

Menorah's 'largest' title lost

BY COLIN MIXSON

It is the world's largest menorah no more-a!

A rabbinical court has forbidden a Park Slope rabbi from promoting the massive menorah that has spread Hanukkah cheer at Grand Army Plaza since 1984 as the world's largest, decreeing instead that the title belongs to a colossal candelabra on the godless island of Manhattan.

The Chabad-Lubavitch court's Dec. 1 decision, first reported by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, ends a years-long feud between Rabbi Shimon Hecht and Crown Heights Rabbi Shmuel Butman — the man behind the competing candleholder in Central Park — but the losing side says they aren't kvetching about the results.

"We're going to follow the court's decision," said Rabbi Moshe Hecht, Shimon Hecht's son. "It is what it is."

Both Hecht's and Butman's menorahs sit on a 32-foot base — the maximum size permitted under Jewish law — but the Big Apple version boasts significantly more

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A LATKE LOVE

Fest honors potato pancake

BY JULIANNE CUBA

These aren't your bubbe's latkes!

A collection of chefs will radically redesign the humble potato pancake next week at the eighth annual Latke Festival, swapping out traditional toppings of sour cream or applesauce for short rib and oxtail jelly. Foodies will flock to the Brooklyn Museum on Dec. 19 to sample unique twists on the Hanukkah staple made from potatoes fried in oil. The festival is a tasty way to bring gentiles and the chosen people together for an early celebration of the holiday of lights, said the festival's founder.

"December is so filled with holidays and really dominated by Christmas, which is wonderful, but I always say that I'm a Hanukkah girl. There's really this void around Hanukkah-related celebration and a latke is so delicious, I mean who doesn't love fried potato?" said Liz Neu-

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HIS FRIED AND JOY: Chef Saul Bolton, of the Norm restaurant in the Brooklyn Museum, will cook up an oxtail-topped latke for the festival on Dec. 19.

Photo by Caleb Caldwell

Pols: Fix bridge typo

BY CAROLINE SPIVACK AND MAX JAEGER

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority must fix a 50-year-old typo, according to area pols.

The agency should correct its spelling of the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge — named for Italian explorer Giovanni da Verrazzano

— which has been missing a Z since it opened in 1964, thanks to a petition started by a Dyker Heights man, local pols wrote in a Dec. 7 letter to agency chief Thomas Prendergast.

"It is our opinion, along with the almost 1,000 signatories, that as we move

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Brooklyn Museum

GENDER ASSIGNMENT: This ancient Egyptian statue was painted red to signify it's a man, regardless of its other attributes.

Mummies and daddies

BY ALEXANDRA SIMON

For this afterlife, it's no girls allowed!

The ancient Egyptians believed that only dudes could live on after death, but according to a new exhibit at the Brooklyn Museum, some women managed to slip into the afterlife

— by becoming men! "A Woman's Afterlife: Gender Transformation in Ancient Egypt," opening Dec. 15, details the post-mortem ritual that temporarily transformed women into men so they could be reborn in the next world.

Modern minds find the

whole concept strange and sexist, but the exhibit demonstrates how much beliefs can change, said its curator.

"I know it's weird but not everybody thinks the way we think — there's more than one way to think about things and we are

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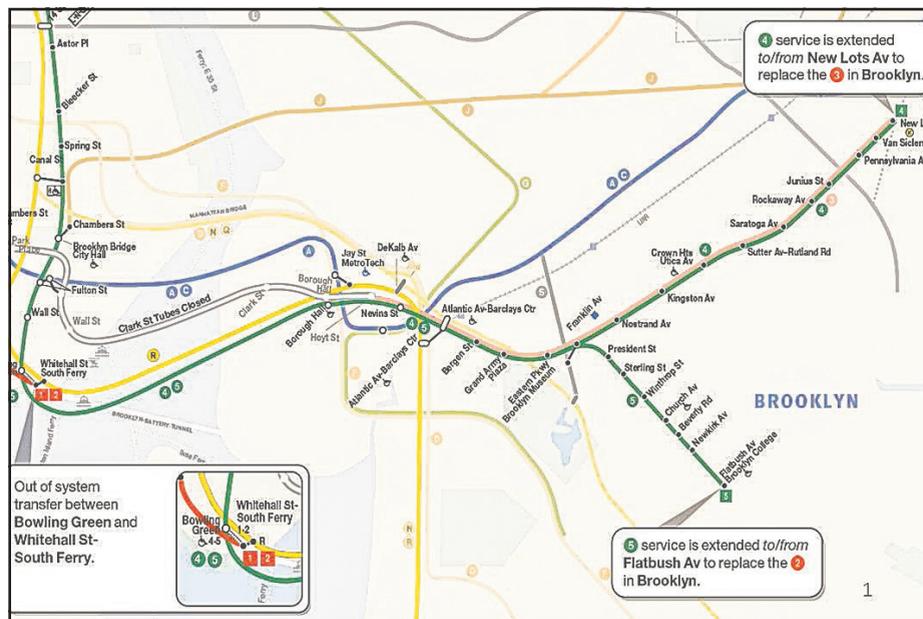
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RED ALERT!

No weekend 2 and 3 train service in Brooklyn starting in spring next year



BROOKLYN, YOU DON'T HAVE TO PUT ON THE RED LIGHT: A map showing where the 4 and 5 trains will run on weekends next year. MTA

BY RUTH BROWN

There will be no weekend 2 and 3 train service in Brooklyn for more than a year while the Metropolitan Transportation Authority repairs the line's Hurricane Sandy-ravaged tunnel to Manhattan next year, the agency announced last Friday.

Kings County red-bullet riders won't be stranded when the 56-weekend closure starts in June — 4 and 5 trains will hit all the local stops from Nevins Street station to New Lots Avenue and Flatbush Avenue-Brooklyn College stations, respectively.

But Clark Street station in Brooklyn Heights and Downtown's Hoyt Street stop will be out of commission during those weekends.

And it will add roughly four-and-a half minutes to the average commute for some 205,000 weekend riders, according to the agency.

