

Civic gurus ok 4th Ave. bike lanes

BY JULIANNE MCSHANE

Bike lanes just got the green light in Sunset Park.

Community Board 7 gave the city's controversial plan to revamp Fourth Avenue the thumbs up at its meeting last week, kissing 225 parking spaces in the district goodbye in exchange for new bike lanes, loading zones, expanded metered parking, and pedestrian-safety measures along the thoroughfare.

Board members' 30-5 vote in favor of the plan to re-make the roadway from 65th Street to Atlantic Avenue followed the proposal's approval by Park Slope's Community Board 6, which endorsed it in a near-unanimous vote earlier this month.

CB7's district manager said the lack of opposition to the redesign scheme surprised some board members, especially because previous meetings about it were advertised with 6,000 fliers throughout the district.

"No matter what the issue, when you're talking change,

Continued on page 12

KITTY CORNERED



HOLA, IT'S ME: In a scene from Daniel Burity's film "Hola Kitty," a costumed performer takes a break in a park.

Daniel Burity

A look inside the mascots

BY ALEXANDRA SIMON

He really got inside her head!

A Bedford-Stuyvesant filmmaker will screen his short documentary "Hola Kitty," as part of the Grand Finale of the Katra Film Series at the Alamo Drafthouse on Feb. 6. The 10-minute movie follows the lives of Latino immigrants who don furry costumes and superhero outfits to pose with tourists in Times Square and Coney Island, and its director hopes the doc will provide a new angle for the national discussion on immigration.

"When I started seeing those costumes in Times Square, I thought it was very interesting that the people doing this were mostly Mexicans and illegal immigrants," said Daniel Burity. "And I always wanted to make a documentary about immigration, only now I could highlight something new.

He was especially intrigued that workers portrayed charac-

Continued on page 6

Stinking street

BY JULIANNE MCSHANE

This avenue needs a bath!

The city is ignoring a stinky Bath Beach street that has reeked of poop for at least the past two years, locals say.

The block of Bath Avenue between Bay 16th and

17th streets smells like raw sewage, and the city is forcing the block's residents and small business owners to live with the putrid scent, according to the district manager of Community Board 11.

"It smells like a sewer
Continued on page 12



Photo by Caleb Caldwell

BRAIN POWER: "A New Brain" follows a musical theater writer (right), who hallucinates numbers while in the hospital.

There's singin' in his brain

BY WINNIE MCCROY

Talk about a surgical theater!

This weekend, the Park Slope theater company will launch a hilarious, heartwarming musical about brain surgery. "A New Brain," opening on Jan. 27 at Gallery Players, is a play

about the healing power of art that feels somehow universal, says its director.

"It moves and touches me, and I think it's one of the most beautiful pieces of musical theater ever written, because it simultaneously shows the honesty and schmaltz and the love

we cherish when we see musicals, but it is also full of biting sarcasm and the difficulties we appreciate in life," said Barrie Gelles. "That's what life feels like; things get dark, but there's hope."

The story, from com-
Continued on page 12

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Beef among beefcakes

Blink Fitness opens on same block as old-school gym



Photo by Jason Speakman

BY JULIANNE MCSHANE

They don't want to work it out.

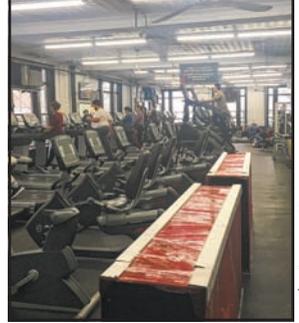
Sunset Park's old-school gym rats are infuriated that an outpost of a chain gym opened its doors just three doors down from a smaller, no-frills one that has been in the neighborhood for nearly 30 years. Blink Fitness opened the company's 65th location in Sunset Park on Jan. 15, on Fourth Avenue between 51st and 52nd streets, but management at the smaller Richie's Gym said that the chain operation had no business opening its doors on the very same block.

"I think it's ridiculous. The neighborhood is big enough for them to open up on another block," said David Vale, the general manager of Richie's Gym, which opened in 1990.

He suggested that opening the spiffy new workout spot so near the gritty local stalwart was a deliberate move to create a contrast.

"Being only a few doors down, they're throwing shade at us to make themselves look better," he said.

Blink's three-story Sunset Park outpost is the company's 13th location to open in the borough, and features more than 80 pieces of cardio equipment and 50 weight machines. The gym chain is known for its affordable membership, which starts at just \$15 per month and includes one free 30-minute training session, along with small-group training sessions. Richie's Gym, on the



CNG / Julianne McShane

BIG DOG VS SMALL GUY:

(Above) Certified personal trainers Mashood Shabbir, Sean Marshall, and Jenni Morris welcomed workout fiends to Sunset Park's newly opened Blink Fitness. (Left) Richie's Gym boasts a no-frills, bare-bones aesthetic – the opposite of Blink's sleek and expansive interior.

other hand, has four other locations in the borough, charges \$25 per month—but not the \$50 annual fee that Blink requires—and also offers boxing in addition to its two floors filled with cardio and weight machines.

