



# VIEWS FROM THE HEIGHTS

Jackson Heights – “A Garden in the City”

Volume 33, No. 2  
Summer 2022

Jackson Heights  
Beautification Group

[www.JHBG.org](http://www.JHBG.org)



## Celebrate Historic Jackson Heights!

Join the JHBG in celebrating Jackson Heights, the first planned garden and cooperative apartment community in America and a City, State, and Federal Historic District

### SATURDAY, JUNE 11

Raindate for Garden Tour: June 18 - all other events rain or shine

#### Slide Lecture on the History of Jackson Heights

At 10:45am and 12:15pm at the Community Church, 81-10 35th Avenue; **FREE**

#### Exhibition of Vintage Photos and Memorabilia

From 10:00am to 2:00pm at the Community Church, 81-10 35th Avenue; **FREE**  
Leisurely view many original photographs, maps and brochures from Jackson Heights' early days

#### A Self-Guided Tour of Private Interior Gardens

From 12 noon to 4:00pm. These park-like private gardens, surrounded by 1920s-era garden apartments, are only open to the public once a year. Visit up to fifteen gardens at your own pace, following a map included in your ticket; Tickets can be purchased in advance or in front of the Community Church, 81-10 35th Ave, on Saturday morning; **\$10**

### SUNDAY, JUNE 12

#### Escorted Walking Tours of the Historic District

Rain or shine

At 12 noon. Tickets must be purchased or reserved in advance.

The tours will meet in front of the Community Church, the southwestern corner of 82nd Street and 35th Avenue; **\$10**

#### TOURS TICKET PRICING

Tickets are \$10 for one tour

Tickets may be purchased in advance beginning May 25th at:  
Espresso 77, 35-57 77th St.

For ticket information and directions,  
leave a message at (347) 766-9129



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**On the cover:** Designed with a "sense of place," JH continues to evolve. This cover shows the relationship between our past and present. Kirsten Magnani worked with Melissa Zavala to transform her drawings of various neighborhood gems to emote the energy of those who own them and those who enjoy them today.

## en español páginas 6-7



## President's Message

BY LESLIE ELLMAN

Dear Neighbors,

Happy Summer! Spring in Jackson Heights is truly beautiful. We are so lucky to live in a neighborhood that offers such a lovely palette of colors from spring to summer (and beyond) as each tree, from cherry blossoms to lindens, and flowers, from snowdrops to asters, bloom. We appreciate our urban nature so much that we care for it all year round. In caring for our green spaces, we are also caring for others and ourselves.

Summer brings more people outdoors and strengthens our sense of community as we have more opportunities to come together. We hope that you can join us this year at one of the different events featured in this issue. When we come together, we strengthen our bonds and our community.

Leslie Ellman, President



## Editor's Message

Community Matters BY MELISSA ZAVALA

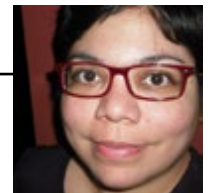
As the year marches forward, the world continues to bear witness to destruction in Ukraine. Grim scenes from that region inspire reflection on the value of community. This issue then considers different facets of civic life joining our diverse neighborhood together before so much disunity and conflict. In this context, we include a range of topics, from a history of the spread of coffee around the world (a drink representing community), to an inside look at one of our local schools, institutions which strengthen society as much as the groups we create. For the first time, we include a full-length article in Spanish introducing the community-building efforts among Spanish-speaking poets and writers working here penned by one of the artists partnering with JHBG, Dr. Guillermo Severiche, scholar of comparative literature. We also welcome new City

Council leadership, featuring a story on Councilmember Shekar Krishnan, along with a profile of a young neighborhood resident whose generosity and creativity represents the spirit of community. We also consider how we can make our area hospitable not just to humans, but also pollinators and opossums, too!

As always, know that we appreciate your support and are happy to hear from you. Please send us your suggestions for stories, articles, and any other thoughts on how we can better serve the neighborhood by emailing us at [info@jhb.org](mailto:info@jhb.org) or writing to us by mail at **JHBG, PO Box 720253, Jackson Heights, NY 11372**.

Welcome, Summer!

Melissa Zavala, Editor



# SUMMER EVENTS IN JACKSON HEIGHTS

## Wednesday, June 8

### JH Art Talks

Rafael Herrin-Ferri, introduced by David Rothenberg  
8 pm. Espresso 77, 35-57 77th St.  
Happy Hour: 7-8 pm.

## Sat & Sun. June 11-12

### Jackson Heights Historic Weekend

8:30 am. A lecture at the Community United Methodist Church of Jackson Heights, 81-10 35th Avenue. Suggested donation of \$20 and \$10 for students and seniors.



## Summer Sundays in the Park Schedule

7/3 Jackson Heights Orchestra

7/24 Teej & The Side Pocket

8/7 Trina Basu, Arun Ramamurthy, Dan Kurfirst

8/14 La Cumbiamba

8/28 SONICA

The events on 7/24 and 8/7 will be preceded by a dance performance presented by Queensboro Dance Festival. This project is made possible with funds from the Statewide Community Regrant program, a program of the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Kathy Hochul and the New York State Legislature and administered by Flushing Town Hall.

If interested, sign up for notifications about Summer Sundays via our website at [www.JHBG.org](http://www.JHBG.org).

All concerts are free at 6-7 pm at Travers Park. Other dates TBD.

## Gardening (Saturdays)

10:30 am. at the gardens at St. Mark's Episcopal Church on 34th Ave., between 81st and 82nd Streets.

