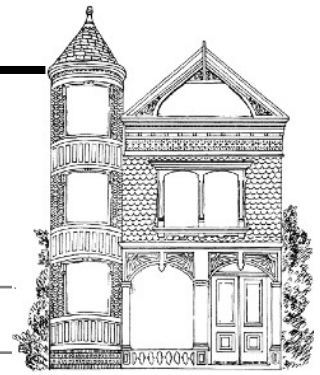


WEST MIDWOOD NEWS



Volume 33

Number 4

December 2019

December WMCA General Meeting

Neighbors from across the West Midwood community gathered at the Mormon Church on Wednesday, December 4, to hear from the WMCA Board about the activities and finances of the association, and to honor Javier Saez of Almac Hardware for his tireless work toward improving Newkirk Plaza. Association president Eric Goldberg presented Javier with a Certificate of Appreciation. Eric assured the attendees that the association is in solid financial shape, and said that WMCA will continue to sponsor such popular social events as the Halloween Parade, the block party, and the upcoming Progressive Dinner, in addition to projects to improve and beautify the neighborhood. Neighbors also heard from Kashif Hussain, Deputy Public Advocate, Office of the NYC Public Advocate, speaking about community issues.



Top left: Eric Goldberg presents certificate of Recognition to Javier Saez of Almac Hardware. Inset: The certificate. Bottom left: Kashif Hussain, Deputy Public Advocate addressing members of the West Midwood Community Association.

The Stories Your House Could Tell

By Joe Enright

15 Waldorf Court

Some of the most ornate homes in Victorian Flatbush were built near the Brighton line. If you doubt me, take a look at the “Japanese House” at 131 Buckingham Road. Why would you build a mansion alongside a railroad? Some have suggested that at the dawn of the Progressive Era, the railroad—newly electrified in 1899—was considered a symbol of progress. Perhaps that’s why the Germania Real Estate & Improvement Company designed courts in West Midwood to surround their malled centerpiece, Glenwood Road: because the courts afforded more views of the smokeless single-car electric trains that clanked by.

In fact, when 15 Waldorf Court was being erected by John Corbin and his architect, Benjamin Dreisler in 1906, the railroad 200 feet to its east was about to become even more visible. Ever since its initial run in 1878, the Brighton locomotives began a gradual descent near Glenwood Road in order to pass under the LIRR Bay Ridge line just south of Avenue H. But in 1906 the Grade Elimination Project began to elevate the same track bed to pass over the LIRR. Because of the courts’ design, only a few homes directly bordered the tracks, which would prove to be fortuitous given the hubbub of the “Big Dig” from 1906 to 1908, a momentous undertaking not foreseen in 1900 when Germania first designed the courts.

Over the next 113 years, 15 Waldorf Court was home to only six families, four of whom were short-timers. The first owner was Charles H. Hawxhurst, a city water meter inspector, who in July 1906 obtained a \$4,750 mortgage to finance the purchase. He was a Civil War veteran who bragged about seeing a Washington-bound Abe Lincoln in Manhattan in 1861. Six years after moving



Continued on page 5

**Mark Your Calendars
Neighborhood Events**

*Celebrate Leap Year!
WMCA Progressive Dinner
Saturday, February 29*



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**President’s Message
Winter 2019**

Eric Goldberg



Welcome to winter! We’ve made it another year, our senses and liberties slightly more damaged, but mostly intact. The world half ablaze, life as we know it continues under our canopy of century old trees, leaves falling and the sounds of our nearby river (the subway line cut) bubbling past—except, of course, for those weekends when it doesn’t.

I am part of a mentor program with a school that I graduated from, and this fall I was paired up with a new student from China. I met him and a group of other Chinese immigrant students at the opening reception for the program. Speaking to them was like diving headfirst into the American Dream. Not the new mall in the New Jersey Meadowlands, but the American Dream of immigration, risk, hard work, and leaving behind the life you know in search of something better. I was absolutely floored by these students, their enthusiasm for their studies, their hopes, career goals, etc. There was a clear sense that here they could dream, and that back home they could not.

While you shop at the Meadowlands version of the American Dream for all of those holiday gifts, remember that to get there, you had to drive by Lady Liberty and the surrounding harbor that has welcomed millions to our corner of the world for so long. Find the “dream” gift, but also take a minute to think about the other dream, and what that means to the immigrants in our community—those seeking a fair chance at a better life, along with a little freedom to pursue their own calling. What can we, as a community, do to foster this flow of humanity, ideas, and dreams from which we all came?

As we move from fall to the holidays, I wish you all a happy, healthy, and American-Dreamy end of 2019. We are incredibly lucky to live in such a special neighborhood within such a special country.

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Brooklyn Sports

By Argyle Art Rhine

Our National Pastime

The power of positive thinking accompanied me to my first game—the final game of the 1954 season. I was 8 years old. The game was Karl Spooner’s second Major League game. We were in Ebbets Field. The foul lines extended almost to the horizon. Spooner shut out the Pirates. He struck out 12. It was a complete game. For two hours, I stood on my seat (to see over the full-grown men all around me), jumping, exhilarated.

My Brooklyn Dodger fanaticism had begun. Not such a great reader at the start of third grade, I advanced perhaps three grades during the spring, reading every article in several newspapers and a couple of books, too, about my beloved Bums. I learned long division so I could calculate batting averages. By the beginning of the 1955 season, the World Series had become my singular goal. The Dodgers, infamously, had never won the Series, but now they had my help. They started the season with 10 straight wins. They lost one. Then they won 10 straight more. Never did I relax my vigilance and never did they relax their lead. My favorite pitcher, Don Newcombe, also started the season winning 10 straight games and finished 20–5, and my favorite player, Duke Snider, became the best player in the Major Leagues—although the record shows that Roy Campanella won the Most Valuable Player award. In the World Series, the Dodgers certainly encountered some resistance, but the Dodgers played brilliantly. The Duke hit four home runs. In the seventh and final game, Johnny Podres pitched a shutout, and Brooklyn’s own Gil Hodges knocked in the only two runs. And for once, the breaks went our way. That ground ball which hit Rizzuto sliding into third base and Amoros’ catch—well, what can I say. Our fervor was rewarded. Bums no more.