But the president of Blink Fitness said he picked the Sunset Park location because the neighborhood has so few gyms, and insisted that he isn't trying to encroach on Richie's or the other specialized yoga, martial arts, and boxing facilities in the area.

"There really is no competition—there's a small gym a block or so from here," said Todd Magazine. "But we are very respectful of our competition and our job is not to put them out of business, that's not what we came here to do."

Vale said that his problem with Blink isn't that it came to Sunset Park, but that it opened on the very same block as Richie's and is sure to take away business with its better-known brand name and larger advertising budget.

"It's not about them coming to the neighborhood, it's about them being on the

same block," Vale said. "Our business runs on blood, sweat, tears, and dreams, pretty much."

One Borough Park resident who said he's pumped iron at Richie's for about 15 years said that someone from Blink should have approached the management at the older gym before the outpost opened, since Richie's is practically a neighborhood landmark.

"It's not a problem that a new gym's in the neighborhood, but I feel that if they were going to at least open on the same block as him, they at least should've come and talked to him and see how he felt about it, and not just do it," said Raoul Vasquez. "It's not right, this gym's been here for such a long time."

But Vasquez said that he thinks Blink will at least have some success appealing to the nabe's younger residents who are contributing to the area's increasing gentrification.

"There's a lot of gentrification right now, so a lot of people that move from Williamsburg are going to choose to go to that gym," he said.

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TOP CHEF: La Vellutata chef and owner Elisa Mazzucato showed off the Park Slope eatery's popular vegan chili-broccoli soup. Photo by Jason Speakman

Buon appetito!

Italian chef debuts vegan eatery in Slope

BY JULIANNE MCSHANE

Call it *verdure Italiano!*

An Italian chef opened a vegan and vegetarian eatery in Park Slope that puts a healthy twist on some of her favorite red-sauce staples. The menu items at La Vellutata do not all come straight from Italy, but that doesn't stop the cook from drawing inspiration from some of her home country's signature foods, she said.

"People ask, 'why isn't it full Italian?' But in Italy, I don't only eat pizza and pasta. It's international," said Elisa Mazzucato, who moved to New York from her native Venice last year to open the casual-takeout restaurant. "And I like Italian food, but I like healthier versions."

The eatery serves a selection of sweets, creamy soups, fruity salads, and veggie-filled burgers such as the "parmigiana burger," a take on the classic dish made with a veggie patty topped with eggplant, tomatoes, vegan mayo, and basil.

Other burgers feature tofu, veggie, and curry patties, shiitake bacon instead of meat, and toppings including avocado mash, tomato and coriander, roasted kale and beetroot, basil, and beet ketchup.

Mazzucato said the three soups she offers closely resemble Italian stews that are typically packed with veggies, meats, and spices.

The chili-broccoli soup, which the chef said is the most popular, is made with vegan cheese, extra-virgin olive oil, chili pepper, cashew nuts, and bread crumbs. The Parmentier is a take on the classic potato-and-leek soup, seasoned with saffron and hempseed. And the Norway — served hot and cold — features the flavors of beetroot, onion, star anise, fresh dill, and home-made wasabi sauce.

Mazzucato sources the ingredients from area vendors — a move she made after scaling back her initial desire to have them shipped from her home country.

"When I started, I thought I could get [ingredients] from Italy, but it's very expensive," she said. "Now, I only want local."

La Vellutata officially debuted in November after Mazzucato decided to open it in the family-friendly, gym-filled neighborhood, according to the general manager of the eatery — the name of which means "velvet," to evoke the inventive and

creamy soups that are the cornerstone of its menu.

"She toured all these different places, and found people are health-conscious in this neighborhood," said Santhosh Umapathi.

About half of the regulars are vegans, Umapathi said, with the other half being meat-eaters willing to try the veggie-filled foods.

Beyond the chili-broccoli soup, regulars also favor the sweet chocolate burger — made with coconut flower, oat flakes, hazelnut grain, mango sauce, and fresh mint — according to Mazzucato, who said she cooked up the menu items following her years working at restaurants in Italy, including the one her parents operate.

The chef hopes to add more gluten-free options, vegan shakes, and lighter soups by summer, and wants to eventually expand within the city — and beyond.

"She has some big plans," Umapathi said.

