights and on weekends until May 18. The free transfer started

on April 24.

Rider groups and pols have long asked the Metropolitan Transportation Authority to make that transfer permanently free, but the authority is still refusing to consider it, spokesman Kevin Ortiz confirmed. Sifuentes said the agency has no excuse not to slash the \$2.75 surcharge for good.

"They should be looking at everything they can do to make travel more convenient for riders in Brooklyn," said Si-



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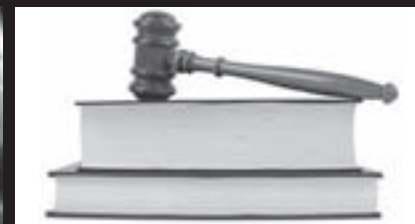


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## Late for school

IS 201 waited two hours to call 911 after wall collapse

BY MAX JAEGER

You can mark them tardy.

Officials at IS 201 waited two hours before calling 911 after a wall collapsed into a Dyker Heights classroom on April 20, according to a fire department incident report obtained by this paper.

Two windows came loose from a wall at 11:15 am and came crashing down into a fourth-floor classroom just moments after a teacher rushed kids into the hallway, but the school didn't call 911 until after 1 pm, the report said.

"FD members were informed the window had collapsed at approximately 1115 hours [11:15 am] and FD units did not receive a response ticket until 1312 hours [1:12 pm]," an incident report from the fire department states.

The school's principal down-played the two-hour lapse, according to a recording provided by a parent who attended a closed meeting with the school's parent-teacher association on April 27.

"We evacuated all the classrooms — not just the right side of the building — all of the classrooms into the third auditorium and the fifth floor gym," principal Robert Ciulla said. "Again, that took time. By the time I did that and turned around, the Fire Department was on scene."

A Department of Education spokesman ignored a request for comment on the late 911 call, instead replying "students were moved from the room, their parents were immediately contacted, and DOE officials were on site inspecting the damage."

But parents of kids in that classroom said the school never alerted them either. Of the dozen parents this paper spoke with, none said they got a call from the school after



**ALL TIED UP:** Officials at IS 201 waited two hours to call 911 after a wall collapsed in a fourth-floor classroom.

Community News Group / Max Jaeger

the window caved in on April 20.

## Deeper issues

School officials weren't the only ones to drop the ball. The fire department report blamed the contractor, Triton Structural Concrete, which was fixing exterior masonry and replacing windows, for the collapse.

"Our investigation revealed that the fastening straps of most every window under rehab had its supporting straps cut and NO temporary fastenings were in place," the report states. "The scene in room 407 could have been tragic."

Nearly 30 classrooms and more than 50 windows were compromised to some extent, according to the report.

"These defects ran the gamut from plaster work covering recent cracks ... to numerous cracks around windows to windows literally pulling out from the structure of the walls," the report states.

A manager at the San Diego-based Triton Structural Concrete declined to comment.

"The incident is under

investigation and that's the only comment we have at this time," said operations manager Steve Levian.

The company has several contracts with the city, and the Schools Construction Authority alone paid the company more than \$6 million for 37 capital improvement projects in 2015, according to the comptroller's Checkbook NYC data portal.

Triton also replaced sections of Coney Island's wooden Boardwalk with concrete from 2010 to 2012, according to Parks Department officials.

Ciulla told parents that "not one student was in harm's way on that day April 20," but a parent whose child was in the classroom just prior to the collapse said the confluence of shoddy construction, a ham-handed emergency response, and refusal to immediately evacuate the building put their kids in serious danger.

"From 11 am to 3 pm, they risked these kids' lives," said Maria Mancini, whose son was in the room moments before the collapse.

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# Botanic Garden party!

BY DANIELLE FURFARO

Talk about flower power!

Tens of thousands of nature lovers and Japanophiles crowded into Brooklyn Botanic Garden this weekend for the park's annual Sakura Matsuri cherry blossom festival.

Revelers, who waited for up to an hour in long entrance lines, said they were excited to frolic among the blooming

cherry blossoms, celebrate with friends and family, and watch traditional and contemporary Japanese performances in the warm spring weather.

"This is the perfect day to come see the cherry blossoms," said Denice Aylett of Park Slope. "It is so beautiful in here."

The entertainment included taiko drumming ensembles, kabuki dances,

and samurai sword fighting exhibitions. The Brooklyn Botanic Garden also offered tours of its Japanese gardens and bonsai museum.

Many visitors showed up in full Japanese regalia or costumes that mimicked their favorite Japanese comic book or video game character. One merrymaker showed up dressed as Morrigan Aen-

sland, a character from the fantasy monster video game "Darkstalkers." She wore long, blue hair, and a red and white cape — and said she felt right at home.

