



VIEWS FROM THE HEIGHTS

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Jackson Heights:
A Garden in the City,
Jackson Heights:
From Ice Age to Space Age

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Editor's Take

by Lila M. Stromer

Welcome to this issue of *Views from the Heights*.

Marc Donnelly mentions in his article that he moved to Jackson Heights from Manhattan, and Melissa Zavala mentions in her board bio returning here from other areas of Queens. I too came to Jackson Heights from another area, but in my case it was Chicago. Although I was a New York (state) person my whole life, I moved to Boston after college. With me went my boyfriend, Joe, who had grown up in a small town in upstate New York. We lived in Boston for 11 years, made great friends and married just before moving to Chicago. We liked Chicago so much that we stayed for 19 years, even buying a condo to really plant our roots. I became the condo association's "gardening committee" (and Joe became First Assistant and Sherpa of Soil), taking care of the container garden that was my brainchild after a lovely communal deck had been built. Joe and I selected the containers, which were put away each autumn and became old friends each spring. We selected the plants each year, deciding by color and flower size and pattern. The garden got better each year as I learned which plants like the sun the deck received, neither withering nor burning to a crisp. However, a few years ago we started to talk about moving back to New York but this time to the city. We put off the move for two years for various reasons, but on New Year's Eve, heading into 2013, we made a pact. NYC in 2013 or bust.

Over those two years we made several trips to NYC. One day we scoped out most of Brooklyn ... we were on and off the subway all day, and by bedtime we were exhausted but wiser about Brooklyn. We did the same thing with Queens. We kept a list of what we liked and didn't like, and put areas in Yes, No or Maybe columns. Each trip we'd revisit the Yes and Maybe areas until we had only a Yes column. The Yes areas of Brooklyn eventually moved to the No column, and the top Yes area of Queens became Jackson Heights. We fell in love with the brick buildings, but we really fell in love with the trees. The week we were here in 2013 to find an apartment was



brutally hot, but the trees offered shade and got the sun out of our eyes. The gardens in front of buildings were in bloom. We were lucky to have friends who live in a building we liked, and there was a rare empty apartment. As we weren't sure we would get it, for two days we saw apartments in other areas because we were imminently moving from Chicago and had to give the soon-to-be hired movers some ... any ... address in NYC. Then luck came our way again when the broker called to say it was ours.

We've been here a little more than a year. We love that this neighborhood is so diverse. We like being able to walk to a major grocery store but then have so many "mom and pop" stores, too. Walking down 37th Ave., we notice the older people with their aides or adult children, and young mothers walking right next to them with little kids. We love that there are so many people walking their dogs; we believe a pet-friendly neighborhood is a plain-friendly neighborhood. We like that shop owners, like Sami Dib of Juju's Bagels Café, were so welcoming, even from our first happenstance in finding his delicious shop. We lived in Boston a long time, and in Chicago even longer. This time, we hope not to move again.

I became the editor of the newsletter only recently, and I'm still a fairly new resident. Please let me know if there are any topics you'd like to know about, or if you'd even like to write an article yourself. JHBG is an all-volunteer organization, so there are all sorts of opportunities to do something you love or do something you want to learn. In this issue check out upcoming JHBG events (like the Halloween Parade!), and how you can lend a hand in keeping Jackson Heights the wonderful neighborhood that it is. If you'd like to become a member of JHBG or donate to support the work that we do, please use the membership page at the end of this newsletter. You can reach me at JHViews@gmail.com. Until next time. ...

Editor's Take

By Lila M. Stromer

Welcome to this issue of *Views from the Heights*.

You may notice in this issue the number of JH events that occurred with the help of volunteers...or more accurately, would not have occurred without them. For example, without an army of volunteers, there would not have been a Halloween Parade (see Ed Westley's article). Or, the visioning meeting on Diversity Plaza that Shekar Krishnan writes about would not have occurred without volunteer groups such as Friends of Diversity Plaza and JHBG, or residents taking the time to make their voices heard.

