

News Of The Neighborhoods

Compiled by Liz Goff

Hollis Man Rips Off O'Donnell

Law enforcement sources said a 23-year-old Hollis man bilked former talk show host Rosie O'Donnell out of almost \$70,000 by forging checks to himself from one of her production companies.

Ramone Costly was arrested last week for cashing two bogus checks last year. The checks were made out to Costly from O'Donnell's production company, KidRo Productions, for \$34,825.43 and \$34,725, prosecutors said.

Costly allegedly deposited the checks into his account at a Citibank branch in Manhattan, authorities said. He withdrew \$7,550 and used \$865 for various, undisclosed purchases, prosecutors said.

O'Donnell staffers never heard of Costly until the forgery was discovered. O'Donnell told investigators Costly had never been employed by the production company.

Costly, a Jamaican-born immigrant and aspiring hip-hop artist, has no prior criminal record. He was held in lieu of \$8,000 bail at his arraignment on May 25.

Flushing Town Hall Expanding

Officials at the Flushing Council on Culture and the Arts (FCCA) recently announced plans for expansion of the Flushing Town Hall. Plans for another \$20 million capital improvement project include construction of a six-story building dubbed the "Campus of Creativity" in

a rear parking lot at Town Hall which would offer an international exchange program, residency program, rehearsal space, an education room, technology room and an open studio. Offices currently located inside Flushing Town Hall will be relocated to the new building, creating additional gallery space within the 112-year-old building.

FCCA officials praised Queens Borough President Helen Marshall for her support of the project, but FCCA Deputy Director Cathy Hung said additional

funds will be required to complete the expansion. Hung reminded the public that rental space is available at Flushing Town Hall in the theater, galleries, green room and garden for parties, meetings or recitals.

Flushing Town Hall is located at 137-35 Northern Boulevard, just minutes from "downtown Flushing." For additional information on the proposed expansion or to review a list of upcoming events go to www.flushingtownhall.org or call 718-463-7700.

City Plan to Fight Hunger

City officials last week announced the establishment of a new site in Queens

where those in need may apply online for food stamps or sign up children for the School Meal Program.

Applicants can go to the East River Development Alliance in Long Island City for assistance and access to the online Food Stamp Application process. Parents are urged to visit the Food Stamp Application Web site at www.access.nyc to sign up youngsters for the School Meals Program. The website offers tips on exercise and healthful eating, along with a complete list of available benefits and programs designed to help defeat hunger.

Boat Capsizes In East River, E. Elmhurst Family Rescued

BY LIZ GOFF

A holiday outing on the East River turned near-fatal for six members of an East Elmhurst family on May 26 after their vessel was sunk by a massive wave kicked up by a passing tugboat underneath the Triborough Bridge.

Romulo Valdez, 36, his wife, Carmen Cruz, an uncle, a cousin and two children ages 9 and 11 were out for a day of pleasure on a friend's motorboat, named "Bite Me," a Coast Guard spokesperson said.

Traveling with the boat's owner, the group sailed from Eastern Queens around the Statue of Liberty and was headed back after three hours on the water, when they crossed paths with the tugboat at about 3:10 p.m., Valdez said. "The waves just started coming out of nowhere," flipping the 17-foot motorboat. "All of a sudden we were in the water," he said.

Kevin Neville, 43, of Garden City, was piloting his 31-foot Sea Ray toward Navy vessels docked in Manhattan for Fleet Week, spotted the capsized boaters in the water according to a Coast Guard spokesperson. Neville said he thought he saw a group of canoers in the distance, until he spotted the top of a boat sticking out of the water and a bunch of people bobbing in and out of the water, hanging onto a plastic cooler. "I knew right then that something was terribly wrong," Neville told reporters.

Neville tossed his safety line and a life preserver to the victims, pulling them closer to his vessel. He called the Coast Guard and then one by one, pulled the family members to safety.

Family members later recalled how private boaters passed them in the water without trying to help. "If it wasn't for him [Neville], we would probably all be dead," Jasmine Valdez, 11, told reporters. The family members suffered no injuries, police and Coast Guard officials said.

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