New PLG Merchants Association Seeks a More Beautiful and Vibrant Flatbush Avenue

by Sherly Kramer and Desmedt Romeo

B oosting Flatbush Avenue—with a number of other quality-of-life improvements along Prospect Lefferts Gardens’ central corridor—is the driving agenda of a new and energetic merchants association.

The Parkside Empire/Flatbush Avenue Merchants Association began meeting in December 2013, after coming to an agreement on what we thought might make Flatbush Avenue from Parkside Avenue to Empire Boulevard a vibrant merchant strip.

Given that for the last 17 years FPEMA, the previous merchant association, had not compiled with various NYC filing requirements, the city revoked its permit for a street fair in 2013. So in order for the community to have a street fair again within the commercial corridor, we needed to form a new association.

Learning from the methods of the old group, our new association, with members of various backgrounds, hopes to create a melting pot of ideas and tools to reach our goals.

The executive board of the new group consists of: President Desmond Romeo, owner of Dr. Cuts; Executive Vice President Shelley Kramer, owner of Play Kids; Secretary JoAnn David, Esq.; principal attorney at the Joyce David Law Office; Treasurer Joyce Gonnee, partner in Gonnee & Gonnee, an accounting, business services and tax preparation firm; and Advisor to the Board Charles of the Pratt Area Community Council (PACC).

The group is focused on four goals:

1. Beautification of Flatbush Avenue between Empire Boulevard and Parkside Avenue.
2. The resumption of the street fair in the summer of 2015, and
3. Working with our local merchants to preserve their businesses and build relationships with residential community leaders and other community organizations.
4. The kick-off of a “Big Local Campaign”

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As echoed in our consumer needs survey that was conducted this spring, the merchants and our consumers are tired of the trash on Flatbush Avenue. We’ve met with NYCDOT and the NYC Department of Sanitation to address getting more garbage bins within our commercial corridor.

The number of deals in PLG, or transactions, was also up on a six-month, year-to-year basis, from 43 to 45 percent—a 17 percent increase.

According to research by Habitat Property released in August, PLG was seventh on a list of 35 Brooklyn neighborhoods to experience the highest year-over-year percentage increase in home resale prices. Average home prices here rose 46 percent, to $979,564, in half-year annual comparisons ending in June (see chart below).

Of the top 10 neighborhoods ranked by percentage increase in average home resale price, PLG’s rate exceeded Sea Gate’s, at eighth place, up 37 percent, to $491,579, on two transactions; Prospect Park South, up 35 percent, on two, on eight transactions; and Windsor Terrace, up 39 percent, to $321,000, on 10 transactions.

Park Slope, Prospect Heights or Crown Heights made the top 10.

The Parkside Empire/Flatbush Avenue Merchants Association has an all-time record for home resales. In the first half of 2014, PLG’s all-time record for home resales, PLG’s all-time record for home resales, PLG’s all-time record for home resales, PLG’s all-time record for home resales, PLG’s all-time record for home resales, PLG’s all-time record for home resales, PLG’s all-time record for home resales, PLG’s all-time record for home resales, PLG’s all-time record for home resales.

Residential Sales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neighborhood</th>
<th>First Half 2013</th>
<th>First Half 2014</th>
<th>Change</th>
<th>1st Half 13</th>
<th>1st Half 14</th>
<th>% Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prospect Lefferts Gardens</td>
<td>669,964</td>
<td>979,564</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>27%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Park Slope</td>
<td>435,250</td>
<td>595,279</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prospect Park South</td>
<td>631,000</td>
<td>852,500</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>167%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Windsor Terrace</td>
<td>432,362</td>
<td>572,000</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Ranked by percentage increase in average sale price. Source: Gregory Hye, real estate services, Halstead Property, LLC

Urban Planner Warns: Neighborhood Unity is Paramount in Rezoning

by Milford Prewitt

Vastly outnumbered, the 300 Sparrows of ancient times could not win the good fight, beating the mighty Persian army in all of their battles until they were ultimately annihilated thanks to traitors.

