

THE 47TH ANNUAL
PROSPECT LEFFERTS GARDENS
House & Garden Tour

Sunday, May 7, 2017 • Noon–5PM

SPONSORED BY The Lefferts Manor Association

TICKETS/\$25 IN ADVANCE AT:

- Bluebird Food & Spirits** 504 Flatbush Ave.
- Drink** 492 Flatbush Ave. * **Play Kids** 668A Flatbush Ave.
- PLG Coffee House and Tavern** 499 Rogers Ave.
- Little Mo Wine & Spirits** 1125 Nostrand Ave.
- Ix Café** 43 Lincoln Rd. * **Trailblazers** 394 Rogers Ave.
- Trixie's Pet Food & Supplies** 575 Flatbush Ave.
- Tugboat Tea Company** 546 Flatbush Ave.

Online: click on the eventbrite at leffertsmanor.org

TICKETS/\$30 ON TOUR DAY AT:

Ix Café 43 Lincoln Rd.

Eight stops including a large co-op apartment; a charming rental apartment; historic brownstone, limestone, and brick homes dating from 1899–1925; plus varied gardens and an art gallery with live music! Enjoy complimentary refreshments, and discounts from local merchants and restaurants

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[NOTE: No children under 12 except infants in front packs only]

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT: leffertsmanor.org

E-MAIL: plghousetour@gmail.com CALL: 718-693-5109

Like us on Facebook at:
Lefferts Gardens House and Garden Tour 2017

Refreshment Donations

Cookies, brownies, cakes, cupcakes, muffins, crudités with dips, etc. are needed. These should be brought to 166 Rutland Road on Saturday, 5/6, noon–2PM or to 179 Rutland Road on Sunday, 5/7 (Tour Day), 11:30AM–noon

Robert Thomason, PLG resident for more than 50 years, looks back

Recalling House Tour's Historic Role as a Community Builder

by Milford Prewitt

As Prospect Lefferts Gardens celebrates its

47th Annual House and Garden Tour, one longtime neighbor who started a house tour some 40 years ago, can't help but notice how different the community and the goals and objectives of the earlier event are from the 2017 tour.

Born 89 years ago in the neighborhood now known as Crown Heights, Robert Thomason and his wife, Jane, moved to PLG in 1963 just as its working and middle-class demographic was changing racially from white to black.

White residents and merchants were fleeing inner cities in the 1960s, leaving Brooklyn for the suburbs and Long Island. The exodus saddened Thomason as much as it instilled a resolve to embrace integration and welcome all races to the neighborhood. Giving homeowners a stage to show off their taste in interior design and renovation was the least of Thomason's concerns.

"The house tour is a lot different today from what we had in mind," he says.

Thomason recalls brokers telling white homeowners that black newcomers from the South and the Caribbean were bound to depress their property values and that they should sell immediately. Complicating matters was the banking industry's wholesale investment in mortgage redlining while brokers stayed busy steering whites out of the neighborhood.

This was called "white flight."

Thomason still looks back in anger at a broker who refused to show him any houses in PLG because he was white, a practice that epitomized racial steering.

"The only way a white person could buy a home in the neighborhood was to buy it from the owner," he says. That was how he was able to buy the home in 1973 that he and Jane still live in on Lefferts III. They had lived in the building as tenants for nine years prior to buying it.

A Neighborhood Ministry

Disheartened by the way the media depicted PLG as economically distressed and racially tense and angered by his home-buying experience, Thomason, an ordained Christian minister who had graduated from Yale Divinity School, vowed to make "this neighborhood my ministry" and change the script.

With other like-minded residents he cofounded the Prospect Lefferts Gardens Neighborhood Association (PLGNA) and soon after, they created a house tour, intended to show that despite the bad headlines to the contrary, blacks and whites could live together as neighbors, welcome one another into their stately homes, and discuss ways to build a better community.

House Tour 47: What's On View

This year's tour is more compact than last year's, extending from Maple to Winthrop Streets, from Flatbush to Rogers Avenues. Packed in are eight terrific stops, not including our famous complimentary refreshments.

Several of the private homes and apartments on the tour show the fruits of recent renovations, giving visitors an opportunity to see new visions for the interiors of century-old buildings.

An 1899 townhouse that had fallen into significant disrepair has been brought back from the brink with a gut rehab. The owners envisioned creative reuse of several original features, including doors rehung in barn-door style over the new powder room and dish pantry.

A 1925 brick neo-Colonial has a completely new kitchen done in an Art Deco style that

would have been familiar to the original owners. The newly redesigned garden and blue-stone patio are also on view.