Time is a valuable asset, and no one has enough of it. So why volunteer when there are so many other ways to spend your time? This is a question that has as many answers as there are people who volunteer their time and energy. When I lived in Chicago, I volunteered at an animal shelter. Why did I volunteer there? My husband and I had lost two cats in a six-month period. The difficulty in making the decision to euthanize was particularly hard with the first cat because my husband was out of town, making the decision all mine. Six months later, we lost the first cat we ever adopted. I began to volunteer, quite honestly, as a healing process. But over the next seven years, my reasons for volunteering there changed. I copyedited because I saw a need, I led training for new volunteers because I was asked and I did pet outreach at a nursing home because a slot opened. The funny thing about volunteering, though, is that there are always unexpected benefits. My résumé grew, I gained confidence and I learned patience. I also made friends with shelter staff and volunteers with whom I'm still in touch, and—not surprisingly—adopted a cute little yellow cat who stole our hearts. I only stopped volunteering because we moved to New York in Aug. 2013.

After moving to JH, I wanted to volunteer where I could play with nature. I stumbled across JHBG when I attended their holiday concert last December. One year later, and I am the editor of this newsletter. In this past year, through JHBG, I've learned about composting—and now donate our scraps, met new people who make Jackson Heights feel more like home and am learning skills in creating this newsletter. Volunteering is funny that way, and stories abound of how much people get out of volunteering when that was never their motivation.

If you saw trees being watered on 37th Ave., you saw JHBG members and volunteers working together. When



you see bright daffodils in front of the post office next spring, you'll think of the Brownie troops that Evie McKenna describes in this issue. If you enjoy the flowerbeds on 37th Ave., you can thank the storeowners who volunteer to tend them.

JHBG is an all-volunteer organization. Among other things, it actively works with the city and other groups to maintain the historic district (see Daniel Karatzas and Len Maniace's article), manages the compost center (see Lenny Olsson and Melissa Zavala's article), organizes the summer and holiday concerts (see Pat Glunt's article; and the orchestra is also all volunteer!), heads the Halloween Parade and Holiday Lighting Ceremony, oversees the Historic Weekend and even runs JHCrew, the dog run. When I went to the holiday concert last year, I had no idea what JHBG did. Now I know that JHBG is important in keeping Jackson Heights one of the greenest and most livable neighborhoods in the city, and it always needs help to carry out its many projects. Check this issue's calendar of events to see what is happening through the end of the year. If you would like to volunteer, please email info@jhbg.org. You can volunteer as much or as little as fits your schedule. Another way to help support JHBG is financially, as all these projects cost money. You can make a donation using the donation page in this newsletter or online at www.jhbg.org/donate. Everything helps, and everything is appreciated!

Until next time...

This is Lila's second issue as the editor. She is a freelance editor by trade, working with academic, business and creative clients. For JHBG, she has spent one sunny afternoon each at the compost center, mulching and painting at Travers Park and watering trees on 37th Ave. She has lived in Jackson Heights since Aug. 2013.



Ghosts and Goblins at the Halloween Parade

Editor's Take

By Lila M. Stromer

Welcome to this issue of *Views from the Heights*.

It's September, and the summer is over (at least officially, if not weather-wise). JHBG has been active all summer, taking care of street trees, gardening, painting benches in front of the post office, putting in tree guards to protect the street trees, sponsoring the JHO concert in Travers Park—not to mention Summer Sundays in the Park—and leading the Historic Weekend, among many other activities. Not only that, but there's also been a lot of activity for the upcoming Good Neighbors Awards on Sept. 26 (see Leslie Ellman's article on p. 9 and cover of this issue).

September has always been a bit of demarcation for me as a good time to evaluate where I am for the year. Did I accomplish much (or anything?!) that I planned way back in January? What of those goals ... or new ones ... do I have for the final quarter of the year? Maybe it comes from going back to school when I was a kid. Clothes shopping for school, first new experiences in the classroom and talking to classmates about what I did over the summer. So, this September as I take a look over my shoulder, I realize that this is my fourth newsletter as the editor. A year ago when I started I had no idea what I was doing. This year I can't say that I'm a whiz at it yet, but it's nice when not everything is brand new with a learning curve at every moment.

On that note, I'm not the only one who is a bit smarter and better than before. Len Maniace, JHBG board president (see his article on the facing page), tells us how Jackson Heights is doing better, from lower crime rates to the Green Market, and a whole lot in between.

Melissa Zavala writes of the tree census conducted by the city; the third one in 30 years. That means every decade the city gets smarter about the trees that do so much for us. If you saw people out and about this summer deeply interested in the trees, it was probably one or two, or "tree," volunteers helping collect the data that will help the city—and JHBG—care better and smarter for the street trees. You can read her story on p. 8.

