DOE opens 13 new boro schools

Some seats replace spots that were phased out or lost through trimming rolls

BY RICH BOCKMANN

At a borough board meeting earlier this week, the Bloomberg administration, which has been largely criticized for its focus on closing schools, touted the high-quality options it has provided students as it recapped the 13 district schools it opened in Queens this year and a number of new construction projects on the horizon.

But of the baker’s dozen that opened their doors this year, only one is in a new building and a number of the approximately 6,000 seats the department says these schools will house when they are fully enrolled in the coming years simply replace seats eliminated from existing schools.

The Hunters Point Community Middle School is the lone institution to open this year in a newly constructed building. The school, which the DOE said will be home to about 400 students when it is fully phased in, shares its new digs with the Academy for Careers in Television and Film Technical High School, which was housed last year in the same building as the Oliver Holmes School in Dutch Kills.

At the East Elmhurst Educational Campus, the Corona Arts and Sciences Academy opened its doors for its inaugural year alongside the Pan American International High School as it waits for its new home to be completed in 2016. The DOE originally planned to give Corona Arts its own campus in 2015, but construction delays have the department now floating a plan to extend the co-location.

For other new institutions, the DOE has found partners with... Continued on Page 12

Turnout high for primary in SE Queens

BY JOE ANUTA

Data show twice the number of Democratic voters turned out last week in several southeast Queens City Council primaries compared to other districts in the west and northeast, hammering home the region’s political clout.

Out of seven contests in the borough’s Democratic primary, three Council districts in southeast Queens led the pack in raw vote numbers and were in the top four for turnout.

“There are parts of southeast Queens that are very politically active, are very active with social issues and they come out to vote,” said one political insider.

About 15,400 people voted in a hotly contested Democratic primary in the St. Albans area to decide who would succeed Councilman Leroy Comrie (D-St. Albans), according to unofficial tallies from the city Board of Elections. About 12,200 voters pulled the lever to nominate Councilman Donovan Richards (D-Laurelton) for the Democratic ticket and... Continued on Page 12

Paul Vallone declared victor as Dem for Halloran’s seat

BY PHIL CORSO

The Democratic primary battle in northeast Queens’ 19th City Council District finally came to a conclusive end, with Flushing attorney Paul Vallone emerging as the winner.

Vallone initially declared victory on the night of the five-way primary vote last week, but... Continued on Page 14

O’Neills makes Maspeth return

BY BIANCA FORTIS

In May 2011, firefighters from Squad 288 lowered the flag waving above a smoldering structure fire. The flag was all that remained of O’Neill’s in Maspeth, the decades-old restaurant that had been gutted by the blaze.

Now, nearly 2½ years later, those firefighters are set to return to the flag to its owner, George O’Neill, when he hosts the grand reopening of his eponymous eatery Sept. 27.

O’Neill said he is planning to close down 53rd Drive for the event and expects to have professional athletes attend.

Although construction is not quite complete, the restaurant, located at 64-21 53rd Dr., has remained consistently busy since O’Neill and his family held a soft opening about two weeks ago.

“It was the spur of the... Continued on Page 14
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Kissena inspections fall short of claims

Parks Dept. may have inflated check-up reports after huge oak tree crushed mother, unborn child

BY JOE ANUTA

In the eight months before a tree fell and killed a pregnant woman in Kissena Park in early August, the city Parks Department appears to have conducted fewer park inspections than authorities claimed immediately after the accident — and one of those assessments lasted only 11 minutes, documents show.

Ying Yi Li, a 30-year-old Flushing resident who was six months' pregnant, was sitting on a bench overlooking Kissena Lake Aug. 4 when a 50-foot-tall oak tree suddenly toppled over, crushing the woman and her unborn child to death, according to authorities.

In the wake of the tragedy, Parks said in a statement released to the press that it had inspected the area six times in 2013, with the most recent observation occurring in June.

But in response to a Freedom of Information Law request filed by TimesLedger Newspapers for the half dozen inspections, Parks only provided paperwork for four.