A limestone townhouse displays a fascinating assortment of artifacts collected in wide travels, particularly in Southeast Asia. The peaceful coexistence of old and new is seen in the kitchen, where the fully functioning gas stove that 'came with' the house shares space with a newer model.

In a brownstone townhouse with animal-themed décor, the original radiators have been painted black, giving them the effect of modern sculptures. The garden has been landscaped for entertaining with a terraced bluestone seating area, fire pit, and gas grill.

A 1910 brownstone was recently renovated with a light but deliberate touch, displaying the spare aesthetic of its industrial designer owner. The original details were respected while creating a comfortable family home.



That only two houses participated in PLGNA's first house tour was hardly discouraging, Thomason says.

"When PLGNA started its first house tour, we only had two houses and in both cases, the owners had no intention on selling. They just wanted people to see this neighborhood." (Then as today, owners whose homes are on the market cannot participate in the house tour.)

"We were determined to have a neighborhood, open to people of all races and incomes, to talk to one another and make this neighborhood a thriving, peaceful community. I dedicated my life as a Christian minister to serve a God of love who is revealed in Jesus Christ and live in an economically diverse neighborhood. This is why I started PLGNA and my ministry is this neighborhood and that is how I am being faithful."

Although today's house tour is more focused on offering access to the private spaces of beautifully renovated homes with distinctive furnishings, art collections, and gardens, and the chance to share contractor recommendations, the late tour coordinator Carole Schaffer agreed with Thomason that the house tour was about more than admiring interior designs.

The House Tour's Deeper Meaning

"House Tour Day for me is just a wonderful spirit of community," Schaffer told the *Echo* in 2010. "My goal has been to showcase the diversity not only of the people, but the architecture; not just the Manor, but all of Prospect Lefferts Gardens."

Schaffer was a long-tenured board member of the Lefferts Manor Association and chief organizer of the house tour when the LMA assumed sponsorship of the event in 1993. A Midwood I resident since the early 1970s, she died in October 2014.

Thomason retired at the age of 57 after working for 20 years as a librarian at the Hewlett Woodmere Public Library in Nassau County—where he cycled to work 40-miles round-trip every day, barring only the most atrocious weather (see the companion story on page 3 about his global bike treks).

(continued on page 4)

A rental apartment in a former church parsonage shows how a couple with handyman skills got creative and built 'fit-ins' that maximize space, allowing them to display an assortment of family heirlooms.

The varied collections of an artistic couple are displayed in their large co-op apartment: colorful pottery, bicycle parts, an arrangement of miniature chairs like their full-sized counterparts. Wherever you look there is something colorful to see.

And be sure to visit Dorsey's Art Gallery, the oldest, continuously active, black-owned exhibition space in the city. You will see the current exhibit featuring the work of local artists and hear live music by a jazz guitarist.

Our refreshment stop is always a tour highlight, held this year in a brownstone garden. Food donations come not only from residents, but also from old and new businesses along the avenues. —Mary Miller, Tour Coordinator

Sesquicentennial!



"Sesquicentennial" is a fifty-cent mouthful of a word that means the 150th anniversary. And 2017 is the sesquicentennial of Prospect Park. Ground was broken in 1866 and the following year the park commissioners held an opening day event that attracted thousands of visitors. Since that time, the Park has been "Brooklyn's Backyard," a haven for millions of neighbors from across the borough. For the past three decades the Park has operated through a private-public partnership between the City and the Prospect Park Alliance, the nonprofit organization that sustains, restores and advances the Park.

The sesquicentennial year will feature many special events, from historical walking tours to concerts. Go to prospectpark.org for more information (at the website you can also link to a two-part podcast on Prospect Park's history).

The next major anniversary event is an expanded **It's My Park! Day** on Saturday, May 20 from 10am to 1pm. Team up with the Prospect Park Alliance and co-sponsor REI to beautify our beloved park. On It's My Park! Day, volunteers join the effort to care for Brooklyn's most spectacular green space with brooms, shovels, rakes, and trash grabbers. This year will focus on Lookout Hill. Advance registration required: click the "Get Involved" tab at prospectpark.org. Call 718-287-3400 for more information. (And feel free to use the word "sesquicentennial!".)

Photo of Endale Arch courtesy of Prospect Park Archives / Bob Levine Collection

Desperate to Stay in PLG, Young Family Finds a Gem on Hawthorne

by Suki Cheong

Stacey Paradiso loves to photograph abandoned, deteriorating old buildings, from train stations in Detroit, to crumbling Pocono honeymoon resorts, to a fire-damaged garment factory in Williamsburg.

When she posted a picture to Instagram of a run-down green-and-white stucco house on Hawthorne Street, she didn't know she would one day be living there.

