The WFP and Bill Lipton: Making the Democrats Honest

T he New York State Working Families Party rocked the political establishment when, during the primaries, it boldly endorsed actress and education activist Cynthia Nixon and councilmember Jumaane Williams over Gov. Andrew Cuomo and his running mate Kathy Hochul. Earlier in the campaign, Cuono had sought the WFP’s blessing. Although Nixon lost the election by a wide margin, the WFP helped diminish the Independent Democratic Conference, a group of eight Democrats in the State Senate who traditionally sided with Republicans. Only two of the 31 districts, which means, the State Senate is back in Democratic control.

No one is bashing more about these victories than the WFP’s state director and co-founder Bill Lipton, who lives with his wife, Yasmin, and young daughter, Ora Luz, on Sterling I.

How did you come to move here? How did you find your house?

I’m from Kingston, N.Y. originally but moved to New York in 1996 and came to Prospect Heights in 1990. My wife is a native-born Brooklynite and even though we knew about PLG when we started to look for a new place, we didn’t consider here because it had an image of being so quiet. If you wanted to go to a restaurant you had to leave the neighborhood, plus there were not that many houses on the market anyway. So what happened to change your mind?

Around 2010 we wanted to buy something and came back here and hit the jackpot. We feel as if this is the best block in the neighborhood. We couldn’t be happier and it has the densest sense of community I think I’ve ever known.

What are your thoughts on PLG’s rising affluence and gentrification?

For New York City and Brooklyn in particular, it is clearly an unfortunate development. The city is becoming increasingly unaffordable for working-class people. And that is making it a far less interesting.

Meet Your Neighbors

by Milford Prewitt

One of the most distinguished homes in the Manor, 66 Maple St., was built by James H. Gilvarry, a high-society lawyer whose career was overwhelmed by accusation of embezzlement.

Edna Wells Handy To Build Bridges in Her Retirement

W hile they don’t agree on much, the politicians who occupy the highest echelons of state and city government agreed on this: the retirement of lawyer and longtime Rutland Rd. resident Edna Wells Handy would not go unnoticed.

So Gov. Andrew Cuomo, Mayor Bill de Blasio, City Comptroller Scott Stringer, Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams, the entire State Assembly, several judges (some retired), prosecutors, her pastor, and numerous lesser-known department heads celebrated the pleasure and ease of working with her.

In either person or through official proclamations, they cheered what her Prospect-Lefferts Gardens neighbors already knew: Handy is a unique, hardworking, caring, smart and indispensable human being whose working life has been dedicated to helping people through government service and the law.

In a reception hall in the historic and stately Twed Court House in City Hall Park in October, more than 200 well-wishers —including several PLG neighbors—celebrated Handy’s retirement after a decades-long career as a lawyer in federal, state and city governments.

Along the way she has been a mother, grandmother, widow, law professor, mentor, public speaker, author, leadership developer, innovator and closer to home, a magnificent neighbor who co-founded a popular book club exclusively for women who live on Rutland Rd.

She is also the recipient of numerous honors and awards for justice and civic engagement including the Ida B. Wells Award, the Outstanding Leadership Award from the Protestant Board of Guardians and the U.S. Marine Corps Appreciation Award.

Many who retire look forward to laying back a bit, catching up with their reading, traveling and spending more time with their grandkids.

Not that she is not going to do those things, but Handy’s retirement plans are to keep going, to keep giving back and make government work for the people.

She will soon finish a master’s degree in Public Administration which she intends to (continued on page 4)

Prospect Lefferts Gardens’ 48th annual House & Garden Tour was one of the most successful in recent years.

More than 600 visitors—100 more than a year ago—visited eight unique homes on Sunday, June 3, as well as enjoyed a refreshment stop with fabulous, live jazz.

Every year the house tour kicks off at noon and usually is a slow walk as tourists take time ramping up of attendees milling through the neighborhood going from stop to stop. The peak is typically around 3 or 4 p.m. But this year, despite gloomy skies and very wet conditions, crowds were right from sighting the beginning.

By 11:30 a.m., tour-goers were lined up outside the first stop on Lincoln Road. Then, as organizers were battling the wind to secure (for the second time) the numbered tour banner in front of The Parkline apartment building, they got word that the lines continued to lengthen at other stops.

Thankfully these visitors, as the concentration of tour-goers eased up in the afternoon. The home- owners were appreciative of the tour guides who helped manage the onslaught of eager visitors and who kept the crowd moving without it feeling too crowded.

This year’s tour was more compact in terms of geography but past years.

