



Proud homeowner Alicia Boyd was all smiles when Sterling I was named "Greenest Block in Brooklyn."

## 'Greenest Block In Brooklyn' Title Planted on Sterling I

A young winter already in the history books with record-breaking, subfreezing temperatures and three snowstorms seems the perfect time to dream about Prospect Lefferts Gardens's summer palette: pretty flowerbeds, whiskey barrels billowing with color, luscious tree canopies and beautifully manicured streetscapes.

According to the judges who dispense the Brooklyn Botanic Garden's Greenest Block Award, those visuals of summer beauty were best expressed in 2013 by Sterling I (the block between Bedford and Washington Avenues), which won the honor in July.

Sponsored by GreenBridge—the BBG's horticulture division that actually runs the contest—the award not only celebrated the block's talented green-thumbed homeowners, but in receiving the top prize, the award remained in PLG for the second year in a row. In 2012, Lincoln II, between Rogers and Bedford Avenues, won the top prize (its second time in the winner's circle in four years).

Add the home gardeners and amateur landscapers in Sterling I's Gardening Committee to that well-proven adage that persistence is the key to success. In

2012, they raised nearly \$2,000 in a fundraiser to buy plants and whiskey barrels and solicited the help of a few professional gardeners who live on the block to get plants at wholesale rates. A second fundraiser in 2013 helped finance the greening effort.

The dynamo behind the block's success was the Gardening Committee head, longtime resident Claudia Loftis. Along with other members, Loftis organized the fundraiser specifically to compete in the contest, distributed leaflets with gardening and yard care tips and organized with near military efficiency a block-long distribution system for the whiskey barrels, flowers, and mulch.

Other vital committee members included: Sharon Sandiford, Debbie Wayman, Everleen Cook, Mary Morris, Christine Granderson, Maxine Thomas-West, Sandra Skoblar, Yasmin Ramirez, and Lorraine Wilson, whose garden is featured on the GreenBridge contest winner website.

Before formally forming a Gardening Committee, Sterling I had competed eight of the nineteen years the award has been around, getting honorable mentions a few times. After the committee was formed, the block's best showing was 4th Place in 2012, an achievement that inspired the neighbors to pull out all the stops in 2013.

It would be an effort that would pay off with the Grand Prize as Sterling I beat out some 200 other blocks and picked up a \$300 check to keep the block beautiful. But winners of the top honor are not allowed to compete the next year. So look for Sterling I to repeat their victory in 2015.

It's easy to see why the judges selected Sterling I. At the height of the summer when the canopy from the street's block-long row of sycamore trees is lush and green and its iconic whiskey flower barrels are abloom with color and plant diversity, only a Monet landscape is more rapturous.

But behind the physical beauty, the support of nearly every neighbor on the block was also key to victory, said Carmen Martinez, president of the Sterling I block association, which is more formally known as the Sterling St. B&W Block Association.

"This just goes to show what you can do when neighbors all pitch in and lend their creativity and sweat to the common good," Martinez said. "We came close in the past. Finally!"

In winning the 2013 prize, some neighbors even took a whimsical, theatrical approach, like longtime resident Alicia Boyd, whose yard stood out more than most. She used high-heeled boots as flower planters on her stoop and entrance-way sidewalk. Many local publications included shots of her home in their coverage, including the *Daily News* and Channel 12. *(continued on page 4)*

## Suit Aims to Stop 23-Story Luxury Rental

# PLGers Demand Zoning Changes To Halt Tall Buildings

by Milford Prewitt

There should have been dancing in the streets when a prominent urban developer unveiled plans to build a mixed-use luxury rental tower virtually in the center of Prospect Lefferts Gardens' Flatbush Avenue corridor.

But instead of celebration, a lawsuit is seeking to either stop the project or reconfigure its scale and scope, mainly by reducing its proposed 23-story height.

A group of community organizations, tenants groups and lay citizens of PLG has teamed up to sue New York State's Housing Finance Agency and The Hudson Companies for violating state laws that require publicly financed construction projects to conduct environmental studies.

The claimants are led by the Prospect Park East Network (PPEN) and include Prospect Lefferts Gardens Neighborhood Association, The Flatbush Tenants Coalition and several PLG residents.

The plaintiffs point out that the building, to be located at 626 Flatbush, would be the tallest on or near the borders of Prospect Park. The Hudson Cos. began clearing the site in early February, demolishing the former family medical center and the rear parking lot that had operated there. Such building heights are already not permitted by zoning codes in Park Slope, Windsor Terrace, and Prospect Park South, all of which—like PLG—border the park.

The suit is the most visible effort to date to draw attention to PLG's lack of contextual zoning codes designed to regulate building heights and to pressure elected officials and regulators to create the necessary zoning rules to forbid unsightly, sun-blocking tall buildings.