Perhaps she was drawn to the unusual building because it reminded her of her grandmother's house in upstate New York, also a stucco, Spanish-revival-style house.

At the time, she and her husband, Paul Paradiso, had been renting a floor of a house on Maple III. When their landlord decided to sell, they had a new baby (their now four-year-old daughter Vera), and only a few months to find a new place.

Stacey treasured the backyard of their Maple Street house, and both she and her husband fell in love with PLG's architecture and tree-lined streets, and have since become active participants in the community.

For more than a decade they'd lived near Prospect Park (Park Slope and Prospect Heights before PLG), and they knew they wanted to continue living near the park. They looked at several other house rentals in more-affordable PLG but none quite fit the bill. Before they knew it, their lease was up, and they had no place to stay except Paul's brother's couch in Brooklyn Heights.

The house on Hawthorne Street came as a godsend. Paul went to see it first, not knowing Stacey had already photographed the place.

It was a generous-sized space, with 2.5 bedrooms, great light, a balcony, and most importantly, a large yard, which they share with the first-floor tenants, three young filmmakers.

Just after they moved in, all the tenants joined together and cleared 86 bags of trash from the backyard. The effort revealed a con-

crete garden path and a small pond, which is stocked with koi fish in spring and summer.

The landlord, the Church of the Evangel, had done a nice job restoring the prewar details in the apartments, and were open to



Paul customizing the space with shelves and built-ins. The house, one of a pair of Spanish mission-style houses designed in 1906 by New York architects D. Quick & Yost, once served as the rectory, or priest's house for the church.

Paul, a software developer for interactive exhibits, and Stacey, a program manager at UNICEF, are able to apply their considerable renovation and design skills not only to their rental apartment, but also to a rambling "country estate" they bought in Vermont. In their spare time, the couple is fixing up the old farmhouse buildings themselves, hoping to turn one into an AirBnB guesthouse (keep an eye out PLG!). It's given them a way to connect with their country roots, while staying in the city where they both work, and where Vera attends the Jackie Robinson School in the neighborhood.

PLG is definitely in their future and they hope to renew the lease on this unique historic house to which they have added their own history.

Suki Cheong, a lawyer, lives with her husband on Fenimore I. She is also an LMA board member.

PLG's Favorite Haunted Home Puts the Ghosts Away for House Tour Redux

by Milford Prewitt

Chances are that most PLG parents who have taken their young children out for Halloween might have already visited the stately and beloved home of Dean and Sheryl Foster on Rutland II.

Virtually a neighborhood landmark, close to Bedford Avenue, the Fosters have produced a real fright night every Halloween for the past 20 years or so. That night, it is home not to the Fosters—who don Count and Countess vampire costumes for the occasion—but to their ghoulish and ghostly trick-or-treaters of all ages.

Fog machines, thick spiderwebs, macabre music, and spooky lighting attract kids and parents alike. On Halloween 2016, Sheryl says as many as 1,500 people stopped by for the show as well as a bit of candy.

But when the ghouls, goblins and Frankensteins go home and the eerie decorations are put away, the Foster household returns to normal as a beloved home that has been occupied by the same family for 32 years. The Fosters raised two children here, and they in turn have blessed them with three grandchildren.

The Fosters enjoyed successful careers on the music side of the entertainment industry (Dean had been a songwriter) and later owned a much-sought-after, home-based, international consulting business, DFA Intercultural Global Solutions. DFA

helped multinational firms navigate the norms and mores of foreign countries and cultures. Although they sold the business sev-



eral years ago and consider themselves retired, Dean still travels extensively as a consultant, Sheryl says, estimating that he has visited 96 countries.

Formerly residents of Windsor Terrace, the Fosters were shown their current home by a broker when they decided they needed

more space to grow their family.

Participating in their second house tour—the first was in 1987, the family's second year in the neighborhood—Sheryl says all of the renovation and rehabbing they have done have been a series of little projects that occurred over the years versus one massive, gut renovation that most newcomers prefer.

"I'd say during the first house tour we were an example of what you do before you upgrade: nothing," she says. "But it has been a long process over the years.

"We've upgraded the kitchen twice, added new appliances and got rid of the old-fashioned wallpaper."



Major upgrades have been made to the plumbing and electrical systems as well, and two additional bathrooms have been added, she notes.

What she is most proud of and what has remained are the original wood details, molding, wainscoting and parquet flooring, which look as good today as they did a century ago.

Sheryl says when they first moved into the neighborhood, many of her neighbors were elderly and were selling their homes to young families.

"And we were one of those young families."

Now her neighbors are new young families riding the wave of Brooklyn's gentrification and she and Dean represent the elders being solicited to sell.