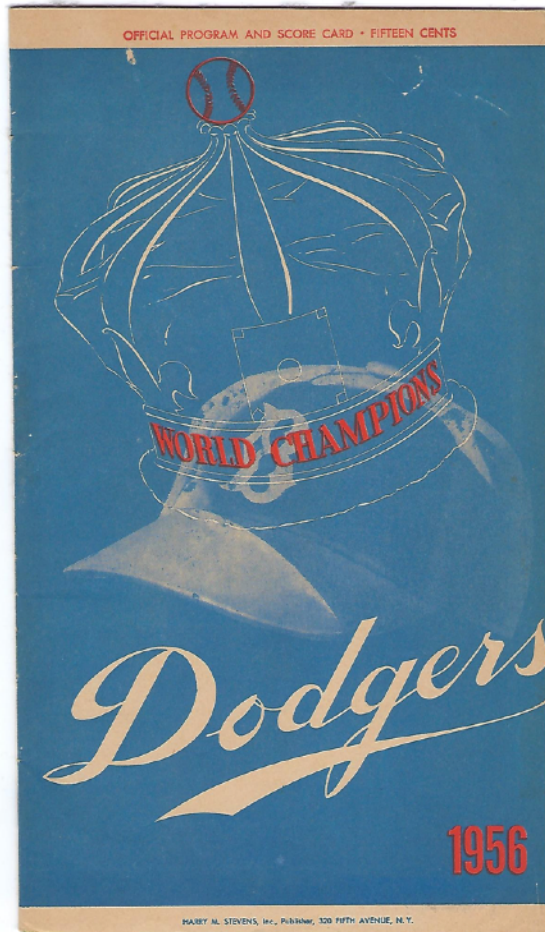
For my 10th birthday, in May 1956, my folks asked me what I wanted for a present. Now there’s a no-brainer. My Dad took me to a night game against the Phillies. The score was 5–2 in favor of the Phils going into the bottom of the ninth inning. The score does not reveal the lopsidedness of the game. It was never close. The two Dodger runs had been on early solo shots by Snider and Hodges, and only one other Dodger had reached base, via a walk. The Phillies’ pitcher (Curt Simmons) had then mowed Brooklyn down, allowing no base runners after the fourth inning and facing only 27 batters going into the bottom of the ninth. My father was a working man. “Let’s go home

before the rush, son,” he said, as the fans streamed toward the exit. “No, Dad, it’s my birthday present.” First batter up, top of the order, is Junior Gilliam, who reaches base with a walk. Next up is Pee Wee Reese, who strikes out. Snider comes up. On the first pitch, he smacks his second homer of the game. There’s some buzzing from the remaining fans. I’m screaming as Randy Jackson (a recent acquisition) comes up. On the first pitch, he launches a boomer into the bleachers. The game is tied! My father groans. “I am not staying for extra innings, son.” “Don’t worry, Dad,” I reply. Up comes Hodges and, on the first pitch he sees, he ends the game with his second homer of the night, a colossal blast. Pandemonium. Never a doubt.

Several months later, in September, Mike and Sonya E., my parents’ friends from Milwaukee, came to Brooklyn and stayed in our house on East 28th Street. Mike, a lawyer, was a patron of my Mom’s (she was an artist) and the four of them had been close for decades. Mike was old; he had gray hair; he must have been over 40. We talked baseball. Rather we argued baseball. The Milwaukee Braves and the Dodgers were in a furious pennant race. Mike was a Braves’ fan! Who’s better? Crandall-Campy? Adcock-Hodges? Robinson-O’Connell? (No argument there). Reese-Logan? Matthews-Gilliam? Amoros-Pafko? Snider-Bruton? Aaron-Furillo? (I loved Furillo—led the league in batting average in 1953, but . . .). And the pitching? Newk, Oisk, Podres, Maglie, Labine for the Dodgers or Spahn, Burdette, Buhl, Conley for the Braves? These arguments raged for hours. Dinner table. Walks around the neighborhood. Mike, to his eternal credit, will always be remembered as an adult who never patronized me. He never said, nor even hinted, “Oh wait’ll you grow up,” or some such slight.

Then while riding in our Pontiac, Mike asked me, “Who are the three current players who you are most sure will go to the Hall of Fame?” “One: Ted Williams. Two: Stan the Man Musial. Three . . .” I hesitated. I wanted to include a pitcher.

Who’s the best pitcher in baseball? I think it’s probably Warren Spahn. He wins over 20 games every year. I can’t say that. He’s a Milwaukee Brave. We’re fighting with them for the pennant. I can’t say “Spahn.” I can’t tell Mike it’s Spahn. “Herb Score,” I blurted out. “Well, that’s quite an unconventional choice,” stated Mike. “I’ll tell you why I think it’s Score,” I say.



For one year, we wuz da woild champions.

“He was 16–10 in his rookie year with an ERA under 3 and led the league in strikeouts. This year, he’s gonna win 20 easy, his ERA is better than ever; he’s leading the Majors in strikeouts. And he’s just beginning.” “You rest your case?” asked Mike. “I go with Williams, Musial, and Score,” I replied.

Next year, 1957, early in the season, Gil McDougal hits a line-drive which crashes into Score’s eye, cracking his skull; he is never the same. Neither am I. Although it’s more like a slap in the face to me, my confidence is really affected. How can this happen when I said he was going to the Hall of Fame? I mean he’s not dead, like the pitcher in Robert Coover’s *The Universal Baseball Association, Inc., J. Henry Waugh, Prop.* But it’s not that; it’s that my prediction is doomed. Mike called me. He remembered my prediction. He was saddened by Score’s tragedy. “It’s Spahn,” I said. “It was always Spahn. I should have said Spahn.”

At the end of that year, the Dodgers deserted me. Baseball’s magic was gone.