The Prospect Park Alliance, while not co-plaintiffs in the suit, is also opposed to the project and is working with the community to petition for contextual zoning in PLG.

The Hudson Cos., which describes itself at its website as a community-supportive and environmentally sensitive construction company, says it was saddened to learn of the community's opposition.

"We are disappointed that opponents of development in the neighborhood have resorted to a lawsuit against an as-of-right project that will bring over fifty affordable units to the neighborhood," says Alison Novak, vice president of The Hudson Cos. and the project manager at 626 Flatbush. Noting that demolition has already begun, Novak says she does not expect the suit to delay the company's timetable.

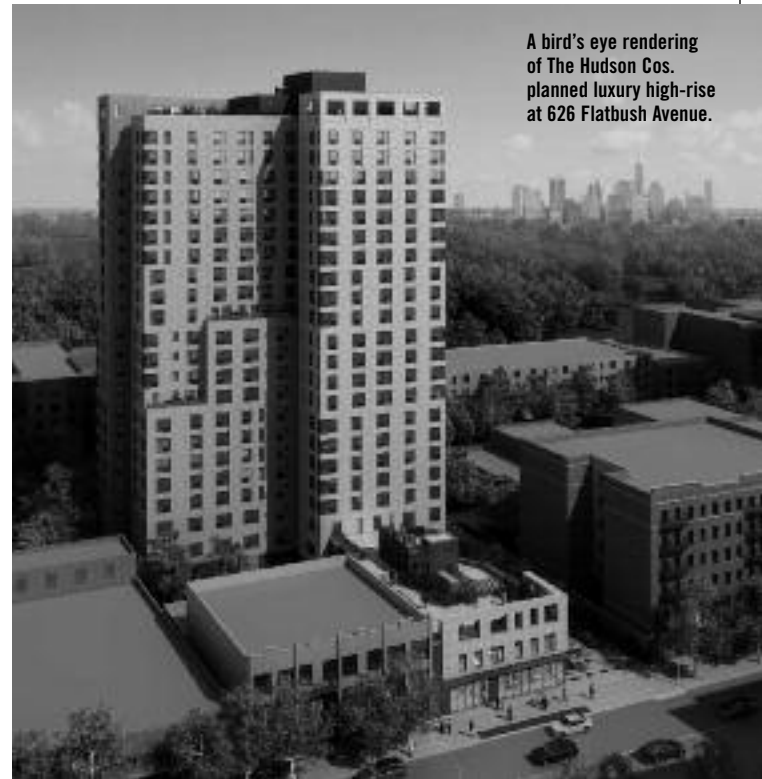


If you've been encased in a block of ice for the past month, you missed the opening of the Samuel J. and Ethel LeFrak Center, Prospect Park's new skating complex. In mid-December, now-former Mayor Michael Bloomberg presided over the ribbon-cutting and then students from the Brooklyn Academy of Science and Environment, pictured above, as well as little ones from PS 161, were among the first to hit the ice.

Located in our neighborhood, just south of the Lincoln Road park entrance, the LeFrak Center is open every day, weather permitting. You can rent skates and helmets and purchase a season pass. For hours, prices and all other information, go to: [prospectpark.org/about/lakeside](http://prospectpark.org/about/lakeside)

Ever since the project was first reported in the weekly real estate trade newspaper, *The Real Deal*, in March 2012, the 23-story, 254-unit luxury rental tower has cast a pall of dread as dark as the shadow it will cast over Prospect Park, Ocean Avenue, Chester Court and Lefferts Manor when finished some two years from now.

Suki Cheong, one of several co-founders of PPEN, a member of the board of the Lefferts Manor Association and a lawyer who has lived on Fenimore I for the past two



A bird's eye rendering of The Hudson Cos. planned luxury high-rise at 626 Flatbush Avenue.

years, insists that the group is not opposed to new development in PLG.

Cheong says PPEN is about the business of making sure that developers respect the predominantly low-rise architectural character of PLG's housing stock, factor in the neighborhood's infrastructure limits and transportation needs, and preserve the socioeconomic diversity of the community and its schools.

Central to all of that is to protect and preserve the landscape and sightlines of Prospect Park, she adds.

### Complications of Government Financing

But beyond the marred aesthetics and sightlines, what's equally worrisome to many is that the project is the recipient of \$76 million in government financing. That works out to \$1.25 million in tax dollars for each of the fifty "affordable" apartments by PPEN calculations. The 200 market rate apartments are to be priced 30 to 40 percent above current market rates in the neighborhood.

The government financing is all the more infuriating to opponents because Hudson Cos. intends to build without union labor, the company and opponents report.

But Novak insists that the government financing, building twenty-three stories tall and constructing without unions made the most economic sense in financing the project if it were to comply with the state's 80/20 Program.