Brooklyn neighborhoods that want to change their zoning laws have a lot in common with those warriors. Despite the empowered politically and financially, community groups will win a battles in the form of injunctions, fines, and restraining orders and get empathetic media attention.

But in the end “big money developers and their lawyers will get what they want,” said Hunter College urban planning professor Tom Angotti.

But to win “a hopeful fight in residents of a community unity and organize in sufficient numbers to send a signal to City Hall and local politicians,” Angotti said.

“You’ve got to try everything when it comes to pushing an alternative zoning proposal,” Angotti lectured. But we know that one surefire move for winning a new rezoning plan is through politics. If your local elected officials want it, they’ll get City Hall’s attention because it wants to give the local representatives something, which is what City Hall gets something in return.

“So the more you unify and organize, the more power a community has,” Angotti said.

(continued on page 4)
To retrofit the floor plan. That mission is a key reason John went to the firm in the first place. Building in the city is expensive, but it also allows him to have more control over the design of his buildings. He believes that retaining the original building, while also incorporating new elements, is the most sustainable approach.

John and his colleagues looked at trying to save the original building, but it proved too difficult to retrofit the floor plan. There was no way to fit a modern home into the original structure. Instead, they decided to start from scratch.

The new building includes 10 units in the next phase, and an additional 10 units in the next phase. The design is intended to be energy-efficient, with extensive use of solar panels and other green technologies. The building is also planned to be LEED-certified, which means it will be built to meet very high environmental standards.

In conclusion, John is a passionate and innovative architect who believes in using sustainable and efficient design principles to create beautiful and functional homes. His work is an inspiration to others in the field of architecture and sustainable design.
### PLG’s Dining Scene, Not Yet a Full Plate, Is No Longer a Bare Cupboard

In a neighborhood where the restaurant scene and nightlife were, until recently, only slightly more lively than Green-Wood Cemetery’s, Prospect Lefferts Gardens is coming alive with new eating places and music options. And the morning isn’t doing too bad, either. Gentrification may have its share of haters in PLG, but one of the positive outcomes is that it encourages local entrepreneurs and restaurateurs to risk capturing some of that new money with new joints in which to drink and eat out and enjoy live music.

The coffee shop/bakery/breakfast/brunch café scene is the most prolific menu category so far, with four relatively new establishments. But a couple of hot bars and grills are also in the mix. Here are some mini-profiles of the new spots:

#### Blessings Café
643 Flatbush Ave. at Hawthorne Ave.

Opened this past spring by the husband-and-wife team, Will Francis (an herbalist) and Liliana Bonafini (an actress), Blessings is a roomy coffee shop and bakery with a busy breakfast and brunch trade. It boasts an outdoor dining section and a trained chef, Subashish, who comes up with a beguiling selection of sandwiches, soups and salads. It seats about 30 people indoors.

#### Bluebird
584 Flatbush Ave. at Lefferts Ave.

Jim Mamary, the same owner of LPT on Lincoln Rd. and a half-dozen other popular restaurants around Brooklyn, has brought his talent for unit location and rustic-design-on-a-budget to Bluebird. It opened in late September in a 2,000-square-foot space that had previously been an illegal night-club. It’s hard to sum up the menu at this writing, but the establishment, still in its soft-opening phase, is shaping up to become a sports-themed American Grill and has seasoned chefs at the helm. A sure-fire hit on the still-evolving menu promises to be the seven-hour grilled beef brisket, prepared daily on the premises outdoors regardless of the weather. The grill is part of the outdoor dining space: a large, 40-foot, terrace-like patio that overlooks the Prospect Park subway stop and is bordered by an old stone parapet that is not only cool to look at, but it will keep guests from falling on the tracks, some 30 feet below. Live music, private parties and karaoke will be offered in a large basement space in the coming weeks. Upfront on the first floor, more private party space will be available with a pool table and flat-screen TV.