La Vellutata [172 Fifth Ave. between Degraw and Sackett streets in Park Slope, (917) 909-1818, www.lavellutatany.com] Open Mon. – Sat., 10 am–10 pm; Sun., 9 am–3 pm.

Palate cleanser

Safe snack born from viral Tide stunt

BY JULIANNE CUBA

This pizza will really tide you over!

A Williamsburg pizzeria is serving blue-and-orange slices inspired by the absurd trend among teens to eat candy-colored — and poisonous — pods filled with Tide detergent.

The co-owner of Vinnie's Pizzeria, an artist

known for using the cuisine as his canvas, said he cooked up the idea because he'd rather people stuff their faces with his nontoxic look-alike than put a potentially life-threatening substance near their mouths.

"If the pods look alluring enough to eat, then why don't I create something people can actually eat?" said Sean Berthiaume, who lives in Greenpoint, where he runs another pizzeria. "It's all over the news, and it's all I see on Twitter, Instagram, Facebook. People are going crazy about this."

Berthiaume's dish, dubbed "Pied pods," is more like a minicalzone stuffed with cheese, pepperoni, and spices that's wrapped in crispy dough and topped with cheese dyed the same colors as the cleaning product that some kids dare to eat as part of the viral "Tide-pod challenge" on social media.

The detergent-free dish started out as a joke, he said, but the owners of the Bedford Avenue Italian joint decided to sell the Pied pods hot and fresh for a limited time when they got tons of orders after Berthiaume



OKAY TO EAT: Williamsburg's Vinnie's Pizzeria is now serving minicalzones that look like Tide pods.

shared a photo of the creation on the eatery's Instagram account.

"This is not meant to be a culinary revolution, just a fun thing," he said. "I don't foresee it becoming a main-menu item, just a pop-up."

The small bites, made

entirely with digestible ingredients, are health-department approved, according to Berthiaume, who is advertising them with the slogan "hope, not soap."

"They are 100-percent toxin-free," the co-owner said. "I hope people don't actually think I'm trying to endorse people eating soap."

This isn't the first time Berthiaume bucked the notion that you shouldn't play with your food. In May 2016, his pie shop shot to fame when it began serving pizzas inside an edible "box" made from the same cheesy slices. And before that, slices adorned with purple-tinted mozzarella, in honor of the late musician Prince, and pies topped with natural rainbow-colored toppings, to celebrate the Supreme Court's 2015 ruling that legalized same-sex marriage, became two of customers' favorite menu items, he said.

"Each one of these things is me just fooling around," Berthiaume said. "And they all started with me trying to entertain our fans and followers on social media."



PIE MAN: Sean Berthiaume, co-owner of Vinnie's Pizzeria in Williamsburg, is serving "Pied pods" — mini-calzones that look like Tide pods — for a limited time at his Bedford Avenue eatery. Photo by Caleb Caldwell

Change they believe in

Cuomo must add faster BQE fix to budget, pols say

BY JULIANNE CUBA

He has to budge on his budget.

Gov. Cuomo must revise his recently unveiled budget so it includes authorization for a process to speed up the city-led reconstruction of a crumbling section of the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway in Brooklyn Heights, a contingent of pols demanded.

Cuomo's current budget does not include a provision allowing for design-build — which advocates say will streamline the restoration of the roadway's triple cantilever by soliciting a single bid for its design and construction instead of separate proposals for each — and the local leaders are requesting a revision before it's too late.

"We all know this is something needed, we believe the governor is a proponent of this, so we don't quite understand why it didn't make its



File photo by Aaron Short

RECALCULATE IT: A group of pols demanded Gov. Cuomo include a provision allowing the city to use design-build in the reconstruction of the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway's triple cantilever in his state budget.

way into his initial budget proposal," said Assemblywoman Jo Anne Simon (D-Brooklyn Heights). "I'm disappointed."

Simon and more than a dozen state lawmakers penned Cuomo a letter urging him to include design-

build in his budget before he released it on Jan. 16.

And now that his first draft is out, the governor has 30 days from that date to amend it before the Assembly and state Senate start preparing their own versions, which will be used with Cuomo's to create a final budget that the state's Commander in Chief must sign by April 1.

Another pol fighting for design-build said he has no plans to back down, and remains optimistic the state will do the right thing.

"I'm committed to working with my colleagues to continue to make the case for design-build. This streamlined process would save taxpayer dollars and shorten the project's timeline," said state Sen. Brian Kavanagh (D-Brooklyn Heights), who also signed his name on the letter to Cuomo.

The city's Department of Transportation is spend-



FALLING APART: The triple cantilever.