## Gallery Night at A.R.T.

(Thursdays & Saturdays)

7:30 pm. New work, free entry and wine. Art Retail Therapy, 84-26 37th Ave.

# The Annual Art Show Returns!

BY BARBARA KUNKEL

After a two-year hiatus, the student art contest was held again this year. The theme centered on Jackson Heights' new greenway, the 34th Avenue Open Street. The participating schools included: PS69, PS149, Our Lady of Fatima, St Joan of Arc, IS145, Garden School, Renaissance School, IS230, PS212, PS280 and PS222. All entries were judged in May. The winners will be announced in June and their artwork will be displayed in several local stores.



# Making Jackson Heights a Home to Bees

BY DAVID WATSON

## HONEY BEES

There are two main types of bees in North America: European honey bees and wild bees. Honey bees pollinate several crops in the United States. Their boxes/nests allow them to be easily introduced in farms or placed on the roofs of buildings. Honey bees, however, do not easily pollinate some native vegetables and fruits.

## NATIVE BEES

Native North American bumble bees are much more efficient pollinators of tomatoes and other edibles as well as wildflowers, native fruits, and berries. In fact, native plants and pollinators coevolved. Regional bees pollinated plants like squash eaten by Native Americans before Europeans introduced honeybees. Today, approximately 3,600 wild bees live in North America in remaining open ecosystems as well as wildflower gardens.

Native bees are different from social honey bees. Ninety percent of native



A typical beehive for domesticated bees maintained by urban gardeners in Queens.

bees are solitary and nest alone. About ten percent are somewhat social. Bumblebees are the only fully social, native bees in North America.

## NESTS FOR BEES

Wood-nesting varieties lay eggs which become larvae inside dead plant stems and branches. For this reason, do not cut back dead plant

stems until mid-April; leave plant stalks up to 12 to 24 inches high. New growth will hide the old stalks. Many ground-nesting native bees need direct access to soil surfaces, often on sloped or well-drained sites.

## SPECIES AT RISK

Many of our native bee pollinators are at risk. Habitat loss, reduced biodiversity, alteration, fragmentation, pesticide use, climate change and introduced diseases all contribute to declines in the number and type of native bees. The status of some wild bees is unknown because there are so many species. Indications suggest that they are losing biodiversity. A recent analysis by the Xerces Society found that 28% of bumblebees in North America are at risk. According to NatureServe, 50% of leafcutter bee species and 27% of mason bee species are also at-risk. In addition, the Rusty Patched Bumblebee

(*Bombus affinis*) has been classified as at-risk under the Endangered Species Act.

## ACTIONS TO PROTECT NATIVE BEES

Jackson Heights gardeners can provide plantings that support native bees by providing wildflower nectar and pollen through spring, summer, and autumn. Local pollinators are adapted to native plants in both their behaviors and in their physical traits. American gardeners are helping protect bees against habitat loss. Spread the word by talking to your gardening friends and neighbors.

At St. Mark's, we have placed a sign that says, "Pollinator Habitat". Please stop by and look at all the native plants and nectar-loving insects. Talk to St. Mark's gardeners to learn more or visit [xerces.org/bring-back-the-pollinators](http://xerces.org/bring-back-the-pollinators) for more bee facts.





# Taking a Closer Look



Our last issue featured an overview of arts education around Jackson Heights. PS212 provides a closer look at how arts education supports their curriculum. BY ARTS EDUCATORS AT PS212, LED BY PRINCIPAL LAURA MINIERO



PreK students perform at an end-of-the-year celebration. Arts education at an early age fosters social, emotional, and intellectual development, with music strengthening literacy at PS212.

Our arts curriculum complements general education by providing students the necessary skills and tools to support their overall learning regardless of subject matter, as well as their social and emotional well-being. In visual arts, students are taught to “Think like Artists”, fostering creativity, often quoted as one of the most desired skills in different work sectors today. Students are encouraged to be innovative, imaginative, and to think critically, essential factors for all areas of learning.

We are proud to expose students to diverse art forms and cultural organizations. Our arts educators (music and visual arts) and partners (Studio in a

## JACKSON HEIGHTS NOTABLES

Highlighting former Jackson Heights residents of notable interest for the ways in which they represent our neighborhood.

### Les Paul

Guitar Hero BY DANIEL KARATZAS

Born Lester William Polsfuss in Wisconsin in 1915, Les Paul was a guitarist and innovator with a legacy that looms large in the music world. He is primarily responsible for the development of the solid body electric guitar, overdubbing, and multi-track recording, three mainstays of contemporary music. But he is probably best known to most for recordings with his then-wife Mary Ford. Les on guitar and Mary Ford's reverberating vocals in songs like “How High the Moon” and “Vaya con Dios” topped the charts in the 1950s.

He began his career in the Midwest, playing with different county bands. By 1938, Les moved to New York City and was a Jackson Heights resident, in an apartment at Electra Court, where Fred Waring's Pennsylvanians and numerous other musicians lived. There, he set up his own underground radio station in his basement (named the Booger Brothers Broadcasting System) and dabbled with recording music. However, in 1941, he was almost electrocuted when he placed his hand in a radio transmitter, claiming that the injury put his career on hold for a year.