For those unfortunate Brooklynites who have to visit the far-off island of Manhattan on weekends



A REAL NO. 2: Get used to seeing fewer of these on weekends. Photo by Louise Wateridge

— and the lucky Manhattanites who get to spend some time in the Borough of Kings — there will be free above-ground transfers between the 4 and 5 Bowling Green stop and the Whitehall Street-South Ferry 1, 2, and R station.

The borough-connecting underwater passageway — officially called the Clark Street Tube — is in bad shape after the

2012 super-storm battered it with some 500,000 gallons of saltwater, damaging tracks, signals, and switches, transit officials say.

After the Clark Street tunnel, the agency will also perform similar weekend repairs to the F train's Rutgers Street tunnel, and close the L train's Canarsie tube full-time for a much-dreaded 18 months of patch-ups.



LOST IN SPACE: VR Bar owner Kishore Doddi shows off his multi-dimensional games.

Photo by Caleb Caldwell

In-depth investigation!

Borough's first VR arcade opens in Park Slope

BY COLIN MIXSON

Park Slope's gaming scene just entered a new dimension!

A Union Street storefront is now home to Brooklyn's first and only virtual reality arcade, where digital adventurers can shell out \$10 for 10 minutes of reality-bending play that the proprietor guarantees will melt your mind.

"Everyone is blown away," said Kishore Doddi of his new business VR Bar, between Sixth and Seventh avenues. "We haven't had one unhappy customer."

It may sound like a high price to pay for just a small taste of gaming's new frontier, but given the headsets and high-end computers used to power them can run as much as \$3,000, it is actually an affordable way for cash-strapped geeks to get their hands on the latest technology, Doddi says.

"Cost-wise, it's definitely not very accessible, and you need a certain amount of technological acumen to operate the system," he said. "It's very hard for the average consumer to have one of these in their home."

"VR Bar" is a bit of a misnomer — the space is more like a living room than a watering hole, and you can't buy booze. The ar-



A STEP-UP FROM MS PAINT: VR Bar has Google game "Tilt Brush," where you can paint in three dimensions. Google

cade sports two Vive headsets, plus television screens so other people can watch what the players are doing in their artificial realities.

Vive is not as well-known as rival device Oculus Rift, but Doddi says he likes it better — Oculus users have to stay stationary, while Vivers can stroll around their digital worlds and duck and weave as virtual bullets fly at their heads.

The difference is especially evident in Google's painting program "Tilt Brush," which allows users to sculpt three-dimensional images and then walk around and through their creations.

"Your movement in the ac-

tual playing area is translated into the VR experience," said Doddi, a former software developer. "So if you point at something on the north wall of your building, it will stay there and you can move around and come back to it, and it will still be there."

VR Bar has a rotating library of between 10 and 20 games and experiences on offer, which change based on Doddi's licensing agreements with publishers.

Right now, you can bring the iPhone favorite "Fruit Ninja" to life — using the Vive's dual controllers as razor-sharp samurai swords to slash through falling watermelons and grapefruit — blast through hordes of the undead in "Brookhaven Experiment," or enjoy a surreal take on your mundane existence with "Job Simulator," a favorite amongst youngsters where players can either muddle their way through a number of routine offices and cooking jobs or throw staplers at their bosses.

Virtual reality users have in the past reported getting motion sickness from the experience, also known as "simulator sickness," but Doddi claims that ad-

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LICH developer reveals its plans for first towers

BY LAUREN GILL

It wasn't a facade.

The developer building a massive housing complex on the site of the former Long Island College Hospital filed plans for two towers last Wednesday, dashing some residents' hopes that its earlier threats to build a high-rise over the Cobble Hill Historic District were just a bluff to push residents into supporting a rezoning.

But, just as promised, the plans show builder Fortis Property Group is planning a 15-story residential structure on a low-rise brownstone stretch of Henry Street, confirming locals' worst fears that their brownstone-lined nabe will soon be overshadowed by tall buildings.

"It's always a punch in the gut to see towers in Cobble Hill," said Amy Breedlove, president of local civic group the Cobble Hill Association.

The Henry Street building, between Pacific and Amity streets, will include 30 apartments, a 21-car garage, and a swimming pool, according to the plans.

There will also be a 17-story high-rise on Hicks Street and Atlantic Avenue that includes 46 units on the top nine floors, six floors of community facilities — which can be used by hospitals and churches, but also as college dorms — and a four-story parking garage for 282 cars that may also serve a new medical center next door.

The developer's honchos had

threatened to build glassy towers over the landmarked low-rise district if local residents and pols didn't support their efforts to rezone the land so they could build more units than is currently allowed. In exchange, they said, they'd erect a less-ugly complex farther away from the historic district.

When residents didn't bite, the real estate tycoons announced in November that they will just go ahead with structures allowed under current zoning, and Cobble Hill Association members crossed their fingers that the developer's earlier threats were all bluster.

But the plans filed Wednesday are broadly similar to those presented to the community in October last year, give or take a few stories.

Breedlove says it's disappointing to see Fortis go through with building on the edge of the landmarked thoroughfare, but hardly surprising given the firm is trying to squeeze as much cash as it can from the project.

"We don't want that height on the east side of Henry Street," she said. "But it's understandable given that a developer wants to take the maximum [building area] to make the most money."

The two towers represent just a small part of the entire development — Fortis still hasn't filed plans for the bulk of the complex in the two blocks bounded by Hicks, Henry, and Amity streets and Atlantic Avenue.



SKY SCRAPING: The buildings in question are the smaller ones on the far left and right. Fortis hasn't filed plans for the rest — yet. FXFOWLE

RAILROADED!

Activist: City's streetcar promo video twisted my words

BY CAROLINE SPIVACK

An opponent of the mayor's proposed streetcar system who publicly criticized the plan says that the city used his critique out of context in a promotional video — making it look like he supported the very plan he is fighting against.