Of course, some things need more help to become better, such as Diversity Plaza. Shekar Krishnan and Len Maniace double-team to explain the plaza's history and about the changes that are needed ... and hopefully arriving soon ... to make Diversity Plaza a more pleasant part of Jackson Heights. Shekar's and Len's articles are on p. 4.



Travers Park is another site that will need help and time to make it a better place. The city is moving forward with expansive plans that will finally give Jackson Heights a park, given

that while we have lots of trees, our only public green space is at St. Mark's Episcopal Church. While I deeply appreciate that St. Mark's makes its grassy courtyard available to everyone—especially people like me who have none of our own—having a lawn, lines of trees and tables added to Travers Park will give residents a place to sit on hot summer nights and for friends and families to gather for picnics and socializing at least three months a year ... and four if you like sitting outside in winter! To read about some of the plans, see my article on p. 7 (and a schematic plan supplied by NYC Parks on p. 6).

There are also two cases that JHBG is watching closely, both of which would make life better. The first is whether 84-11 37th Ave. will be retained as a one-story building (see Gloria Daini's article on p. 9) and if the plans for Willets West mega mall are permanently stopped (see John McCaffrey's story on p. 5).

Of course, part of looking back means looking ahead. And what's ahead? JHBG's 25th annual Halloween Parade! Check out the Save the Date poster on p. 11 and watch the JHBG website for more information. One big change: the parade starts at noon to meet police precinct requirements. If you get there at the usual starting time, it'll be over and that would not be a treat! And also check out all about the Jackson Heights Orchestra's upcoming concerts and call for members on p. 12!

Until next time ...

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Editor's Take

By Lila M. Stromer

Welcome to this issue of *Views from the Heights*.

Spring is around the corner, and everyone is gung-ho for the warmer weather. The change in seasons has the same effect on me as New Year's. I ask myself: What am I looking forward to? What have I accomplished? What remains to be done? As a still-relative newbie to both Jackson Heights and this paper, I'm eager to see the work JHBG has done to beautify our community and to write about it in 2015.

I am looking forward to the things I took for granted last spring – and before I really knew of JHBG. I am also eager to see the tulips rise out of the ground from the bulbs JHBG and volunteers planted throughout JH. There will be the bright yellow daffodils, the best harbinger of spring, that JHBG and Girl Scout Troops 4315 and 4297 planted. Seeing the trees start to green along 37th Ave. will be a source of pride, as I helped water them this past summer, along with a small brigade who carried buckets of water up and down the street. I got a bit wet but had a fabulous time and met some lovely neighbors.

I'm particularly looking forward to the Historic Weekend, scheduled for June 13 and 14. It is at this event last year that I got to know more about JHBG and the people who make the group so active. My husband, Joe, was not available for the garden tour, but I was thrilled to discover how lush JH truly is. The gardens are little pieces of heaven, especially when you do not have one. I talked to Joe about every garden, and the beauty of the landscapes and flowers. We took the architectural tour together, and realized again how lucky we are to have landed here.

If you have a garden, consider registering for a free tree on April 12 at JH-SCRAPS, the compost center run by JHBG. To find out how to register with the New York Restoration Project, see Evie McKenna's **Springtime Fruit Tree Giveaway** (p. 10).

One event we landed upon by accident in 2014 was a concert in Travers Park, and again saw how JHBG makes this community, well, a community. We enjoyed the music of the Jackson Heights Orchestra at a Summer Sunday in the Park concert...while enjoying lemon-lime ices from a little cart with a bicycle bell. It felt so much like summer should feel, but often does not. This summer Joe and I will attend more concerts, which are scheduled to begin June 21 and last for nine consecutive Sundays. I see quite a few lemon-lime ices in my future.



One of the major changes to watch in 2015, of course, will be the Bruson Building, which suffered that massive fire in April 2014. An important part of the community for more than 70 years, everyone is interested in what businesses will fill it. See **The Bruson Building: What's Next?** (p. 6) on what has transpired to date. That is not the only building JHBG is watching. As Dan Karatzas reports in **JH Scrutinizes 5-Story Planned in Historic District** (cover page), JHBG is working with the Landmarks Preservation Commission on the requested build-out of 84-11 37th Ave., from a one- to five-story building. You can find JHBG President Len Maniace's concerns in **Dangerous Precedent: Wave of Bigger Buildings** (p. 5).