From an article posted on the website oldqlscard.com: “Although the station's broadcast radius was small, they still managed to disrupt communications at LaGuardia Airport! The broadcast equipment itself was responsible for Les' near fatal electrical accident. It is rumored many greats of the day previously mentioned



Les Paul and Mary Ford (left) lived in the building Electra Court (right) and were neighbors with many musicians living in Jackson Heights and Elmhurst, both rich artistic communities.



plus Benny Goodman, the Dorsey's and Glenn Miller were in attendance at those jam sessions broadcast from the Les Paul Pirate Station in Jackson Heights, Queens, at all hours.”

While Les and Mary seemed to have moved around a bit in the 1940s, they returned to Jackson Heights and recorded some of their most famous songs. From the October 29, 1951, issue of *Time* magazine: “Their first big hit, ‘How High the Moon’, was ground out in a basement in Jackson Heights, N.Y. Paul first taped the bass rhythm on the guitar,

covered it a few times with guitar chords, ran through it some more with guitar embroidery. Then he dubbed in Mary's voice twelve times, to get the effect of both unison and harmony. Total number of layers: 24.”

Jackson Heights seems to have played a fairly big role in his career over a period of about 15 years. The Les Paul guitar is still sold today, 70 years after it was introduced. And well into his 90s, Les Paul played a regular gig at the Iridium jazz club in Manhattan. He died on August 12, 2009, in White Plains, NY.

School, NYC Ballet, Arts Connection, Flamenco Vivo, CUNY CAT, Joyce Theater, Carnegie Hall, and others) are masters at their specialties, providing a great quality of arts education.

Literacy is a core subject emphasized in classrooms while music is seen as an extracurricular activity students can learn for fun or possibly to give regular teachers a break. However, music can help students develop and be well-rounded. There is value in music for music's sake and it can also enhance and deepen other subject areas including literacy. Many commonalities exist between music and literacy, especially in the pre-K to second grade years, making music education a vital element in children's literacy development. In our general music program, children

practice discerning pitches, types of voices, inflections, contrasting high/low, loud/quiet. Discriminating between similar auditory elements is essential for effective communication. Decoding symbols, letters, words, and sentences, learning visual focus and visual memory, are part of both fields.

Our general music teacher is most proud of the confidence and joy that participation in her music classes provides students, helping their emotional socialization. Singing or playing instruments in front of peers, teachers, and parents during concerts provide children growth opportunities by practicing feeling secure before a group. Some find confidence in their singing voices while lacking it in their speaking voices, or vice-versa. Those lacking confidence will simply get more

exposure and reinforcement through both literacy and musical experiences. Social skills developed in music classrooms may not be emphasized in regular classrooms. Music naturally creates a social environment where students work together to produce common results. They become comfortable interacting with peers in new ways and learning from one another by listening. In elementary school, solos are rare, with group work receiving most of the focus. When students perform solos at a younger age, they learn about self-presentation before peers and an audience.

PS212Q values and supports the arts for their importance in children's development for diverse reasons. We encourage and honor the arts as an integral part of our curriculum planning.



**Community life is enhanced by certain foods and cultures—coffee is one of them. Visit our neighborhood coffee shops and consider the history of this delightful drink!**

Long before Islam conquered Egypt and North Africa, the Coptic branch of Christianity spread along the continent's East Coast, often centered in monasteries. Somehow, priests discovered that the local coffee shrub produced berries containing caffeine, a stimulating compound chasing sleep away.

It is unclear whether the beans were initially roasted, chewed, or boiled, but around 500 AD they crossed the relatively narrow Red Sea to the port city Mocha, in present day Yemen. Mocca entered our vocabulary as either strong coffee or coffee blended with chocolate by inventive pastry chefs. Experiments adding spices and flavors, roasting, and boiling, fascinated people with coffee. It turned out to be a perfect beverage for desert dwellers, drunk from tiny cups needing little precious water and minimal fuel.

Its fame spread north to Medina, at the time the center of the budding Islamic faith. After some religious tussle, coffee was accepted as a replacement for fermented beverages. Yemen

turned out to have the perfect climate and geography for growing Arabica coffee and for 1,000 years was the only supplier. As Islam spread rapidly along the North African Coast, settling on the Iberian Peninsula, coffee did not travel along, remaining popular in the Middle East.

Around 1090 AD, Crusader armies from Western Europe tried to regain control of the cradle of Christianity spending over 200 years battling over the Middle East. Upon returning to Europe, they bragged about silk and strange spices though not coffee. A very active spice trade went on for centuries between Europe and Asia via the Middle East. For a while, Genoa and Venice supplied European nobility with cinnamon, ginger, cloves, pepper nutmeg and more. Coffee played no part.

From the East came the Turks who had adopted Islam, and soon worked their way up into the Balkan countries, becoming the Ottoman Empire. They took over Constantinople (Istanbul), threatening and occupying most of Eastern Europe. The Turks drank coffee—still imported from Yemen—and developed their own coffee culture, still followed in parts of Greece.

Eventually, the curiosity of European scientists was piqued by the strange beverage and by 1550 AD, the Pope was convinced that it was not sinful to drink infidel

coffee, which was spread by the Turkish Ambassador through Italy and France. By 1640, it reached England as a beverage of enlightenment. The Coffeehouse became so popular with learned gentlemen that the ladies of Oxford complained that coffee drinking robbed them of their husbands. The Turks besieged Vienna twice without success but left some coffee bags behind, starting the Austrian coffee culture.

Supply became a problem. Yemeni rulers wanted to control the coffee business and outlandish stories about smuggling coffee beans out of Yemen abound. The Dutch succeeded first, planting it in Java, the administrative island of Indonesia, giving us another term, Java, connected with coffee. Soon, the French and Spaniards brought coffee to the Caribbean and South America. The British East India Company planted coffee in Sri Lanka (Ceylon), but when tea was discovered in India and further East, with its management being easier than coffee, Brits turned to tea drinking.