The department, responsible for the maintenance of 2 million trees inside the city's parks and 600,000 more along streets in the five boroughs, did not respond by press time to explain the discrepancy.

The first two inspections occurred at the beginning and end of March, and found all the conditions acceptable in an area of Kissena Park listed as Zone 2, which includes the area where Li died, although the inspector did identify a low-hanging limb. There was no specific reference to the tree that struck Li in any of the reports.

One of the inspections lasted for about an hour, while the duration of the other was not noted.

But what appears to be the same employee returned to Kissena April 13 and spent only 11 minutes looking over the same zone.

“We believe that the inspections, particularly cumulatively, constituted an appropriate review of the zone,” Parks spokesman Arthur Pincus said in a statement.

The exact boundaries of the inspection area were not clear. The entire park is 237 acres and divided into six zones.

Zone 2 covers the areas east and west of the park's tennis courts from Bowne Street to the corners of Rose and Oak avenues, according to the documents.

On the 11-minute inspection report, the Parks employee noted conditions including a half-hollow tree southwest of the tennis courts and potholes on the path near one of the staircases leading down to the lake.

On May 22, a third inspection was performed for an hour. An inspector found one dead tree overlooking Rose Avenue to the east of the tennis courts.

Several photos attached to the report show that leafless tree standing out from its verdant counterparts.

The inspector also characterized the lawn as overgrown in 75 percent of the area, and took photos of a ruler to illustrate the length of the grass, the report states.

Li was married to Aleksandar Dikov and lived with his parents in a Parsons Boulevard apartment.

Li's family is planning on suing the city for negligence.

Reach reporter Joe Anuta by e-mail at januta@cnglocal.com or by phone at 718-260-4566.

24-story hotel coming to downtown Jamaica

BY RICH BOCKMANN

The MTA and the Greater Jamaica Development Corp. sealed a deal Wednesday that paves the way for Long Island hotelier Able Management to erect a long-awaited, 24-story lodging-and-retail tower across from the JFK AirTrain station.

The agency's board voted to approve the $1.7 million sale of 4,181 square feet of property owned by the Long Island Rail Road to GJDC affiliate 93-43 Sutphin LLC, which owns another adjacent 5,794 square feet.

The properties, which combined allow for about 111,200 square feet of buildable area, will then be sold to Able for $4.5 million, to be split 38/62 between the LIRR and Greater Jamaica.

The Port Authority gave the development corporation $2.7 million to purchase the property in 2004, the year after the AirTrain opened, with hopes the nonprofit would be able to lure corporate tenants to the site. The PA was supposed to either collect its money or the property, which houses a 6,000-square-foot building GJDC uses for meetings, if nothing had been built by 2008.

In the meantime, the city rezoned 368 blocks in downtown Jamaica in 2007, changing the area across the AirTrain station from low-density manufacturing to high-rise commercial.

The request for proposal issued for the site last summer touted the more than 200,000 passengers who pass through the downtown area each day using the LIRR, subway, bus and the AirTrain link to John F. Kennedy International Airport.

Able is proposing to build a $35 million, 210-room hotel with a full-service restaurant and retail space on the ground floor.

“The location is well-suited for a hotel, as it is directly across from and easily accessible to the Jamaica transit systems. Guests will be able to utilize the AirTrain to and from JFK Airport,” Able CEO Viral Patel said. “We look forward to successful completion of the project and becoming part of the downtown Jamaica business community.”

The company, which manages hotels in Plainview and Brentwood, was chosen over BRP Development Corp. due to “unacceptable contingencies” in the latter's proposal.

Greater Jamaica President Carlisle Towery touted the private investment as a long-awaited payoff for the groundwork the nonprofit laid with its public partners.

“‘Able Hotels’ commitment to build this hotel is a major step in our long-term dream of seeing private investment augmenting Greater Jamaica Development Corp.’s public partnership with the MTA and the Port Authority in enhancing downtown Jamaica’s unique potential for transit-oriented development,” he said. “No other neighborhood in New York offers the convenience of a wide array of commercial and retail outlets, combined with subways, the Long Island Rail Road, buses and the AirTrain providing quick and easy access to John F. Kennedy International Airport just 10-minute ride away.”