This was viewed as a plus for tour-goers based on idle chatter at the refreshment stop. It gave people more time to spend at each home and it allowed for more breaks along the way.

House Tour 2018: Reminisicing on PLG’s Day to Shine

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Architectural Diversity Shines

Showing a variety of architectural styles and diverse living spaces are among the features of the house tour.

It’s important that there be at least one apartment on tour, though this year we were lucky to find two very different ones. And, it was an inter- esting juxtaposition on Madison I to see the precise detail of the modern renovation on the north side of the street, compared to the period details and antiques of the (continued on page 4)
House Tour 2018 (continued from page 1)

The floral designers knocked it out of the park. Not only were the flowers themselves stunning, but the vases and containers the arrangements filled were equally irresistible. The fresh arrangement stops were particularly notable. The decorative metal bowl full of colorful blooms next to the lemons center made a gorgeous pairing.

The arrangements’ beauty jibed with the music of the Camila Meza Duo, which included percussionist Caleb van Gelder. The duo captivated guests at the refreshment area with romantic standards and fiery original compositions. Not only were the bees circling the flowers, organizers got word early in the tour that there was a “buzz” over the fact that there were wings and pasta salad at the refreshment stop. Thanks to Jim Mamary and the staff at Bluebird, who helped make this memorable and successful house tour.

We are always grateful for the goodies donated by local businesses and residents. It just wouldn’t be our tour without Gino’s cannolis and the dishes at Taqueria El Patrón.

Social Media Boost Attendance

Beyond the amenities and the charming participating homes, also contributing to the increase in attendance this year was our deeper dependence on social media. Spearheaded by Ashley Chamberlain, folks could go to @Chameleonbk on Instagram or Facebook and there were many posts to the Prospect Lefferts Gardens and Brooklyn Neighborhoods group on Facebook and access to its 11,000 members.

These sites were constantly being updated, with links provided to LeffertsManor.org and to Eventbrite for tickets. Eventbrite sold 182 advance tickets this year compared to 136 last year and 106 the year before that. We expect the trajectory for online ticket sales will remain on an upward trend in the years to come.

We also had great house tour articles featured on the popular websites Brownstoner.com and BrooklynPep.com.

Fifth Time in Nine Years

Lefferts Ave. 2 Wins 2018 ‘Greenest Block’ Honors

Fourth Time in Nine Years A PLG Bloc Wins

Lefferts2’s prize was the fourth time a PLG block has won the top honor. Lincoln Road 2 won in both 2009 and 2012 and Sterling 1 got the top prize in 2013.

A casual stroll down Lefferts Avenue between Bedford and Garden judged this block “The Greenest Block in Brooklyn” for the year. Lined with an array of colorful flower beds, huge plant boxes, hanging pots, stylish tree guards, recycled found art, a decorative metal bowl full of colorful blooms somehow, we managed to make it happen. It’s a quintessential Brooklyn neighborhood, but it still neatly plays along the sidewalks—without digital devices—and the green-scaping catches up with each other discussing events around the block and the world.

The block’s energy is captured by the Lefferts Avenue Community Neighborhood (LANT) street association, headed by Francesca Leonpoli and Dr. Zanina Frederick, who serve as president and vice president, respectively.

The block association was formed in 2013 with the goal of bringing neighbors together and maintaining the friendly spirit despite gentrification. To do this, LANT tests monthly meetings, neighborhood clean-up days, an annual tea party and a block party.

And the community’s big project is the planting of flowers in the spring. This initiative is led by Kathy Parris, Sandy Merril and Doug Blaska, who make up the leadership of the Gardening Committee. They conceptualize the design ideas and, along with Leonpoli and Frederick, mobilize neighbors to contribute to the efforts to beautify the block. Their hard work had already earned the Greenest Block honors in recent past.

In local businesses are supportive of their efforts. Savoring the thrill of victory in the history books, the residents want another taste of triumph and are already meeting to plan for more victories in the future.

Lefferts 2’s prize was the fourth time a PLG block has won the top honor. Lincoln Road 2 won in both 2009 and 2012 and Sterling 1 got the top prize in 2013.

The block association is moving forward with the goal of bringing neighbors together and maintaining the friendly spirit despite gentrification. To do this, LANT tests monthly meetings, neighborhood clean-up days, an annual tea party and a block party.

But beyond this are the friendly neighbors who band together to make it all happen. It’s a quintessential Brooklyn neighborhood, but it still neatly plays along the sidewalks—without digital devices—and the green-scaping catches up with each other discussing events around the block and the world.