File photo by Jason Speakman

ing \$1.9 billion to repair the decrepit triple cantilever that runs from Atlantic Avenue to Sands Street, and agency honchos recently warned residents that they may have to boot thousands of big-rigs from the expressway and send them down local streets if it is not fixed by 2026.

The current timeline for the 70-year-old span's restoration begins in 2024 and ends in 2029. But Simon and other design-build advocates say the process would cut about \$113 million from the job's total cost and accelerate work by about three

years, allowing it to start in 2021 and finish in 2026 — before the expressway crumbles beneath the weight of passing trucks.

"The scenario nobody wants is for this to be delayed so much so that trucks have to be banned, the city is sort of counting backwards in the calendar to ensure they get this going," Simon said.

And there's still a chance that state lawmakers will approve design-build through the typical legislative process if it doesn't get slipped into the budget, but that possibility is less likely while

Albany is laser focused on its financial agenda, the assemblywoman said.

"The most effective way to get this done is through the budget," she said. "We'll certainly encourage Cuomo to amend his."

The governor signed off on design-build for several state-run projects, including the construction of the new Kosciuszko Bridge, and supports its use, according to a spokesman, who said Cuomo is willing to discuss giving city officials the authority to incorporate the process in the expressway's reconstruction.

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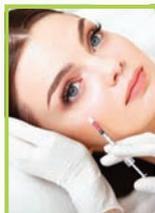
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BOROUGH OF BOOKS

Brooklyn author named ambassador for youth literature

BY JULIANNE MCSHANE

She's changing the world one page at a time.

One of the borough's own award-winning authors will travel the country over the next two years to promote the power of reading and literature to young people across the nation.

The Library of Congress named Jacqueline Woodson as the sixth National Ambassador for Young People's Literature earlier this month, and her platform — "reading equals hope times change" — is meant to inspire youngsters to harness their own power to help believe in and create a better future, she said.

"Reading gives us hope. When we read about the people who came before us and fictional characters who overcome the odds, it gives us this sense of what we can do ourselves," said Woodson, who lives in Park Slope. "When we have hope and information, we can create change."

Woodson is the author of more than two dozen books for kids and young adults, and her list of accolades is long. She took home the country's top literary prize — the National Book Award — in 2014 for her memoir, "Brown Girl Dreaming," and was a finalist for the prestigious award three other times, including in 2016 for her most recent book, "Another Brooklyn." She is also a two-time winner of the Coretta Scott King award, which honors African-American authors who write about the black experience for a youth audience, and is a four-time winner of the Newbery Honor,



LOCAL LUMINARY: Award-winning author and Park Sloper Jacqueline Woodson was named the sixth National Ambassador for Young People's Literature by the Library of Congress.

Photo by Jason Speakman

one of the most prestigious awards for children's literature.

Woodson's devotion to exploring the experiences of kids through her writing contributed to her appointment, and will help her communicate the power of literature to young minds, according to the Librarian of Congress.

"I have admired Jacqueline Woodson's work for years, especially her dedication to children and young-adult literature," said Carla Hayden. "The Library of Congress looks forward to Jacqueline's tenure of encouraging young readers to embrace reading as a means to improve the world."

In her role as literary ambassador, Woodson will travel to schools and libraries — as well as less-ex-

pected venues, such as prisons and juvenile-detention centers — to converse with young bookworms from all backgrounds about how books have changed them in an effort to forge connections between readers, she said.

"I would love to go to prisons, I would love to go to juvenile-detention centers, group homes, any place where people have not had the same kinds of opportunities to gather and talk about literature and feel safe," she said.

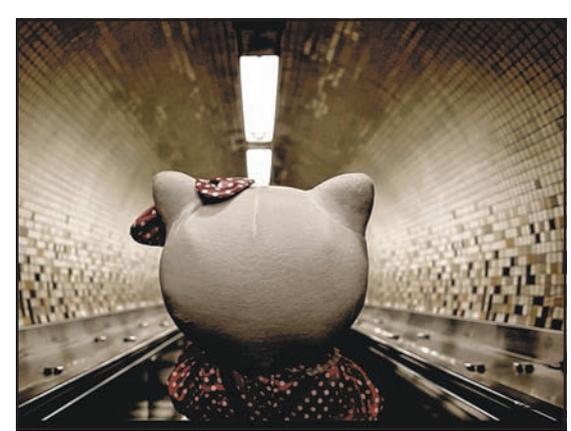
She hosted her first event on Jan. 11 on the distant isle of Manhattan, where she talked to middle schoolers at a local bookstore. But Woodson will also make a special effort to visit rural parts of the country to promote the

work of diverse writers, she said. And even though she's assuming her post during a particularly divisive moment, Woodson said she does not plan to get too political, and will instead try to teach tiny readers to be change-makers by developing empathy through reading.