Sponsored by the New York State Housing Finance Agency, the 80/20 Program allows developers to use tax-exempt bonds to create affordable housing for moderate income tenants in generally desirable neighborhoods. The bonds finance the construction of larger residential buildings at substantially reduced costs to the builder. In exchange, the developer is obligated to reserve 20 percent of the apartments for those earning no more than about \$43,000 for a family of four.

In an interview prior to the filing of the lawsuit, Novak was well aware of the strident neighborhood opposition to 626 Flatbush. But she added at the time that her office had received just as many calls from PLG residents who can't wait for the project to debut. *(continued on page 4)*

# The First African American Airline Attendant Reflects on Life as an Activist and Pioneer

by PIA J. RAYMOND, LMSW

Residing in Patio Gardens for more than a decade, Ruth Carol Taylor has left a lasting imprint on civil rights for women and African Americans in Brooklyn and beyond.

This creative, dynamic thinker and orator began her journey, December 27, 1931 in Boston, Massachusetts. In her youth, Taylor's father moved the family to a farm in upstate New York where she developed a love of snakes. She later taught children how to safely handle snakes and, for many years, kept a pet snake in her Brooklyn home.

At a time in the United States when discrimination was legal, Taylor faced the world with the same confidence and tenacity that she exercised with snakes. Inspired by her mother, who was a nurse, Taylor applied to the Ivy League's Cornell University. When the overtly prejudiced admissions officer asked her why she didn't apply to a historically black school like Howard University, Taylor facetiously retorted: "It was easier to commute 13 miles to Cornell than 281 miles to Howard."

Despite Cornell's ultimate rejection, the undaunted Taylor applied to and was admitted to Elmira College, later graduating from the Bellevue School of Nursing as a registered nurse.

She followed in her mother's footsteps for a few years until an unlikely but exciting career change presented itself. The National Urban League was behind a national effort to pave the way for African American women to become flight attendants, and, loving a challenge, Taylor jumped at the opportunity and applied.

"I stepped into the picture at a certain time," she reflects. "I was a New England person with good references, background, looks, ability to speak well and no gold in the teeth."

Selected from a pool of 800 African American applicants, Taylor was hired in 1957 by Mohawk Airlines, generating international headlines as the first black flight attendant. It was a game-changing event in the world of business and civil rights. For Mohawk Airlines, Taylor's hiring would be among the cutting-edge company's many "firsts." (According to Wikipedia.com, Mohawk was a regional carrier that specialized in the Mid-Atlantic and Great Lakes regions. It would also be the first domestic regional carrier to use passenger jets in its fleet and the first to employ computers for reservations. Due to name changes, mergers and acquisitions over the decades, Mohawk Airlines today is

the forerunner of US Airways, now a division of American Airlines Group.)

Taylor's passion for people and international travel sensitized her to how all people were essentially the same and wanted the same freedoms and respect. But despite her open-mindedness and the enlightenment of Mohawk management in hiring her, the company forced her to resign when she married six months after landing the job. At that time, all airlines had a mandatory policy that flight attendants were to remain single.

Taylor and her husband had a daughter, Cindy, and lived in both the Caribbean and London. The dismissal from Mohawk and the burgeoning civil rights movement compelled her to become an activist and a journalist.

While writing for an Afro-Caribbean magazine based in London, Taylor promised the editor that she would get an interview with President John F. Kennedy. Although that interview never happened, Taylor did meet the president in the East Room of the White House, where they were photographed by official photographer Cecil Stoughton.

After London, the family moved to Barbados, where Taylor founded the country's first professional nursing journal. It was also in Barbados that Taylor had a son, Larry, before returning to New York in 1977, where and when she co-founded The Institute for Interracial Harmony.

"There is only one race, the 'hueman' (sic) race that consists of people of varying colors or hues," she says.

Her activism and fervor for civil rights became personal one day when her son, Larry, was mugged and the police treated him as anything but a victim.

"Rather than getting the police's support, because of his 'hue' Larry was treated as if he was the perpetrator," Taylor recalls.

But from that unfortunate encounter came Taylor's groundbreaking work, *The Little Black Book: Black African Male*



A young Carol Taylor met President Kennedy at a White House reception.

*Survival in America*. She initially wrote the guide in 1985 for her son, but made it her life's work to widely distribute the pocket size rulebook.

In 2008, she was lauded by the New York State Assembly for her accomplishments, activism and community involvement.

The walls of Taylor's Patio Gardens apartment showcase photos and articles chronicling the rich history that she has helped to shape. Taylor spends much of her time in her apartment, with her mind and passion fully engaged. She makes prolific use of the Internet to voice her opinions and observations at her blog, "Carol Taylor Word." She was also a major caller on the recently cancelled but popular progressive radio talk show "Talk Back With Hugh Hamilton" on listener-supported WBAI-FM.

"Whenever I'm asked if I am still disseminating my 'Little Black Book' in the war against colorism, I ask: 'Are they still killing our black children?'"

