Katrina Rehab Stint Becomes a Five-Year Commitment to Help

by Martin Friedman

When Hurricane Katrina occurred in 2005, I had never gutted a house, put up drywall, laid a tile or painted siding. Since Katrina, my partner John and I have been on mission trips to the Gulf Coast, learning and doing all of the above and more in both New Orleans and coastal Mississippi.

The first two years were really tough, both in what we saw and the physical work of raking and gutting. We have now been rebuilding for the last three years with no end in sight. In addition, there have been volunteer opportunities such as helping to cook community meals at St. George’s Dragon Café feeding ministry, assisting with St. Anna’s mobile medical van and working, with the Beacon of Hope community organization, clearing and beautifying the front yards of abandoned homes.

We have worked alongside some of the homeowners and they all have a story to tell. Sometimes, just being there and listening to them has served a purpose.

Recently, Camp Coast Care, the group we were working with in Mississippi, announced that they would be ending their mission because of lack of funding. To date, 60,000 volunteers have participated, 3,500 homes have been gutted and 570 homes have been rehabbed or built.

We hope to return to New Orleans this fall to continue the work there. There are still thousands of homes and many neighborhoods that have not returned to anything resembling pre-Katrina conditions.

Initially, we made a personal commitment of five years. This is the fifth anniversary and there is at least another five years of work to do.

Closer to home, I have been volunteering with Habitat for Humanity, where I have been involved with a 41-unit complex in Bushwick, two condos in the Bronx and I am currently working on 16 units of housing in Bed-Stuy.

Habitat was worse than anything I had seen on television; “unbearable” hardly describes the conditions. There were countless garbage piles taller than the Pancake-

With $500,000 Rehab, PLG Montessori on Track to Earn Prestigious ‘Green’ Certification

by Milford Prewitt

When the Montessori School on Rogers Avenue and Rutland Road resumes classes in the fall, its pre-K students will enter only the second school building in all of Brooklyn to meet top standards for being green, energy efficient and environmentally toxic-free.

While the 2- to 6-year-old kids the school traditionally serves probably wouldn’t understand the importance of their school earning a LEED School Building Certification, their parents may be comforted to know that in rehabbing the three-story building, contractors did not use any drywall, paint, adhesives, forest products or other materials that emit volatile organic compounds known as VOCs. Moreover, building materials had to be mold- and fire-resistant, too.

Why is that important?

“Decades of research have shown that children learn better, teachers and staff are more energized and efficient when school environments are free of VOCs,” says Tony Briggs, the executive director of the school. A block away, an unrehabbed building the school previously used will be available for workshops, community meetings and other functions. LEED Certification, Briggs notes, is a standard that is higher and harder to achieve than satisfying New York City’s building and construction codes.

Trying the health of students and their teachers into building design and construction materials, along with energy conserva-
tion and efficiency, LEED – which stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, a rating system enforced by the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC), a private non-profit organization that promotes green construction practices – has a specially designated school building division separate from residential, commercial and office structures.

Yetsah Frank, director of programs and policy for the USGBC’s New York region, says that PLG Montessori is the second school in Brooklyn to earn LEED certification.

(Tony Briggs, executive director of the PLG Montessori School, seen above.)

With the installation of a rear steel staircase the city’s fire codes demanded, Briggs estimated that it cost $500,000 to improve the building.

Meanwhile, Wendy Welling-
ton, education director, says she is looking forward to the school’s 58th year of service in PLG. She said about 35 stu-
dents will attend the school this fall, about 30 percent of them children of color or who are bi-racial.

It costs a family about $12,500 to $14,500 a year to send a child to this Montessori (continued on page 2).
**What Would You Do with the ‘Phat Albert’s Building’?**

At nearly 150,000 square feet and occupying a full square block, the “Phat Albert’s Building” is among the largest commercial properties in Prospect Jefferts Gardens. It was once the iconic landmark of the neighborhood, with its wide face clock tower and voluminousness that the years housed a bakery, a furniture store, a garage that specialized in truck and bus repair, and warehouse storage for any of a number of industries. No one alive today remembers when the hands on the clock last moved. Even can-do Borough President Marty Markowitz suffered a rare defeat some years ago trying to raise money to get the clock repaired.

Today the building is dominated by the discount retailer Phat Albert’s, which shares the block with a car wash and a beer wholesaler. On the second floor is a children’s woodworking studio, a dance studio, and a few government-backed offices. And no one is saying that Phat Albert’s doesn’t know how to be there. They pay their taxes and their rent. They enjoy strong demand for their goods and services from local residents. But in a neighborhood where commercial bank branches, book stores, gyms and recreational facilities for teens and senior citizens are far and few between, the Echo fantasized:

If money were no object and you were put in control of repurposing the Phat Albert’s space, what would you do with it? Reporter Marcia Lloyd asked that question to random pedestrians in the Manor, outside Phat Albert’s, and one neighbor she found in her waiting pool.