Over the summer, the Economic Development Corporation asked residents to help plan the trolley's Sunset Park-to-Queens route, and it later produced a publicity film using footage from the meetings. The video quotes long-time Sunset Park community leader Bob Bernard as saying the project "made potential open up for this community," but Bernard says an unscrupulous editor cut him off just before he could finish his thought — that the potential for bad outweighs the potential for good.

"If you look at this thing, it's clear I'm being misquoted from my body language and tone," said



NO SHILL: Bob Bernard says the city took his critique of the streetcar out of context and used to suggest he supported the plan. NYCEDC

Bernard, who looks unnerved in the clip and is clearly cut off mid-sentence. "I'm against what they're proposing. And you would have heard that if they used the full quote, because I said there is potential for good, but I also said that there is more potential for

bad than good with this project."

The five-second sound bite was snipped from a roughly 20-second critique where Bernard explained that the streetcar — dubbed the "BQX" — would lead to jacked-up rents and locals' displacement.

The film was published online on Nov. 3, but Bernard wasn't even aware he was featured in it until recently. Members of Sunset Park social-justice group Uprose who were at the June meeting later saw the video and alerted Bernard, a former director of the Fifth Avenue Business Improvement District, that he was taken out of context. One activist called out the Economic Development Corporation at a contentious Dec. 12 meeting, alleging the agency cherry-picked quotes to suit its needs.

"He is adamantly against the BQX, and he was making a long point about why this is a problem," said Uprose organizer Ana

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VEHEMENT OPPOSITION: Sunset Parkers railed against the Mayor's Sunset Park-to-Queens streetcar at a Community Board 7 meeting on the project. Community News Group / Caroline Spivack

Sunset Parkers: Trolley a vehicle for displacement

BY CAROLINE SPIVACK

They're calling it a streetcar named displacement.

SunsetParkersrailedagainst Mayor DeBlasio's streetcar proposal when officials held a meeting to take community input on the Sunset Park-to-Queens trolley on Dec. 12, claiming the only thing the trolley would be good for is jacking up their rents. DeBlasio, the developers who first

floated the plan, and the city's Economic Development Corporation all claim the \$2.5-billion people-mover will connect locals to jobs elsewhere along the waterfront, but even the people who would use it for just that believe the money would be better spent on improved buses and maintain the plan is a gift to developers that will make Sunset

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A clean start

Neighborhood watchdogs demand a state-led cleanup for Coney Island Creek

BY CAROLINE SPIVACK

Coney Islanders want the state to clean their name-sake creek.

Members of Community Board 13 voted unanimously on Nov. 30 to ask Albany to make Coney Island Creek a so-called "state Superfund" site — meaning regulators would figure out who was responsible for the dirty waterway's deplorable condition and bill them for the clean-up. For decades massive amounts of toxic chemicals poured into the creek from industrial facilities that lined its shores. But the October discovery that an apartment complex was dumping 200,000 gallons of raw sewage per day into the water was the last straw, said one board member.

"Things have reached a turning point," said Brighton Beach environmental activist Ida Sanoff. "In the past few months an awful lot of new information has turned up about the creek and what a danger it represents to the people who swim there, fish there, and live there — it's time to clean up that creek."

The flow became a chemical dumping ground starting at the turn of the 20th century, when the Brook-



CLEAN UP: Charles Denson and Pamela Pettyjohn are pushing the state to consider Coney Island Creek as a superfund site.

Photo by Georgine Benvenuto

lyn Yard Dye Company and the Brooklyn Union Gas Company, as well as various waste transfer stations and oil depots, began operating on its shores, according to Coney Island Historian Charles Denson. Toxic sludge containing notoriously noxious chemicals such as arsenic, cyanide, and benzene flooded the river for more than 50 years, he said. And as several facilities shuttered, illegal ship-breaking operations popped up and used the creek as a

dumping ground for boat debris in '70s. Today auto shops line the creek on Neptune Avenue and often trash whole cars into the creek, he said.

But a state-led cleanup is a long ways off. First the Department of Environmental Conservation must locate the most contaminated pockets of shore and riverbed — then it must determine if the contaminants pose a significant-enough threat to trigger a clean-up. Then it has

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BRIDGE

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forward, the MTA should take serious consideration in rectifying this error on all future signage," wrote state Sens. Andrew Lanza (R-Staten Island) and Martin Golden (R-Bay Ridge), who also sits on the authority's Capital Program Review Board.

Replacing all the posts bearing the error immediately would be costly and cause traffic jams, so the pols are asking the Department of Transportation, which maintains signs, to

phase in the correction.

"We suggest instead that as signs become faded, un-serviceable, or become a safety issue, they are replaced with new ones with the correct spelling of Verrazzano," they wrote.

Dyker Heights resident and Italian-American advocate Robert Nash circulated the petition earlier this summer calling on the agency to fix the faulty spelling.

The revision would end a decades-long insult to the first European to explore New York Bay, Nash said.

"I'm extremely happy —

I can't tell you how happy I am. Giovanni da Verrazzano discovered our neck of the woods, and we honored him with a bridge — the least we can do is spell his name right," Nash said.

A journalist who literally wrote the book on the bridge also lauded the push so long as it does not raise tolls any further.

"Better late than never," said Gay Talese. "But I'm hoping that the cost of correction, the expense of hiring work crews in cranes adding a second 'Z,' will not be passed on to motorists passing through the toll gates."

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Be Proud Foundation salutes those men and women in blue with annual Police Appreciation Luncheon



Locals and politicians turned out to honor the men and women in blue from various Southern Brooklyn police precincts and the department headquarters in Manhattan at the 11th annual Police Appreciation Luncheon: Honoring Our Everyday Heroes at Cats on the Bay in Sheepshead Bay on Dec. 2.



They waived their right to remain silent!

Community members and elected officials praised local law enforcement heroes during the 11th annual Police Appreciation Luncheon: Honoring Our Everyday Heroes at Cats on the Bay in Sheepshead Bay on Dec. 2. The event — hosted by the Be

Proud Foundation — honored those in blue from various precincts in Southern Brooklyn and the department headquarters in Manhattan, and the love was well-received, said one community affairs officer.