A 24-story hotel is in the works near downtown Jamaica's AirTrain station. Photo courtesy Greater Jamaica Development Corp.
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GADI AVSHALOMOV, M.D.
Diplomate of the American Board of Allergy and Immunology

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The trustee appointed to oversee Peninsula Hospital’s bankruptcy is suing the for-profit health care company that managed the institution in its final days.

Peninsula trustee sues dead hospital executive

BY RICH BOCKMANN

The trustee appointed to oversee the bankruptcy and eventual closure of Peninsula Hospital has accused a blacklisted health care executive of secretly operating the failed institution and running it into the ground for his personal gain.

Lori Lapin Jones filed a lawsuit in Brooklyn federal court late last month accusing Steven Zakheim of pulling the strings for Revival Home Health Care — the company that swooped down in a failed effort to save the Far Rockaway hospital in December 2011 — and funneling business to other companies he owned while bleeding the institution dry.

Zakheim died earlier this month. The lawsuit identifies a dozen other individuals and corporate affiliates with the executive as defendants.

In 2005, the state Department of Health refused to grant Zakheim a certificate he needed to run a medical company, citing a “cloud of Medicare or Medicaid fraud,” so when his wife Faye Zakheim purchased Revival in 2005, the two had to sign an affidavit stating he would have no involvement in the company. Meanwhile, Peninsula found itself in a precarious financial position.

In 2011, it filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection with about $34 million in assets and more than $70 million in liabilities. As part of the court-ordered agreement, Revival would lay out an $8 million loan to help keep the struggling institution afloat and appointed one of its executives, Todd Miller, as the hospital’s chief restructuring officer.

Jones, a Great Neck, L.I., bankruptcy attorney who was appointed trustee in March 2012, however, claimed that it was Steven Zakheim all along running the hospital.

“Steven Zakheim controlled the operations of Revival HHC and was a decision-maker at all times from 2005,” the lawsuit claimed.

In between the time Revival took over and Jones was appointed trustee, she claims, the private company directed at least $1.3 million in reimbursements to the “Zakheim enterprise,” expediting payments to these companies while others had to wait.

Jones said Zakheim saw Peninsula’s buying power as a way to get more aggressive pricing for his other companies.

“The debtors would serve as potential sources of revenue and would also serve as lucrative sources of business and profit for the other enterprise business lines,” she wrote.

While Revival and Jones battled in court over control of Peninsula, the Health Department essentially sealed the hospital’s fate in February 2012 when it closed the lab, citing untenable conditions.

The hospital closed its doors in April 2012.

Jones is suing for “damages in an amount to be determined at trial, but believed to be at least several million dollars, plus punitive damages.”
Avella drafting legislation against pension stripping

BY PHIL CORSO

Retirees are afraid. Those were the words John Hyland used while advocating for a bill state Sen. Tony Avella (D-Bayside) intends on submitting to protect retirees from having their pensions sold off by their longtime employers.

Hyland, who spent 33 years working as a union chief steward for the Communication Workers of America at New York Telephone/NYNEX, a predecessor to Verizon, spoke from a firsthand perspective when he said seniors who worked their whole lives should never need to worry about the practice known as pension de-risking, or pension stripping.

“All of us are very afraid,” Hyland said Monday at a news conference in Avella’s Bayside office. “And we have every right to be.”

The fear stemmed from a practice in which a company sells the pensions of its retirees, usually to an insurance company, without notifying its owner. In some cases, retirees would see their pensions converted into annuities, which are not regulated under the federal Employee Retirement Income Security Act, and not protected under the federal Pension Benefit Guaranty Corp.’s insurance coverage.

Avella said residents in his district brought the issue to his office this year after news broke that Verizon sold off 41,000 former management retirees’ pensions to Prudential Insurance Co., putting their pensions potentially at risk in the event the purchaser ever fails. The senator immediately started drafting legislation that would protect existing retirees whose pensions were sold off, calling it one of the most important pieces he ever worked on.