Coffee in various strengths became the in beverage in Western and Central Europe. A new strain higher in caffeine called Robusta, was discovered. How coffee cherries are cultivated, traded, and processed to fill 2.25 billion cups every day is another fascinating and complicated story remaining to be told.

## Mensaje de la presidenta

POR LESLIE ELLMAN

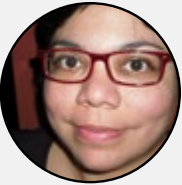
Queridos vecinos, ¡feliz verano! Tenemos la suerte de vivir en un vecindario que ofrece una agradable gama de colores de primavera a verano y más allá. El verano saca a más gente fuera de su casa y fortalece el sentido de comunidad, ya que tenemos más oportunidades de reunirnos. Esperamos que puedas unirte este año en alguno de los diferentes eventos presentados en este número. Cuando nos congregamos, fortalecemos nuestros lazos y nuestra comunidad.



## Mensaje de la editora. La comunidad importa

POR MELISSA ZAVALA

El año sigue su marcha mientras el mundo sigue atestiguando la destrucción de Ucrania. Este número considera las diferentes facetas de la vida cívica al congregarse a nuestro diverso vecindario ante tanta desunión y conflicto. En este contexto, incluimos una variedad de temas, desde una historia sobre expansión del café en el mundo hasta un vistazo a una de nuestras escuelas locales. Por primera vez, incluimos un artículo completo en español que introduce los esfuerzos en construir comunidad entre poetas y escritores hispanohablantes que trabajan bajo la pluma de Guillermo Severiche, uno de los artistas integrantes del JHBG. Como siempre, apreciamos tu



apoyo y estamos encantados de conocer tu opinión. Por favor, envíanos propuestas para historias, artículos o cualquier otra idea que nos ayude a servir mejor al vecindario a [info@jhb.org](mailto:info@jhb.org) o escríbenos a nuestro correo a **JHBG, PO Box 720253, Jackson Heights, NY 11372.** ¡Bienvenido, verano!

## Los destacados de Jackson Heights. Les Paul, héroe de la guitarra

POR DAN KARATZAS

Nacido como Lester William Polsfuss en Wisconsin en 1915, Les Paul fue guitarrista e innovador, con un legado que destaca en el mundo de la música. Fue el creador del cuerpo sólido de la guitarra eléctrica, la sobregrabación y la grabación multipista, tres pilares de la música contemporánea. Probablemente, para la mayoría es mejor conocido por las grabaciones con su entonces esposa, Mary Ford. Les en la guitarra y Mary Ford reverberando voces en canciones como How High the Moon y Vaya con Dios encabezaron la lista de éxitos en la década de 1950. En 1938, Les se mudó a la Ciudad de Nueva York y residió en Jackson Heights en un apartamento del edificio Electra Court, donde estableció su propia estación de radio clandestina en el sótano. Ya entrado en sus noventa, Les Paul tocó de manera regular en Iridium, un club de Jazz en Manhattan. Murió el 12 de agosto de 2009, en White Plains, Nueva York.

## La Madre Naturaleza te necesita

POR LEN MANIACE

Jackson Heights se vuelve

más verde año tras año, y el programa Tree LC del JHBG es un impulso grande detrás de esto. Esta primavera, el Tree LC comenzó a trabajar en un jardín de mariposas mucho más grande en PS69, un proyecto que seguramente tomará varios años. Pero para expandir más nuestros esfuerzos en Jackson Heights, necesitamos aún más voluntarios; esperamos que te nos unas. Para ser voluntario escríbenos a [jhbgtrees@gmail.com](mailto:jhbgtrees@gmail.com).

## Un vistazo más de cerca

Por los educadores de arte de la PS212, encabezados por la directora Laura Miniero. Nuestro plan de estudios artísticos complementa la educación general, el bienestar social y emocional de los estudiantes al proporcionarles las habilidades necesarias y las herramientas para apoyar el aprendizaje total sin importar la materia de estudio. En las artes visuales, a los estudiantes se les enseña a "pensar como artistas", a acoger la creatividad, con frecuencia considerada una de las habilidades más deseables en diferentes sectores laborales hoy en día. Por eso, la PS212Q apoya el arte e invita a que sea le haga un espacio en los planes de estudio.

## El café: una historia

POR ARNO SCHMIDT

Mucho antes de que el Islam conquistara Egipto y África del Norte, la rama Coptica del Cristianismo se extendió a lo largo del Costa Este del continente, con frecuencia concentrada en los monasterios. De alguna manera los curas descubrieron que el arbusto de café local producía una

frutilla que contenía cafeína, una sustancia estimulante que les quitaba el sueño. No está claro si al principio los granos eran tostados, masticados o hervidos, pero alrededor de 500 d. C. cruzaron el Mar Rojo hacia el puerto de la ciudad de Mocha, en lo que hoy es Yemen. Hacia 1550 d. C., la extraña bebida despertó la curiosidad de los científicos europeos y el Papa fue convencido de que no era pecado tomar café, creencia que pronto se extendió hacia Italia, Francia y, en 1940, a Inglaterra. Los holandeses fueron los primeros en tener éxito en cultivarlo en Java, isla administrativa de Indonesia, de donde viene la palabra Java, otro término relacionado con el café. Pronto, los franceses y los españoles llevaron el café al Caribe y a Sudamérica.