“It was great to be honored, and it was a fun event,” said Police Officer Danny Chiu from the

61st Precinct.

Locals performed for New York’s Finest, including a musical duo who gave a moving rendition of some patriotic tunes, said foundation founder Raisa Chernina. Deana Marchuk sang ‘God Bless America’ and Anna Malkina Shumaeva played violin

“It was great. A 9-year-old, she sang ‘God Bless America,’ and the older lady — she won the grandmother competition — she played violin,” Chernina said referring to the foundation’s annual talent show for ladies of a certain age.

The luncheon also served appreciation cakes with “Thank

you NYPD!” in icing on them for the men and women in blue — but the officers exercised some self-control and brought the cake back to the precinct to share with everyone, said Chiu.

“We brought it back to the precinct so everyone could enjoy,” he said.

Naughty and nice

House of Yes hosts a sexy cosmic Christmas show

BY LAUREN GILL

This show is rated X-mas!

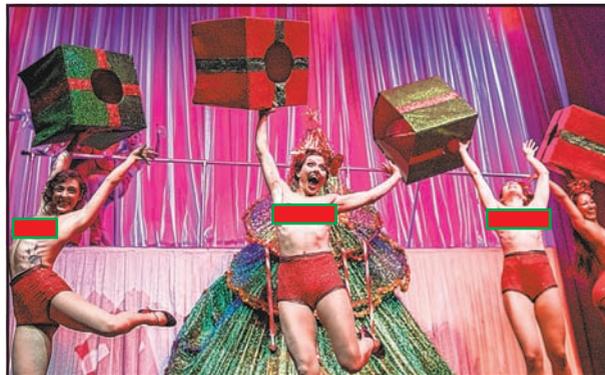
A beautiful and bizarre burlesque Christmas show will stuff your stocking with scantily-clad elves, athletic aliens, and high-flying reindeer for six nights starting this weekend. One of the creators of the intergalactic extravaganza “Xmas Spectacular: Home for the Holidays,” opening at Bushwick’s House of Yes on Dec. 16, says that the performance is really out of this world.

“It is the most ridiculous thing you’ll ever see in live theater,” said Kae Burke, who stars in the show with her House of Yes co-owner Anya Sapozhnikova. “It’s fabulous, confusing, and really wonderful — and sexy!”

The show follows the pair as they journey to their home planet “Upstate New York” for Christmas. Along the way, they dodge a meteorite blizzard and stop on festive planets inhabited by silly and sometimes naughty characters, including a group of pain-deer (sodomasochistic reindeer), misfit drag queens, “Santercize” instructors, North Pole dancers, and Santa’s forgotten daughter.

The show also boasts aerial performances, dance numbers, and a live score that blends original tunes with Christmas classics.

This is the seventh “Xmas Spectacular” at House of Yes, but the first with Burke and



Sapozhnikova in starring roles. They drew on some of their own experiences to come up with the wacky plot — Sapozhnikova is from Russia and never really celebrated Christmas, but Burke always invites her to spend the holiday with her family. The spectacular begins with Burke realizing that she has left her friend behind, and retrieving her to make it home in time for Santa’s

trip down the chimney.

The immersive performance will help audiences get into the holiday spirit with eggnog, cookies, and a photo booth with old St. Nick. Guests can also get some last-minute shopping done at an intergalactic gift shop, which will hawk holiday must-haves such as space pasties.

Several other Brooklyn shows, including “Nutcracker Rouge” have

UNWRAP YOUR GIFTS: (Above) The “Xmas Spectacular” at Bushwick’s House of Yes, opening Dec. 16, will feature giant presents, misfit drag queens, and “paindeer.” (Left) The holiday figures bear gifts — and very few clothes (we’ve covered up some gifts with boxes).

Andrew T. Foster

recently embraced the naughty side of yuletide season. Burke said that Christmas is a much hotter holiday than Thanksgiving or Arbor Day because of glitz and glamour that comes with it.

“It lends itself to sexiness,” she said. “It’s sparsely, extravagant, and over-the-top.”

“Xmas Spectacular: Home for the holidays” at House of Yes (2 Wyckoff Ave. at Jefferson Street in Bushwick, www.houseofyes.org). Dec. 16–17 and 19–22 at 8 pm. \$35–\$50.



WHO WAS THAT MASKED WOMAN?: This mummy mask of Benuipet is sometimes labelled “The Coffin of the Lady of the House.” Sarah DeSantis

MUMMIES

Continued from page 1

opening ourselves up to think outside of what we think is right,” said Egyptologist Edward Bleiberg. “In ancient times people believed in this — I don’t believe in this but I find it fascinating that people believed this.”

The transformation ritual required mummifying a woman’s body in the same way as that of a man, a process that included describing her with the masculine word for “you” on her coffin, and painting an image of her with red skin.

“Red skin on the coffin indicates a male,” said Bleiberg. “On a woman’s coffin they used to paint her skin to the male color for a ritual.”

Mummification was generally just for the rich and elite, but it is unknown whether poorer Egyptians also did similar rituals, said Bleiberg.

The exhibit consists of 27 pieces of artwork, including paintings, jewelry, and sculptures, as well as a 70-pound coffin that was used for at least two gender-transformation rituals. Some of the

pieces are making their debut after years in storage, said Bleiberg.

“Some of them are restored and have been taken out of storage and conserved for this purpose,” he said. “This is giving people the opportunity to see things they haven’t seen, and to hear a story about them that is really something really new and different.”

The exhibit also shows how archeologists’ attitudes towards gender have changed over the years, said Bleiberg.

“What’s so great about it to me is looking at art through a feminist lens because when I was a student, we looked at this and said they made a mistake,” said Bleiberg. “We look at issues with much more open mind, and feminism allows us to think in much broader way in the way gender is treated.”

“A Woman’s Afterlife: Gender Transformation in Ancient Egypt” at the Brooklyn Museum [200 Eastern Pkwy. between Flatbush and Washington avenues in Prospect Heights, (718) 638-5000, www.brooklynmuseum.org]. Opens Dec. 15. \$16 suggested donation.