In essence, Avella said his legislation would provide the same protections retirees had before their pension plans were transferred so they are not left vulnerable.

“Retirees depend on their hard-earned pensions and when companies go through the process of pension stripping, they are playing a risky game with a retiree’s pension,” Avella said. “By leaving affected retirees with virtually none of the longstanding federal pension protection mechanisms provided by ERISA and the PBGC, companies are shifting the burden of risk onto pensioners.”

The senator presented the legislation he plans on introducing next session to a packed Bayside district office filled with retirees and members of the Association of BellTel Retirees and ProtectSeniors.org.

“I do not believe that the state guaranty safety net is sufficient to support an insolvency of a company as large as Prudential,” Stone said. “As we learned in the recent financial crisis, no company is too big to fail and Prudential, which purchased the Verizon pension liabilities, is no exception.”

State Sen. Tony Avella (second from l.) joins constituents and pension experts, including attorney Edward Stone (r.), to discuss legislation he will soon introduce providing basic protections for retirees in New York.

Photo by Phil Corso

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City busts bribery suspects

Investigators say Councilman Richards reported liquor store men

BY RICH BOCKMANN

The city’s corruption cops arrested a business- man last week after the southeast Queens city councilman he allegedly tried to bribe turned him in.

The Department of Investigation said police had apprehended Tarsem Singh and two others Friday in connection with an alleged plot to bribe Councilman Donovan Richards (D-Laurelton) to drop his opposition to their plans for a liquor store across the street from Springfield Gardens High School.

In May, Singh filed an application with the state Liquor Authority for 219 BS Wine & Liquor Inc., at a strip mall on the corner of North Conduit Avenue and Springfield Boulevard, a site where the community had previously protested plans for a pay-by-the-hour hotel.

After Richards and neighborhood leaders made their views known on the liquor-store proposal, Singh and an associate met with the councilman to discuss the application.

City investigators say that at that meeting, which was caught on camera, Singh allegedly tried to buy favor with Richards, who refused a cash bribe and reported the scheme to the authorities.

Singh and two of his associates later discussed the application with someone they thought was one of Richards’ representatives, but was in fact an undercover investigator.

Two of the men subsequently met with the agent on two different occasions and allegedly handed over $1,400 in cash and promised another $1,100 if Richards would support their SLA application.

“Call the Liquor Authority. We are counting on you,” the second man, Davinder Singh, texted the undercover agent the next day, according to the DOI.

“Clearly, the good news is that there are public officials unwilling to sell their offices,” DOI Commissioner Rose Gill Hearn said. “The Council member’s prompt report allowed DOI to investigate swiftly and shut down the scheme.”

Richards said his office is not for sale.

“When I was elected, I promised my constituents that I would carry myself with the utmost integrity and that I would do whatever was needed to protect our quality of life,” he said.

“May these arrests show those who seek to bribe public officials that our communities and children aren’t for sale.”

South Ozone Park residents Tarsem Singh, Davinder Singh and a third associate, Rajinder Singh, were arrested Friday on bribery charges. Tarsem Singh has a license with the city Taxi and Limousine Commission, which the DOI said it notified of the investigation’s findings.

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No plans to close ‘Big A’ right now

BY BIANCA FORTIS

The Aqueduct Racetrack in South Ozone Park will not be shutting down anytime soon, a spokesman for the New York Racing Association said.

The Albany Times Union reported last month that NYRA was considering closing the horse racing facility.

But when asked about the report, Eric Wing, a NYRA spokesman, said flatly Tuesday “there are no plans to close Aqueduct.”

NYRA board members and state Sen. Joseph Addabbo (D-Howard Beach), however, have both said the closure is one idea being considered in order to make the association financially sustainable.

At an Aug. 28 meeting of the NYRA reorganization board, Chief Executive Officer Christopher Kay said he hoped to develop a plan by next year to make NYRA a private business again, the newspaper reported.

Board members discussed ways to increase revenues and lower expenses. Finance Committee Chairman Stuart Subotnick brought up the possibility of closing the racetrack.

He said a decision to close it had not been made at that time, but the future of the track still was unclear.