"I see the changes in the neighborhood," she says. "But it was a little dangerous when we moved in. Now I enjoy seeing the new families restore the houses and keep them viable. I think it's lovely."

But she is not tempted to cash in.

"I'm not interested in selling," she declares. "The only way I'll leave this house is in a pine box.

"Or could that be a vampire's coffin?"



A wall of fiery orange-red vases greets you in the dining room. A multicolored collection of vintage cookware and pottery surrounds the kitchen. A montage of bicycle parts and gears dominates the multi-toned blue bathroom. The display of 1960s-era modern furniture and lighting throughout is beyond impressive. This place is a collector's paradise.

Sarah Frank and Bill Scanga can't even blame the propensity for all their "stuff" on each other because they are *both* guilty. Funnily the couple met on the most minimal of terms as only their eyes and noses were exposed while sledding in Fort Greene Park after a snowstorm in January 2004. Behind the snow suits, hats and scarves were two unique, creative people with a destiny.

Bill is the president of a nonprofit museum in Williamsburg called City Reliquary focused on NYC history. Originally from Philadelphia, Bill came to New York for art. He was an installation art sculptor and worked from a studio in Williamsburg that had "space" and floor-to-ceiling shelving, perfect for storage. Sarah didn't realize that when she married Bill, she married his half-dozen bicycle collection as part of the bargain.

Sarah is a production designer for television and film. She is a true New Yorker, born and raised on Manhattan's Upper East Side. Sarah really didn't know much about Brooklyn.

Like many Manhattanites, it was a place that she ventured to only for the occasional event. But alas, in 1999 she moved to Fort

Not Afraid of Color on Winthrop

by Roberta Woelfling

Greene, eventually met and married Bill, and in Brooklyn they remained.

Then along came Olive. The arrival of their daughter prompted them to start shopping for real estate. They knew people in PLG so that's where they started looking. When two consecutive contracts on homes they were negotiating to buy fell through, a friend picked up their spirits with news about the opportunity to buy the apartment on Winthrop.

In 2009, they became the proud owners of the large three-bedroom condominium.

Sarah and Bill love the neighborhood—being near Prospect Park, the community, the people. They love their building. The building staff take very good care of them and they are grateful to have wonderful neighbors. And after a few recent renovations, they really love their new kitchen and bathrooms.

Sarah was recently interviewed by CBS about what it was like to be the production designer for the hit TV series *Bull*. The journalist was so intrigued by her answers and interested in her personal style that they did a photo shoot at the apartment. They loved all the collections, including Olive's. Her colorful, eclectic room is a testament to the saying that the "fruit doesn't fall far from the tree."

Roberta Woelfling is an architect, secretary of the LMA Board and president of the Rutland 1 Block Association.



Photographs for the Echo's PLG House & Garden Tour feature are by Rutland II resident Martin Friedman.

Robert Thomason Fulfills His Retirement Dream: Touring the World on a Bicycle

by MILFORD PREWITT

Just when you thought 89-year-old Robert Thomason had made his last epic bicycle trip, he dashed off to Maryland one weekend this past October on his trusty 18-speed Cannondale. As grueling as the approximately 400-mile-round-trip ride from Prospect Lefferts Gardens to Maryland in a single weekend might be for even the most fit weekend warrior a third of his age, for Thomason it was virtually a couple of laps around Prospect Park.

In the past 30 years since his retirement as a librarian who pedaled 40 miles round-trip every day for 20 years from his Lefferts Avenue home to work at the Hewlett Woodmere Public Library in Nassau County, the 54-year resident of PLG has seen more of this Earth from his bicycle saddle than many frequent flyers will see from their window seats.

Only the most atrocious weather stopped him on his bicycling commute, and by his reckoning, there were maybe a half dozen of those over 20 years.

The exceptional fitness and stamina he achieved during his working days provided the confidence that enabled him to fulfill a retirement dream: to see the world, revel in humanity's diversity, continue his lifelong quest for knowledge, and give praise to "a loving God" while touring the world on a bike.

An ordained Christian minister who considered his life's work the peaceful integration of PLG regardless of color, income or ethnicity, Thomason's bike treks attest to his unabashed love of diversity. He has pedaled through China, Japan (three times), Thailand, The Netherlands, much of Western Europe and America, coast-to-coast. When he first started his long-distance biking resumé, Boston and Baltimore were some early ports of call.



Robert Thomason and his dependable 32-year-old, 18-speed Cannondale bicycle have traveled the world for more than thirty years.

On every ride, he traveled alone.

Throughout his 30 years in retirement, Thomason—an unsung hero in the fight against unfair housing and discriminatory lending practices in PLG in the '60s and '70s—would take off on one of his cycling journeys roughly every five or six years.