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**Setting It Straight: Neighbor Objects to Echo Coverage**

Dear Editor:

I think the House Tour issue (in May) was great and Elaine and I were pleased with the box about our house. My only serious critique is about something you wrote in the lead article about the Schaffer house.

In my opinion, it greatly exaggerates how “bad” our neighborhood was when they moved here in 1975. My own experience in the first few years we lived here (1974–1977) was that our neighborhood was remarkably crime-free—certainly compared to Park Slope, where we had lived previously.

It’s true that there was a perception of increased crime citywide following the 1977 blackout, but you write about merchants being “burned out in the riots following New York’s historic, citywide blackout.” That happened in Bushwick, and elsewhere, but not in our neighborhood.

I admit that I hesitated to walk the Block from Flatbush Avenue following the blackout, but when I worked up the nerve to do so, I learned that only one corner store had been looted (Bedford Camera which never re-opened). Some merchants, such as the two brothers who ran Trade Fair, the predecessor of OJ’s, spent the blackout night guarding their shops but, with that one notable exception, there was no violence.

Crime has dropped enormously, starting with the Dinkins administration’s “community policing,” but that happened in Bushwick, and elsewhere, but not in our neighborhood. I had no idea how many people would respond, but the group had nearly 70 participants and the afternoon group had 50-plus! The demographics included some locals seeking a new experience, others who wereSkate School: right about the unique story of Kings County preserved and nurtured, appreciated and loved, for more than a century. We feel privileged to be part of such a special neighborhood, one that the NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission has described as having a distinct “sense of place.”

I became acquainted with the unique story of the Lefferts clan and their familial farmland from a book on Brooklyn I bought years ago. From the vision of the original single-family covenant, to the diligent safeguarding by the Lefferts Manor Association, to the 1975 historic district designation, these ingredients are an accumulated blend of organic and deliberate actions that have kept this magical little square of Kings County preserved and nurtured, appreciated and loved, for more than a century. And this pride of place led me on a sparkly day in May three years ago to share the love and pride by voluntarily leading a walking tour through the neighborhood.

I qualified to be a tour group leader in the “Jane’s Walk,” the annual multi-community walking tours named after the legendary urban activist Jane Jacobs and sponsored by the Municipal Arts Society.

MAS provides the platform and guidance for anyone wishing to create a tour to showcase a favorite neighborhood or venue, and I was one of 135 city tour leaders that weekend.

Billed as “Must See PLG,” I promoted the tour quoting the same description the Landmarks Preservation Commission used: “an introductory walk of the landmark district, Lefferts Manor, where gorgeous examples of neo-Renaissance, Romanesque Revival, neo-Federal and Tudor are proudly on display—showcasing some of the finest enclaves of late 19th- and early 20th-century housing in New York City.”

I remembered that Jane Jacobs celebrated the “smallness of big cities” and the “micro-villages” within them that serve to keep metropolitan areas healthy and vibrant. With that in mind, I created a two-hour itinerary that began in front of Wholesale Foods on Flatbush and ended up at the then newly finished LeFrak Skating Center.

Two hours sped by as we traversed from Lefferts Avenue to Lincoln Road, to Maple Street, switching between Flatbush and Bedford Avenues, all the way down to Fenimore Street, then north up Flatbush, ending in the park.

I had no idea how many people would respond, but the morning group had 70 participants and the afternoon group had 50-plus! The demographics included some locals seeking a new perspective and some wide-eyed Manhattanites who exclaimed, “I had no idea this was even here!” They could not get over the expansive yards and red-tiled roofs of the brick homes on Maple, the Axel Hedman limestones emblematic of the “White City Movement,” the neo-Georgian brick townhouses of Rutland Road with their Juliet balconies just down from neo-Tudor row homes, and the cool ’60s vibe of Patio Gardens.

In addition to the architectural eye candy, we took note of the quiet of the wide streets, the generous sidewalks, and the greenery juxtaposed against the new construction of 66 Flatbush.

I believe PLG is a stellar example of the urban micro-village to which Jane Jacobs alluded. It is my hope that it will remain a beloved example of the best of New York City, both past and present.

Laura Charelian is a real estate agent.
Bill Lipton (continued from page 1)

and generous place. The city used to be rich in religious services. My mom was born during the Depression and grew up poor here in Brooklyn. It’s much harder to be working-class in New York City today. It’s more a squeeze and the worst example of that is the subway: more expensive, less dependable and increasingly unfaf-

nufiable.

How did the WFP get started and what were you doing before?

Soon after I graduated Columbus, I became a commun-

ity organizer and then started to get involved in electoral politics. Eventually I helped start the WFP in 1986. It was an alliance of community organizations like ACORN, Citizen Action and unions, like the CWA (the telephone workers union) and enlightened elected officials like Dave Dinkins.