He said funds allocated for upgrades at Aqueduct should be spent wisely in case assets are later moved to Belmont Park or Saratoga Race Course, the two other racetracks NYRA operates.

Closing the Aqueduct Racetrack is one option board members of the New York Racing Association say they would consider in order to make the association financially sustainable.

www.TimesLedger.com
Vornado plans 24-story addition to Rego Center

BY BIANCA FORTIS

Work has already begun to build 314 apartment units on top of the Rego Center shopping mall in Rego Park.

An application submitted by Manhattan-based Vornado Realty Trust to construct the 24-story addition was approved in June, according to documents filed with the city Department of Buildings.

The addition would be 288 feet high and will be designed by the New York firm SLCE Architects, records show.

The new development will not include enclosed parking space, according to the records. The mall already has a parking deck and the Rego Park Mall, in front of the center, has a four-level parking garage. The apartment piece, which was included in the original plans for the shopping center, is considered Phase 2 of the center’s development.

Vornado Realty Trust first opened the shopping complex, at 61-35 Junction Blvd., in 2010. While community members were initially concerned about traffic congestion in the area, the center was a welcome addition to the neighborhood because it brought the promise of jobs.

But congestion is again a concern, according to Community Board 6 District Manager Frank Gulluscio. He said he has received calls from community members about the construction.

“It’s a major concern for everybody,” he said. “We have to monitor that closely from a traffic and law enforcement standpoint, to make sure that things flow around the area.”

Gulluscio also said there is some concern among board members about the lack of library access in the area. The Rego Park branch of the Queens Library, on 63rd Drive, requires patrons to cross Queens Boulevard to use it. The Lefrak City branch is on the other side of the Long Island Expressway.

Construction has begun to build 314 apartment units on top of the Rego Center shopping plaza.
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Apostle Dr. John H. Boyd's legacy will live on long into the future in the Cambria Heights community where his ministry first began, his family and community leaders believe.

“Fifty years from now a young man will go past this street and ask his mother, ‘Mommy, who was Apostle John Boyd?’ That mother will tell him what a great and wonderful man he was and maybe that will make for a follow-up of Apostle Boyd,” state Assemblyman William Scarborough (D-Jamaica) told those gathered to see the corner of 219th Street co-named for Boyd Saturday afternoon.

“For his name to live on forever in this community on a street sign, there are no words,” said Boyd’s son, Pastor John H. Boyd II. “It was always about making life better for the people in this community.”

Boyd’s New Greater Bethel Ministries started in a small brown canvas tent that the late church leader set up at the corner of Linden and Francis Lewis boulevards in 1972.

“I was 16 years old. I didn’t understand what in the world he was doing,” said his son, who has since taken over the church. The congregation quickly grew to more than 2,000 members, and in 1975 the church acquired the Cambria Heights theater complex, which now serves as a school run by the ministry. The church also runs a food pantry, soup kitchen and 24-hour prayer phone line.

“John Boyd’s voice went around the world,” said the Rev. Charles Norris about the minister’s Voice of Bethel radio broadcast, which officials believe reached almost 150 million listeners each week.

Tributes to the late church leader were given by elected officials, including U.S. Rep. Gregory Meeks (D-Jamaica), City Comptroller John Liu, state Assemblywomen Barbara Clark (D-Queens Village) and Vivian Cook (D-Jamaica), Scarborough, and City Councilmen Ruben Wills (D-Jamaica) and Leroy Comrie (D-St. Albans), who hosted the weekend event.

“Apostle Boyd was about teaching and about economic development. He was teaching other people to be ministers,” Comrie said. “He was about acquiring property to make sure that the church could be self-sufficient.”

Boyd’s sister Dr. Cindy Boyd-Hazel, who spoke about how her brother encouraged his six siblings. “I see this tent, and I said, ‘Wait a minute. There is a tent in here. We didn’t ask for that,’ and I was told that’s Rev. Boyd’s tent,” she joked. “He’s in our spot, but it’s Rev. Boyd so we are going to have to move and go someplace else.”