## Hacer de Jackson Heights un hogar para las abejas

POR DAVID WATSON

Hay dos tipos de abejas en América del Norte: las abejas europeas y las abejas salvajes. Las primeras polinizan varias plantas en Estados Unidos. Sus cajas/nidos permiten que sean fácilmente colocadas en granjas o en azoteas de edificios. Sin embargo, no polinizan con la misma facilidad algunos vegetales y frutas nativas. El abejorro nativo de América del Norte es un polinizador mucho más eficiente de tomates, otros vegetales, flores salvajes, frutas nativas y moras. Muchas de nuestras abejas nativas polinizadoras están en peligro de extinción debido a la alteración de su hábitat. Los jardines de Jackson Heights pueden proveer de néctar de flores salvajes y polen a las abejas nativas. En la iglesia de ➡



San Mark hemos puesto un letrero que dice "Hábitat para polinizadores". Por favor, pasa y mira las plantas nativas y los insectos amantes del néctar. Habla con los jardineros para aprender más o visita [xerces.org/bring-back-the-pollinators](https://xerces.org/bring-back-the-pollinators)

### Conoce al concejal Shekar Krishnan: en casa en Jackson Heights

POR MELISSA ZAVALA  
Las elecciones locales del año pasado representaron un logro histórico para las comunidades de la India y Bangladesh: por primera vez en la historia de la ciudad, el Distrito 25 eligió un representante descendiente del sureste de Asia llamado Shekar Krishnan. Junto con el concejal Krishnan, también haciendo historia, está el Distrito 39 en Brooklyn, donde la hija de padres de Bangladesh y primera mujer musulmana, Shahana Hanif, fue electa para representar de Park Slope a Kensington. A pesar de la larga presencia e influencia de la comunidad del sureste de Asia en Nueva York, especialmente en Jackson Heights, funcionarios como Krishnan y Hanif son excepcionales también en su poca representación en el gobierno.

### Invertir en su vecindario: Aviv David

POR MELISSA ZAVALA  
A principios de este año, el JHBG fue sorprendido por una generosa donación entregada por un grupo llamado "Little by Little". Fundado el año pasado por las gemelas de 10 años, Bella y Nadia Solomon, el grupo aspiraba a alimentar a los necesitados, poquito a poquito. Comenzando con el impulso de una lata de frijoles iniciado por su

escuela, la Escuela Ella Baker en Manhattan, y con sus amigos, aumentaron sus esfuerzos para incluir venta de pasteles, colecta de alimentos y un concurso de arte para recaudar fondos destinados al dispensario Lion's Share Pantry de la iglesia de San Mark. El ganador del concurso, a su vez, eligió una organización local para donar el premio. El generoso donador y ganador es Aviv David, un chico de 12 años, del sexto grado de la escuela Queens School of Inquiry. Cuando le preguntaron por qué eligió el JHBG, él respondió: "Lo elegí porque parecía que [el dinero] podría ayudar [...] y si donaba parte de mi premio al JHBG, pensé que no se desperdiciaría".

### Reverdezcamos Queens ¡Re-córchalo!

POR MELISSA ZAVALA  
Si el corcho es un producto natural, ¿por qué desecharlo? Mejor, ¡re-córchalo! Organiza una colecta de corcho y llévalo a M Wells Steakhouse en Long Island City, al 43-15 de Crescent Street. Este restaurante está asociado con ReCORK, una alianza de negocios recicladores de corcho que trabaja con la compañía canadiense de zapatos SOLE; juntos promueven innovaciones usando materiales de corcho naturales para reemplazar las espumas a base de petróleo y los plásticos por alternativas sustentables. ¿Qué soluciones verdes te gustaría promover? Escríbenos a [info@jhb.org](mailto:info@jhb.org), o envíanos preguntas o comentarios a nuestro correo regular a **JHBG, PO Box 720253, Jackson Heights, NY 11372**.

## Estamos conectando a escritores con En Construcción Reading Series

POR  
GUILLERMO SEVERICHE



Escritores que forman parte de En Construcción se reúnen para compartir sus labores con una comunidad.

**E**n Construcción nació en 2019 con la intención de darle un espacio de encuentro y celebración al trabajo hecho por escritores latinoamericanos en Nueva York. En nuestras lecturas, cuatro escritores presentan textos no publicados, en proceso de revisión, es decir, "en construcción". La idea es conectarnos con el público y darle una vida más concreta al trabajo solitario de quien escribe, un contacto real con las personas que quieren escucharnos en nuestro idioma. Jackson Heights resultó ser el lugar ideal para convocar el trabajo de poetas, narradores, dramaturgos y escritores de no ficción. Nuestra nueva casa es el **Centro Cultural Barco de Papel (40-03 Calle 80)**, un espacio en el que nos podemos transportar a aquellas librerías de barrio en Mendoza, San Juan, Bogotá o Santiago. En Construcción busca celebrar lo comunitario, las redes de escritura y los vínculos entre personas que disfrutan la literatura y su producción, con textos que puedan estimular a los lectores a nivel emocional e intelectual. Por eso, la lucha por mantener el funcionamiento de En Construcción continúa y es necesaria. La pandemia no nos detuvo. El apoyo del JHBG ha sido fundamental para mantenernos a flote. El poder creativo de los vínculos que se generan en nuestros encuentros nos da la energía para seguir escribiendo y compartiendo nuestro trabajo. Síguenos en Instagram [#enconstruccionnyc](https://www.instagram.com/enconstruccionnyc) y en Facebook o también puedes revisar nuestra página [enconstruccionnyc.com](https://www.enconstruccionnyc.com).