I became a Mets fan when they were born. On two occasions, the magic returned. I was sitting in the right field upper deck during the sixth game of the ’86 World Series. After the Red Sox scored two runs in the top of the tenth and recorded two outs in the bottom of the inning, I was looking right into the their dugout as the players climbed to the top step, smiling, laughing, preparing to run onto the field as soon as they

recorded one more out. Once again, the fans around me streamed to the exits to beat the rush. “Unbelievable!” I screamed; “May your house burn down and you have to live out on the street! You’re gonna miss the greatest comeback in the history of baseball! Where’s your faith? You gotta believe! Oh, you’re gonna be sorry,” I ranted. And, as Mookie Wilson does his breakdance and “the ball gets through Buckner,” it was so.

And still there was one more reprise of baseball magic. My 11-year old son Julian and I attended the fifth game of the 1999 National League Championship Series between the Braves and the Mets. It was raining. It was cold. Julian had the sniffles. He also had school the next day. Somewhere around the tenth inning, I fulfilled my dad requirement and asked him if he wanted to go home. “You gotta be kidding,” was his reply. In the top of the 15th, the Braves took the lead. Yes, of course, faithless fans streamed to the exits. And yes, with the Rhines screaming, the Mets tied it up on Todd Pratt’s bases-loaded walk and then won the game on Robin Ventura’s grand slam, causing a Mets’ fan-and-player frenzy. After the winning run crossed home plate, the players mobbed Ventura, who never made it to second base, and so, his blast was converted into a grand slam single.

In baseball and in life, notwithstanding impurities therein, Julian and his brother Jesse continue to dream and to pursue those most fervent dreams. From generation to generation, we continue to circle the bases.

Quick Community Action Resolves Retaining Wall Kerfuffle

By Joe Enright

No sooner had the frightful costumed hordes receded this Halloween, then West Midwood and Ditmas Park homeowners immediately bordering the Brighton line suddenly faced a much more serious horror. Violation letters arrived from the NYC Department of Buildings threatening enormous fines for not inspecting the retaining walls which separated their property from the Q train right-of-way. David Newman, Anthony Finkel, and other cut-dwellers complained to CB14, which masterfully communicated the owners’ shock to the City and the MTA.

Should David and Anthony invest in wall-climbing gear and repel down into the cut to look for cracks? A WCBS News video and other media coverage helped push this man-bites-dog story forward and within days NYC Transit legal beagles confirmed that the responsibility for inspection rested with the railroad, not the owner. Faced with this MTA pushback, the Buildings Department squashed the violations.

The history of the retaining walls was recently researched by Joe Enright in preparing a walking tour of Newkirk Plaza for the Flatbush

Development Corp. Basically, the walls extending from Church Avenue to Avenue H were erected between December 1905 and August 1907 as part of the grade elimination project which depressed the surface Brighton line into a trench. Easements were obtained by the MTA’s predecessor, Brooklyn Rapid Transit (BRT), from all the neighboring homeowners which allowed the BRT access to their property to build concave retaining walls, extending seven feet thick at the base (under the homeowners property) and two feet wide at the surface. These

agreements thus gave the BRT two additional feet on each side of their right-of-way which allowed it to expand from two to four tracks. Wider easements from Foster to Newkirk Avenues also allowed the railroad to build an express stop. However, the Newkirk Plaza building owners escaped the Halloween scare because retaining walls adjacent to transit stations were not covered under the regulation the Buildings Department was spookily attempting to enforce.

For more on the retaining wall construction, see <https://argyleheights.blogspot.com> or Joe Enright’s YouTube video at <https://bit.ly/2KqdT8X>



Retaining Wall Construction at Newkirk Avenue in 1906

The Stories Your House Could Tell — *continued from page 1*

in, Hawxhurst, nearing retirement, apparently swapped homes with Albert Horstmann, who had a more modest abode eight blocks away—with no driveway—on East 22nd Street. Hawxhurst passed away there in 1920.

Horstmann's interest in West South Midwood was soon apparent. He had registered a new Ford automobile in 1912, and immediately after moving to Waldorf Court he built a garage. In addition to houses, Horstmann also traded horses, a very profitable business in southern Brooklyn, given the racetracks in Sheepshead Bay, Brighton Beach, and Gravesend. But the Progressives declared war on gambling and by 1910 every Brooklyn racetrack had been closed due to state legislation prohibiting horse betting. However, there was still the bridge path on Ocean Parkway that led to Prospect Park, where thousands of equestrians sauntered every month, and stables still abounded throughout our area. Four years after Horstmann's daughter was wed in the home by a Lutheran minister in April of 1915, the family sold the house and moved to Brightwaters in Suffolk County, which had just been developed by T. B. Ackerson, the father of Westminster Road and one of the most celebrated builders of Victorian Flatbush. Suburban flight has a long history! In Brightwaters, Albert bought a livery and sold horses until retiring to Merrick, where he died in 1943.

The third family also lasted about six years at 15 Waldorf Court. Frederick G. Speckels was a statistician for a fire insurance company. William Morris, the brother of Speckels' spouse, Virginia, was waked in the home after passing away there in 1923. Soon thereafter the Speckels moved to East 23rd Street in South Midwood, where Frederick died in 1934.

From the Roaring Twenties to the end of the Eisenhower era, the house was occupied by William and Agnes Hecht. He was a salesman, then an assistant manager for an electric alarm company. Their daughter Madeline married Kenneth Smith, a Harvard grad, at the Packer Institute Chapel in 1930, and the newlyweds rode out the Depression at 15 Waldorf Court. William Hecht served on the Board of the West-South Midwood Property Owners League, and he and Agnes were feted at a 50th wedding anniversary party hosted by Madeline and Kenneth in 1953 at the old Pierrepont Hotel on Montague Street. Agnes died in 1957 and William joined her a year later.

In 1958 Madeline sold the home to Irving Rubinstein and Ethel Cahan, who had wed months earlier. Both were very successful in the retail apparel business. Ethel, a widow, owned a shop on West 56th Street in Manhattan, where she met Irving, a major *macher* (big shot) divorcé. After settling in West Midwood, Ethel moved her business to Avenue M, and in May 1958 Irving, who had held leadership positions in Jewish charitable organizations for many years, was elected President of the B'nai B'rith lodge representing New England, New York, and eastern Canada. After retiring to Palm Beach, Ethel and Irving remained generous funders of the Anti-Defamation League and the Jewish Arts Council until they too passed away within a year of each other in the early 1990s. Ethel's daughter,

Cora Cahan, became a notable dancer and a longtime New York arts administrator. She served as president of the nonprofit that gave us the New Victory Theater on 42nd Street, and as I write this, she has just joined the Baryshnikov Arts Center as its new president and chief executive.