The most recent edition of *The Little Black Book* can be purchased through contacting Taylor directly.

At eighty-three years old, the activist is now a proud grandmother to a grandson, Tyler, and her namesake granddaughter, Taylor Grace.

She still accepts speaking tours and engagements and wants the world to continue "realizing, recognizing and acknowledging the beauty of diversity."

Visit Carol Taylor, RN at: • [caroltaylorword.blogspot.com](http://caroltaylorword.blogspot.com)  
• [www.racismtest.org](http://www.racismtest.org)

Contact her at: • [littleblackbook@juno.com](mailto:littleblackbook@juno.com)

Pia Raymond is a board member of the Lefferts Manor Association, and serves as vice president of the Nostrand Avenue Merchants Association. A lifetime resident of the Manor, she lives with her family on Maple I.



**UPDATE:** Back in September 2012, MEET YOUR NEIGHBORS featured an interview with Maple St. resident Arem Duplessis, the long-time Art Director of the *New York Times Magazine*. It was recently announced that Mr. Duplessis has been named a Creative Director at Apple. It is a wonderful opportunity for an extremely talented individual. However, it means that Rem, his wife Wendi, and their two children will be moving to the San Francisco area. We wish them all the best out west.

At first, the valiant effort by the Department of Transportation to make the 54-foot width of Flatbush Avenue in PLG more user friendly for motorists and safer for pedestrians did everything except what it intended to do.

Traffic actually worsened and pedestrian safety had never been more imperiled as short-tempered motorists, dollar van drivers and jaywalking pedestrians engaged in a ballet of chicken.

That was in November when the DOT had finished its "Flatbush Congested Corridor Project," a complex series of lane consolidations, reduced parking spaces, and no-turn options at certain intersections. All the way from Empire Boulevard to Nostrand Avenue, motorists and pedestrians who used to navigate Flatbush Avenue with confidence were presented with new traffic patterns, missing passing lanes, and vastly enlarged crosswalks and safety zones for pedestrians.

Flatbush turned into a parking lot for weeks on end, especially during the late-afternoon-to-early-evening rush hour southbound. From Grand Army Plaza to Nostrand, Flatbush resembled the freeways of Los Angeles at rush hour and not Brooklyn's most vital traffic artery.

But minus the intrusion of discourteous dollar van drivers and a major water main

## DOT's Flatbush Avenue Congestion Relief Project Slowly Paying Off

by Bill Butts

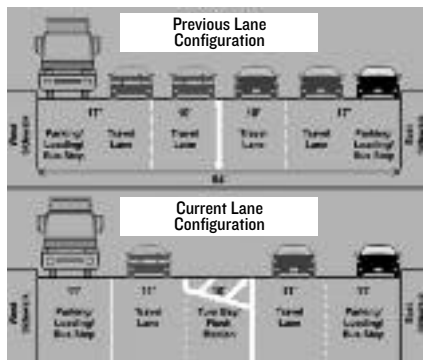
break in late November, there are signs that what the DOT had hoped for is beginning to pay off.

The most prominent changes are to the Flatbush Avenue lane markings. DOT traffic studies showed that the previous two travel lanes were too difficult to use and added to congestion. Drivers had to change lanes frequently to avoid delivery trucks, double-parked cars, drivers waiting to make left turns, or dollar vans taking on or letting off fares. These factors made for slow traffic and lost time.

Can less be more? The DOT said yes.

So it removed one traffic lane in each direction, but created a shared center median with left-turn-only queues. It widened new travel and parking lanes. In addition, during the 7 to 10 A.M. morning rush there are no-stopping restrictions in the second northbound lane.

In addition to lane markings, the DOT also put in place changes to intersections in our



neighborhood. At the Empire Boulevard intersection, for example, westbound traffic no longer sees the concrete right-hand-turn-only divider, as it is replaced with a regular through-turn lane, and the savings in space allowed for a shortened crosswalk for pedestrians. For southbound traffic the right lane has become a right-turn only, and for eastbound traffic the right-turn only lane will be removed.

Another important change is at Lincoln Road and Flatbush. There pedestrian safety was the focus. A new north crosswalk runs straight across the whole intersection, while the tip of the gas station island has been extended nearly twenty feet or more to direct car traffic away from the crosswalk.

What's most novel is that the awkward and unsafe left turns from Lincoln Road onto Washington Avenue—which often left pedestrians with the uneasy thought they could be hit in the back blindsided by a left-turning car

—are no longer permitted. Only left turns onto Flatbush from Lincoln are permitted.

Finally, to eliminate the chronic right-turn congestion at Parkside, five parking spaces were removed at the corner and a dedicated right-turn lane was installed from the space savings.

In addition to traffic changes, the DOT has also been working with businesses to improve parking rules, schedules and business deliveries. DOT hopes that smarter loading/unloading parking schedules can reduce double parking by trucks, while also leaving more hours available for lawful car parking.