Spring is also a good time to give a nod to Queens in general. In the "New York City" edition of Lonely Planet, Queens was chosen as the No. 1 Best in the US 2015 destination. An article in the Feb. 16, 2015, issue of the New Yorker highlighted the mural painted on a wall outside of I.S. 145 ("Writing on the Wall"). The cover of the Jan. 15–21, 2015, issue of Time Out screamed in bold letters, "All Hail the Queens: A Love Letter to New York's Hottest Borough." Yet, with all this attention, the June 2014 report by Exploring the Metropolis Inc., "Queens Performing Artists and Workspace," under the Queens Workspace Initiative, found that throughout the borough, the performing arts – music, theater, dance – lack performance space, rehearsal space and overall funding.

While Queens is on the rise, clearly there is more to do. Spring is the best time to look forward and take action steps to make the rest of the year the best it can be.

Until next time...





Editor's Take

By Lila M. Stromer

Welcome to this issue of *Views from the Heights*.

The summer has come to a close, although the weather has actually become lovelier. It was *hot* and *dry* for weeks ... really months ... on end, so the cooler air offers a well-needed break. I am a freelancer, so it's a relief to work and sleep at home without needing the air conditioner. Now is the time of year when the AC isn't on, but neither are the radiators, which create a different issue of heat. As Len Maniace notes in his President's Message (on the cover), heating a NYC apartment is a matter of regulating heat as best you can. This was a change for my husband and me, given our condo in Chicago had central air and heat, meaning if it got warm or cold, we simply changed the thermostat. Clearly, most NYC apartments have neither central AC/heat nor thermostats. Thanks to a neighbor, and a year after we struggled with an overheated apartment, we learned that our radiators have little knobs that regulate the heat, at least to a certain degree. The radiators are old and the knobs work only so well, but saving anything on heat also helps save energy.

As Len also noted, trees help regulate the temperature, which is why I was glad that NYC Parks planted two young trees on my street. With such dry weather, I was concerned that they wouldn't do well, given that tags on the trees said they needed to be watered between May and October. I learned from Len that to do well, they'd each need two gallons of water per day, every day. I've watered these trees via a one-gallon jug throughout the summer, although, truthfully, I did sometimes forget (or just didn't want to go up and down four times from my fourth-floor apartment, elevator notwithstanding). Not so with JHBG watering the trees on 37th Ave. Stephen LaMarch and Len explain in their article (p. 6) that JHBG faithfully watered the trees on 37th Ave. twice a week. Normally, JHBG's Tree LC volunteers water once a week, but this year was so dry, they did double-duty. Want to help throughout this fall, plus plant perennials in the newly renamed curbside gardens? The contact information is in their article.

JHBG volunteers also added bright yellow beauty by planting sunflowers. The dedicated Gardening group, as described by Nuala O'Dogherty (p. 6), not only planted flowers and plants in many locations, but it also removed

ugly weeds and trash. Like the Tree LC volunteers, the Gardening volunteers do important work in making Jackson Heights what it is: a green and nature-filled city within a city. The Gardening volunteers work every weekend throughout the year, save the winter, so if you'd like to help clean up Jackson Heights and make it a prettier place with multiple gardens, there are plenty of opportunities! Read Nuala's article to find out more.

Directly related to its work with trees and gardens is the group's composting center, JH SCRAPS. As Lenny Olsson, a master composter, told me a while ago, JHBG's compost center helps bring food full circle, in which, for example, a peach pit is broken down to help the soil grow a peach tree. In his article on the cover, Lenny explains how leaves are part of this process. Not only could JH SCRAPS use your leaves, but by not having the city haul them away to a landfill, you're doubly helping the Earth. You can bring your bags of leaves—in brown bags or clear bags only—to JH SCRAPS every Saturday from now throughout October. In another article on JH SCRAPS, Lenny announces the site's expansion and a visit by Queens Borough President Melinda Katz. There are big plans for the site, which you can read about on page 8. My husband and I often remark how much of a smaller footprint we have in NYC. We recycle nearly everything, and we compost a lot, thanks to both JH SCRAPS on Saturdays and the city's collection on Sundays at the Green Market. Our trash going to the landfill has diminished significantly (which goes back to Len's article on the cover ... full circle again).