In 1966 Ethel Cahan sold 15 Waldorf Court for \$28,000 to Mike and Ella Weiss. Mike grew up in an apartment building at East 17th Street and Avenue H, attending Hudde JHS and Brooklyn Tech while making after-school deliveries for a long-gone drug store just west of the underpass at Avenue H. Ella Friedman, meanwhile, grew up on Argyle Road near Beverly Road and attended Walt Whitman JHS and Erasmus. They met as teenagers attending a Flatbush youth group, and both went to Brooklyn College. Upon graduation, they were married and began careers as teachers, renting an apartment on Nostrand Avenue near Avenue K while pursuing graduate degrees.

Envisaging a family and a house, they wanted to stay in Victorian Flatbush, and when they saw Waldorf Court it was love at first sight. Two children, Janna and Ethan, followed, and both attended P.S. 217, where Ella became active in the PTA, eventually serving as president. Her career in education,



meanwhile, morphed from classroom to management to boardroom as she became a powerhouse for Brooklyn College and the Brooklyn Arts Council.

Mike was no slouch either. Originally a physics teacher at Brooklyn Tech, he was appointed assistant principal. After two decades in education, he began a second career in government, which included ten years with the NYC Department of Transportation, where he eventually served as First Deputy Commissioner before leaving to become the Executive Director of the MetroTech Business Improvement District.

Looking back on their decision to stick it out and fight for Flatbush while others around them fled (see the story on page 6 for more on this and their many contributions to West Midwood and Flatbush as a whole), Mike and Ella concluded: "The best move we ever made." Flatbush is grateful they stayed.

Mike and Ella Weiss: Fighters for Flatbush

By Joe Enright

You can't be more Flatbush than Mike and Ella Weiss. They are not independently wealthy. They do not own sports teams, breweries, horse farms, or realty portfolios. Instead, they own an unassuming wooden frame cottage house you might pass a hundred times and never notice. But they have led lives of service that have enriched all of us in Flatbush in so many ways.

Shortly after moving to Waldorf Court, Mike Weiss joined the Board of the West Midwood Community Association. Soon



Ella and Mike Weiss

thereafter he was elected president for five years and has provided invaluable continuous support ever since. In 1975, Mike helped found the nonprofit Flatbush Development Corporation (FDC), serving as unpaid board president, promoting better housing, youth programs, commercial revitalization, and crime control. Within a few years, FDC was able to wrangle \$20 million of public investment, stabilizing the area and helping to create one of the few economically and ethnically integrated neighborhoods in the city. And, as Mike is always quick to point out, "Ella helped every step of the way during my 15 years at FDC, particularly in planning and organizing events." Mike also was a member of Community Board 14 for over a decade, serving as its vice-chair for a while. He was a founding member of the Brooklyn Tech Alumni Foundation, where he played a major role in getting Tech their first athletic field and helped to raise millions of dollars for teacher training, student trips, and school equipment.

Meanwhile, Ella Weiss, while still active at P.S. 217, became Director of Community Relations for the Brooklyn College Performing Arts Center and later joined the board of directors there. She has also served as executive director of the college's Office of Alumni Affairs and Assistant Vice-President of External Affairs. She raised millions of dollars for the Brooklyn Center for the Performing Arts (BCBC) and secured funding to rebuild the college's library before moving on in 2012 to become president of the Brooklyn Arts Council.

Were we to list all of the Weiss's contributions here, the newsletter would need another dozen pages. Thanks, Mike and Ella, for fighting for Brooklyn when Brooklyn wasn't cool.

The OMNI Ensemble

The OMNI Ensemble is a chamber music group, featuring West Midwood's own David Wechsler, created to perform a uniquely flexible repertoire. From the Renaissance to the contemporary avant-garde, the ensemble presents programs of enormous variety, all designed to provide their audience with a musical diversity not ordinarily encountered in a single musical event. This variety of styles endows the group with its unique perspective. The core of The OMNI Ensemble is David Wechsler, flutes, saxophones, and midi wind controller; Brian Snow, cello; and John Cheek, piano and synthesizer.

Since 1983 The OMNI Ensemble has produced a successful concert series noted for its innovative combination of programming and guest artists. The OMNI Ensemble has appeared on NPR, WNYC radio, The Voice of America, Hawaii Public Radio, WKCR, and WQXR, as well as Westchester Public Access television.

All programs are performed at the Brooklyn Conservatory of Music, 58 Seventh Avenue, in Park Slope. Tickets are \$15 general admission, \$10 for students and seniors. The remaining performances for this year are the following:

Saturday, February 29, 2020, 8:00 pm

Works by: Arnold Schoenberg—*Pierrot Lunaire*

David Keberle—*Four to Go*

Bohuslav Martinu—*Sonata for Flute and Piano*

Aaron Copland—*As It Fell Upon a Day*

Improvisations by the OMNI Ensemble

Artists: David Wechsler, flute, piccolo; John Cheek, piano; Emily Cedriana Donato, soprano; Jeff Adler, clarinet, bass clarinet; Victor Costanzi, violin, viola; Larry Spivack, percussion, conductor

Saturday, March 21, 2020, 8:00 pm

Works by: C.P.E. Bach, Mozart, Georg Phillip Telemann, and David Wechsler

Artists: David Wechsler, flute; Rebecca Pechefsky, harpsichord; other artists TBA

Midwood-Ditmas Gardeners Unite! *by Marion Yuen*

Some readers may remember the lot on the corner of Newkirk Avenue and East 8th Street as the home of Compost for Brooklyn, a community composting project and native plant garden. Just a year ago, when that project had to close due to lack of resources, a team of local residents and the Pakistani American Youth Society (PAYS) came together to keep this green space open. And, on October 6, the Newkirk Community Garden (www.NewkirkGarden.com) held its first Open Garden Festival Day, a celebration of our first growing season and an invitation to the community to share in planning and cooperation for next year.