At community meetings to assess what is going on, many residents expressed concerns that the new single traffic lane will be totally blocked by a double-parked car, delivery vehicles or dollar vans. Officials said while there are no guarantees, the new rules may mitigate the problem. Most agreed that police enforcement would be critical, but were uncertain how tough the police would be.

But now there is a new complication: the new lines painted on the road surface have almost entirely faded. The most likely explanation is that the recent cold temperatures caused the paint not to adhere properly. No word yet when DOT will address the situation.

Bill Butts is a resident of Rutland I and a longtime member of the board of the Lefferts Manor Association.

## Talented, Hard-Working Partners Make Tip of the Tongue Café a Crowd Favorite

by Joan Kelley

Leafing through a November issue of *New York* magazine, an article on the best new brownies caught my eye. There, placing second in the overall rankings, were the espresso cheesecake brownies from our very own Tip of the Tongue. I made a quick dash to 43 Lincoln Road to try one for myself!

While there, I met the owners, Eric McIntyre and Scott Fagan, who were kind enough to share their story with the *Echo*. Not only are the men partners in business, but they are also married soul mates and the parents of an adopted son, two-and-a-half-year-old Jake.

Both Scott and Eric trained at the prestigious Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, NY. Scott immediately began working as a freelance chef with private caterers (with the idea he'd like to open his own) while developing recipes for the South Beach and Zone diet books. He also did

food writing for magazines such as *Saveur* and *Cooking Light*.

Scott started Tip of the Tongue Catering out of their Park Slope apartment ten years ago. As it grew, they moved the business into a commercial kitchen in Long Island City, Queens. Meanwhile, Eric worked for three-and-a-half years in the pastry department at Manhattan's prestigious fine-dining restaurant Eleven Madison Park before joining Scott at the catering company.

Eric explained how their café came to be: "We'd talked about opening a brick-and-mortar business for years, a retail venue which would feature my baking and pastry work—Scott does the savory; I do the pastry. When we moved into Lefferts Gardens five years ago, we began putting together our business plan, seeking investors and looking for retail space."

Tip of the Tongue opened Memorial Day weekend 2013. All of their pastries, except the bread, are baked fresh on-site, using Eric's recipes. Most of the savory items are prepared in their much larger catering kitchen and delivered to the café daily.

Their coffee roaster is Fortyweight Coffee located in Ithaca, NY, which sources its beans from a handful of free-trade distributors in East Africa, Latin America and the Pacific Rim. From each location, they offer a variety of beans and roasts that change regularly, allowing Tip of the Tongue to offer an interesting and eclectic coffee menu.

Wow. A successful catering business and the café, which is open seven days a week! How do they manage it all?

So far it's going well, they said. The response from their neighbors/customers has been positive and supportive.

"We follow a strict schedule by having ongoing meetings to carefully plan our days and weeks," Eric revealed. "We also have a two-and-a-half-year old at home, so we really try to stick to the schedules we set. However, there are always curve balls that require us to be flexible."

Noticing that they had a Special Order Thanksgiving Pie Menu available, I asked them whether they had any plans to extend the catering side of their business to the neighborhood via the café.

"All our cakes are available for special order in three sizes: eight, ten and twelve inches," Scott noted. "We also offer our catering services, as well as our café space for on-site events. In September, one of our customers held his fortieth birthday party here after we closed one Friday night."

"We've catered three other events off-site through the café as well. We are also rolling out a holiday pastry menu that includes confections, holiday cakes and holiday cookies."

As for the future, much is on the partners' culinary horizon.

"Now that we're entering the colder season, we have just rolled out steel cut oatmeal with maple syrup, dried fruit and nuts, a potato mushroom soup, a new French hot chocolate, spiced cider. For the holidays we're adding a chocolate peppermint cake, black rum Bundt cake, and spiced cake with eggnog buttercream, coconut cream pie, peanut brittle, chocolate peppermint bark, toffee bark, candied almonds, and holiday cookies."

Yum! And stay tuned for "gluttonous coffee."

Joan Kelley, a music business executive, and her husband, Dennis Kelley (webmaster of the LMA website), have lived in the neighborhood for ten years.



Scott Fagan, center, with staffers Camilo Domínguez and Brittany Ianno

## Santana Premium Hand Rolls Top Quality Cigars on Nostrand Avenue

by Adrian Lesher

For those wanting to savor a well-sourced, well-crafted cigar in a friendly setting, Prospect Lefferts Gardens' Santana Premium Cigars is the place to go.

Owner Fay Santana hails from Tamboril, a city in the Dominican Republic famous for cigar production. He grew up in the lush tobacco fields owned by his father, where he acquired a love for the cultivation of tobacco and the art and craft of cigar manufacture. This background inspired him to open Santana Premium Cigars in 2010.