*Photo by Mark Sylvedy*

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**KINGS COUNTY NURseries: PUTTING THE “GARDENS” IN PLG FOR 55 YEARS**

By Jackie Myers

One of the joys of being an urban gardener and living in Jefferts Manor is the easy access to Kings County Nursery, arguably one of the best nurseries in Brooklyn. Located on New York Avenue in the middle of the block between Rutland and Fenimore where it was founded 55 years ago, the nursery has been the not-so-secret secret that makes the yards and gardens in Prospect Jefferts Gardens among the most lush in all of Brooklyn.

Now under the caring and thoughtful ownership of second-generation family owners – husband-and-wife Joe and Lisa Merola – Kings County Nursery has planted roots for another 55 years as daughter Stephanie intends to follow in her father’s footsteps. The Merolas are knowledgeable, outgoing, charming and have a strong sense of commitment to the neighborhood and its residents, many of whom they know by name.

“Throughout the history of our business we’ve seen many changes and realize we are located in a solid, strong community with many great people in it,” says Joe who specializes in the retailing and operations of the business, while Lisa focuses on design and landscaping.

Joe Jr.’s father started the business in 1955 years after he immigrated from Italy as an 8-year-old boy in 1937. Later, Joe Sr. served in the U.S. Navy near the end of the war, and during a trip back home to Italy, met and married Joe Jr.’s mother.

Both DNA and proximity predetermined that Joe Jr. would go into the family business: He was born in the house that is right next door to the nursery. The family moved to Queens when Joe Jr. was about 2 years old and he went to work with his dad every chance he could.

Lisa says the employees, which includes other family members, are devoted and loyal to the business and have long tenures.

“Billy Magro, also family [a brother-in-law], has worked for us for 35 years and has been a great asset to our business especially, with his knowledge and experience,” Lisa says. “Andre has been with us for seven years and helps keep my plants healthy and customers happy.

“Sean has also joined our family at Kings County Nursery. He works hard and learns quickly.”

Joe Jr. and Lisa bought the nursery from his uncles about three years ago and immediately upgraded and broadened the inventory.

On a recent visit there were Dwarf Southern Magnolias, a fraction of the size of their larger cousins, displaying huge white flowers. Heuchera, a wonderful plant in rose, white and pink, thrives in shade and is available in a wide range of colors. Kings County Nursery stocks Hostas in many sizes and shades of green including one of my favorites called “Mouse Ears.” It remains tiny and has a lot of character. What’s especially beautiful is a small species of American Wisteria, good for containers and the proper pruning will flower in small spaces or on a trellis.

“We are willing and able to give advice and instructions for do-it-yourself projects,” Lisa says. “So stop by the shop and garden center. A three-year resident of the Manor, Jackie Myers lives with her husband, Steve, on Rutland 3.”
Deborah Mutnick Documents Our Vibrant History and Lively Neighbors

by Susan Fox

Recently, the Echo got wind that PLG resident Deborah Mutnick was taping interviews with neighborhood old timers. A writer, documentary and English professor at Long Island University, Mutnick has lived in PLG for 13 years with her husband - also a writer - and their 12-year-old son. One hot summer morning, this reporter sat down with Deborah amidst the churning fountain, vibrant flowers and birdsong in her relaxing Midwood 2 garden to discuss exactly what she’s up to.

And it’s a lot. Interviews with neighborhood residents is just one layer of the many voices she is capturing in a multi-project, mixed media, Stads-Terkel-like oral history that celebrates the history and residents of her beloved PLG. Deborah is a powerhouse of ideas on how to document the history of the PLG community in our own voices and work to preserve our city’s history.

“It’s kind of like the pied pipper [what I do],” she explains in a melodious voice, while the breeze ticsle wind chimes in the background, “and you just keep playing the song and then people follow along and they drop off... and then more people come. I just love doing it.”

Mutnick started罐 a series of three themed story circles with PLG residents, currently is embarking on a project with Nelson Simon of Hawthorne Street and Jamie Yenger of Midwood 2. They intend to “use the StoryCorps model to have two people that each know about each interview and each record it.” Deborah says. The aim is to “get these stories out and to archive them.”

But she also intends to expand the interviews into larger projects such as this fall’s National Day of Listening, planned by StoryCorps, or to produce them as podcasts or radio programs through The Prospect Lefferts Gardens Neighborhood Association’s proposed neighborhood guide to build community between residents and merchants has been given by a bright idea. She hopes to draw on students from her upcoming course, “Writ- ing in the Community,” to doc- ument interviews on this and other PLG-based projects.