The multi-ethnic alliance that preserved this community space was a significant step in a neighborhood where public green space is scarce. According to Community Board 14, our area ranks next to the bottom in New York City residents' ease of access to parks.

The Open Garden Festival, attended by several hundred neighbors, was supported by local businesses that donated food, including the Flatbush Food Coop, and restaurants Bahar Masala and Gyro King. Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams and Assembly Member Bobby Carroll presented citations to neighbors and volunteers for their service in restoring this community garden. Visitors reviewed the renovation plans drawn with community input by a Pratt graduate student.



A grant from the Citizens Committee for New York City has allowed the construction of planters for growing herbs and vegetables, while we preserve space for a rain garden and native flora. We've made our own soil with "PUREsoil" sediment from a construction site (delivered free via the NYC Clean Soil Bank) and "hoof hatted" compost donated by Brooklyn Equine (the former Kensington stables), continuing the theme of community engagement.

In the winter months when it's too cold to work in the garden, we're planning a workshop series on garden-related topics such as working with seeds and enriching soil. We're considering various other options, including becoming a community-supported agriculture (CSA) distribution point for farm-raised products. As our membership grows, we will also be able to distribute trees from the New York Restoration Project each spring and fall. We look

forward to working with home owners with private gardens on the local ecology as we collaboratively manage invasive plant species and popularize pollinator varieties (such as milkweed).

Marion Yuen, a developer of green infrastructure projects, lives in "Little Pakistan" and sits on the steering committee of Newkirk Community Garden. The Newkirk Community Garden is now raising funds to cover liability insurance and other expenses. You can support them at <http://gofundme.com/newkirkcommunitygarden>.

School News PS 217 *by Sherry Goldberg*

It was great to see many of you at the PS 217 Fall into Fitness Health Fair and Carnival on October 19. It was an afternoon of health-and-fitness-related games and activities, including yoga and Zumba classes, free flu shots, and pumpkin decorating. Those teachers sure can Zumba! The fair took place on the track, and the beautiful early fall weather lead to a strong turnout of school and community families.

This year we've also had dedicated math and literacy nights at school. Math Night featured hands-on activities, from basketball math to arts and crafts related to math strategies. At Literacy Night we had a book exchange, with books for children and adults, as well as grade-appropriate games and challenges for the whole family and, of course, prizes. Free pizza was served at both events, which lead to a packed house! Science Night is scheduled for March, and if anyone in the

community is interested in volunteering to staff a table or has a fun science project that's only mildly messy, your help is welcomed!

Our part-time library aide has started, and the kids are thrilled to have dedicated library time during and after school. If anyone is interested in volunteering to add extra supervision, let me know (sherrymgoldberg@gmail.com).

The after-school Discovery Zone has kicked off as well. Free after-school programs include ukulele, "soap box" (public speaking), leadership, basketball, soccer, math, and more.

Finally, you may have seen enthusiastic PS.217 students and their families sporting new school gear. We unveiled a new school logo and merchandise earlier this year. To purchase school merchandise, contact the school office or email me at sherry.goldberg@gmail.com



Have an idea for this newsletter? Let us know! Email us at Editor.WestMidwoodNews@gmail.com

The Mad Gardener

By Robert Brannon

Are Bulbs the Best of All Garden Plants?

Bulbs definitely have a number of points in their favor. *Quick results:* It can take years for many good flowering plants to finally bloom, whereas bulbs will always bloom in less than a year. *Reliability:* Bulbs have been raised in perfect sunny conditions, somewhere far away, and already have their buds formed inside, before you even plant them, so they will always bloom beautifully, at least in the first season. *Colors:* Bulbs come in a dazzling spectrum of bright colors: red, yellow, white, pink, orange, purple, green . . . and there are even many small bulbs that are a bright blue, the rarest of all colors among flowers. *Variety:* There are more than 50 kinds of bulbs available, in varied sizes and shapes, from just 2 inches tall, to 8 feet or so. *Seasonality:* Many bulbs bloom in early spring, when their bright colors and sweet scents are especially welcome. Others bloom much later, in summer, and still others bloom in the late fall, when leaves are dropping and the air is getting colder. Local Brooklyn nurseries have only a small selection of bulbs, and at high prices. Much better online sources are McClure & Zimmerman, Van Engelen, John Scheepers, Color Blends, and k. van Bourgondien

The Mad Gardener went unusually mad this fall, planting approximately 2,000 bulbs on the city-owned sidewalk strips (the 4 feet between sidewalk and street). Hundreds went into the long strip next to Russell and Adele Tomblin's corner home, at 675 Rugby Road. In April and May, you are invited to see them in bloom, near the corner of Rugby and DeKoven Court.

Saving the Disappearing "Monarchy"

The beautiful and once abundant orange butterflies, with striking black accents, are known as monarchs. But over the past 20 years, their numbers have declined by 91%, according to the NYTimes. Evolution has led to a dangerous vulnerability for the monarchs: Their larvae can only grow, can only survive, on one plant: milkweed (*Asclepias*), which is no longer abundant. A number of our neighbors are helping the endangered monarchs to escape extinction by growing milkweeds. More of us should follow their good example. The best approach is to place small dry dirt-balls containing milkweed seeds on top of bare soil, in fall or spring. A source for them is www.seed-balls.com, where they are created by disabled adults.

Spectacular Flowering Trees

There can be little doubt that the most beautiful and spectacular flowering trees here in the northeast are the deciduous magnolias. They came originally from China and Japan. The pink, white, yellow, purple, or bi-colored flowers are quite large (up to 12 inches), and they bloom very early, on bare silvery branches, before the leaves appear. For \$100 or so, one can order the very finest, most beautiful of all varieties. I'd suggest first getting a copy of *The Plant Lover's Guide to Magnolias* by Bunting (\$19.00 at Amazon), which has excellent pictures of many outstanding magnolias, and the book also lists nurseries that can supply them.

