

BY LINDA J. WILSON

Although Oliver Siandre spent three days in jail on Rikers Island, there is no guarantee he will do serious time for a vandalism spree during which he defaced walls, garage doors, trees, the granite columns in Athens Square Park and many other locations throughout Astoria with his graffiti tag of "KIKO", City Councilmember Peter Vallone Jr. told the Community Board 1 district cabinet last Wednesday.

"There is no jail time for a misdemeanor graffiti charge," Vallone said at the cabinet meeting in the Kaufman Astoria Studios commissary. "We were able to get this case raised to a felony because of the amount of damage and the District Attorney offered a year in jail. Siandre turned it down."

All the same, Vallone added. Siandre was one very surprised individual when the judge presiding at his arraignment hearing set bail at \$25,000. Siandre was led away in handcuffs and was the involuntary guest of the city until his family could raise the money. "I hope he enjoyed his baloney sandwiches while he was sitting there," Vallone said. However, the councilmember, who is chair of the Public Safety Committee and was an assistant district attorney in Manhattan as well as a defense lawyer before running for the 22nd Council District seat, pointed out, while the arraigning judge obviously took a dim view of Siandre's actions, there is no guarantee that the trial judge will feel the same way. "We don't know who we're going to get [to preside]," Vallone said. He and other interested community groups, including the 114th Civilian Observation patrol (114th Civ-OP) attended every court date at which Siandre appeared and will continue the practice

Vallone Jr. Updates Board 1 Cabinet On Vandal, Voltage

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as much as time and schedule permit.

Graffiti is on the rise again after a period of cooling own for a number of reasons, Vallone added. Police ranks now number fewer than 37,000 officers for the entire city, meaning fewer officers are on patrol and able to catch vandals in the act. What's more, he added, most of the miscreants arrested for graffiti in recent months have been males between 13 and 17 years of age. "There's a new generation that thinks graffiti is 'cool'," Vallone said. Adding to the problem, Vallone continued, is the fact that many corporations sponsor graffiti vandalism through the manufacture of video games that make the vandalism a sport. One such game, he said, gives detailed instructions on how to do graffiti.

Nor is graffiti easily removed in many cases, Vallone said. "They're using acid to etch their

"tags" in windows now," he said. "That means you have to replace the whole window. You can't just paint over it."

As chair of the Pubic Safety Committee, Vallone has introduced several measures to punish graffiti vandals. "We've removed the word 'intent' from the statute, making it easier to prosecute" he said. "And we've raised the age at which a person can be charged with possessing graffiti instruments to 21. Before, they got a pass once they turned 18. And we've doubled the penalties for possession of etching acid.

Under other new laws owners of private property can be held liable for failing to remove graffiti. Owners of buildings housing six or more families and owners of commercial buildings will be issued a notice and must remove the graffiti from their property within 60 days or be subject to a \$350 fine. However, the measure is

not as stringent as it first appears. "They can call the 311 number and get the city to clean the graffiti at no charge," Vallone said. The same proviso applies to owners of smaller buildings. "The important thing is to get the graffiti cleaned off the building," Vallone said. With Councilmember Melinda Katz he is supporting a bill that would compel vandals to clean their own graffiti off the buildings they deface. "Graffiti is a crime and it leads to other crimes," he said, pointing out the importance of eradicating the vandalism as soon as possible.

Vallone also noted that a bill addressing the problem of stray voltage has been introduced. Two years ago a woman in Manhattan was electrocuted when she stepped on a "hot spot" where live voltage coursed through a metal plate in a sidewalk and in recent months a dog was killed and a child in Harlem was severely shocked under the same circumstances.

"The state Public Service Commission, which is supposed to regulate the utilities, is useless," Vallone added. "They ask a utility to do their own inspections. That's putting the fox in the henhouse"

Vallone is introducing a bill that will have the city work with the Department of Environmental Protection, the state Department of Environmental Conservation and other concerned agencies to address the problem of stray voltage. "Snow melts and slush gets into manholes and comes into contact with bare wires because salt corrodes the insulation and that creates a lot of the problems," Vallone said. "There are new technologies that can help with this. You shouldn't have to walk through a minefield on a city sidewalk."

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