#### Cinnamon Girl
513 Flatbush Ave. near Midwood St.

Debuting this past summer, Cinnamon Girl is part of a three-unit chain that’s based in Bedford-Stuyvesant. The coffee, tea and bakery chain also features a commissary and boasts that outside of the bagels, everything else on the menu (minus packaged goods)—about 70 percent of the menu—is prepared fresh every day. Open until 9 p.m. most nights, Cinnamon Girl joins a growing list of restaurants competing for the breakfast and fresh-baked goods segment with great coffee and pleasant customer service.

#### Gratitude Café
459 Rogers Ave. at Midwood St.

The parents of three children, the husband-and-wife team Annalisa Riordan and Richard Otto—both of whom worked for years as waiters—vowed that if they ever opened a restaurant, it would be kid-friendly and accommodating. “I know what it is like lugging kids around when you want to eat out.” Annalisa said. “So we wanted to open a place that was totally kid-friendly.” To that end, Gratitude features a dedicated kids space and even piano and art lessons for youngsters four to six years old. Boasting an organic, locally harvested menu (to the extent that is possible), Gratitude has been open since December and owes a lot of its origin to Kickstarter, the Internet investment pool where strangers invest in start-ups they believe in.

#### Midwood Flats
504 Flatbush Ave. at Midwood St.

Since opening at the end of September, Midwood Flats has been hot as Georgia asphalt on a scorching summer afternoon. Standing-room-only crowds, virtually until its 4 a.m. closing, Midwood Flats is high evidence of the pent-up desire for something to do in the evening and early morning in PLG. (It stays open until 4 a.m. on weekend nights.) The creation of lifelong friends and restaurant developers Kal Narvilo and Chad Casey (whose name many will recall as the co-owner of Tugboat Tea Co.), Midwood Flats is a gastropub, a European-style beer-and-spirits emporium with unusual sandwiches, soups and salads. The centerpiece dinner option is the lobster roll. The biggest complaint so far: “I live in Patio Gardens, right across the street, and can’t even get in the place.”

### PLG Arts/Inkwell Café
408 Rogers Ave. at Sterling St.

PLG Arts long jazz collaboration continues this fall and winter. But the group is also scheduling classical recitals in private homes. See the story on page 4 for more information.

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**LPT Staff and Patrons Raise Donations to Bury Murdered Cook**

Staff and loyal customers of the Lincoln Park Tavern raised more than $3,500 to cover burial costs and help the family of Juan Carlos Luna-Juarez, an LPT cook who was stabbed to death on September 7 during a botched robbery. Juan Carlos, 23, and his brother, Angel, 24, missed the last bus after closing the restaurant and were walking to their Bedford-Stuyvesant home when they were attacked by a gang of young men. Five assailants were charged with murder, robbery and weapons possession.

An ongoing fundraising campaign to help Angel, who spent several days in the hospital with stab wounds and cannot work while recovering, and the family, has been set up at www.juanfund.com.

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**With No Opponent, Jesse Hamilton Guaranteed to Succeed Eric Adams to 20th District State Senate Seat**

After an 11-month vacancy in the 20th District State Senate seat formerly occupied by current Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams, Jesse Hamilton, a lawyer, community leader and collaborator of Adams’s is guaranteed to succeed him.

Mr. Hamilton beat fellow lawyer and former school administrator Rubain Dorany in an ugly and bitter primary election campaign in which both men tried to get the other candidate kicked off the ballot.

Hamilton won with 9,090 votes to Dorany’s 4,189. He will run unopposed in the general election as there is no Republican challenger slated to run.
Urban Planner: Unity is Paramount in Rezoning

(continued from page 7) An internationally-recognized scholar who brings a progressive, community-first approach to urban planning, author of several academic and lay books on the topic and a former government planner for New City, Angotti led a workshop at Taftari Cafe back in August discussing the efforts to rezone Prospect Lefferts.