Despite traveling tens of thousands of miles over the globe, Thomason says he could never fathom riding on the streets of New York. "It's just too dangerous," he says.

A 20th Century de Tocqueville

His basement stores several large plastic storage bins filled with diaries, notebooks, news article scrapbooks, photographs, postcards, maps and other paraphernalia about his trips and the neighborhood's drive for fair housing and diversity.

No matter the trip, Thomason ended nearly every night in the home of a host family that was part of an international bicycling support network where he diligently wrote in his diaries. He would also worship with many of his hosts.

No trip personified his commitment to recording the day's events more than his six-month trek in 1985, from April to November, from Brooklyn to San Diego.

"I knew I was in shape for a cross-country ride," he says. "It was just a matter of having time. Retirement solved that problem."

In 200-plus pages, typed single-spaced on an old-school typewriter, Thomason revealed himself as a latter-day, Alexis de Tocqueville, the French sociologist, historian and journalist who traveled the United States for nine months in 1831 and took copious notes on people, culture, mores, and politics. Four years later, de Tocqueville produced his famed book, *On Democracy in America*, renowned for its prediction that the U.S. would have a war between the states over slavery.

In Thomason's case, he traveled to San Diego along the so-called blue highways, the small-town roadways that connected rural America and some modest-sized cities, when President Ronald Reagan was in office. Then as now, and just as de Tocqueville detected two centuries ago, Thomason noted a troubled nation: Factories were leaving for overseas or closing up, drug abuse among the young and poor was rising, families were disintegrating and income inequality was manifesting itself.

Slices of Middle America

A member of the League of American Wheelmen in Missoula, Montana—perhaps the oldest bicycling club in the U.S.—that gives cross-country bikers maps and a network of homes to stay in overnight, Thomason often found himself in some uncomfortable situations. He noted a blizzard of amusing, weird, and inspiring interactions with

(continued on page 4)

Greenlight, a "Third Place Space," Aspires to Be More Than a Bookstore

by JANE VON MEHREN

When Rebecca Fitting came to New York City in 2006, she rented an apartment in Prospect Lefferts Gardens and though she moved away, she kept coming back. In 2014, she bought an apartment in the neighborhood and, with her business partner, Jessica Bagnulo, opened Greenlight Bookstore at 632 Flatbush Avenue (at Fenimore) late last year.

Rebecca's experience here convinced her that PLG, like Fort Greene where the partners had opened their first store, needed and could support a bookstore. "We had paid off all of our start-up loans for opening Greenlight in Fort Greene and our kids were old enough that we finally had energy again," Jessica explains about their decision to launch a second location. After initial talks with a potential partner in PLG didn't pan out, they explored other options and eventually connected with Hudson Companies Inc., developers of the Parkline, the once-controversial apartment tower. It was a great match: the location was the perfect size, included an administrative space, and Hudson saw that a bookstore would bring something positive to the neighborhood.

As they had in Fort Greene, the partners launched a Community Lender Program asking for individuals to invest in the bookstore. They raised nearly \$250,000 with more than 30% of it coming directly from the PLG community.

At least 300 people attended the store's grand opening party in early January, most of them from the neighborhood, which thrilled the partners. "People have been so welcoming and so gracious and excited about the bookstore which is super satisfying. It's sort of what we hoped and expected, but it's more so that we even thought," Jessica says. Weekends are particularly busy. Story Time on Saturday afternoons has quickly grown into a community favorite with families. They come for the reading, to see one another, and buy books.

Jessica and Rebecca are learning about what differentiates the PLG and Fort Greene locations. "Our job is to bring in what the neighborhood wants," Rebecca explains. As the partner in charge of inventory, she does this by "religiously watching what sells and responding to it." She is finding PLG is more racially diverse and socially active. While fiction titles are strong sellers, a deeper and wider selection of nonfiction is selling here than in Fort Greene. Among their bestsellers: James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*, Javaka Steptoe's *Radiant Child*, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *We Should All Be Feminists*.



Greenlight's Saturday afternoon Story Time is attracting families with young children. Recently, illustrator Mika Song read from her book, "Harry and Clare's Amazing Staycation."

In response to the times and to their customers, the store is launching the Civic Engagement Series: the last Monday of every month, they will host a nonprofit organization and give them the store space for an hour to lead an interactive session that gives people some tools for engagement. The first event, at the end of April, will be with the New York Writers' Coalition, which offers writing classes to under-represented groups. Make the Road, which deals with working and immigration issues, will follow at the end of May.