### Connecting Writers With the En Construcción Reading Series

**E**n Construcción was formed in 2019 to celebrate and provide a space for the work carried out by Latin American writers in New York City. During our readings, four writers present unpublished texts in the revision process, that is, "under construction". The aim is to connect with the public and provide more of a concrete life to the solo work of the writer, as well as actual contact with an audience wanting to listen to us in our language. Jackson Heights makes for an ideal place to convene the work of poets, storytellers,



playwrights, and non-fiction writers. Our new home is the **Centro Cultural Barco de Papel (40-03 80th Street)**, a space where we can transport ourselves to those neighborhood bookstores in Mendoza, San Juan, Bogotá, or Santiago. En Construcción seeks to celebrate community, writing networks, and the links between people who enjoy literature and its production with texts that can stimulate readers on an emotional and intellectual level. That is why the work to keep En Construcción going is so necessary. The pandemic did not stop us. JHBG's support has been instrumental in keeping us afloat. The creative power generated during our meetings drives us to continue writing and sharing our work. Follow us on Instagram [#enconstruccionnyc](https://www.instagram.com/enconstruccionnyc) and Facebook, and you can also check out our page [enconstruccionnyc.com](https://www.enconstruccionnyc.com).



Councilmember Krishnan with his two young sons about the neighborhood, often found socializing with constituents.

# Meet Councilmember **SHEKAR KRISHNAN**

## At Home in Jackson Heights

Among the First Southeast Asian Elected Officials, He Now Leads District 25

BY MELISSA ZAVALA

Last year's local elections represent an historic gain for the Indian and Bangladeshi communities: for the first time in the city's history, District 25 elected a representative of Southeast Asian descent named Shekar Krishnan. Along with Councilmember Krishnan, also making history was the 39th District in Brooklyn where the daughter of Bangladeshi parents and the first Muslim woman, Shahana Hanif, was elected to represent parts of Brooklyn from Park Slope to Kensington. Despite the long-time presence and influence

of the Southeast Asian community throughout New York City, and especially in Jackson Heights, officials like Krishnan and Hanif are exceptional also in their underrepresentation in government. Councilmember Krishnan shares a glimpse of his life in Jackson Heights, in a community he is proud to represent.

The son of Indian parents from Kerala, Shekar Krishnan grew up in Rockland County, often coming to Jackson Heights with his parents to shop for food and housewares, and to maintain the types of community ties that sustain immigrant

communities as they build new lives in the United States. This neighborhood reminded his parents of their home almost 10,000 miles away. It now also roots his young interethnic and interfaith family where the characteristic diversity of the neighborhood reflects that found in his own home. His parents' immigrant experience deeply shapes Councilmember Krishnan in many ways. Seeing his scientist parents confront racist structures throughout their careers despite having the privilege of an education and documentation made him especially sensitive to the plight of so many immigrants facing greater struggles. This inspired him to become a lawyer as well as founder of Communities Resist, where he worked as a community rights lawyer for over 12 years representing many clients struggling with documentation and basic rights violations of different kinds, especially housing ones. The importance of housing as a basic right led him to think that where one lives has everything to do with other everyday crises and how they are managed, or not. Mr. Krishnan often begins discussions about the issues he cares about, how he conceives of policy, and other subjects, from the basic principle of the home.

His ideals prioritizing the home also led him to run for office. His years of activism ➡





**Introducing TeamShekar:**  
Weilai Rice, Kevin Montalvo,  
and Chanel Martinez (l. to r.),  
on opening day at the office,  
introducing themselves to  
the community.



The first federal PCR testing site,  
operating at Travers Park as the  
omicron variant surged last winter.

exposed him to deep inequalities which the pandemic only enhanced, crystallizing his desire to run for office to make a difference from within city government. Following years of disinvestment, once the pandemic struck, it was no coincidence that Jackson Heights and Elmhurst became the epicenter of the epicenter. The rights and resources of the area's residents were not enforced or funded. He realized he could serve by helping people where they are, reaching them in their own languages. Mr. Krishnan is multilingual, having also taught himself Spanish. Reaching people and serving them, he says, is what really fueled him to run for office so that our communities get the resources they deserve: "Essential workers from our communities were the very people who were excluded from all of the government programs intended to help".

He is ready to tackle the foundational issues that led him to run as well as others. He says: "We are in a housing emergency. We have to make sure that house owners are not underwater with their payments. Our immigrant communities must be protected, too. They must have the resources they need.

**"Where we live affects  
all of these different  
things around us....  
[They] need to be conceived  
together in new ways."**

Our hospitals are also a priority for me. Elmhurst Hospital is the perfect example: it gets less in funding than any other private hospital does."

Parks is another area where he is already making a difference as Chair of the City Council's Committee on Parks and Recreation. He says, "I see parks as a justice and public health issue," which is leading him to fight to expand green space and advance the plans initiated by his predecessor, Danny Dromm, for a community center in a neighborhood hungry for public space. Other issues Mr. Krishnan cares deeply about include reducing pedestrian fatalities; investing in public schools; addressing land rights, consumer affairs and protection, and immigrant detention; as well as preserving

and diversifying small businesses—seven issues in all. To address these, he is establishing alliances in government. Earlier this year, he met with newly elected Mayor Eric Adams, representatives from different city agencies like the Department of Sanitation and the Department of Transportation, to provide them a clearer picture of what the community needs. The first mobile testing center in the city and the country soon made its debut at Travers Park.