About 70 people attended the meeting, most of them members of community groups or lay citizens who are outraged by the height of the 30-story residential tower going up at Flatbush and who want to bring contextual zoning to Prospect Lefferts Gardens.

Contextual zoning limits the heights of new buildings, thereby preserving the architectural heritage of low-rise communities. The law exists in every neighborhood bordering Prospect Park except PLG.

"To make that all happen, you got to unify, you got to organize and you got to put pressure on your local elected officials," Angotti coached.

The battle lines have extended to PLG’s northern edge in recent weeks where activists and community members are protesting plans to upzone Empire Boulevard from Flatbush to Nostrand Avenues. They fear that if Empire Boulevard is upzoned, it will accelerate gentrification, displacement of low-income families, increase congestion and squeeze the energy and sewer grid.

The dispute reached such frenzy at a recent Community Board 9 meeting that what was thought to be the board’s resounding of their prevarication for a study to rezone Empire Boulevard is in doubt after Borough President Eric Adams called the vote “invalid.” Adams, who supports Mayor de Blasio’s ambitious plans to build or preserve as many as 3 million new affordable housing units in the next 10 years, represents the board that staffed the city to the address of “the Department of Real Estate.”

“Their really don’t have your interests at heart or community preservation as a goal,” he charged.

He said the complex chain of review—where rezoning proposals can go through months, if not years, of CDPC overviews, community board hearings, borough president approval, city council hearings—can take years, if not years, of CDC overviews, community board hearings, borough president approval, city council hearings.

“THERE IS A SCAM THAT DCP AND THE DEVELOPERS TELL A NEIGHBORHOOD..." HE WARNED THE AUDIENCE THAT PLG HAS A LOT OF SIMILARITIES WITH "THEIR REALLY DON’T HAVE YOUR INTERESTS AT HEART OR COMMUNITY PRESERVATION AS A GOAL,” HE CHARGED.

He warned the audience that PLG has a lot of similarities with Williamsburg before that neighborhood was “discovered.”

“There is a scam that DCP and the developers tell a neighborhood when they are ready to gentrify it,” he said. “It’s called the ‘mixed-use scam’ and they way it works is that we are going to build all of these mixed-use projects with affordable housing.

“But that scam has been disastrous in Williamsburg,” he charged. “It has been totally transformed and gentrified and if you were economically fragile, Williamsburg is no longer your home because the scam is low-income folks can’t live there.

He then takes a lesson from history, particularly how communities successfully fought planning czar Robert Moses 60 years ago when he campaigned to build a highway from the Hudson River to the East River, a plan that would have obliterated Greenwich Village, the West Village, the East Village, Soho and Tribeca.

“Communities fought him and won,” he said. “In the East Village, they deeded the buildings and the land to community land trusts so that nothing can be built there anymore.

“It takes time and it takes patience, but once people get connected to the places they live, you’re got to put in the time and the sweat and you can survive.”

LMA’s Joiner’s Campaign to Refurbish Flatbush’s Metal Trees

Longer than anyone can remember, those metal and concrete tree sculptures in Flatbush where Flatbush and Ocean Avenues merge with Empire Boulevard are lying in a state of disrepair.

The first neighborhood landmark people see when traveling south from Flatbush into PLG, the corroding, neglected and chipped sculpture trees are hardly the “welcoming committee” they were intended to be built in the late 70s.

Two years ago, Tim Thomas, the blogger of the popular Q2 Parkside, made it a personal crusade to transform the dilapidated structures. He took on the MTA and the DOT—whose property the trees sit on—and fought financial support. The LMA was happy to make a sizeable donation.

The Echo is helping to make a sizeable donation.

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 melindaporter@qns.com.

For a stronger community, join the Lefferts Manor Association

MANOR ASSOCIATION

1 (we) subscribe to LMA’s efforts to improve our neighborhood as a community of historic, landmarked, single-family homes.