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WAY TO PIVOT

Amputee inspires others to play basketball

BY CAROLINE SPIVACK

A Bensonhurst basketball player with one leg is going out on a limb to show that players with prostheses can ball with the best of 'em by playing on a team composed entirely of amputees.

Patrick "Patty" Filosa lost his left leg to a rare medical condition in 2013, but today he tours the country as part of Amp 1 — a team of amputee basketball players from across the country with the mission to inspire and educate — and he is taking that message to Brooklyn's hardwood. Filosa struggled with the loss of his leg at first, but after years of hard work he is at ease on and off the court and went from a sports fan to an athlete fans flock to, a teammate said.

"I was there when Patty first had his amputation, and it's amazing to see someone whose come so far," said Jovan Booker, who lost his right leg below the

knee when he was 10 months old and has played with Amp 1 for six years. "Being an amputee brings a lot of physical struggles, but it also brings mental struggles, and I think Patty having the ability to see me and others — who have had this all their lives and how comfortable we are — it's really motivated him to be a better person. He's very passionate about what we do and being a positive role model."

The 28-year-old Filosa was born with a genetic disorder that made his left leg brittle, and after years of surgeries to correct the issue, the limb had to be amputated in 2013 when he was 25. The loss of a leg was a major blow to the sports fanatic, but he did some research and a few months after losing his leg, Filosa attended an Amp 1 game at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in Manhattan. Seeing the players crush the competition inspired him to

take his first steps toward joining the team, said Booker.

"He came up to us after the game and said, 'I know I don't even have a prosthetic yet — and I don't care how much work it takes — but I'm going to be part of Amp 1,'" said Booker. "And ever since Patty joined he's taken the helm of what we do here in the city."

Filosa got his prosthesis — a polymer lower leg with the logo of his all-time-favorite sports franchise, The Mets — and joined the team last year. Since then he has visited more than 30 schools in five different states to show kids that losing a limb cannot block success or happiness.

One particularly memorable encounter with a child was during a visit to Nike's headquarters in Oregon, where he met a Palestinian boy who lost his leg in a bombing there. The meeting left a lasting impression on Filosa



LOST A LIMB GAINED A PURPOSE: Bensonhurst Patrick Filosa lost his leg in 2013 and has since traveled across the borough, city, and country with Amp 1 — a basketball team of amputees.

Photo by Caleb Caldwell

who felt he was able to make an impact in the boy's perspective.

"I just wanted to show him just because you're different it's okay — that's okay," said Filosa. "Kids can be cruel, and it's amazing when you're able to show them just because you have a disability

that doesn't stop you from what you want to do — whether it's being a writer or a rock climber. You can do it."

Until Filosa joined, Amp 1 had only two New Yorkers — Booker and teammate Robert Rodriguez.

Continued on page 12

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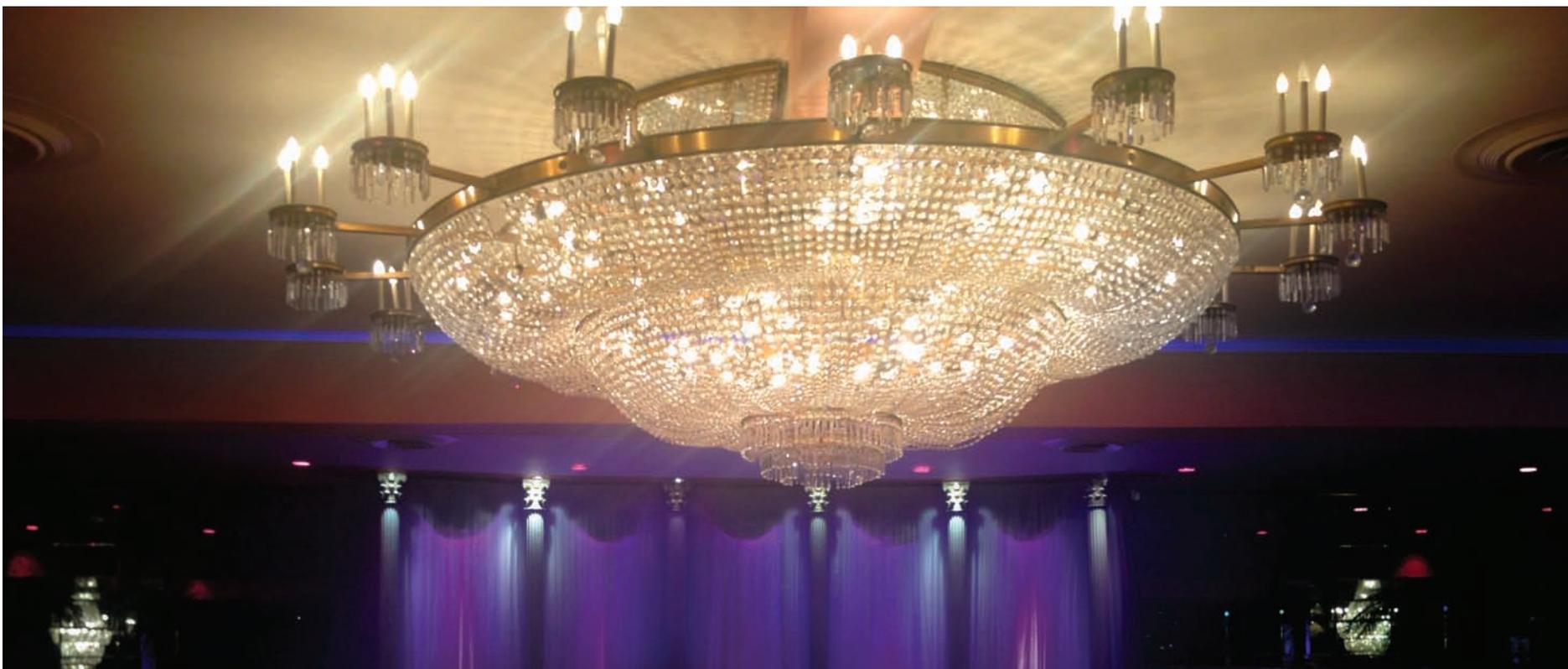
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MENORAH

Continued from page 1

girth than Brooklyn's and netted the Guinness World Record for the title in 2006.