The unassuming shop sits on the west side of Nostrand Avenue between Lincoln Road and Maple Street. Right across the street is the well-manicured garden of St. Francis of Assisi Church and down the block lies the popular Barbadian restaurant, Culpepper's.

Walking into Santana's, a visitor first sees a glass cabinet full of cigar accoutrements: cutters, punches, lighters and humidors. Just beyond this cabinet is a large walk-in humidor filled with a diverse mix of cigars. Most, if not all of them are hand-rolled in the store. It is relatively rare, even in New York, to have cigars made on the premises.

A cigar tobacco is encased in a tobacco leaf wrapper, which imparts a significant part of the flavor. Santana uses a variety of wrappers from around the world, including Arapiraca (from Brazil), Havana (from Cuban seed, made in the Dominican Republic), the rich and dark Indonesian, and the smooth and mild Connecticut wrapper. The fillers come from the family's plantation in the Dominican Republic and from Nicaragua. Cigars are available in a variety of shapes and sizes, including torpedoes, Churchills, coronas, and robustos.

Fine cigar making requires a high degree of artisanal skill, and Santana relates that he has been able to ensure his quality by hiring seasoned craftsmen to do his blending and rolling. Initially, it was his cousin Francis, who came to Santana Premium Cigars after a career at the famed tobacco company, Davidoff. Now, it is Ulysses, also from Davidoff and a protégé of Francis. Both men, says Santana, have enough renown that middle-eastern royalty have flown them in for private events.

In the back of the store there is a comfortable lounge area, with overstuffed couches and chairs, and two large-screen televisions. A broad range of customers—including physicians, lawyers, businessmen and police officers—can often be found here in a state of happy relaxation, watching a game of basketball, football, soccer or baseball.

The customer base reflects the diversity of Prospect Lefferts Gardens. Santana's draws an ethnically varied crowd, with cigar lovers coming from the nearby Hasidic community as well as PLG's dense West Indian, Caribbean and African American base. Although most of the customers are men, women frequently stop in and enjoy a smoke.

I've been to Santana Premium Cigars before, and enjoyed myself. This time was no different, and I was impressed with the flavor and balance of the cigars, as well as the evenness of the burn. If you're a cigar smoker, you must visit.

Adrian Lesher is a New York City public defender who has lived on Sterling II for fourteen years.



Fay Santana, owner of Santana Premium Cigars

### Gastropub Coming to the Neighborhood

That long vacant storefront on the corner of Flatbush and Midwood will become a game-changing restaurant and bar concept when a gastropub opens there this summer.

Community Board No. 9's Public Safety Committee gave its "enthusiastic support" in granting a liquor license to veteran multi-concept restaurateur Kalkin Narvilas. As first reported January 29 at the website *DNAinfo New York*, Narvilas intends to change the character of food service in PLG and along Flatbush with a European-style gastropub featuring beer taps, high-end whiskeys and a novel menu centered on unusual sandwich combinations, soups and salads.

"We're going to have a lobster roll on a pretzel bun, and some short rib sliders," Narvilas told the NYC-centric website. "We're going to have 24 draft lines and high-end whiskeys and scotches with a focus on local New York breweries and distilleries."

The *Echo* plans a more in-depth feature in the future.

## Lefferts Gardens Montessori Pre-School to Expand to Elementary Grades

by Charlita Davis Parents in the PLG area have often moaned about the limited options for progressive primary schools in the neighborhood. However, as of September 2014, family-owned Lefferts Gardens Montessori pre-school will expand to include elementary grade levels.

LGM was founded nearly thirty years ago by Lenore Briggs and is presently run by her children, Anthony Briggs and Meryl Thompson, along with Windy Wellington. Although the pre-school operates out of two buildings on Rogers Avenue that are owned by LGM, the elementary school will operate out of a different location in the neighborhood.

The LGM elementary school will have small, meaningfully diverse mixed-age classrooms with a ten-to-one student-

teacher ratio. Children will develop a strong base in the common core standards (math, language arts and literacy, science, social studies and the arts) through a Montessori curriculum that emphasizes self-direction, individual assessment, project-based learning, and physical activity in a healthy, playful environment that promotes curiosity and respect for all.

LGM's administration became interested in expanding to elementary years ago, but it became a reality after parents approached them with the same idea and committed to support them in the expansion.

"We're so excited about the opportunity to serve another age group of children in PLG and the surrounding area," says Tony Briggs. "We look forward to continuing our work fostering children's love for learning and are thrilled to provide another option for parents in this wonderful and diverse community."

Parents are equally enthusiastic about the opening of the elementary school.

"I am interested in the advantages a Montessori education provides for elementary school children," says LGM parent Jeanne Ebiri of Rutland II. "We were seeking child-led, individualized curriculum."