Due: $25.00 per household or $25.00 per senior citizen household

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

NAME

ADDRESS

TELEPHONE

E-MAIL

Enclosed is my check for $ ________________

SUPPORT NON-RESIDENT FRIENDS:

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

NAME

ADDRESS

TELEPHONE

E-MAIL

Enclosed is my check for $ ________________

LFA presents the Brooklyn Solar Quartet on October 26.

PLG Arts’ Busy Fall Schedule Showcases Author Readings, Chamber Music, Inkljazz Shows

by Reni Klinger

PLG arts is like The Little Engine That Could: chugging along through the energy of its volunteer board of directors and other volunteers. The group promotes the arts in the neighborhood and builds community as it celebrates the vibrant creativity of the residents of Prospect Lefferts Gardens and surrounding Brooklyn neighborhoods.

This is the group whose posters you’ve seen around the neighborhood, advertising the ongoing jazz series at the Inkljazz Comedy Club on Rogers Avenue, art shows at Tugboat Tea Company on Flatbush Avenue, and a membership drive party at the Darsey Gallery on Rogers Avenue.

Since its founding in 2007, this local nonprofit group has increased the number of board members to eight and increased its general membership while embarking on an expanded event program. Initially, visual arts exhibits, jazz, dance, visual, and Pop-up Neighborhood Shows (a visual arts exhibit with more than 3,000 visitors in four weeks) hooked the group.

“PLG is always on the lookout for new members and business supporters,” says Hollis Headrick, co-president, “and we’re also looking to expand our base of volunteers to help run our existing programs or propose new ones. We have very specific requests of our business supporters, or who offer discounts to our members.”

PLG Arts has expanded its roster of activities to include two new series: chamber music and literary readings, announced Rina Kleeger, the other co-president of the group.

The next Meet-The-Author reading will feature Martha Southgate, a Brooklyn author of four books, including The Farm from the Left, which is currently being adapted into a stage play. Kerry Waddington and Vida Davis; and Darcey Steinke, PLG resident whose new novel, Sister Golden Hair, is being published this month.

The reading is scheduled for October 30. The series is hosted at the Inkljazz Comedy Cafe. “I’ve always talked about getting involved in the neighborhood,” says volunteer Mike Hudson, organizer of the series, “but for years it was mostly just—that I’m talking about it but not doing it. A big crowd and people let us know they wanted more. So we’re putting together events for the fall and winter.”

“We welcome these readings at the Inkljazz,” beams PLG Arts Treasurer Byron McCray and owner of the club. “They bring in a very special crowd that doesn’t usually attend our regular jazz and comedy nights, and we are happy to support the arts.”

The next jazz concert series will be held on October 16 featuring the Brooklyn Solar Quartet in a PLG home (check the website for details: www.plgars.org).

The Chamber Music Series brings classical music to our area in a way that’s accessible to all residents, thanks to the generosity of PLG homeowners who host the concerts,” says volunteer Anne Dasch, organizer of the series, which debuted in the spring of 2014. “The concerts reflect the varied music scene in New York City, with diverse performers playing traditional classical music and new works.

Two jazz nights at the Inkljazz are also scheduled in October, and PLG Arts’ visual arts exhibit continues at Tugboat, with “Reprehensible Representational Painters” opening on November 1. “Keep your shoes on,” Kleeger cautions, “so you’re ready to go throughout the fall!”

For more information about PLG Arts programs and volunteer opportunities, visit www.plgars.org.

Three of the past four years, a block in PLG has won the “Greenest Block in Brooklyn” award, a competition sponsored by the city’s Department of Environmental Protection and the Brooklyn Greenest Block of 2014 to a block of Macon Street in Bedford-Stuyvesant. But PLG still made a strong showing, Lincoln Road—also a two-time top winner and the block to beat in 2015—came in third place. Last year, Sterling Street I took the top prize.

This Year’s ‘Greenest Block’ Top Honor Slips Past PLG

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