"This is wider and weighs more. There's no comparison," Butman told this paper in 2014.

But Hecht has long maintained that his is the tallest because it sports a central candle — or *shamash* — that is six inches taller than his counterpart's.

To promote his claim, Hecht created a website called www.worldslargestmenorah.com, which remains online despite the court's decision.

But the Rabbinical court — essentially an arbitration process, where both parties agree to abide by the ruling — was more interested in the issue of branding than physical size, and how Hecht's claim to have the world's largest menorah could negatively affect Butman's, which predated the Kings County one by several years, according to a rabbi familiar with the case.

"The case was about the branding, not the reality of what's larger or shorter," said the rabbi, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

As a result of the court's decision, Hecht will have to re-brand his menorah, although his main focus



STILL THE LARGEST IN OUR HEARTS: Revelers dance around the Grand Army Plaza menorah in the halcyon days of Hanukkah 2015, when it was still considered the world's largest.

File photo by Louise Wateridge

— as ever — will be promoting the lighting event at Grand Army Plaza, his son said.

"The menorah is the same menorah," Moshe Hecht said. "We're really just focused on making this Hanukkah the greatest ever."

The Manhattan menorah isn't Hecht's only rival — his own nephew, Rabbi Aaron Raskin of Congregation B'nai Avraham of Brooklyn Heights, also runs a giant public menorah lighting during Hanukkah, which Raskin has previously declared to be the borough's "official" one.

But the Borough of Kings' preponderance of

hulking Hanukkah lamps means it still enjoys bragging rights for boasting the *most* mega-menorahs, if not the official largest, according to one local mensch.

"We've got two huge menorahs and they've got one. Enough said," said former Borough President Marty Markowitz.

The not-largest menorah will be lit for the first night of Hanukkah with a kickoff concert and hot latkes at Grand Army Plaza (between Plaza Street West and Plaza Street East in Prospect Heights), Dec. 24 at 7 pm. Free. For subsequent lighting times, see www.worldslargestmenorah.com.

CREEK

Continued from page 5

to figure out what group or groups are responsible so it can charge them for the remediation. If it cannot find the culprit, state taxpayers will foot the bill, according to a spokesman for the Department of Environmental Conservation.

The state has designated or is considering designating roughly 100 sites in Brooklyn as state Super-

funds. One nearby example is the former site of the Dangman Park Manufactured Gas Plant on Neptune Avenue in Brighton Beach, where developers are erecting a shopping center and residential tower. National Grid must pay for the clean-up, because it is successor to Brooklyn Union Gas Company, which ran the plant and caused the contamination.

State Sen. Diane Savino (D-Coney Island) and Assemblywoman Pamela

Harris (D-Coney Island) are working with the community board to dig up dirt on the cruddy creek before they formally ask the state to designate it a Superfund site.

"The scope of the situation requires all involved parties to come together at the table," said Savino. "And we are fully committed to exploring all possible options for a safer environment for the surrounding residents of Coney Island Creek."

AMPUTEE

Continued from page 10

They did some outreach in New York City, but they've really ramped up their

presence in the boroughs since Filosa joined, according to Rodriguez.

"Patrick is the Amp 1 ambassador," said Rodriguez, who also lost his right leg from below

the knee when he was 10 months old and has played with Amp 1 for four years. "He has such a great heart. We really wouldn't be able to do what we're doing without Patrick."

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Expert: Downtown hotels hitting saturation point

BY LAUREN GILL

Downtown may be getting a little too suite for travellers' tastes!

A 196-key Hilton just opened its doors on Smith and Schermerhorn streets — the fifth hotel to open in the area in the past two years, and the neighborhood could soon hit its capacity if the lodge-building frenzy doesn't slow down, according to an expert.

"I definitely think there's a saturation of hotels," said Colby Swartz, the managing director of hotel advisory firm Suzuki Capital. "I don't know if [Brooklyn's] the best locations for a new hotel site — yet alone a destination point to actually draw clientele."

Between them, the new Hilton, Holiday Inn, Hampton Inn, Dazzler, and Even hotels have added 934 rooms to the area in the past two years, joining existing chain inns the Marriott, Hotel Indigo, Sheraton, Aloft, and, of course,

the Brooklyn House of Detention-adjacent Nu Hotel.

Right now, the hotels' main selling point is offering lower rates than their counterparts across the river — a room at the Hilton in Manhattan on a recent Thursday night cost at least \$399, while a bed at the Brooklyn one was just \$209, and guests say it is a great deal.

"I like to stay in Downtown Brooklyn so I can do Brooklyn and Manhattan," said Anne Marie Pellicano, who travels from Florida to Kings County on business regularly, and recently stayed at the new Hilton — which she loved. "It's half the price of what you pay in Manhattan."

But Downtown is hardly a tourist destination, Swartz said, and the glut of generic hotel brands are going to start struggling if they can't differentiate themselves from one another by offering reduced rates or special amenities.

"Particularly when you're in the Brooklyn area you definitely need to have a little more of a draw than 'Hey, I have a hotel here,'" he said.

Most of the Downtown hotels offer similar prices between \$200 and \$300 a night and fairly standard amenities such as business centers and gyms — none of the rooftop pools and award-winning restaurants of Williamsburg's boutique lodgings, or the bargain-basement prices of inns in industrial Gowanus.

Still, the hotels all seem to be doing good business right now, according to a local real estate guru — and he thinks demand for beds will stay strong thanks to the addition of new entertainment options in the area such as Barclays Center and the massive City Point shopping complex.

"There's so much new activity across the spectrum, I think the hotels all seem to be doing very well," said Timothy King, a man-



NEW KID ON THE BLOCK: A 196-key Hilton opened on Jay and Schermerhorn streets earlier this month — just the latest in a hotel-building boom Downtown.