“I would love to see an exhibit of PLG Arts at the Brooklyn Histori- cal Society,” Deborah says, referring to Public Perspectives, a Society-run competition for community-curated exhibits in New York City’s galleries. “PLG is one of the most truly integrated neighborhoods that I’ve ever lived in,” Deborah boasts. “It’s not uniform, not one voice. There are ten- sions in the community and... they have to be worked out. But that’s what fascinates me,” she says ebulliently. “It’s a very lively, vibrant community.”

PLG will garner a chapter in Mutnick’s book in progress, Writing Memory and the Politics of the Place.

Susan Fox, a writer and documentarian, lives with her husband and two children on Fenimore 2.

Julia Child’s Great-Nephew, a Manor Neighbor, Visits Rutland 2 Book Group

by Joan Kelley

It’s one thing to belong to a book group whose members appreciate good food, good company and good stories. It’s quite another matter when the members of this group get to share them all with the co-author of the memoirs of a famous chef.

That’s what happened when The Rutland 2 Readers, a book group made up of women who all live on Rutland Road between Bedford and Rogers Avenues and who find the culinary arts as important in their meetings as literary introspection, were entertained by Alex Prud’homme, the great- nephew of the late chef and cookbook author Julia Child.

And talk about timing: his visit came soon after the release of “Julia’s Ripe,” his new memoir of his aunt’s life. Published last fall, “Julia’s Ripe” weaves the stories of Julia Child’s life in postwar France as she learned to cook and researched recipes for Mastering the Art of French Cook- ing withJulia Child, her aunt.

Alex Prud’homme was inspired to write the book after he received a call from Julia’s great-grandson, William, who was looking for someone to write the book.

The book is a portrait of a woman who was not only a chef, but also a spy. The book chronicles his aunt’s life as she worked her way up to the position of chef at the French Embassy in Washington, D.C.

Julia Child was a very different person than her sister and her nephew, Alex Prud’homme. While her sister, Dorothy, was a very private person, Julia was very public and loved to share her stories.

Julia was a woman who was deeply committed to her work and her family. She was a very talented person who was able to balance her career and her personal life.

Julia’s Ripe” is a wonderful book that captures the essence of Julia’s life and accomplishments. It is a book that everyone who loves Julia Child should read.

Author Stephen Hall Tackles the Nature of Wisdom

Ask five or six people what “wisdom” is and the chances are you will get five or six different answers. Like love, wisdom is an indefinable something in our emotional, psychological and intellectual being, and it could be a byproduct of pain, joy and experience. In his sixth and latest book, Wisdom: From Philosophy to Neuroscience, Rutland Road resident and science writer Stephen Hall examines one of the most intractable facets of human experience. And like his well-received work from 2006, Size Matters: How Height Influences Health, Wealth, and Success of Boys, Hall serves up some uncomfortable truths and optimistic insights about ourselves.

Born in Cleveland, Ohio, Hall has lived on Rutland 2 for the past 12 years with his wife, Mindy; son, Alessan- dro, 12; and daughter, Mia, 14. In fact, Mia plays a big role in his father’s work. Their experi- ences together within blocks of the World Trade Center on the morning of September 11, 2001 con- tributed to pushing Hall on the road to Wisdom.

Echo: How did you come to move to the Manor?

SH: My brother’s college roommate grew up on Rutland 2. At the time, Mindy and I were living in Cobble Hill and needed more space. When my brother’s roommate showed me the area, I was totally uninterested.

Two to three years later, we saw it again and moved over.

What do you like about living here?

It really wasn’t until after we had been here for a year that I really came to love this neighborhood. It’s a great place to raise kids, great neighbors and the quality of the homes can’t be beat.

Why did you write about wisdom?

Wisdom factors in all that we do. Raising a family, managing money, avoiding dangerous situations. It shapes our political and social decisions or writing a book.

Which book have you read and is it a personal favorite of your book by Alex Prud’homme?

I don’t have a favorite. I try to read a variety of books, which is why I think it is important to be well read.

What do you think about your father’s book, Size Matters?

It’s a missed opportunity. I think it’s a shame that he didn’t explore the idea of how height influences health and success in more detail.

What do you think about the book, Wisdom?

It’s a very well-written book. I think it’s a great book for anyone who is interested in the nature of wisdom.

What do you think about your mother’s book, Julia’s Ripe?

I think it’s a great book. I learned a lot from the book and I think that it’s a great book for anyone who is interested in Julia Child’s life.

What do you think about your brother’s book, Size Matters?

I think it’s a great book. I think that it’s a great book for anyone who is interested in the nature of human height.

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It Was Good While It Lasted!
Flatbush Avenue between Lincoln and Maple turned into an impromptu traffic-stopping street party Saturday, June 26th when fans of Ghana’s soccer team poured out of the Mayfair Cafe, our local West African restaurant, to celebrate Ghana’s 2-1 victory over the U.S. in the World Cup. Alas, the thrill lasted just another week before Ghana was ousted by Germany, 1-0.