Another LGM parent, Michelle Dees, says, "I love that my child will be able to walk to school and I am excited about continuing with the diverse and nurturing environment LGM has provided our family. I believe that Montessori fosters inquisitiveness, critical thinking and a passion for learning that is essential to long term success."

As an LGM parent myself, I wholeheartedly echo the sentiments of Michelle and Jeanne. Since our daughter's entry into the pre-school, my husband and I had hoped that we would be able to replicate the experience at the elementary school level. We are glad that our hopes have turned into reality.

For more information on LGM's elementary school, email: [lgamelementary@gmail.com](mailto:lgamelementary@gmail.com).

## PLGers File Suit to Stop 23-Story Rental; Demand Zoning Changes *(continued from page 1)*

"We've been through this before and what usually happens is that once people see the finished product, all of this criticism dies down," she says. "I think it is really going to be a beautiful building that complements the neighborhood and just as they probably said the same thing about [16-story] Patio Gardens sixty years ago. Neighborhoods change.

"It's easy to say we could have done a shorter building but it would not have been economical. Another thing that people should know is that the building is going in a commercial corridor—one hundred feet off of Flatbush Avenue, off the sidewalk; it's not going in the heart of the historic district."

Cheong is not swayed by Novak's defense.

"No, it's just going in the middle of two historic districts, and right in the backyards of the historic Chester Court houses," Cheong counters. "Not to mention the beautiful early 1920s Art Deco and limestone Beaux Arts apartment buildings on Flatbush Avenue.

"At a meeting with homeowners on Chester Court, the developer stated that the reason they felt it was optimal for them to build a taller, narrower building was that they would get higher rents for high floor apartments with great views."

PPEN supplied the Echo with this illustration showing how the 626 Flatbush project would look from inside Prospect Park.



Dr. Stan Myers, a PPEN co-founder and Rutland I resident, reiterates that the group is not opposed to development. But he thinks the law should be amended to compel developers to conform to neighborhood architectural aesthetics and to preserve Prospect Park's sightlines.

"Six-Two-Six Flatbush is going to be as tall as Ebbets Field Houses," Myers notes. "Think of a building that tall in the middle of the neighborhood, a neighborhood dominated by four-to-six-story buildings.

"But imagine what it's going to look like from inside Prospect Park. When Vaux and Olmsted designed Prospect Park, their vision was that buildings would not be seen taller than the trees. This is going to set a terrible precedent if we don't do something."

Novak insists that the company did nothing wrong or underhanded.

"Everyone in this city lives in a building in which a real estate developer had to do some research to comply with laws and zoning codes," she said. "We did not scour the neighborhood to get around some law. We found a site that we thought would be best for this project."

Novak said she worries about campaigns to change zoning laws "just because it's your preference" for some alternative.

"We have designed and intend to build the best building we can for that site and it is going to be a great fit," she said. "They'll see."

Bill Hogeland, a freelance writer who specializes in American history, a PPEN co-founder and longtime PLG resident, says for all of its website's pro-neighborhood talking points, the Hudson Cos. should have been just as proactive reaching out to the neighborhood to be sure the project would be in scale.

"We're in favor of development," he insists. "That should go without saying. But developers are always forcing us unfairly onto the defensive instead of responding to legitimate concerns that are of course perfectly reasonable, universal to all neighborhoods."

## 'Greenest Block' Planted on Sterling I *(continued from page 1)*

"We got nearly everyone on the block to do something," Martinez added.

She cited Gardening Committee member and longtime neighbor Everleen Cook, who rallied the block years ago to compete in the contest. Later, Cook would become very active in the annual solicitation of homeowners and she even took care of yards of those neighbors who were shut-ins. Pam Yard, another neighbor and vice president of the block association, also helped elderly neighbors spruce up their yards.



Celebrating Sterling I's award at a home reception on the block back in November are, left to right: Jesse Hamilton, Crown Heights district leader and candidate for State Senate; Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams; State Assemblyman Karim Camara; Carmen Martinez, president of the Sterling St. B&W Association; and Walter T. Mosley, Assemblyman for the 57th District

Robin Simmen, director of GreenBridge, said of the 60-plus homes on the block, nearly all were involved. Neighbors even tidied up the front yard and trimmed the shrubbery of a long-vacant house on the block.

"Nearly every family on the block participated," Simmen said. "We like that. But not only that, they helped one another."

Coincidentally, the Sterling Place block between Flatbush and 8th Avenues in Park Slope came in second.

Two other blocks in PLG caught the attention of the GreenBridge judges: Lefferts III, between Rogers and Nostrand Avenues and Maple II, between Bedford and Rogers Avenues, both received honorable mentions.

Although PPEN is in favor of development, the neighborhood needs contextual zoning immediately, Hogeland argues.

