

# Mayor Becomes Senior Citizen Today

Our heartiest congratulations to Mayor Michael Bloomberg as he celebrates his 65th birthday today!!

With his birthday coming on Valentine's Day, the city's chief executive is in for a double dose of good wishes. But what do you get the man who has everything, even a \$3 billion surplus which will ease his way to a new budget this spring?

We would hope that as the mayor is now officially a senior citizen that he has a carefree and enjoyable day, but we all know from past experience there's scant chance of that.

Be that as it may, we hope his scheduling office gives him a light work load for this special day and that only cupid's arrows are aimed his way.

**TOUGH BLOW FOR GOVERNOR:** Governor Eliot Spitzer got a particularly rude introduction to Albany's way of doing business last week when Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver and Senate Majority Leader Joseph Bruno engineered the selection of Assemblymember Tom DiNapoli as the new state comptroller. In so doing, the two powerbrokers snubbed a trio of other choices that had been recommended for the post by a special panel of former comptrollers.

Understandably, the new governor took the blow particularly hard and is now threatening all kinds of retribution against Silver. The powerful speaker appears to be impregnable, but if there's a way to get at him, the one-time "Sheriff of Wall Street" will find it.

Meanwhile, the emotional and highly charged battle for comptroller will only add to the conflicts that are expected to accompany the efforts of Spitzer, Silver and Bruno as they try to work out an agreement over a very difficult budget that is already under consideration.

The governor reacted angrily to the outcome of the comptroller selection process, but we

think there will be less of this kind of behavior as the budget negotiation goes forward, although there surely will be trying times ahead.

**CANDIDATE EMERGES:** Martha Stark, one of the three candidates tagged by the selection panel as a candidate to fill the state comptroller vacancy is reportedly considering a run for city comptroller in 2008, when the post will become available because of term limits.

Reports are circulating that Stark, now city Finance Commissioner, is considering running to succeed incumbent city Comptroller William Thompson Jr. Stark received good reviews as one of the finalists for the state comptroller's job and now is thinking about running for the city post, according to media reports.

**HEVESISAGAENDS:** The sentencing last Friday of former state Comptroller Alan Hevesi by an Albany judge ends a sad chapter in the former Forest Hills public officials' life and nearly four-decade-long career in public service.

Hevesi, 66, received a \$5,000 fine and no jail or probation time, and is barred from ever again running for public office. At the sentencing, Hevesi apologized to his family, staff and New York state and said he was culpable and responsible for his actions. He had pleaded guilty for using a state worker to chauffeur his sick wife, Carol, for more than three years.

**RAGUSA PROMISES ACTION:** Newly elected Queens Republican Leader Philip Ragusa laid out a busy agenda for the organization following his election to succeed state Senator Serphin Maltese about a week ago.

Ragusa, who has headed the Eastern Queens 26th Assembly District for 23 years, stated: "We have to ensure the re-election of Senators [Frank] Padavan and Maltese and we must field a full slate of City Council candidates and modernize our operations and efforts."

He said his plans include a "vigorous" fundraising drive, extensive coordination between county party and local clubs, voter registration efforts and a fully functioning Web site.

Ragusa, a Whitestone resident and CPA for 35 years, noted that his Bayside/Little Neck/Douglaston district, where Republicans are outnumbered by Democrats three to one, has continuously elected Padavan and had other successes in the past.

Ragusa has also been active civically as president of the Beechhurst Property Owners Association and the Greater Whitestone Taxpayers Association, among others.

Padavan (R-C, Bellerose) noted that Ragusa, as a private citizen will be able to "focus his energies and serve the GOP unencumbered by other responsibilities". Also, said Padavan, "It has never been more important to have grassroots leadership and citizen involvement."

**AVELLA BLASTS MAYOR ON SCHOOL BUS SNAFU:** When Mayor Michael Bloomberg lashed out at Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum and City Councilmembers who criticized the Department of Education's new school bus plan, Councilmember Tony Avella (D-Bayside) lashed back, saying the mayor's statement was "a really disgraceful comment on his part".

Avella called for a full investigation of the new plan, which generated many complaints from parents. He stated, "Under the guise of saving money, DOE has shown total disregard for the parents and children, educators and the bus companies." Avella also questioned whether money was being saved by the new plan.