"We teach social justice through literature. [Kids] learn about kindness, hope, fear, caring, and then as they get older they begin to understand those things on a deeper level," she said. "Literature should be for people to lose themselves in an emotional journey, but when they come out of that journey they're different, they're changed."

Woodson said her home borough is a welcome respite.

Continued on page 12



INTO THE DEPTHS: A woman in a Hello Kitty costume rides the escalator on her way home from an all-day session in Times Square.

Daniel Burity

KITTY

Continued from page 1

ters of different ethnicities, he said.

"Hello Kitty is a Japanese character, and you have a Mexican person working illegally in the U.S. as that character — I wanted to examine the social aspect of immigration," said Burity.

After talking to the costumed performers, he discovered that people will often treat a fictional character better than they would an actual human immigrant, said Burity.

"One woman talked about how much she feels better in the costume because [Hello Kitty is] not Latina — people don't see color, they just see this character," he said. "What was heartbreaking was how she feels even more comfortable dressing up in a Hello Kitty costume than being herself."

And just wearing the costume is no easy feat, Burity discovered. He tried on a costume head, and he only lasted two minutes with it on.

"I tried on a mask and it's not a good idea if you're claustrophobic,"

said Burity. "It's heavy, it's super dark, and it's extremely hot. I don't know how they can wear it for hours, but they do."

In an era when anti-immigrant sentiments have increased, Burity hopes that his film will provide a glimpse into the effort that immigrants will go through in order to remain in the United States.

"I finished this film just before Trump was elected, but my intention is to educate people and for the film to be fun and not preachy," he said. "I'm not a teacher, but I think people will learn about other realities, and about the work illegal immigrants do to maintain a life here."

"Hola Kitty" is one of 15 short films screening during two sessions during the Katra Film Series finale.

The winner, determined after the screening, will win a camera kit worth \$5,000.

"*Hola Kitty*" at the *Katra Film Series* [445 Albee Square West between Willoughby and Fulton streets Downtown, (718) 513-2547, www.katra-filmseries.com]. Feb. 6 at 7 pm. \$30-\$100.



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Rockaway takeaway

City plans to pull lanes from parkway

BY ADAM LUCENTE

The city wants to block a way on the Rockaway Parkway.

Locals are livid about the Department of Transportation's plans to take away a lane of the Rockaway Parkway in Canarsie as a way to reduce traffic accidents.

"I think it's horrible," said Canarsie resident Marc Want. "They're out of their minds."

Rockaway Parkway would go from two lanes each way down to one between Flatlands and Seaview avenues, to make room for turn lanes and pedestrian islands at intersections, according to the plan presented at the Community Board 18 meeting on Jan. 17.

The plan is part of Mayor DeBlasio's Vision Zero initiative to elimi-

nate traffic deaths by the year 2020, which identifies that stretch of the parkway a "Vision Zero Priority Corridor" due to the relatively high number of fatalities there.

Six people died and 22 suffered severe injuries in traffic accidents in that area between 2011 and 2015, and a majority of motorists speed between Avenues J and K on the parkway, according to city statistics. There are also several schools in the area, and a nursing home.

But Canarsie residents complained that the plan unfairly punishes drivers when the real problem is pedestrians.

"There are too many cars and not enough roads," said Judy D. Newton at the CB18 meeting. "Instead of punishing mo-

torists, who have to go to work, and people going about their day, why not also punish the jaywalkers?"

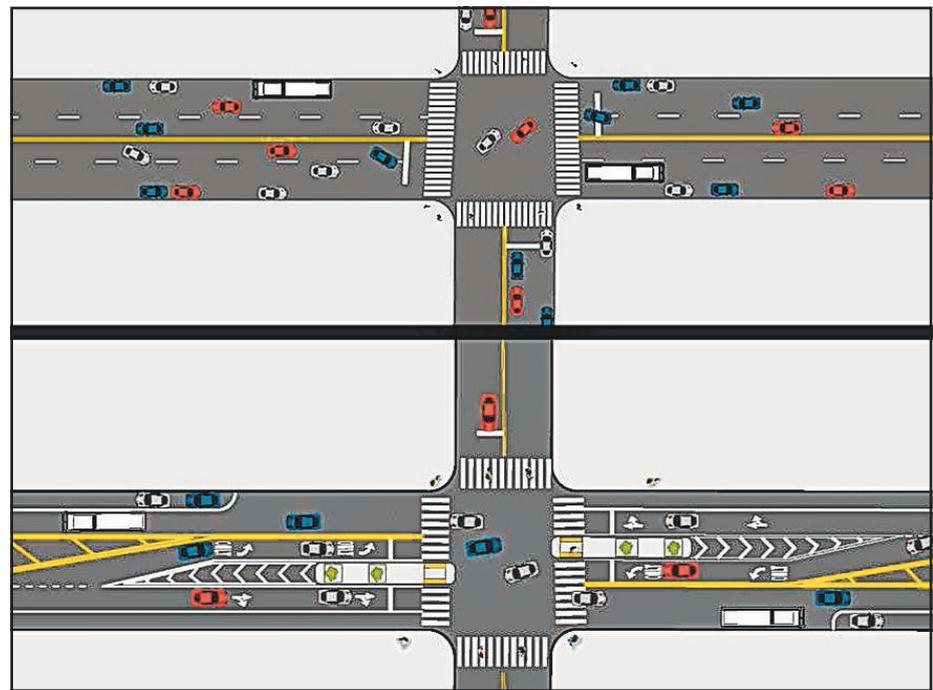
Locals also griped that the plan would make traffic even worse.