There is, of course, other news in this issue. Three outside groups offer important information. Connecting.nyc Inc. is working to help Jackson Heights nonprofit groups have a way to announce their work via dedicated domain names. There's a lot of work to do, and they are looking for your help. You can find out more in Tom Lowenhaupt's article on page 2. Another group helping to better Jackson Heights is Queens Quiet Skies, which is trying to reduce airplane noise. To read what that group is up to, and how you can help, including specific steps, read Brian Will's article (p. 9). Finally, The Queens Consort is a new musical organization bringing early music to Queens. I had the opportunity to hear a concert earlier this year, and they are *definitely* worth following. You can read more about this group and find its schedule on page 10. Want even more music? Check the save-the-date information on page 11 about the upcoming Jackson Heights Orchestra's schedule. And JHBG's Halloween Parade is just around the corner! See page 5 for the save-the-date info on that event.

In the interim, enjoy your autumn! Until next time...

Editor's Take

By Lila M. Stromer

Welcome to this issue of *Views from the Heights*.

This small newspaper always deals with all things Jackson Heights. But this particular issue is all about the old and new of Jackson Heights.

Len Maniace's *President's Message* (see the cover) is all about the long established and recently established organizations that make Jackson Heights what it is, whether it be a greening organization or a music organization. All of them help make Jackson Heights a better, prettier and more communal neighborhood.

Of course, one of the organizations that's putting Jackson Heights on the map is the Queens World Film Festival (see the story on the cover by Katha Cato, one of the founders of the Festival). In just a few short years, this festival has attracted hundreds of filmmakers and audiences to Jackson Heights. It is growing so well now that the QWFF has offerings in three other nearby neighborhoods: Astoria, Long Island City and Sunnyside. The QWFF is making many parts of Queens important destination stops.

Not to toot our own horn—okay, maybe a little bit!—JHBG took a peek over our shoulder at what was accomplished in 2015 (*JHBG by the Numbers*, p. 4), both as a way to wrap up last year and to look forward with projects for this year. Those of us lucky enough to have lived in Jackson Heights in 2015 had a lot of entertainment (multiple Jackson Heights Orchestra [JHO] concerts and nine Sundays of music at Travers Park, to name just a few of the music happenings); fun days with the summertime Historic Weekend, the 26th Annual Halloween Parade and the December sing-along in front of the post office to start off the holidays; and plenty of greening opportunities, from composting to planting to mulching to counting trees (see Melissa Zavala's story on the tree census on p. 6).

With all that was accomplished in 2015, JHBG's plans for 2016 are just as big. Of course there'll be the annual events again, and plenty of days of watering the neighborhood street trees and planting bulbs. JHBG would love to have your help with one, two or more projects. For example, on page 2 there are already two opportunities to help make Jackson Heights a prettier and greener place to live. On March 19 there's a tree stewardship event, and on March 26 there's a chance to mingle and share ideas on gardening around Jackson Heights throughout the summer. And the first JHO concert of the year is on March 16; read all about it on page 8!



To see other events, check out the Calendar of Events on page 5.

To get back to the “old”—in this case the history of Jackson Heights—Barbara Lombardo interviewed long-time resident Betty Morris, who has lived in Jackson Heights for more than 90 years. It is a real treasure to have someone in the community who can show us how far this once little and pastoral neighborhood has changed over time. To get a glimpse of life back then, check out Barbara's interview on page 9.

And to get back to the new—in this case a new section on page 7—JHBG is reaching out to Spanish-speaking neighbors by offering a summary of the important articles in this newspaper. We are hoping to grow this outreach throughout 2016. If you have any suggestions on how we can best do this, please let me know at views@jhb.org.

For a combo of old and new, there's a new grassroots organization, The Radical Age Movement, that was launched a year ago to combat the challenges of the traditional notions of aging. Its founder, Alice Fisher, tells all about the organization and the reason for creating it on page 10.

There are more stories of the old and new in Jackson Heights. Something that Jackson Heights has been battling for a long time is the Asian Longhorned Beetle (ALB), a pestilent critter that has destroyed thousands of trees across the boroughs and Long Island. See Marc Donnelly's article on page 11 to find out what to do if you see an ALB and how to prevent its spread. Jackson Heights is still considered under quarantine. On a new note (and a nicer subject), the Queens Bike Initiative is a new group that is spreading the word about safe biking and looking to create more bike routes (see p. 12). For new news on an old subject, the landmarking of Fairway Hall, on the docket of the Landmarks Commission since 1990, was recently removed from that list (for the original article, see the November issue; for the latest article, see p. 13).

I want to end on a note about the new, and a yummy one at that! See Victoria Steinberg's article on page 8 about some of the new restaurants opening in Jackson Heights. We are an ever-changing community, and this is just one sign of that growth.

Until next time...