Use, and Respect, the Sidewalk Strips

Homeowners in West Midwood are encouraged to plant flowers, bulbs, shrubs, etc., in the sidewalk strips in front of their homes, as many

already do. We should remember, however, that the strips are city property, not ours. Once planted, everything there legally belongs to New York City. Anyone who injures, kills, paints, or removes: "any trees, plants, flowers, shrubs, or other vegetation" from those strips can be fined. In practice, the Parks Department is most actively concerned with protecting the established "street trees" on city-owned property. Harming a street tree can result in a very large fine; this is not just theoretical, it has indeed happened in our neighborhood.

The Most Troublesome, Expensive, and Climate-Destroying Plant . . .

. . . is of course, lawn grass. Grass is expensive because it requires special machinery (mowers) to keep it neat each summer, and troublesome because it permits a great many weeds, and will hardly grow at all in very shady areas. The carbon exhaust from mowers and the chemical runoff into oceans from fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, and other lawn chemicals are contributing to fish and shrimp extinctions and to global climate disruption.

If one has a large, sunny, and flat lawn out in the spacious suburbs, and growing children who enjoy active outdoor sports, lawn grass has an obvious utility. However on our small, shady urban properties, their only real value is a "traditional" front-yard look, originally copied from Britain. In a future column, I shall highlight several West Midwood homes that have pioneered attractive green front yards, with no lawn grass.



Dozens of bulbs, of all colors and sizes, waiting to be covered.

Halloween 2019: Don't Rain On Our Parade *By Virginia Waters*

It was a great evening, with a large turnout for the annual Glenwood road parade—trick-or-treat fest. Despite days of worry about forecasted rain, it was a beautiful night: no rain and 68 degrees. It was warm enough for people to sit outside on their steps and hand out candy. Joe Enright continued his method of candy delivery: through the front porch window with the assistance of our son's cat, Simba. The kids loved it.

Many people volunteered to help put on this year's event, which could not have happened without them. The same group of people generously helps out year after year and should be thanked for their continuous service.

Joe Enright created the flyer and delivered the supplies.

Joan Greenberg bought all of the supplies.

Many people graciously donated cupcakes, donuts and cookies for kids of all ages. Bake sale coordinators from P.S. 217 Parents Association arranged for the leftovers from their bake sale to be donated to us. We definitely would have run out of food sooner than 6:25 without it.

Om Agrawal, Harriet Rhine, Leonore Max, Linda Howell, and I staffed the tables. This group also did the clean up. It is virtually mayhem giving out food and pouring juice between 6:00 and 6:30 pm!

Kai Lui and Henry Finkel set up the lights. **Anthony and Henry Finkel** and **James Enright** helped with table setup and take down.

We had an especially melodious musical group leading the parade: **Ernst Mohammed**, leader, **Alan Bennett** and **Steven Cohen** on trombone, **Joel Siegel** on trumpet, **Warren Bloom** on baritone sax, and new neighbor in **Nate Rogers** on keyboard.

The 70th Precinct did a fine job of providing protection. Officers from the Community Affairs Unit made sure that the streets were closed for the parade and that there was a police presence in the neighborhood for trick-or-treaters after the parade.

New neighbors **Bob Pavlacka, Jessica Pizzo** and their one-year-old daughter **Vera** gave out 650 pieces of candy before they ran out at 7:00 p.m. They plan on buying 1,000 pieces next year. Newly moved-in **Nate Rogers, Allidah Muller**, and their two-year-old son **Caleb** were excited to be participating in their first West Midwood Halloween festivities. Both families were very impressed with what a great neighbor event this is.

The **Dunfey/Nisson** and **Thornton** families had their annual front porch parties, and many houses were outstanding in their decorations.

The **Thornton** house had a circus/sideshow theme with a painted big top tent on the porch. Heavy drapery on the porch entrance created the stage. **Martina Grimes**, who moved out of the neighborhood last year, came back to the Thorntons as a bearded lady. **Eileen and Patrick Thornton** were both ringmasters. **Katie Thornton** was a trapeze artist, and her boyfriend **Robert** was a muscle man. There were two **Frans**—one a fortune teller and the other a jester/clown. **Nicole** was also a fortune teller and **Pete** was a tattooed man.

Lynda Walsh Clifford and **Graham Clifford** continued their festive Halloween decorations. The theme was a Deadly Forest with body parts appearing out of the garden piece by piece. Lynda and Graham had lights and huge keys around their necks as the gatekeepers. They also had a number of enormous, brightly colored spider webs and lots of lights on the porch.

The **Finkels** had lots of tombstones in their yard, hands surrounding trees, and a smoke machine.

Thanks to the many homeowners who decorated their homes and gave out candy to the literally hundreds of trick or treaters. And thanks one and all for your assistance in again making West Midwood's Halloween festivities the best ever.

The People in Our Neighborhood What's Happening in Your Life?

Let West Midwood News readers know about significant events in your life — a birth or a loss, an engagement or a marriage, an honor or a promotion. Please contact us at editor.WestMidwoodNews@gmail.com.

NEW NEIGHBORS

Jacob Baron and **Sam Marrell** moved to Wellington Court in October, with their seven-year-old beagle/whippet rescue dog, **MoMo**. Jacob works in commercial real estate finance and Sam works in HR at the Met Museum. In their spare time, they love to travel, see movies, and attend classical music concerts. Sam was a classically trained bass player in his former life. They moved here from Park Slope so they could have a house and a yard without leaving Brooklyn. They love the neighborhood so far, especially the diversity, the friendly atmosphere, and learning the word “stanchion” (which they think look great). MoMo loves all people and all attention and can't wait for his dads' contractor to finish the deck/fence so he can play in his new yard. His dads can't wait either.

Nate Rogers, Allidah Muller, and their two-year-old son **Caleb** recently moved to Argyle Road from South Slope. Nate

is an architect who works for Beyer Blinder Belle Architects & Planners in the city, specializing in historic preservation and renovation projects for museums and higher education institutions. Allidah is an art teacher at Community Roots Charter School in Fort Greene. They love outdoor activities such as hiking and sailing and they enjoy spending time in Maine in the summer. They are both keen on historic architecture and urban landscapes and love the neighborhood's combination of majestic London Plane street trees and historic houses. They have enjoyed attending the block party and Halloween parade and look forward to meeting new neighbors and talking about old houses.