"Making that one lane will be disastrous. It'll take forever," said Jim Buchanan, "If it's one lane, I'd rather walk. I could make it quicker."

A Department of Transportation rep defended the one-lane proposal by calling the current arrangement a license to speed.

"Two lanes, there's no reason not to speed," he said. "One lane allows you to control speed."

He also said that the planned left turn bays — separated from the other lanes by a concrete median — will better separate cars at the busy inter-



LANE CHANGE: The current lane configuration, at the top, would be revamped at intersections to include turn lanes and pedestrian islands, at bottom. Department of Transportation

sections.

"We think it's better," he said. "The left doesn't interfere with the right."

This is not the first plan the department has unveiled for Rockaway Parkway. The city suggested adding pedestrian

islands back in 2016, and Community Board 18 supported the idea.

Residents did say they recognize the need to address the civilian deaths on the thoroughfare — but with something short of stripping away traffic

lanes. Want said he would support adding speeding cameras to the area instead.

"I understand kids were killed. Idiots speed there," he said. "They should put speeding cameras. It'd be a lot cheaper."

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A reading rainbow!

Youngsters fill Greenpoint church for Drag Queen Story Hour

BY JULIANNE CUBA

This queen got kids in the learning spirit!

A local drag queen took to the altar of a Greenpoint church on Jan. 21 to read stories to a crowd of youngsters, defying gender and religious norms to remind the kids that they can be anything they want when they grow up.

“I think our current state of politics has sparked a huge interest in raising a generation that is not prejudiced,” said Rev. Yolanda, who identifies as transgender and lives in Bay Ridge. “Because of the fundamentalist attitude around the country and world, people are saying ‘No, we embrace diversity.’”

Rev. Yolanda, who leads a non-traditional interfaith congregation in the outer borough of Manhat-



QUEEN READER: Drag queen Rev. Yolanda read to youngsters at Greenpoint’s Park Church Co-op on Sunday.

Photo by Taylor Balkom

tan, expanded the young minds in attendance by reading from stereotype-

breaking books that included “It’s Okay to Be Different” and “The Very Hungry Caterpillar.”

The storytelling session at the Lutheran Park Church Co-op on Russell Street between Nassau and Driggs avenues was part of a national initiative uniting queens and kids called Drag Queen Story Hour, which swept the borough as early as 2016 when another performer read to kids at a Fort Greene bookstore.

Tots have long been taught the fundamental benefits of reading, but learning from a drag queen helps them master the skill as well as the art of kindness, Rev. Yolanda said.

“Anybody can read books to children, but with drag queens doing it, the kids will grow up with a different kind of mindset

when it comes to demonizing people,” she said.

And the session didn’t just inspire the tykes in attendance — parents who watched the mistress of ceremonies engage their youngsters learned something from her, too, she said.

“It’s usually the parents that have questions,” said Rev. Yolanda. “The kids are usually just laughing and having fun.”

The event gave one Greenpoint tot an opportunity to come face-to-face with a queer role model who doesn’t conform to traditional gender constructs — an important introduction in a world that seems to grow more prejudiced by the day, according to her mom, who did not want to give her last name.

“I want her to start



BROAD READING: Robin McConaghy, 5, shared a magic moment with Rev. Yolanda with a wand the youngster made following the story hour.

Photo by Taylor Balkom

learning early that gender is fluid and there are all kinds of different, wonderful people in the world,” Devon said about her 5-year-old daughter, Robin.

“And to grow up with very positive, queer-friendly feelings, knowing that she can wear whatever she wants, and be whoever she wants, when she grows up.”

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BRAIN

Continued from page 1

poser William Finn, follows a musical theater writer named “Gordon Schwinn” who suffers a brain injury due to arteriovenous malformation. The musical’s full-blown song and dance routines spring straight from the character’s unconscious mind, said Gelles.