Burglars Entering Homes Via AC Units
The 71st Precinct is investigating a number of home burglaries in which criminals entered apartment buildings and single family houses by pushing in the window air conditioner units on lower floors. With more people buying air conditioners during this summer’s record-breaking heat, police advise residents to be more security conscious when installing the units.

Kenwyn A. Sandy, Lincoln Road Resident and Architect, Dies
Kenwyn A. Sandy, a 6-year resident of Lincoln and an architect who had a specialized practice remodeling and rehabbing churches, died June 26 after a three-year fight with blood cancer. He was 68 years old and lived with his wife, Stephanie, for 32 of them.

Born in Grenada, Sandy immigrated to Trinidad and Tobago with his family as a child and earned a scholarship to attend the prestigious Fatima College there. He later came to the U.S., graduated from Columbia University with a Master’s degree in architecture, and subsequently became a licensed architect in New York and Maryland.

Semi-retired, he opened his own practice, Ken Sandy Design Collaborative, several years ago. He had a successful practice not only in church redesign and renovation, but also in the private residential market. He returned to Trinidad and Tobago to start up his first architectural business in the 1980s, but when it folded the family eventually decided to return to the U.S.

Until he became ill, Stephanie said her husband had boundless energy. He loved to travel, but he regretted not having enough free time to do so. His favorite pastimes were reading, watching tennis and golf.

She said he was passionate about architecture and other visual arts and supplemented his skills by learning to draw and paint with some distinction and style. He was also a poet, civil rights activist, philanthropist and avid gardener.

“He could grow anything back there,” Stephanie recalled, “He planted peach trees, eggplants, tomatoes, green peppers, cucumbers and other various vegetables. Unfortunately, gardening was another pastime he was unable to devote adequate time to.”

Besides Stephanie, Mr. Sandy is survived by five children, four grandchildren and numerous nieces and nephews.

The Annual ‘National Night Out’ housed locally by the 71st Precinct, along with the 71 Community Council, will be on August 3rd, from 4-6pm. The event will be held on Sterling Street between Rutland and Rogers Avenues. Free food, refreshments and rides for all. For more information, please contact the 71 Community Council office at 718-735-0257.

The Plaza Swing Series, has Brooklynites dancing to the sounds of jazz on Thursdays in front of the Brooklyn Public Library in Grand Army Plaza. There are swing dance lessons starting at 8:00pm and the music kicks off at 7. And it’s all free! Shows remaining this summer are:
July 8 Swing Songs with Matt Munisteri
August 5 One Hundred and One Swing Days
August 12 Paul Shapiro’s Ribs and Brisket Revue

The Lefferts Manor Association was founded in 1950 to maintain and improve our historic neighborhood, enforce the restrictive one-family dwelling covenant, and bring together residents for their better acquaintance and mutual benefit.

If you’re not a member, please join now.

Dues:
Jan.-Dec. 2021: $20 per household / $10 per senior citizen household

Please send application and check to:
The Lefferts Manor Association / PO. Box 250-640, Brooklyn, NY 11225 or put in the mail slot at 214 Rutland Road.

The Lefferts Manor Association ECHO

Setting It Straight The Echo made a couple of factual errors in the last issue. In the all-out war issue in May. The errors were in the story about the integration of Prospect Lefferts Gardens. First, both black and white brokers participated in block busting schemes. Second, Bob and Jane Thompson live on Lefferts 3 and bought their home in 1973 for $350,000. Our $95,000. The Echo regrets the errors.

40th PLG House Tour Well Attended and Busy

Despite dark skies, the theft of a car that very morning of a neighbor who opened her home for the event, and another participating neighbor whose basement flooded when the sewer line backed up just a few hours before the 40th Annual PLG House & Garden Tour kicked off, the event was among one of the series best.

While it didn’t break any records for attendance, the Tour drew high marks from visitors and neighbors alike for the breadth and depth of the houses and the awe-inspiring design schemes of a few. From its inception, the PLG House Tour is high on the Manor’s social calendar and often comes to a close with backyard barbecues and house parties as neighbors reconnect or make new friends.

Among the more popular homes this year were Jackie and Stan Myer’s lighthouse on Rutland 3, the garden and elaborate backyard deck of Rosanne and Matthew Saros on Rutland 2 and the inspiring renovation and decorative details in the brownstone owned by two Broadway actors on Midwood 2.

Carole Schaffer, a 34-year resident of the Manor, LMA board member and chief organizer of the Tour for more than 10 years, said the 2011 Tour is already looking to be another crowd pleaser, noting that a couple of families have volunteered a year in advance to put their homes on view.

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Bob Edwards
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Lucia Haring
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Milford Prewitt

The Echo is a member of the Community Board 8.

The Lefferts Manor Association is a member of the Brooklyn Historical Society and the New York Landmarks Commission.

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