Photo by Caleb Caldwell

aging partner at Downtown's Cpx Real Estate, which helps hotels find land in the area.

One recent Hilton guest said

he did want to stay in Manhattan, but came to Kings County when he couldn't get a room there —

Continued on page 18

Pork is pulled

Mill Basin gets a kosher barbecue restaurant

BY JULIANNE CUBA

It's a meat-zvah!

Mill Basin has a kosher barbecue joint. Four friends from the neighborhood opened Main House BBQ — the area's first smokehouse serving rabbi-approved fare — in mid-November.

The restaurateurs developed a taste for the goyish Southern cooking style while spending childhood summers upstate, and they wanted to create a version that they and fellow observant Jews could really sink their teeth into, one of the owners said.

"Barbecue has blown up over the past few years in New York City, and I think people who keep kosher have been cognizant of that and recognized that, and there has been a desire to have that type of food applied to the kosher palate,"

said Richie Grin, one of the four owners — all of whom keep kosher. "Us bringing that into the community has been amazingly well-received, just because there has been a request for different types of cuisine outside of the standard."

Barbecue styles are regional — iterations from Kansas, Texas, Tennessee, and the Carolinas all have their distinct hallmarks — but the guys behind Main House aim to forge their own Brooklyn style, which (like the borough itself) is a melting pot, Grin said.

"Barbecue being a new thing to New York, there's no reason why we can't create our own style and take what we love best from each region and create our own standard for what we want our Brooklyn barbecue to be," he said.

Of course it helps to have Hill Country Barbecue pit master Dale Buchheister acting as their executive chef, Grin said.

"What we liked about Dale's resume, he had different types of styles. We were looking to create this idea of Brooklyn barbecue that wasn't steeped in any specific region of barbecue," he said of the Kansas native.

Buchheister may be able to bring home the proverbial bacon, but he sure can't make it kosher, so the guys need a team of special kitchen supervisors called "mashgiachs" to make sure that the ribs and roasts meet religious standards — one of the unique challenges of running the smokehouse, said co-owner Elan Strobel.

"That's what makes it more difficult to run a kosher barbecue place. Ac-



OPEN FOR BUSINESS: Steve Weiss, Teddy Weiss, Richie Grin, and Elan Strobel recently opened kosher barbecue joint Main House BBQ in Mill Basin.

Photo by Jordan Rathkopf

ording to strict laws, mashgiachs always have to be on site to observe and monitor the food activity — whether it's checking veggies for bugs, or turning on the fires, or making sure the meats are certified kosher," he said. "We are constantly running the smoker, and someone always has to be on site."

Main House has three

different mashgiachs that rotate shifts 24-6 (everyone takes off the Sabbath) and it definitely makes running a restaurant a little trickier, Strobel said.

The diet also forbids eating meat and dairy together, so owners got creative with some of their sides — for instance substituting brisket fat for milk and butter

in their "shملتzy mashed potatoes."

Speaking of dietary restrictions, the joint even has smoked tofu for vegetarians. Just don't ask for pork.

Main House BBQ [6001 Strickland Ave. at E. 60th Place in Mill Basin, (718) 673-8773]. Sun-Thurs, noon-10pm. Friday, noon-3pm. Closed Saturdays.



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LATKES

Continued from page 1

mark.

Latke Festival started out small — in the kitchen of Neumark's catering company Great Performances — but has expanded to fill the Brooklyn Museum and feature include 21 different restaurants, each competing to make the fried fritter even more delicious, said Neumark.

"Every year it has grown and we get different kinds of restaurants involved and the people really, really look forward to it because there was nothing like it," she said. "And it's a perfect food that just lends itself to interpretation."

During the three-hour festival, attendees will sip from an open bar, sample many latkes, and vote for their favorites. Because it is easy to fill up on the starchy staple, we to spoke to four Brooklyn chefs — and the returning Manhattan champ — about the dishes to seek out first:

Mid-East mash-up

Brooklyn mini-chain Kulushkat will combine the Jewish staple with its Middle Eastern counterpart the falafel to create "the Falatke," which is topped with a lemony green tahini slaw.

The mix of different flavors create a culinary experience like no other, said chef and owner Yagil Kadosh.

"We're pretty psyched, we've been working on it for a couple months. People are going nuts for it. We're hyped. It's a unique flavor, and a unique concept," he said. "It's very authentic flavors. I think it'll be great."

Returning champs

Chefs from Veselka in Manhattan will prepare a "Hanukkah Latke" with potato and zucchini, and topped with chicken liver paté and julienned vegetables. The restaurant took home the gold last year and hopes to repeat the feat this year, said co-owner Jason Brichard.

"We're looking forward to

it and possibly doing a repeat championship," he said.

A little fishy

Chef A Napadol of the Clinton Hill Thai restaurant Samui will bring some of her native Thailand's flavors into the kitchen to serve a latke topped with shrimp, salmon, and a spicy garlic sauce. The shrimp is raw and sterilized in vodka, and it adds a depth of flavor, said Napadol, while the salty salmon roll balances everything out.

Carraway's fav

Shelsky's Jewish deli in Boerum Hill will serve a latke version of its Great Gatsby sandwich, named for its caraway seeds. The latke is studded with caraway seeds, fried in duck fat, stuffed with honey mustard, and topped with horseradish cream cheese and pastrami-smoked salmon, a decadent combination that might win the competition, said chef and owner Peter Shelsky.

"It's outrageous. It's stuffed with something, it's different than some-

thing we've ever done," he said. "And I think having it stuffed, when you bite into it, it oozes out a little, that might be the ticket."

A Norm-al latke

Brooklyn Museum's own the Norm restaurant brings in Caribbean flavor with an oxtail-topped latke made from the potato-like woody root called yuca. Chef Saul Bolton purees onion into a juice and squeezes it into the latke to make it crispy, with no chunks, and adds a coconut milk-made yogurt and cilantro on top. The savory oxtail marmalade speaks to the neighborhoods Caribbean community, said Bolton.

"Because it's at the Brooklyn Museum, it speaks to the diversity of Brooklyn. I wanted to do something that sort of bridges that group, not the traditional latke," said Bolton.