Clark praised Boyd’s impact on Linden Boulevard, his work with prison inmates and outreach to patients at the Coler-Goldwater Specialty Hospital & Nursing Facility on Roosevelt Island.

Liu told the crowd that the ministry was left in good hands.

“I think he is creating his own legacy as well,” Clark recalled trying to organize an overnight vigil in Roy Wilkins Park to raise money for cancer research.

City Councilman Leroy Comrie (l.) helps Mother Margie Boyd and her daughter-in-law Lady Boyd pull the cover off the street sign. Photo by Christina Santucci

“I want to thank all of you for remembering a part of my brother’s dream and my brother’s life,” said Boyd’s sister Dr. Cindy Boyd-Hazel, who spoke about how her brother encouraged his six siblings. “He worked with us and let us know we could be whatever we wanted to be.”

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Moon Festival

Hundreds of people turned out Saturday evening for the Flushing Development Center’s Moon Festival parade. (Clockwise from top left) Earl Beckles from E&J Productions sports the costume of a massive winged creature in the parade; members of the Asociacion de Diablos Cojuelos Organizadores de New York dress as “Dominican devils” for the festivities; Francis Lewis High School’s Patriot Battalion JROTC group walks in formation on Main Street; the Huang Sing Kwoon Lion Dance Team carries a dragon; younger Emily Dong is lifted in the air; and stilt walkers from the Brooklyn-based Kaiosoha Moko Jumbies USA march along Elder Avenue.

Photo by Christina Santucci
Political leaders in western Queens are opposing a congressional proposal that would cut $39 billion from the federal food stamps program over the next 10 years.

U.S. Rep. Carolyn Maloney (D-Astoria) Monday called the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, which provides food stamps, a vital safety net that keeps millions of Americans out of poverty.

“These cuts are part of the GOP’s continued affront on millions of low-income families, many of them headed by single woman,” she said.

Maloney was joined by state Assemblywoman Aravella Simotas (D-Astoria) and City Councilman Jimmy Van Bramer (D-Sunnyside) in front of the Hour Children food pantry in Long Island City to publicly denounce the proposed cuts.

House Republicans, led by Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-Va.), want to change eligibility requirements for the program, which would leave between 4 million and 6 million Americans ineligible for food stamps, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priority. The goal of the cuts is to decrease the national deficit.

The center projects that in 2014, more than 3 million New York state residents will be using the program.

The SNAP program is usually part of the Farm Bill, which is reauthorized every five years. However, Republicans pushed for a cut of about $20 billion to food stamps, causing the bill to fail. Now Republicans have nearly doubled the amount they want to cut in a new separate bill.

Food stamp recipients throughout New York state are already hit with more than $300 million in reductions to SNAP benefits when a cut to the program goes into effect Nov. 1, the center said.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 temporarily increased SNAP benefits as a way to stimulate the economy, but that boost is now expiring.

“There are countless western Queens residents who heavily rely on SNAP benefits to feed their families every single day,” Van Bramer said. “If enacted, these proposed cuts will place a tremendous strain on local city food pantries, like Hour Children, which are already struggling to feed those in need.”

Abigael Burke, the food pantry and outreach coordinator for Hour Children, said the SNAP program is the first line of defense for anti-hunger advocates.

“We must keep it strong,” she said. “Food pantries and soup kitchens and emergency food programs like my own are the last line of defense and they are already strapped.”

Burke said within the last couple of years she has seen an increase of more than 40 percent in food pantry participants and that number is continuing to grow.

Community leaders gather at the Long Island City food pantry Hour Children to protest cuts to food stamp benefits.

Maloney complimented the work done by Hour Children, but said the organization is underfunded and cannot be relied upon to provide assistance to needy members of the community.

According to the center, 47 percent of food stamp recipients are children and nearly two-thirds of benefits go to women. The bill would also cut 280,000 children from school meal programs.

“No child should have to go hungry because of partisan politics,” Simotas said. “I join Congresswoman Maloney in her call to protect the most vulnerable among us by providing access to adequate food for every American.”