"We need contextual zoning in PLG, and right away, because there's a massive-scale development frenzy going on right now," he argues. "I think there's an egregious inequality at work here, and I hope our representatives will address it immediately to get the neighborhood the protections we deserve."

### Politicians Join the Opposition

At the most recent LMA general meeting back in early November, the 626 Flatbush project was the centerpiece of the agenda and was scorned by nearly all who chose to speak up.

During a PowerPoint presentation about the project, Cheong noted that outgoing Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz was in favor of the project. But new Brooklyn Borough President-elect Eric Adams fumed when he learned during Cheong's presentation that the project was proceeding against the neighborhood's wishes and still had public financing.

"It's almost as if your tax dollars are being used against you," Adams said at the meeting, without necessarily stating his position on contextual zoning.

Pressed in the same meeting to put forth legislation for a moratorium on tall buildings in PLG, Councilman Mathieu Eugene deflected the pressure by claiming that zoning code changes require "research" that he intends to pursue.

PLG State Assemblyman Karim Camara pledged his solidarity with the community opponents and vowed to work with his city and state colleagues to create "contextual zoning, community notification, and a greater commitment to affordable housing, particularly when taxpayer dollars are used for development."

Novak, the Hudson Cos. project manager, confirms that the company is not using union labor on the project. She says during a construction bust some fifteen years ago which was spawned mainly by union strikes, developers like the Hudson Cos. found non-union contractors whose talents, skills and experience were equal to if not better than union contractors.

"So not only do these contractors bring skill and quality, but because they are non-union, they bring down the cost of projects and make better use of time."

With demolition already underway, Novak says she expects excavation for the tower will begin by spring. The Hudson Cos.' plans call for the total construction time to be about two years, with the first tenants to move in by the summer or fall of 2016.

## The Sharing Economy Comes to PLG by Alan P. Berger

No doubt you've heard of or maybe have even used the services of Zipcar, Airbnb, the bike-sharing program CitiBike and TaskRabbit. These are all examples of the "sharing economy," or the collective consumption economy.

This growing movement recognizes two inconvenient truths. First: We don't have unlimited resources and we need to find ways to consume less. Second: We already possess a lot of stuff that we could be using a lot more than we currently do. The sharing economy ultimately asks: Wouldn't it be great if we could go down the street for something we need rather than have to buy it or do without it?

The advantages of the sharing economy are many:

- It saves time and money
- It's a great way to meet your neighbors and know more about people in your neighborhood
- There's less reliance on corporations
- Reduced production of goods decreases our use of everything from raw materials to energy
- Consumers get greater access to a wider variety of goods, as they'll have access to products and services that they never had before

In November, a sharing goods and services program kicked off in Prospect Lefferts Gardens by a group of area residents. It's through the website NeighborGoods (neighborgoods.net) and sponsored by PLGshare. At the website, visitors can register for and sign up for the PLGshare, giving access to all the goods and services that participating PLG neighbors are already offering on the site.

Once registered, neighbors will also be able to request any good or service they need or want. And it's all free!—there's no charge for using the service and participants make all the arrangements, be they the offering lender or the receiving borrower.

What kinds of products and services might be listed at NeighborGoods?

The shortlist would include virtually every merchandise category one could find at Amazon. There's construction and building tools; all manner of home and office electronics including computers; kitchen devices such as food processors, juicers, and blenders; musical instruments; recreational equipment like bikes and skis; snow blowers; garden equipment; and much, much more.

To read an enlightening article on the sharing economy visit: [www.newyorker.com/talk/financial/2013/09/16/130916ta\\_talk\\_surowiecki](http://www.newyorker.com/talk/financial/2013/09/16/130916ta_talk_surowiecki)

Alan P. Berger is a self-employed social entrepreneur and consultant who has lived on Lincoln Rd. for three years and in PLG for six.



For a stronger community, join the

## Lefferts Manor Association

MANOR RESIDENTS:

- I (we) subscribe to LMA's efforts to improve our neighborhood as a community of historic, landmarked, single-family homes.  
Dues: \$20.00 per household or \$10.00 per senior citizen household

NON-RESIDENT FRIENDS:

- I (we) support the work of the LMA and would like to contribute to their efforts.

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Enclosed is my check for \$ \_\_\_\_\_ + \$ \_\_\_\_\_ = \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
DUES                      ADD'L CONTRIBUTION                      TOTAL

Dues cover January through December 2014. Make checks payable to Lefferts Manor Association. Send payment and form to: P.O. Box 250-640 / Brooklyn, NY 11225 or drop in the mail slot at 214 Rutland Rd., 163 Rutland Rd. or 25 Maple St.

### Echo Seeks Home Distributors for Non-Manor Blocks

The Echo is seeking help distributing copies on blocks that are in PLG but not in the Manor. If you or someone you know would like to volunteer, please contact the editor at [milfordprewitt@aol.com](mailto:milfordprewitt@aol.com).

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