State Senator John Sabini (D-Jackson Heights) also questioned how much, if anything, is being saved. In the first days of the new plan, the lawmaker was out at 7 a.m. some mornings, along with children and parents, to observe how the plan was working.

**MALONEY SOUNDS ALARM:** "It is completely ridiculous that MMS (Minerals Management Service) would take the person most likely responsible for the [oil] royalty rip-off and put him in charge of the whole show" was Congressman Carolyn Maloney's reaction to the Department of the Interior announcement that Chris Oynes was being promoted to associate director of the MMS Offshore Minerals Management program.

Maloney said it was Oynes who signed 700 of the 1,100 oil and gas leases for 1998 and 1999 with missing price thresholds that limit royalty relief. Since then, Maloney has worked actively to ensure that the U.S. is paid its fair share of royalties for oil taken from federal lands.

Maloney said Oynes' action in 1998-99 was "one of the government's costliest and most ridiculous missteps in recent history".

**BID TO BAN 'N' WORD:** State Senate Minority Leader Malcolm Smith (D-St. Albans) reports that the senate unanimously approved a resolution that would impose a moratorium on the use of the "N" word in New York state for 12 months from February 1, the first day of Black History Month. Councilmember Leroy Comrie (D-St. Albans) has introduced a similar resolution in the council. Councilmember Helen Sears (D-Jackson Heights) supported Comrie, saying the word has "unfortunately become all too common, particularly by our young people".



## Gennaro, Community Celebrate Pomonok

### Library Reopening

The Pomonok Community Library in Flushing recently reopened after a \$175,000 renovation and the event was celebrated by Councilmember James Gennaro who secured the funds for the renovation, Assemblymember Nettie Mayersohn and Queens Library Director Thomas W. Galante.

Gennaro (D-Fresh Meadows) said the renovation included new circulation desks with speedy self-service checkout technology; new plasma screen TVs; new tables and chairs; a completely restored children's room, and refreshed collections of books and movies.

Added in was restored decor consisting of new carpeting, tile flooring, lighting and repainting.

At the reopening, where the P.S. 200 student glee club performed, Gennaro said the library "enriches the life of the community".

**Pictured cutting the ribbon are Gennaro and Galante.**



## On the brief side...

### Maloney Eyes 'Hidden' Bank Overdraft Fees

Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney, recently appointed House Financial Institutions Subcommittee chairperson, has reintroduced legislation to rein in the billions of dollars that bank customers are paying in hidden overdraft loan fees.

Maloney (D-Queens/Manhattan) explained that bank customers are often automatically enrolled in overdraft protection services without notification and are often given no notice when they are on the verge of overdrawing their accounts.

"As a result, they have to pay back overdraft loans that they may not have wanted, and interest on those loans accrues until enough money is deposited into their account," she said. "The Center for Responsible Lending has estimated that customers pay between \$10.3 billion and \$22.7 billion a year in overdraft loan fees."

Maloney's legislation would equip bank customers with more control and information about overdraft protection fees and would alert them if they are on the verge of overdrawing.

### Liu Rejects Parking Lot Plan Changes

Using terms like "laughable" and "not acceptable", City Councilmember John Liu (D-Flushing) shot down proposed revisions to redevelopment plans for Municipal Parking Lot No. 1 in Downtown Flushing which had been submitted by the city Economic Development Corporation (EDC) and developer TDC/Rockefeller Group.

Liu said at a Community Board 7 meeting that the proposed reduction in parking spaces and rate structure are laughable because these changes will no doubt harm many of the small businesses that make up the core of Downtown Flushing.

The lawmaker also said changes in the world class Youth Center would be extremely difficult to realize. He added: "More fundamentally, if the construction costs have gone so out of control as the EDC and developer claim, perhaps this entire project is no longer supported by the underlying economics."

### Avella Introduces Council Reforms

A series of "good government" reforms are being introduced in the City Council by Councilmember Tony Avella (D-Bayside), including proposals to ban outside work by the lawmakers and the elimination of extra pay for committee chairpersons and leadership positions.

Avella said he would also like to see committee chairpersons granted more authority to act independently of the Council Speaker on matters that come before their panels. He said the Speaker has too much power in terms of legislation which goes through the committees.

Avella, who has announced his intention to run for mayor in 2009, has opposed many council issues, including a recent pay increase that the members voted for themselves and which he refused to accept.