“Hishallucinationsturn into song and dance numbers, because in my mind, if you spend all your time writing musicals, your subconscious lets loose in that style,” she said.

Between tap routines, nurses and doctors attend to Gordon’s hospital business. In her production, Gelles wanted to emphasize that Gordon’s crisis is not happening privately in his home, but that all his family struggles, relationships, sadness, joy, and fear unfold before an audience of doctors, nurses, and orderlies — an ordeal that many audience members can relate to.

“It’s incredibly pub-



ORDERLY DANCING: “A New Brain,” opening at Gallery Players on Jan. 27, features a dancing, singing cast of doctors and nurses. Photo by Caleb Caldwell

lic, but also isolated,” said Gelles. “I’ve emphasized the drama and trauma of hospitalization and the health care process. Right now, health care is at the forefront of everyone’s mind, wondering what would happen if we’re in danger, uninsured, or in a crisis.”

Finn wrote the play after his own experience with arteriovenous malformation in 1992, teaming up with book writer James Lapine, who also collaborated with Finn on his

1981 musical “Falsettos.” It debuted Off-Broadway in 1998, and had a re-staging in 2015 as part of the Encores! concert series. Gallery Players finally got the rights to the play this year, and turned over the reins to Gelles, who has a passion for tackling shows that are a bit off the beaten path — either under-appreciated works by great composers, or better-known pieces to which she can apply a different take, she said.

“I love re-envisioning revivals and finding a new

way to pay tribute to writers, drilling down to the core of what the show is at heart and finding a way to explode it onto the stage,” said Gelles. “Not to be disingenuous to the original piece, but to find the ultimate truth and recreate it.”

“A New Brain” at Gallery Players (199 14th St. between Fourth and Fifth avenues in Park Slope, (212) 352-3101, www.galleryplayers.com). Jan. 27-Feb. 18; Thu-Sat at 8 pm; Sun at 3 pm. \$25 (\$20 seniors and students).

AUTHOR

Continued from page 6

spite from her travels. She enjoys walking and running in Prospect Park on writing breaks, and even set one of her two books due out in August, “The Dream of America” — a novel about a diverse group of friends working through personal struggles together — in Crown Heights.

“I just love Brooklyn, it’s my home, I grew up in Bushwick,” she said. “Brooklyn feels like part of my skin, and I thought Crown Heights was an

interesting place to set a book because of how it’s changing so rapidly, for the good and the bad.”

And by the end of her two-year term, Woodson hopes she will have persuaded enough kids — and adults — to pick up more books and feel more confident in their own abilities to make the world a better place.

“I do think that by the end of two years, my hope is that a lot more people have much deeper understanding of the power of literature in our lives,” she said. “But in order for times to change, we also have to do the work.”



BOOK BLING: Author and Park Sloper Jacqueline Woodson’s medal from the Library of Congress. Photo by Jason Speakman

STINK

Continued from page 1

treatment plant,” said Marnee Elias-Pavia. “It’s unfair that it’s not being addressed in a timely manner. It’s unfair that they have to live with those odors, and it’s unfair to the businesses.”

City records show locals have dialed in 21 complaints to 311 about the sewage odor and backups just since last March, and that a local first complained about the stink back in January 2015. A Staten Islander who works in the area and frequents a café on the block, Café Venecia, said that he has smelled the poopy fumes almost every day he’s been there for the past two years — and that the stench sometimes even drifts into the café.

“It’s really bad — you think you’re in the bathroom,” said Alun Thaqi. “It’s gross, you’re eat-

ing in there and the door opens and people come in and you get the smell.”

Thaqi and other locals pointed to a sewer drain on the corner of Bath Avenue and Bay 16th Street as the source of the stench.

Councilman Justin Brannan (D-Bath Beach) and locals alerted the Department of Environmental Protection to the smell, which the agency said it’s trying to fix.

“Councilman Brannan and his constituents brought this issue to our attention and we thank them for their patience and understanding as we work towards a solution,” a spokesman said.

The agency did not respond to inquiries about when it most recently visited the site or what its explanation was for the smell.

Elias-Pavia said she thought the odor could be due to a sewage backup, but another local dismissed that

idea, citing the distinctive odor, and suggested it could be much more dangerous than just wayward poop.

“A lot of people say it smells like gas,” said Joe, who lives on Bay 16th Street and declined to give his last name. “I would compare it to a sulfur smell. But the city should investigate, for sure.”

The Fire Department, which deals with gas leaks, also did not return a request for comment by press time.