In a statement, Borough President Helen Marshall said SNAP helps recipients “get the nutrition they need to be healthy. The huge $40 billion cut that some in the House are proposing to make to SNAP would heartlessly throw millions of Americans out of the program and cut benefits for millions more.”
**Schools**

Continued from Page 1

Catholic schools willing to lease out unused space for public school students. Both the East Elmhurst Community School and the Middle Village Preparatory Charter School opened inside Catholic schools this year.

In western Queens’ District 24, among the most overcrowded in the city, the department cannot keep up with the growing student population.

Nick Comaianni, president of the area’s Community Education Council parents group, said the cramped classroom problem has two parts: finding an appropriate site for a school and getting the city to pay for it.

“We have a budget for about 1,200 seats, and that’s not going to solve the overcrowding,” he said. “We would need a lot more seats than that. I’d say thousands more.”

In other locations, the city has found unused space in buildings where it can open schools. August Martin High School in South Jamaica and the Virgil I. Grissom School in South Ozone Park were both identified by the BOE as underused and new schools opened in their buildings. The practice, known as co-location, has been criticized for wasting space on administration and creating inequalities when it comes to sharing spaces such as libraries, cafeterias and auditoriums.

Still at others, the department is phasing out enrollment or cutting grades at schools and using the extra space for what it calls new seats.

Student rolls at Flushing High School are being reduced while two new schools are phased in, and at the Campus Magnet complex in Cambria Heights the Institute for Health Professions will gradually grow as two high schools are phased out.

**Turnout**

Continued from Page 1

about 10,000 people voted to re-elect Councilman Ruben Wills (D-Jamaica).

That is compared to Council districts similar in population but home to fewer Democrats like Howard Beach, where about 5,900 voters turned out for the primary. About 7,700 people voted in each of two races to replace term-limited Councilmen Peter Vallone Jr. (D-Astoria) and James Gennaro (D-Fresh Meadows), while roughly 8,700 Democrats came out for a closely watched primary to succeed embattled City Councilman Dan Halloran (R-Whitestone).

Southeast Queens also recorded some of the highest turnout.

The primary to succeed Comrie drew a roughly 20.5 percent turnout of registered Democrats, as estimated by TimesLedger Newspapers using unofficial tallies and the most recent voter registration numbers from 2011 both from the city Board of Elections.

The next highest turnout was in northeast Queens, where an estimated 19.5 percent of Democrats went to vote in the bitter five-way battle for Halloran’s seat.

Following that, 18 percent of Democrats in the district covering Laurelton and currently represented by Richards came out, while 17.3 percent voted in Wills’ race for the seat covering South Jamaica, South Ozone Park and Richmond Hill. The sheer number of Democrats means the area’s largely black population can play a crucial role in winning Queens, either for a citywide or borough-wide race.

Former Councilwoman Melinda Katz was endorsed by the influential Rev. Floyd Flake from the Allen AME Cathedral in Jamaica in her successful bid to secure the Democratic ticket for the borough president race. The move surprised some political observers because he had been expected to back Comrie, a leader in the southeast Queens community.

“I think it was a very important part of the borough president race, and the fact Melinda made such a concerted effort to lock down support there just exemplifies that,” a source said.

Southeast Queens also came out in droves to support city Public Advocate Bill de Blasio in his mayoral primary victory, according to data compiled by The New York Times.

But the leadership in southeast Queens is undergoing a period of dramatic change.

State Sen. Malcolm Smith (D-Hollis) has been indicted on corruption charges and disgraced former Sen. Shirley Huntley is now serving a jail term for misdirecting government funds.

City Councilman Leroy Comrie (c.) celebrates with unconfirmed Democratic primary winner Daneek Miller, who the lawmaker supported as his successor.

Photo by Nat Valentine
Boro pressures FAA to conduct noise complaint studies

BY PHIL CORSO

Anyone opposed to the idea of the Federal Aviation Administration exempting itself from studying how its flight patterns might affect the environment has less than two weeks to speak up.

Last month, the agency released a draft of Order 1050.1F — Policies and Procedures for Considering Environmental Impacts, which proposes that all authority over determining when or if an environmental study must be completed over resides in the hands of FAA administrators. The order also proposed that such decisions can be made without soliciting any public comment.