Bookstores are what Jessica calls "third place spaces"—not work, not home—but places you can go to connect with your community and its culture. "We are serving the literary culture that is already here," Rebecca says. Both of Greenlight's founders look forward to doing more to serve the PLG community by partnering with schools, organizations, and local businesses.

Jane von Mehren is a literary agent at Aevitas Creative Management. She lives on Rutland I.



A downside to the Echo's publication schedule—optimistically described as "quarterly"—is that we are occasionally scooped by rival papers. A case in point; the well-known Manhattan daily, *The New York Times*, profiled Greenlight Bookstore's opening in its Business Day section back in November 2016.

Bluebird Food & Spirits
504 Flatbush Ave. (opp. Planet Fitness)
25% off food and drinks
Offer good noon to closing

Blue Sky Bakery
404 Rogers Ave. (bet. Sterling & Empire)
Muffin and coffee discount special
Offer good 8:30AM to 3PM

Brooklyn Greenery
560 Flatbush Ave. (bet. Lincoln & Maple)
20% off fresh juices and fruit smoothies
Offer good 10AM to 8PM

Burger Mexicano
545 Flatbush Ave. (bet. Lincoln & Maple)
25% off food and drinks
Offer good noon to closing

Culpepper's Restaurant
1082 Nostrand Ave. (corner of Lincoln)
10% off any purchase
Offer good 11AM to 7PM

Desserts by Michael Allen
1149 Nostrand Ave. (bet. Midwood & Rutland)
10% off a homemade gelato
Offer good 12:30PM to 8PM

Drink
492 Flatbush Ave. (opp. Planet Fitness)
10% discount on anything in the store
Offer good noon to 5PM

Errol's Caribbean Bakery
661 Flatbush Ave. (bet. Hawthorne & Winthrop)
10% off any purchase
Offer good noon to 5PM

Erv's
2122 Beekman Pl. (off Flatbush, near Maple)
Half off cocktails
Offer good noon to 2AM

Expression in Ceramics
1151 Nostrand Ave. (bet. Midwood & Rutland)
10% off selected items
Offer good noon to 7PM

Greenhouse Café
539 Flatbush Ave. (bet. Lincoln & Maple)
Free hot or iced coffee with purchase of breakfast or sandwich
Offer good noon to 5PM

Greenlight Bookstore
632 Flatbush Ave. (across from Fenimore)
15% off any purchase
Offer good 10AM to 7PM

5/7/17
PLG TOUR DAY
Special Offers*

These neighborhood restaurants and merchants are extending special Tour Day-only (unless otherwise specified) offers to tour goers who show their PLG House & Garden Tour wristbands.

Businesses with this symbol have restrooms available for tour goers/customers.

Honey Badger
67 Fenimore St. (corner of Flatbush)
Dutch pancakes and coffee for \$11
Offer good 11AM to 10PM

Jus Fishy
555 Flatbush Ave. (bet. Lincoln & Maple)
10% off any purchase
Offer good 11AM to 10PM

Kalushkat
1137 Washington Ave. (bet. Lincoln & Lefferts)
10% off any purchase
Offer good 11AM to 10PM

King of Tandoor
600 Flatbush Ave. (bet. Midwood & Rutland)
15% off the dinner menu
Offer good noon until 10:30PM

Kings County Nurseries
625 New York Ave. (bet. Rutland & Fenimore)
Download a 10% discount coupon at www.kingscountynurseries.com for use on an in-store purchase of \$20 or more—excludes landscaping. Good anytime.

Little Mo Wine & Spirits
1125 Nostrand Ave. (bet. Midwood & Maple)
Enter to win a \$25 gift card; free wine tasting
Offer good from noon to 9PM

Pels Pie Co.
446 Rogers Ave. (bet. Lefferts & Lincoln)
Two for the price of one on any beverage
Offer good 7AM to 10PM

Play Kids
668a Flatbush Ave. (bet. Hawthorne & Winthrop)
20% off any toy or book (excludes Lego & Micro scooters & helmets)
Offer good 11AM to 5PM

S & B Florist
1138 Nostrand Ave. (bet. Midwood & Rutland)
5% discount on a \$25 purchase
Offer good any day between 10AM and 4PM

Sushi Tatsu III
644 Flatbush Ave. (bet. Fenimore & Hawthorne)
10% off purchase
Offer good noon to closing

Trixie's Pet Food, Supplies & Accessories
575 Flatbush Ave. (bet. Maple & Midwood)
10% off any purchase
Offer good all day of tour

Tugboat Tea Company
546 Flatbush Ave. (bet. Lincoln & Maple)
A small coffee (reg \$1.75) for \$1.00
Offer good 8AM to 6PM

* Tour Day specials that were announced too late to be listed in the Echo will be included in the house tour's ticket/guidebook.