What was your role in the midterm elections?

It’s a huge win for the PLG and for all of Brooklyn to have a true progressive in the State Senate [the WFP endorsed, first-time office seeker Zellnor Myrie] who refused to take campaign contributions from real estate developers. We were there first and couldn’t be prouder to be on Team Zellnor.

Why was it important to win the IDC?

It’s clear that corporate and right-wing wealthy inter-

ests have a lock on the Republican Party and major interest groups in Democratic Party and we saw the IDC and Gov. Cuomo’s support of them as an intolerable sit-

uation. Now more than ever, in this era of Trump, we need to democratize our politics and economy.

We are very concerned about what’s going on in country. The Democrats have a very serious identity cri-

sis. A recent poll asked people what does the Democratic Party stand for and the number one answer was “I don’t know.” Fifteen years ago it was the party of the little guy. So our job is to pressure the Democrats to put working families first and not their corporate donors.

Edna Wells Handy

Edna Wells Handy (continued from page 1) leverage into her own start-up, Wells Handy & Associates, a consulting firm to help government agencies better serve their constitu-

encies.

“Let me use my role as bridging the gap between the provider and the recipient to do just that. I know I’m not the first, but it’s time that I took it all in and do it.

that is what I’m going to do with Wells Handy & Associates,” she says. “We’re going to be ‘sure-
amous’ and work with distressed organizations or institutions at a cross-

roads in both the private and public sector.

Since graduating from Georgetown University Law Center in Washington, D.C. in 1976 and passing the bar, Handy’s resume glows with high achievement and awesome responsibilities. The energy and passion that fueled her work experience would make the most achiev-

ing overachiever feel lazy and unaccomplished.

Her resume lists eight government consultant positions, including counsel to the NYC Police Commissioner, Commissioner of the Department of Citywide Administrative Services and most recently, the Acting Chief Compliance Officer.

Then there are her top legal positions that include general counsel for the New York City branches of the NAACP, bureau chief of Law Enforcement Investigations for the King’s County District Attorney’s Office and United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York and one of her first jobs after law school, a fellow at the American Civil Liberties Union.

She’s also had at least five teaching positions at prominent law schools where she taught such courses as bar exam preparation, writing and research ethics and has mentored young law school students on staying the course.

But all those heavyweight positions did not diminish nor detract from her love of family, community and church—attributes she says she acquired from parents whose lives were shaped by the civil rights movement.

Born in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Handy’s Rutland II home for the past 33 years has seen a lot of life, merriment and grief. While establishing her legal career, Handy raised three daughters in the Rutland home and only the offspring of Michael Handy, her now-deceased husband. (He died in the house from a heart attack in 2003). Her household currently includes a grandchild (and a second one due in June). Handy’s daughter Catlin Henderson. Henderson died after a long fight with brain cancer. The family supported her through the entire process.

“I wasn’t interested in the private sector,” she says. “I wanted to be part of the solutions for equity and fairness and government seemed the best way to do the job of those in the public sector.”

At a recent memorial rite for the former Rutland II resident, Handy was one of many to express the sadness and grief that many felt when Henderson died. Henderson was a remarkable woman who was a bridge between the public and private sector.

“She met me at Johns Hopkins Medical School,” Handy said. “I was on scholarship working nights as a medical technician. She met me in the morning, and I knew I had met someone special.”

Henderson introduced her to her husband, Lenny, who was a pediatrician. They married and had four daughters.

Roberta Weilfling, Ed itor .. 718-287-3392

KendallChristiansen ... 718-941-9543

Genine Edwards ....... 718-813-1139

President

Pam G laser ........... 718-622-2235

PiaRaymond ......... 646-318-0233

Roberta Woe lfling ...... 718-826-2741

Milford Prewitt, Ed itor .. 718-287-3392

KendallChristiansen ... 718-941-9543

Genine Edwards ....... 718-813-1139

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MLK Day ‘19

Storytelling & Music Event

Monday, January 21, 11 AM–3 PM at Grace Reformed Church of Flatbush 1800 Bedford Ave. (at Lefferts Ave.)

Hosted by Prospect Lefferts Gardens Neighborhood Association (PLGNA) Featuring author Jacqueline Woodson and other artists to be announced

For a stronger community, join the

Lefferts Manor Association

Dues are $25 per household or $5 per senior citizen household. Dues cover January through December 2018. More details at Lefferts Manor on the web.

For more information contact: Lefferts Manor Association

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So many ordinary young people...