Latke Festival at the Brooklyn Museum [200 Eastern Pkwy. at Washington Avenue in Prospect Heights, www.latkefestival.com]. Dec. 19, 6–9 pm. \$70–\$120.



NOW THAT'S LIVING: VR Bar is really more like a living room than a bar.
Photo by Caleb Caldwell

VIRTUAL

Continued from page 3

vances in the technology have more or less ironed out that particular kink — although it does still happen occasionally.

"It happens pretty rarely," he said. "One girl got some motion sickness, but she was flying in Google Earth for like 20 minutes."

Doddi only has the VR Bar space until March, so the arcade might be as fleeting as the sessions, but he says he is considering renewing the lease if it is a success.

Game like you're in the 1994 music video for Aerosmith's "Amazing" at VR Bar [808 Union St. between Sixth and Seventh avenues in Park Slope, (909) 547-4673, www.vr-bar.nyc]

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TROLLEY

Continued from page 4

Park too expensive for the people who live there, one said.

“Why spend so much money on inventing this whole new system when you could improve the buses and trains we all already use?” said Gloria Vargas, who lives along the proposed route in Sunset Park and works in Red Hook. “As someone who lives here, I don’t want or need this. Yeah I could hop on it and head to work in Red Hook, but why do that when I already have the bus? And that’s because it’s not for us — it’s meant to bring others.”

The city revealed potential routes for the so-called Brooklyn-Queens Connector earlier this month and officials are in the midst of visiting community boards for feedback. But Sunset Parkers spent more than two hours waving protest signs and heckling city honchos when they came to make their pitch at Community Board 7 on Monday night.

Proponents expect the trolley to spur development on the waterfront and

plan to finance the project with additional tax revenue reaped as a result of new construction. The plan will necessarily cause gentrification that will lead to higher rents and the displacement of locals, one critic said.

“It’s the financing of the project — the fact that it relies on rising property values. It’s a self-fulfilling prophecy because without the gentrification there is no [streetcar],” said Ana Orozco an organizer with local social-justice group Uprose. “This is for new residents that will be living in luxury developments near the waterfront.”

Councilman Carlos Menchaca (D–Sunset Park) has previously said he could not support the plan if it led to increased rents.

“What was \$800 for a one-bedroom is now almost \$2,000, which is absolutely insane,” he told Gothamist over the summer. “If this is going to accelerate that, I’m not for it.”

But the councilman refused to take a stance when locals publicly asked him on Monday.

Officials did not respond to concerns about displacement, but they did say the new rail would make locals

more mobile.

“This is not a silver bullet solution to all of New York City’s transportation problems, but this will really move the needle for greater transportation connectivity between the existing resources which are city-wide ferry stops, different bus routes, subway lines, and Citi Bike stations,” said Emma Pfohman.

But some locals maintained the cash would be better off in the state-run Metropolitan Transportation Authority’s hands.

“It just doesn’t make sense to pour so much into something new when there aren’t enough buses and it’s like being in a can of sardines,” said Sunset Parker Edward Avila. “The money could be better spent elsewhere.”

Even Deputy Mayor Alicia Glen has acknowledge the streetcar’s hulking cost compared to city buses.

“There will still be folks who argue (not crazily) that no matter where the money comes from, it is still more expensive than (bus rapid transit),” Glen wrote in an e-mail the Daily News acquired via a public information request. “And that is true.”

WORDS

Continued from page 4

Orozco. “However the EDC used it to promote the BQX, so what is the point of these visioning sessions? What is the point of these feasibility studies if they’re supposed to be neutral and the city comes away from them saying, ‘Yay the community loved it — next meeting.’”

Officials could not explain the error but

agreed that the video was wrong.

“You’re right, it should be accurate, but I’m sorry I can’t speak to the specifics of that situation,” said Adam Giambrone, who was hired by the city to head the streetcar system’s design.

It is apparently not the first suspect promotional video for the contentious project.

The cadre of waterfront developers pushing the

plan paid hipster media company Vice to produce a trolley-boasting video that featured Brooklyn-born hip-hop artist Talib Kweli in the spring. But a spokeswoman for the artist later told blog Patch that Kweli was not aware of the proposal’s finer points and was not sure whether he supported the plan as proposed or simply the broad notion of improving Brooklyn transit.

HOTELS

Continued from page 14

and he wasn’t disappointed by Downtown’s offerings.

“It’s pretty cool that the subway stations are close,” said German traveller Benno Waibel, “In the end I’m happy that we went to Brooklyn.”

People have certainly

underestimated the neighborhood’s appeal to travellers in the past. When the Marriott opened its doors in 1998 — the first hotel in the area for more than 50 years at the time — the borough was so maligned the hotel chain obscured its true location by naming it the New York Marriott at the Brooklyn Bridge.

But it has been such a hit that its operators doubled the hotel’s size in 2006, and shelled out \$45 million for a renovation last year to keep the space fresh.

Sometimes demand is so high, the Marriott actually directs people to competing hotels nearby, said company spokeswoman Kathleen Duffey.

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The lawsuit alleges that the Museum's disclosures of its current admission fee policy violate consumer protection laws by not adequately disclosing to visitors that they may enter the Museum upon payment of an amount of their choice ("pay what you wish"). The Museum denies those allegations.

The parties have agreed to a proposed settlement under which the Museum, without any concession, finding of wrongdoing, or agreement regarding the adequacy or inadequacy of the current disclosures, will revise its signs, website, and other disclosures of its "pay what you wish" admission fee policy. No money will be paid to class members, and no adjudication of any claims for money damages they may have will occur.

The Court will hold a hearing on approval of the Settlement at 10:00 a.m. on March 14, 2017, in Courtroom 228, 60 Centre Street, New York, NY 10007. Any class member may present objections he or she has to the Settlement.

You may learn more about the Settlement and procedures for objecting to it at www.metfees.com, or by calling Class Counsel at (212) 763-5068. PLEASE DO NOT CONTACT THE COURT.

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