Caitlin McNally Hobley and **Tony Hobley** moved to Waldorf Court in March, along with their one-and-a-half-year-old **Zoe**. They have since welcomed baby **Pierce!** They moved here from Bedford Stuyvesant because, with a new baby on the way, they needed more space and were craving trees and quiet and a neighborhood where they could walk around and meet other families. Caitlin is a documentary filmmaker and Tony is an advertising executive. With two kids under the age of two, they currently have no spare time, but historically they like to see friends, see movies, read, and hang out with each other. Zoe loves dogs and has been enjoying getting to know all the dogs in the neighborhood, and Caitlin and Tony love how wonderful the neighborhood is and how kind everyone has been.

West Midwood Cooks (and Bakes!) *by Allidah Muller*

Editor's Note. *This month, West Midwood News introduces a new column, suggested and edited by a new neighbor, Allidah Muller. West Midwood is blessed to have quite a number of really excellent cooks and bakers. (If you want further proof, just come to the progressive dinner this February 29.) In each issuer of West Midwood News, Allidah will bring us some of our neighbors' favorite recipes, and the stories that go with them. If you have a favorite recipe you'd like to contribute, contact Allidah at allidah.muller@gmail.com. Allidah herself starts us off, with three wonderful recipes for chilly winter days.*

Pimento Cheese

Growing up in South Carolina, it seemed like many families we knew had their own pimento cheese recipe. Most of them have the same basic ingredients: cheddar cheese, a binder (mayo or cream cheese) and pimentos. I like this one because you can add a little bit of heat if you want, but it's also tasty without. I love serving it at parties with Ritz crackers or Triscuits and celery sticks. And I always make a double batch to have leftovers.

- 8 ounces extra sharp cheddar, finely grated
- 1 4-ounce jar pimientos, drained and chopped (Cento and Goya both make good versions, but you can use jarred roasted red peppers in a pinch.)
- 1 teaspoon grated yellow onion
- ½ cup mayonnaise
- ⅓ cup cream cheese
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon pepper
- Pinch of ground cayenne

Put the cheddar, pimientos, onions, mayonnaise, cream cheese, salt, pepper, and cayenne in a medium bowl and mix with a wooden spoon until it is well blended and the cheddar becomes creamy. Refrigerate for about 1 hour before serving. It will keep in the refrigerator for up to 1 week.

Pecan Pie

My family loves pie, and our Thanksgiving dessert table usually has at least four different ones. We often will try new recipes, but there are some (like this one) that we make annually because it just wouldn't be Thanksgiving without it. I stumbled across this Martha Stewart recipe almost 10 years ago, and it has two things going for it: the tanginess of the cream cheese in the crust balances the sweetness of the filling and the filling is full of chopped pecans, not that sort of gelatinous layer that most pecan pies have.

Crust

- 2 teaspoons cold water
- 1 teaspoon cold cider vinegar
- 1½ cups all-purpose flour, plus more for surface
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 4 oz. (1 stick) cold unsalted butter, cut into small pieces
- 4 oz. cold cream cheese, cut into small pieces

Combine water and vinegar in a small bowl. Combine flour and salt in another bowl. Using a pastry cutter or your fingers, cut butter and cream cheese into flour mixture until mixture resembles coarse crumbs with some larger pieces remaining. Add water mixture to dough in a slow, steady stream, stirring, until mixture just begins to hold together. (Alternatively, pulse ingredients in a food processor.) Turn out onto a piece of plastic wrap, and wrap. Press dough into a disk using a rolling pin.

Refrigerate until firm, about 1 hour or overnight. (Dough can be frozen for up to 1 month; thaw before using.)

Roll the dough into a 12-inch round on a lightly floured surface. Fit dough into a 9-inch pie dish. Trim edge, leaving a 1-inch overhang. Turn overhang under so that edge is flush with rim. Flute edge. Freeze until firm, about 15 minutes.

Make filling.

Filling

- 10 oz. pecan halves (2¾ cups), toasted
- 4 large eggs, lightly beaten
- 1 cup packed dark brown sugar
- 1 cup light corn syrup
- 4 oz. (1 stick) unsalted butter, melted and cooled
- 2 tablespoon pure vanilla extract
- ½ teaspoon salt

Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Set aside 16 pecan halves for garnish; coarsely chop remaining pecans. Stir together eggs, sugar, corn syrup, butter, vanilla, and salt in a medium bowl until well combined. Stir in chopped pecans, and pour mixture into prepared piecrust, spreading evenly. Garnish edges with remaining pecan halves.

Place dish on a rimmed baking sheet, and bake, rotating halfway through, until filling is just set and crust is golden brown, about 90 minutes. (Tent with foil if nuts are getting too dark.) Transfer to a wire rack, and let cool completely.

Fall Minestrone

I love making soup once the weather gets cold, and this one has become the soup I make the most. It's originally from Alice Waters' *The Art of Simple Food*, but I've put my own twist on it over the years.

- ¼ cup extra virgin olive oil
- 2 onions, finely chopped
- 3 carrots, finely chopped
- 3 stalks celery, finely chopped
- 5 garlic cloves, coarsely chopped
- 5 thyme sprigs
- 2 bay leaves
- 2 teaspoons Kosher salt
- 1 small leek, sliced from root to stem then cut into half-moons
- 1 28 oz. can diced tomatoes
- 1 28 oz. can cannellini beans
- 3-ish cups of chopped butternut squash
- 1 bunch kale, stemmed and chopped

Heat the olive oil in a heavy-bottomed pot over medium heat. Once it's shimmering, add the onion, carrots and celery. Cook for 15 minutes or until soft and translucent (you don't want to brown them too much). Add the garlic, thyme sprigs (whole!), bay leaves, and salt. Cook for about 5 minutes until the garlic becomes fragrant but not browned. Add the tomatoes, then fill the can 2 or 3 times with water and add it to the pot. Bring to a boil and add the leek and squash. Simmer for about 10-15 minutes before adding the beans and kale. Cook until the squash is tender. You can add more water if the soup is too thick. Remove the bay leaves and any thyme twigs. The leaves will have magically fallen off into the soup.