The first PLG Arts Music Festival, a weeklong event, **May 15-21**, will feature nearly fifty musicians in nine different locations throughout Prospect Lefferts Gardens. Performances include jazz and improvised music, chamber music, a classical brunch, an afternoon Latin jazz performance outdoors, and an interactive family music event. All PLG Arts-sponsored events are free; some cooperating venues may charge admission.

Music²⁰¹⁷ Festival

5/15 It all begins with jazz by **Trio Elgar** at 9PM and the **Stephanie Richards Trio** at 10PM, part of the 65 Fen Music Series. 65 Fenimore St.

5/16 **Kazemde George** leads a jam at Parkside Bar. 9PM-midnight, 705 Flatbush Ave. Stay out late!

5/17 Westbury Inn will host two sets of jazz by the **Aaron Burnett Quartet**. 8-10PM. 673 Flatbush Ave.

Catch jazz by **Trio Elgar** at Soup & Sound, 292 Lefferts Ave., 8PM (Suggested donation at this show: \$20)

5/18 At KD's Bar & Lounge, jazz trumpeter **Adam O'Farrill** will be performing two sets starting at 8PM. 408 Rogers Ave.



5/19 Friday night at KD's Bar & Lounge offers a double bill: Guitarist/vocalist **Camila Meza** at 8PM and jazz ensemble **Caroline Davis's Alula** will play at 9PM. 408 Rogers Ave.

5/20 Enjoy chamber music by **Anne Dearth** and **Nic Handahl** with a delicious brunch at Desserts by Michael Allen, 1149 Nostrand Ave., 11AM-1PM



Latin jazz outdoors!
Rachel Therrien Latin Jazz Quartet, 2-4PM at Parkside Plaza (Parkside & Ocean Aves.)
(in case of rain, this show moves to Desserts by Michael Allen, 1149 Nostrand Ave.)

Go large with two sets by the **Liberté Big Band** starting at 8PM at KD's Bar & Lounge, 408 Rogers Ave.

5/21 **Miss Nina** with her signature pink guitar hosts an interactive family music workshop. 2PM at Greenlight Bookstore, 632 Flatbush Ave.



Contemporary chamber music is the speciality of **The Rhythm Method**. They play at The Owl Music Parlor, 497 Rogers Ave., 7PM

The PLG Arts Music Festival is sponsored, in part, by the Greater New York Arts Development Fund of the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, administered by Brooklyn Arts Council (BAC). PLG Arts is also grateful for funding from the office of City Councilman Mathieu Eugene. The outdoor performance at Parkside Plaza is presented in collaboration with the Parkside Plaza Committee.

To Save Their Block's Character, Fenimore Neighbors Petition for Rezoning

Despite the acrimony and internal dysfunction that has thwarted Community Board 9 from greenlighting a community-wide rezoning plan in Prospect Lefferts Gardens, at least one block in the neighborhood is proceeding with a rezoning initiative.

Actually, it's half a block—the south side of Fenimore Street between Bedford and Rogers Avenues. That's where 21 neighbors from the Fenimore Street Block Association have won CB9's support as a co-petitioner to the Department of City Planning to study changing the block from an R6 zone to an R2 zone. Such a change would forbid the construction of buildings taller than the existing wood-frame homes that give the block its unique architectural character.

While it's not a done deal, rezoning could be a turning point in the community's development. The next issue of the *Echo* will delve into the process and examine what's at stake.



In our fall 2016 lead story, "PLG Confronts a Great Divide," the *Echo* made a couple of errors. Mayor de Blasio's goal is to build or restore 200,000 affordable housing units before he leaves office, not 100,000. Also we failed to

correct zoning study opponent Alicia Boyd, who we quoted saying that PLG is the most populated neighborhood in Brooklyn. Point of fact, the 11226 zip code from Parkside Avenue to Foster Avenue (north to south) and New York Avenue to Coney Island Avenue (east to west) is not only the most densely populated area in New York State, it's also the thirteenth most dense in the country. The *Echo* regrets the errors.

Recalling House Tour's Historic Role (continued from page 1)

As a young person who grew up during President Roosevelt's tenure and the only child of parents who happened to hate Roosevelt, Thomason says he nonetheless possessed an inborn sense of social justice and equality.

Thompson served in the Army in the Panama Canal during WWII. When VJ Day came, he recalls rushing to Times Square to "kiss every girl I could find."

He earned a liberal arts degree in social studies and education from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

"But I was really struggling with the question of who I am. I was 21 or 22 and really didn't know what I wanted to do with my life."

After acquiring a teacher's certificate to work in Chapel Hill's school system, his sense of restlessness and fear of having an aimless life returned.

