

Editorial

Queens Deserves Marshall's, Bloomberg's Praise

There is no shortage of reasons to be proud of Queens. Borough President Helen Marshall enumerated many of them in her State of the Borough address yesterday, and we concur. Leading the pack, however, was her emphasis on this borough's ability to reinvent itself.

Marshall's comments stressed the public and private redevelopment projects happening throughout the borough—Flushing, Long Island City and Jamaica were three commercial areas cited. The housing sector is strong as well; Marshall noted that thousands of new, affordable units will be built in the course of the next few years. Citifield, the new home for the Mets National League Baseball team, is rising on the Shea Stadium parking lot, and public comment on redevelopment of nearby Willets Point will soon be heard.

Queens continues to progress in other areas, Marshall pointed out. Crime in the borough is down and more police officers are patrolling the streets. A new police academy will rise on the site of the former Police Department Tow Pound in College Point that will consolidate in one campus facilities for civilians, recruits and active police officers—instruction space, support and administration buildings, a field house, indoor shooting ranges, a tactical village, housing facility, driver training fields, K-9 environments, parking, a vehicle maintenance facility and a utility

plant. There have been great strides in other educational endeavors, including more seats for students in all grades in the borough's public schools.

While lauding the borough's many-faceted progress, Marshall did not deny that in some areas improvements are needed. One of every 622 homebuyers in the borough is facing foreclosure, "a terrible figure", according to Marshall. She will address the issue by funding programs offering assistance. Libraries, hospitals, parks and other entities which add to the quality of life in the borough will also be addressed, she said.

Marshall is not the only city official to find the borough of Queens deserving of recognition. New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg will deliver his annual State of the City address at a new ice rink-swimming pool facility in Flushing Meadows-Corona Park on Thursday. Among the many elements of life in the city that Bloomberg will possibly cite as reasons for optimism are record tourism activity—which Marshall is encouraging in Queens through the opening of a new tourism center in a converted "Redbird" subway car permanently parked on the east lawn of Borough Hall in Kew Gardens—the declining number of city teenagers acquiring or continuing a smoking habit, and, as Bloomberg noted earlier, New Yorkers continue to make great

strides in education, quality of life and public safety. In 2007, the school funding process was reformed to address historic inequities, agreements were reached to award bonuses to educators who work in highest-need schools and improve student achievement and progress reports that grade each school from A to F were issued. The 311 citizens' service hotline in June 2007 recorded its 50 millionth call since inception. This year the city's street cleanliness rating rose to 94.3 percent—the highest rating in more than three decades.

Most important, as Bloomberg previously noted, the city is one of the safest places in the nation. Fewer murders were recorded in 2007 than in any year since statistics have been kept. Since 2001, crime has dropped citywide by 26 percent, and schools, public housing and subways are safer than ever before.

New York is the safest city, and Queens is the safest, fastest growing borough. We hail Marshall's pronouncements on the state of the borough and we applaud Bloomberg's decision to deliver his State of the City address in a facility in a Queens park. In so doing, he paid the borough a compliment of the highest order. We thank him, even as we note that his praises and those of others are well and truly deserved.

and it all sounds good. But we won't really know how palatable it is until we find out what's really on the table, what goes into it and what it costs.

I very strongly support and share many of the governor's priorities for New York, but remain mindful of the fact—as does he—that our state faces a potential budget gap of some \$4.3 billion. When we see the governor's proposed 2008-2009 state budget later this month, we'll have a better idea of whether we can afford this menu and what adjustments might need to be made to the ingredients.

George Onorato
State Senator
12th Senate District
Astoria-Long Island City

Wants Space For Pre-K

To The Editor:

As one of the original proponents of universal pre-k, I read with great interest the recent editorial titled, "Free Up Universal Pre-k \$" [*Gazette*, Jan. 9, 2008]. I certainly agree that the benefits a full-day pre-k program can have on a child are innumerable. This is why I supported last year's budget which provided \$146 million in new pre-k funding, bringing the total statewide pre-k budget to \$446 million. New York City is receiving more than half of this money. However, due to overcrowding, space is not always available during the regular school year to accommodate the number of children who want to attend a pre-k program.

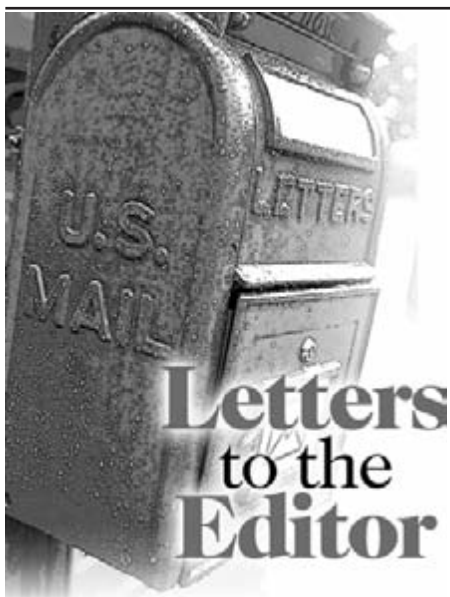
This is why a number of years ago, I

established the first of its kind summer-pre-k demonstration program in New York State. This demonstration program afforded 600 children the opportunity to participate in a summer pre-k program if they were unable to do so during the regular school year. The result was about equal to the present half-day regular school year program.

This program was such a success that I made sure it became law. Now, if a school district does not have the space for a pre-k program during the school year, they can establish a summer pre-k program. Additionally, I also included in the law the ability of a not-for-profit to offer a pre-k program, paid for by the state, as long as they meet all the same requirements as a local school. In Western Queens many pre-k programs exist in not-for-profits at no charge to the children. Unfortunately, [Schools] Chancellor [Joel] Klein still has yet to heed the call and initiate new school construction to accommodate the great need for universal pre-k. The state, in its new building aid formula, will pay for over 50 percent of the cost of such construction.

I urge everyone concerned about the best education opportunities to write the Governor [Eliot Spitzer] and urge him to advocate that universal pre-k be part of the Contracts for Excellence.

Sincerely,
Ivan C. Lafayette
Member of Assembly
34th District, Jackson Heights



Governor Offers Buffet Menu

To The Editor:

In his second State of the State address to the New York state legislature [on January 9], Governor [Eliot] Spitzer presented a highly ambitious agenda for meeting some of the most important needs of New Yorkers. I particularly appreciated his emphasis on providing more support for our higher education system, expanding health insurance coverage for New York's children, enhancing tax relief and establishing a new fund to provide greater affordable housing opportunities for middle-income families.

But, historically, the State of the State address is somewhat akin to a buffet menu. There's usually something there for everyone,

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