With several new elected officials now joining the City Council following historic wins, voices previously marginalized are being included. Among them are those of taxi drivers whose desperate working conditions have led to several suicides of drivers drowning in debt and earning low wages. Mr. Krishnan wants to tackle large issues like these while also improving everyday matters like pedestrian safety, an issue he experiences viscerally as a father while holding hands with his young sons. He plans to prioritize all of these matters in order to improve our communities. To make this point, he says: "Where we live affects all of these different things around us. Lack of park space, hospitals, safe streets for pedestrians, immigrant rights, and so many others need to be conceived together in new ways. I think people know this about me, but this is the perspective I think is the new element I bring to government. Being a father of two young children also gives me a unique perspective, as does that of being the son of immigrants."

Drawing from these multiple viewpoints, he seeks to represent the diverse communities calling Jackson Heights home.



Shekar Krishnan with his parents, his wife,  
Zoe Levine, and their sons on election day  
when he won his City Council seat.

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# AVIV DAVID: Investing in His Neighborhood

BY MELISSA ZAVALA

Earlier this year, JHBG was surprised by a generous donation delivered by a group called Little by Little. Founded last year by a set of then 11-year-old twin girls, Bella and Nadia Solomon, they aim to feed the hungry, little by little. Given the challenges of addressing food insecurity—a global problem taking special form in American cities—and with the girls being small, the name of their organization simply fit. Beginning with a bean can drive initiated by their school, the Ella Baker School in Manhattan, and together with their friends, they grew their efforts to include bake sales, food drives, and an art contest fundraiser that raised money for the Lion's Share Pantry at St. Mark's Episcopal Church. The winner of the art contest, in turn, selected a local organization to donate half the prize to. That generous donor and contest winner is Aviv David, a 12-year-old sixth grader at Queens School of Inquiry. Born in Flushing, Aviv has been living here for several years. He spends a lot of time in the neighborhood, with the Open Street being one of his favorite elements of life in Jackson Heights—that, the Farmer's Market, and his Malkhut group, a Jewish spiritual community in northwestern Queens which builds togetherness by amplifying a sense of community through local activism. Besides nature, Aviv's main interest is reading fantasy. He is an avid reader and a big fan of the Brandon Mull *Fablehaven* series. Asked why he selected JHBG to share his prize he said, "I picked it because it sounded like [the money] could help out. We don't go out to Manhattan to do things, and if I donated part of my prize to JHBG, I thought it wouldn't go to waste". Aviv and his mother were familiar with the organization, having gardened on 34th Avenue and attended JHBG programs.

A soft-spoken boy, Aviv, is humble about his win and his generosity. His mom received an email about the art contest fundraiser, and they decided to enter on a whim. Aviv had been exploring Pointillism at school, looking



Aviv shows the winning composition earning him a cash prize for an art contest. Both the fundraiser event and his prize supported neighborhood organizations fostering community life.

at unspecified subject matter while considering balance, symmetry, and composition. With one of his interests being the natural world, he narrowed down his choices to a sketch of sea jellies and a woodland scene. He settled on the woodland scene. He was surprised to receive the most votes on the day of the Zoom Art Contest, winning him the main prize! He says about the experience, "I kinda didn't like [winning] because of all the attention. For five days, people said, 'You won!' Now, after all of that, I kinda like it now." Of his winning piece he says, "I like nature. I've never drawn anything like it before and it seemed like a nice concept. I like art. It's fun, but I don't have a special interest in it. This is a school assignment, and I had a good idea for it. I worked really hard on it and my mom helped motivate me". In his characteristic practical and humble manner, he voted for somebody else's artwork among a diverse field of submissions from student artists ranging in ages between 5-17. The win was unexpected, but he is glad he won so he could contribute to his neighborhood's cultural life.

## Wild Sightings in Jackson Heights: Oh-Possum!

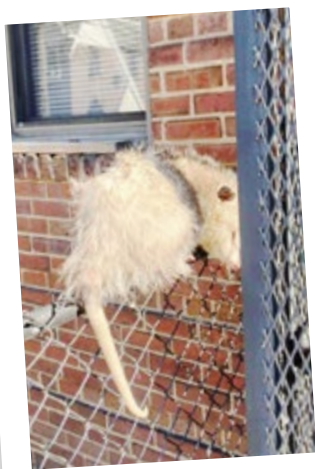
KEN JACOWITZ REPORTS

What is cat-sized, has rough feet and a scaly prehensile (grasping) tail? For anyone guessing this must describe a New York City rat, it might be surprising to learn instead that this identifies the only North American marsupial, the opossum! "It is nice

to see wildlife in Queens", says Ken Jacowitz, who spotted one near 37th Avenue. He recounts his wild sighting this way:

I walked by and was surprised to see an opossum. It was very still, maybe sleeping (opossums are nocturnal). The only movement it made was a

couple of tiny adjustments to its grip on the fence. I imagine it thought it was climbing up a tree to snooze. I don't know where it lives, just that it was sleeping or at least not very active on the fence I found it on. It's an odd place to take a snooze, it probably mistook the fence for a tree.