The FAA did not return requests for comment in time for publication.

Elected officials from every level of government came together Tuesday afternoon in Bayside to oppose the FAA’s proposal, accusing the agency of arrogance and trying to pass key decisions under the radar.

“It is outrageous that the FAA is seeking greater leeway to exempt itself from vital environmental studies, which determine whether or not new airplane routes — and the accompanying noise — adversely impact affected communities,” said U.S. Rep. Grace Meng (D-Flushing), one of the many elected leaders fighting the federal agency.

“The agency’s plan to further sidestep this critical process is a slap in the face to all who live and work underneath new flight patterns, and it is imperative that the FAA abandon its intention to proceed with it.”

Meng joined U.S. Rep. Steve Israel (D-Melville) in penning a letter to FAA Administrator Michael Huerta, urging him to step away from the proposal, adding that consequences could include more of a noise burden over constituents’ homes.

The army of lawmakers and southeast Queens community leaders has been battling the federal agency for more than a year after it revised its flight procedures out of LaGuardia Airport, ultimately resulting in a drastic increase of airplane noise over residential areas like Bayside and Little Neck. The shift was made in accordance with the FAA’s NextGen flight procedures and was made possible by the agency issuing itself a categorical exclusion, voiding any responsibility for an environmental impact study.

Now, elected officials said the FAA was trying to include a similar categorical exclusion but on a much broader level, as outlined by the proposal.

“Navigation performance and area navigation procedures developed, certified, published or implemented under this section shall be presumed to be covered by a categorical exclusion under Chapter 3 of FAA Order 1050.1E unless the administrator determines that extraordinary circumstances exist with respect to the procedure,” the draft order said.

The FAA did, however, establish a public comment period for the controversial draft order, which will close Sept. 30. Until then, residents can submit comments to the agency through regulations.gov docket number FAA-2013-0685.

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DON BYRON is part of The New York State Presenters Network-Artist Partnership Project made possible through a grant from the New York State Council on the Arts, a state agency with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature. It is also supported by FGCA Board member Ms. Veronica T. Tierg

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xious for the issues that mat-
were term-limited out of the
district revolving around
quality-of-life issues and 
district left bruised in the
vestigations that are part of the
O'Neill’s
Continued from Page 1
moment — we decided to 
just open the door and see 
what happened,” O’Neill 
said. “It was so crowded you 
couldn’t get out the door. I 
couldn’t believe it. I’d love 
to know how it happened.”

It seemed, O’Neill said, 
that people had just been 
waiting for him to open for 
the last couple years.
Within days of the 
grease fire, O’Neill had set

a plan in place to rebuild.
He has had a few construc-
tion setbacks that kept de-
laying the opening date, but 
throughout the rebuilding 
period, O’Neill always sat
outside the building over-
seeing construction.

“He never leaves,” his
daughter Tara O’Neill Pyle
said.

Now he spends all his
time inside the restaurant.

“I’ve been counting — I’ve been here about 
185 hours in the last two
weeks,” O’Neill said. “I’m wondering when I’m going 
to get some overtime.”
Pyle said neighbors 
seem to really miss having
O’Neill’s as their meeting
spot.

“‘It’s such a neighbor-
hood place,” she said.

O’Neill’s, which was 
originally founded by 
George’s father in 1928 as
Plateau Tavern, has long
played host to locals wish-
ing to celebrate family
events.

Already since its re-
opening, the restaurant has
held parties for birthdays,
christenings, communions
and baby showers.

Patrons enjoying the 
food and “the atmosphere of 
the place” are what O’Neill
looks forward to the most, he
said. “If somebody tells me 
they enjoy the food, that 
really picks me up.”

In total the restau-
rant can hold about 350 
customers and offers both 
a bar menu and a fine din-
ing menu, which includes
prime, aged beef and fresh
seafood prepared by famed
chef Richard Burns, O’Neill
said. The kitchen is open 
from 11 a.m. until 2 a.m. ev-
ey day.
The restaurant also of-
ers catering services.
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