Serve in bowls. Garnish with a few teaspoons of really good olive oil and some grated Parmesan cheese if you feel like it. (If you're the kind of person who saves parmesan rinds in their freezer, then adding one to the soup after it comes to a boil gives it some great extra flavor.)

Advertisements

Mario Catanzaro

No Victorian house, like those in our neighborhood, should be without an antique clock. Whether it be mantle, wall, shelf, or grandfather clock, or something more modern like an early electric clock, I can probably help. If interested, call me at (718) 282-8471.

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What Is West Midwood Online?

Want to ask folks in the neighborhood whether they have any recommendations for a plumber or roofer or such? Or maybe what local eateries or merchants they like? Perhaps you'd like to be in the know about issues affecting our area? Then join the West Midwood Online email discussion group, aka the listserv.

Send an email to joe@enright.com with your street address, name, and the email address that you want to use to post and receive messages. He will add you to the group and send you the simple instructions. There are presently over 200 email subscribers representing about 125 households.

To join you must be a permanent resident of West Midwood and agree not to post messages of a religious, political, or spam nature. Insulting or crude language can also lead to revocation of the ability to post. Finally, new and existing members can also request a daily recap containing all of the activity within the previous 24 hours, rather than receive messages as they occur.



Box Tops For Education

by Sherry Goldberg

Please help P.S. 217 raise money by clipping Box Tops for Education! Our school receives 10 cents for every single box top we submit, and the funds add up quickly! It's simple: keep an eye out for the Box Tops for Education logo

(shown above) on the products you use every day. Participating product lines include major brands such as General Mills, Green Giant, Pillsbury, Old El Paso, Ziploc, Hefty, Betty Crocker, and many more. Simply contact me at sherrymgoldberg@gmail.com. I would be happy to pick up box tops or coordinate a drop off.

Would you like to advertise your Brooklyn-based business in this space? For the bargain price of \$50 per year, you can be included in all four issues of the *West Midwood News*. Please contact Joe Mislowack at jmislowack@gmail.com to

Mark Your Calendars!

**Celebrate Leap Year at the WMCA Progressive Dinner
Saturday, February 29**



Spotted any Graffiti Lately?

New York City's Graffiti-Free NYC program offers free graffiti removal services to commercial, industrial, and residential buildings in all five boroughs. Any New Yorker can anonymously report unsightly graffiti.

Graffiti-Free NYC (GFNYC) works as a cooperative effort between the New York City Economic Development Corporation (NYCEDC), the Office of the Mayor, and the Department of Sanitation. GFNYC removes graffiti at no cost to the property owners or tenants.

The Goals of Graffiti-Free NYC are to:

- Provide no-cost graffiti removal for affected commercial, residential, and industrial properties throughout New York City
- Generate goodwill throughout local business communities
- Increase property values
- Partner with social service organizations that help to train, employ, and rehabilitate segments of the City's population

Submit a request online:

If you are a tenant or member of the public, click the link to enter the address of the property.

If you are the property owner, click the link to enter the address for a one-time graffiti removal request or submit an online Forever Graffiti Free Waiver, which provides permission to the City to remove graffiti on the property in the future without additional permission from the property owner. Forever Graffiti Free Waivers in Spanish and Chinese can be downloaded and mailed to the address listed on the waiver.

Submit a request using 311:

Contact 311 via phone or the mobile app. and provide the address of the graffiti. For additional information about how graffiti removal is done, how the waiver process works and timing of graffiti removal, please visit GFNYC's website: <http://www.edc.nyc.gov/graffiti>



Neighbors' Businesses and Services

To add, cancel, or update a listing, contact Ellen Bilofsky at ebb11@optonline.net.

Babysitting

Griffin Umrigar Laguardia Arts High School student, available for babysitting. Creative, in the neighborhood and many references available! Please contact me at 917-244-9978.

Education and Lessons

Danielle Buonaiuto Private voice lessons for high-school age and adult students in classical, musical theatre, and pop styles. Master of Music from Peabody Conservatory, and 10+ years' teaching experience. danielle.buonaiuto@gmail.com.

Rob Garcia Drum lessons. I've been teaching private lessons to students of all ages for the past 25 years, and I have a great teaching studio in my home at 34 Wellington Ct. For more info about lessons, see <http://www.robgarciamusic.com/notepad.php> Contact me at robjgarcia@hotmail.com.

Udi Hazan Private table tennis and archery lessons. Certified coach - level 1 in ping pong and level 2 in recurve bow archery. 718-859-8432

Florence Manglani Semi-retired bilingual school psychologist, still teaching at Brooklyn College, is available for consultations. 718-434-2134

Julian Rhine Guitar lessons. BA in music and English from Vanderbilt University. 917-981-0675

Melissa Scott Yoga for Every Body! Currently offering private or small class instruction. 718-781-6509; kettleandkame@gmail.com.

Harriet Rhine Swimming instruction, at East Midwood Jewish Center, Fridays: children 6 months–3 years old, 10:30–11:00 am; adults, all levels, 11:00 am–12 noon. 646.670.0822: hrhine165@gmail.com.

Amy Rowe Tutoring in math, reading, writing, ESL, test prep, and other subjects. All ages, all levels welcome. Experienced education program leader, researcher, teacher, tutor, writer, and editor can help make learning fast and fun. amyrowe.nyc@gmail.com; 917-723-0348

David Wechsler Flute lessons. Long-time member of Brooklyn Philharmonic and many years of experience teaching at all levels. 347-528-6318

Health and Mental Health

Laura Campbell-Lui Shaklee Distributor household cleaning products; nutritional skin care; nutritional supplement products; appointments available. 917-767-3579; lauraclui@yahoo.com.

Jan Castro Custom Thai bodywork and Swedish, sports, and myofascial massage: 60–120-minute sessions. Reasonable rates. Great birthday or special occasion gift. jancastro1@gmail.com or 314-323-9060. Please call two or more days in advance.

Andrea Freshman, LCSW Specialty: trauma healing with emphasis on integrating the mind-body connection. 718-434-6873.

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