"And so I went to Yale Divinity School, thinking I'd do vocational counseling and work with groups."

It was during his divinity studies that his love of a Christian God and commitment to social justice and equality were honed. He says he became deeply influenced by the humanism, spiritual inspiration and ethics of several professors, most notably H. Richard Niebuhr, who Wikipedia describes as "one of the most important Christian theological ethicists in 20th century America."

Please Don't Sell

He met and married Jane in Springfield, Ohio where they both worked for a while, he as a guidance counselor at a settlement house and she as a sixth grade teacher in a country school.

But for someone who would help found a progressive community association and work with people in all manner of causes and movements, Thomason says he made a profound and ironic discovery about himself.

"I really don't like working with groups," he says. "I far more enjoy working with and helping individuals."

That insight into his own psyche and the closing of the settlement house led him to acquire a library science

degree at Columbia University, after which he began his long career as a librarian.

"Being a librarian was perfect for me because you are helping individuals," he says.

He says one of his most memorable moments as a librarian was helping a *New York Times* editor who was writing a book about a Civil War battle between Northern black troops and Confederate soldiers. At the National Archives he located a copy of the handwritten battlefield report the Northern general filed after the fight.

"This editor was thrilled and I was so happy to have helped him," he remembers. "Just think, the library is paying me money to have fun."

Thomason's basement library has several large storage bins filled with news clippings, notebooks, newspapers, diaries, photographs, maps and other paraphernalia about the neighborhood's housing battles, court filings and community meetings. However, much of his archive is in the Brooklyn Room on the second floor at the Brooklyn Public Library main branch at Grand Army Plaza.

Most notable among the articles is one from 1971 when brokers' sales tactics had reached such an outrageous fever pitch, the New York secretary of state ordered a moratorium on broker solicitations in PLG. Any broker violating the order could lose their license for life. It's not clear when the moratorium was lifted.

Looking at his long residency in PLG, Thomason says he is proud the neighborhood no longer suffers the racial animus and housing discrimination that marred his early decades here. But he is no fan of gentrification, which he believes destabilizes neighborhoods and can result in less economic and racial diversity.

"I think gentrification is a big problem," he argues. "Everyday my neighbors and I are getting letters offering to buy our homes and some of my neighbors are selling."

"I tell them, don't sell. But some are and are going back to the Caribbean or the American South. Others are being priced out."

"But I'm not selling."

Robert Thomason's Retirement Dream

(continued from page 3)

the families with whom he overnights. Here are a few examples of Thomason's reportage:

- In Pennsylvania he stayed with a farmer who thought Thomason's life was meaningless and his retirement pointless. To which Thomason fired back: "How safe is our democracy if citizens have to be directed by a boss to have a meaningful life?"
- In Frederick, Md., he saw class divisiveness, income inequality and displacement as locals reported rents were rising from \$500 to \$2000, resulting in people paying half their monthly incomes on housing. "I prayed then

that rich and poor might start talking to one another," he wrote.

• In Summerville, Mo., he ran across a woman who didn't know until she was 12 years old that a family member she thought was her sister was actually her mother. "From that experience began a major theme of my bike trip: the disintegration of the American family."

• In the dark ages before cellphones, Thomason used landlines to call his wife, Jane, to check in. One of those calls he made was from Centralia, Mo. to celebrate—as best one could over the phone—their 25th wedding anniversary.

• In Ironton, Ill., he watched firemen let a house burn down because the

owner didn't have a tag on his home to show that he'd paid the \$35 monthly fee to the fire department. "We have to be strict," the fire chief told Thomason when he asked why they did nothing but watch.

He traveled a thousand miles on his cross-country odyssey before he got his first flat tire. While that was an easy job to fix, he worried about the more challenging task of replacing a spoke and truing the rim on the road.

The bike he started that journey on, a French-made Peugeot, died in Missoula, and he was forced to buy a new bike, the same Cannondale he rode to Maryland back in October.

"That is a *great* bike," he boasts.



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: \$25 per household or \$15 per senior citizen household

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 \$ _____ + \$ _____ = \$ _____
DUES ADD'L CONTRIBUTION TOTAL

Dues cover January through December 2017. Make checks payable to **Lefferts Manor Association**. Send payment and form to: Martin Friedman, 214 Rutland Rd., Brooklyn, NY 11225 or drop in the mail slot at 214 Rutland Rd.

PLG's Flower Barrel Planting is coming up on Saturday, May 13, IOAM to NOON. The Manor's annual beautification event! To participate in planting, contact one of your block's LMA board members (list at right) for details. Need a barrel? They're in stock at Kings County Nurseries on New York Avenue.

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