"She is fast and powerful, so I always choose her," said Stephanie Darius of East New York. "I am a cosplayer, so dressing up like this is normal for me."

**SPRING IS IN THE AIR:** (Left) Traditional Japanese taiko drummers perform during this year's Sakura Matsuri, also known as the cherry blossom festival, at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden. (Center) Tens of thousands of stir-crazy flower fans showed up for the festival. (Above) Doris Xu wore a traditional Japanese kimono. Photos by Jason Speakman

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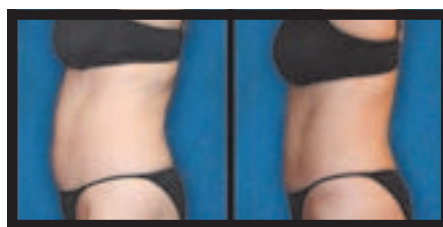
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# TEXTING

Continued from page 1

igates on behalf of cyclists. "Many people bike because it costs less than a Metro-Card or a car, and here they are getting hit with summonses when they're not even breaking the law."

But the top cop at the Park Slope precinct claims they are breaking a law — illegally wearing headphones while biking — and the so-called "cellphone" tickets are simply filed as such.

"The way the tickets are classified, the earphone tickets are labelled as cellphone tickets," said Captain Frank DiGiacomo at a Community Council meeting at the 78th Precinct station house on April 28.

Meanwhile, representatives of the New York Police Department legal bureau did not respond to multiple requests for comment, but a spokeswoman testified at a recent Council hearing that New York's texting ban technically applies to cyclists.

The language states otherwise: it specifically bans

texting by operators of "motor vehicles," which according to the term-definition section of the overarching motor vehicle statute does not include human-powered vehicles like bicycles.

Nowhere is that distinction more relevant than Park Slope, home to a large density of cyclists and also the precinct in which bikers are most likely to get slapped with a summons for checking their phone while on the move.

The 78th Precinct, which covers Park Slope, Prospect Park, and parts of Prospect Heights and Gowanus, blew its neighbors out of the water in mis-enforcement. The 76th Precinct, which covers Red Hook, wrote one such ticket in 2014, while Fort Greene and Bedford-Stuyvesant's 88th Precinct and Sunset Park's 72nd Precinct wrote none. The distant runner up in the area is the 84th Precinct, in Brooklyn Heights and Downtown, which issued 15 tickets to bikers for cellphone use in 2014.

The high numbers in Park Slope are most likely the result of a combination



**TEXT OF WILL:** Cyclist Tara Matern demonstrates the safer way to text on the go — while stopped — in Williamsburg.

Photo by Stefano Giovannini

of the precinct's strong support of the mayor's Vision Zero plan to reduce pedestrian deaths, an initiative that was a cornerstone of the policy of Commanding Officer Michael Ameri and continued by his replacement.

Safety activists in the

neighborhood have worked closely with police on Vision Zero initiatives, but have been less than pleased when the focus falls on bikes. One Community Board 6 member and enthusiastic cyclist praised DiGiacomo for his focus on road safety, but

questioned if bikes warrant the same amount of concern as reckless drivers.

"The difference between a driver on a cellphone and a biker on a cellphone is a significantly different magnitude," said Eric McClure, a Park Slope cyclist and Community Board 6 member. "I have a lot of respect for the 78th Precinct, and they do a great job of keeping people safe, but I'd prefer to see them prioritize the behaviors that are most dangerous to a greater number of people."

Cops citywide cited cyclists 427 times in 2014 for cellphone use, a number that may result from a combination of scant legal training and a misconception that the cellphone-ban law applies to cyclists, Vaccaro said.

"Police are not trained in motor vehicle law, and there is an unwarranted assumption that traffic laws are so simple that why waste time training about them," he said. "How much time would it take for the sergeant to get up at morning roll call and say 'hey guys, there's an exception when it comes to cyclists?'"

While police continue to ticket cyclists for cellphone use with shaky legal backing, Councilman Mark Treyger (D-Coney Island) has been pushing to end the legal limbo with a law that would specifically ban texting while biking. Treyger introduced the legislation last year after he said he saw a biker almost cream a pedestrian while gazing at his screen, and he defended the bill against critics in a recent Council session.

The bill has met with howls of protest from bike activists, who want police to focus their safety initiatives on motorists, or on the very least increase ticketing of already-outlawed dangerous practices like riding the wrong way. Both Vaccaro and McClure acknowledged that phone use while biking is a boneheaded move, but the lawyer said legislators need to consider the potential a behavior has to harm people other than the risk-taker himself.

"I know of no incidents of this causing serious injury or death," Vaccaro said. "Legislation has to be data-driven."



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