A resident who has lived just across the street from the suspect sewer drain since 2001 said the rancid stink often wafts into her home, but that even if it doesn’t, she smells it every day, and she demanded the city put a stop to it.

“It’s terrible. I don’t walk over here because I think that’s where it’s coming from,” said Kerry Noonan. “When it’s at its worst — it’s just overpowering. Do

BIKE LANES

Continued from page 1

there’s usually strong opposition,” said Jeremy Laufer. “We didn’t see what we had anticipated in terms of opposition.”

To make room for cyclists, the Department of Transportation will narrow the parking lanes on both sides of the avenue to eight feet, allowing for a two-and-a-half-foot-wide buffer and five-foot-wide bike lanes. The avenue will retain its two travel lanes in both directions, but will receive new loading zones and lose four parking spots per block to make room for pedestrian islands.

The proposal has been in the works for years and builds on safety improvements that the transportation department made to the thoroughfare in 2012.

Cycling advocates have long called for protected bike lanes on

Fourth Avenue, arguing that it’s the most convenient route to Downtown, but that it is unsafe for bike riders. The Department of Transportation previously told the activists that the avenue was too narrow for protected bike lanes, but finally agreed to add them to its proposal last year.

And last month, the transportation department sped up its plan to paint on the lanes by about a year or so at the request of locals and Councilman Brad Lander (D-Park Slope), who insisted that the original 2021 end date for the bike lanes’ Eighth Street-to-Atlantic-Avenue stretch be accelerated because it would be dangerous for cyclists to pedal along a partially complete path.

The agency will now finish painting the lanes in 2019, and workers will begin construction on other Fourth Avenue capital improvements — including installing the pedestrian is-

lands, protective planters, and other sidewalk amenities — between 65th and Eighth streets this spring as opposed to next fall, according to a transit agency rep. The same capital-improvement projects will begin between Eighth Street and Atlantic Avenue in 2021.

The bike lanes’ addition to the Fourth Avenue makeover previously sparked controversy among locals, with some calling them “rolling gentrification.”

And other residents recently railed against a similar board-approved city plan to add bike lanes and remove parking spots on several streets between Seventh Avenue and the waterfront, which locals complained could make the roads impassable for emergency vehicles.

Construction of those bike lanes will begin next spring, according to the Department of Transportation.

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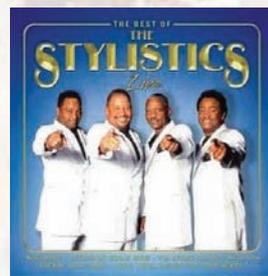
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BROOKLYN CO-OP FOR SALE:
1.5 BR Co-Op in Bay Ridge at 6817 Colonial Road, 4A, Brooklyn, NY 11220. Auction is Feb 1st, 10am at 360 Adams Stt, Room 974, Brooklyn, NY 11201. Reserve is set at \$200k. **SOLD AS IS**
Email Nathan.Horne@Corcoran.com or text 706-255-5657 for "inquiries."

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Det 1 fam 2 bed dup, LR/DR/EIK fini base Pvt dr. FIN 829006
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Local doctor treats herniated and bulging discs, sciatica, and serious lower back pain

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Surgeons perform an estimated 300,000 to 400,000 back surgeries every year. Annually, neurosurgeons perform at least 100,000 operations for lumbar disc disease alone, and orthopedic surgeons perform a similar number. It is estimated that between 20% and 40% of these operations are unsuccessful.

That is why doctors from all over the country are racing to acquire and get trained to operate the DRX9000™, an FDA approved device that is saving thousands of Americans suffering from chronic back pain from going under the knife.

Dr. Melinda Keller, who treats serious back pain without surgery explains how

the DRX9000™ works... “Over 10 years ago, NASA began to notice an unexpected result of space travel: Astronauts that left with back pain would come back without it. After investigated this now phenomenon here’s what they found: During the anti-gravity state of the mission there were decompressive forces on the intervertebral discs and back pain was relieved. How? When you travel through space, the effects of gravity are removed and you are in a weightless state. All the pressure is taken off your spine and discs. Even better — and this is the key — a negative pressure is created. This negative pressure actually sucks the herniated material back into the

disc and allows it to heal. Thanks to the DRX9000™, disc herniation sufferers finally have a non-surgical solution.”

The main conditions the DRX9000™ has documented success with are back pain, sciatica, herniated and/or bulging discs (single or multiple), degenerative disc disease, facet syndromes and a relapse or failure following back surgery.

Anyone wishing to learn more about this new FDA approved solution to back pain or to set up an appointment for a free consultation call Dr. Keller’s office at 718-234-6207 or visit **Brooklyn Spine Center**, 5911 16th Ave., Brooklyn, New York 11204. Brooklynspinecenter.com.