# Let's Green Queens: ReCORK It!

**Want to do more to slow climate change?  
Here is another green tip!** BY MELISSA ZAVALA

It is one more of those innocuous materials found in everyday things from flooring to cricket balls and fishing rods, also commonly in our homes in the form of wine bottle stoppers. Made from the cork oak (*Quercus suber*), cork comes from an evergreen tree that represents little stress to soils and provides a home to various animal species including endangered European fauna like the Iberian lynx (*Lynx pardinus*) and the Spanish imperial eagle (*Aquila adalberti*). Forests of this oak species are found along Mediterranean Europe where trees are both wild and cultivated, and also along northern parts of the African continent. There are different elements that make cork unique, mainly its thin-walled and air-filled cells which provide insulation from heat and sound, and repel water, making cork especially useful for different purposes. Cork production for wine bottle stoppers constitutes 25-30 percent of cork harvesting, especially in Portugal, where the tradition of cork-making is a source of national pride.

Because cork is a natural product, why toss it? Instead, ReCORK it! Organize a cork collection and take them to M Wells Steakhouse in Long Island City, at 43-15 Crescent Street. This restaurant partners with ReCORK, an alliance of cork recycling businesses working with the Canadian footwear company SOLE, which together foster innovations using natural cork materials to replace petroleum-based foams and plastics with sustainable alternatives.

What green solutions would you like to promote? Email us at [info@jhb.org](mailto:info@jhb.org), or send us questions and comments via regular mail at **JHBG, PO Box 720253, Jackson Heights, NY 11372.**

**ReCORK:** [recork.com/us](http://recork.com/us)

Dead trees were removed from the 34th Avenue median this spring, making space for new trees.

## Mother Nature Wants You!

BY LEN MANIACE

Jackson Heights is getting greener year by year – sometimes it seems day by day – and JHBG's Tree LC crew is a big force behind this.

The group has planted seven trees and adopted 100; it created 50 street-tree gardens; pruned dozens of trees; installed dozens of tree guards; and planted a butterfly garden at the Jackson Height Post Office. This spring, Tree LC began working on a much bigger butterfly garden at PS69, a project likely to take several years to complete.

It's all part of the team's scheme to make Jackson Heights Mother Nature's home in the city.

If you are up and about on 37th Avenue or 34th Avenue before noon on Saturdays or the occasional Sunday you've probably seen our team. We work year-round, usually numbering from six to 14 volunteers per outing, with a total of 70 people participating in a typical year – making it one of the busiest tree-stewardship groups in all of NYC.

When we first started 10-years ago, Tree LC focused on a few blocks on 37th Avenue in the 70s; now it works from 74 to 87 Street; tree pruning the entire length of the 34th Avenue Open Street; on the 75th Street Elm-Jack Mall (made famous by Wink, the penguin statue); with additional tree gardens on 37th Avenue in the 90s.

Our dedicated work has encouraged NYC Parks to plant 66 trees along 34th Avenue median by the end of next spring, and to plant larger-growing trees on both Elm-Jack medians (both north and south of Roosevelt Avenue).

But to expand our efforts to more of Jackson Heights, we need even more volunteers and we hope you will join. To volunteer, please write to us at [jhbgtrees@gmail.com](mailto:jhbgtrees@gmail.com).

the mouth to intimidate predators.

But there is no reason to fear opossums. "It was only scary in that while I do not think it would be aggressive, if you got too close, it might get scared, and I'd also hate to see a child innocently try to pet it," says Mr. Jacowitz. Keep your dogs and cats away from them as well. Mr. Jacowitz adds, "It's great and interesting to see, but wildlife should

be admired from a distance. I got within 3 feet to take a photo and I thought I was maybe testing my luck. Wild animals should be left alone".

What unusual wildlife have you seen around the neighborhood? Send us pictures and share your story by emailing us at [info@jhb.org](mailto:info@jhb.org), or writing via regular mail at **JHBG, PO Box 720253, Jackson Heights, NY 11372.**

Photo courtesy of Clarence Eckerson, Jr.

### OPOSSUMS continued

Opossums (*Didelphis virginiana*) consist of about 120 species and are adapted to life on trees and on the ground. They are omnivorous, feasting on a varied diet, including vermin like mice, rats, roaches, and bugs, making them good neighbors to humans. They also consume animal carcasses like roadkill to satisfy their need for extra calcium. Nomadic and solitary, they linger in places where food and water

are consistently available. Pups are born up to 20 at a time, and transition from their mother's short-lived placenta to the marsupium, a pouch-like structure where young can hold on to their mothers and nurse. Known mostly for "playing 'possum" to protect themselves from threatening animals, opossums can lay still from minutes to about four hours, emitting a foul smell as they bare their teeth and foam at



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**VIEWS FROM THE HEIGHTS – Summer 2022**

## ONGOING EVENTS

**Saturdays, 11am-1 pm**

**JH-SCRAPS (composting)**

69th St. & 35th Ave.

For info on what is compostable,  
contact [info@JHBG.org](mailto:info@JHBG.org)

**Most Saturdays, 10 am**

**Tree LC**

Meets at the NE corner of  
80th St. & 37th Ave.

Schedule may vary and include  
some Sundays. Check the  
[JHBG Facebook page](#)  
for complete information.

**Saturdays 10 am**

**Clean and Green**

For complete details,  
go to [www.jhbg.org](http://www.jhbg.org).

**Daily**

**JH-CREW dog run**

69th St. between 34th & 35th Aves.

To join, go to [www.jhbg.org](http://www.jhbg.org)  
for application. Suggested  
donation, \$25/year.

## FRIENDS & NEIGHBORS:

*Please join us or renew your membership (there are 2 ways):*

Go to [www.JHBG.org/membership](http://www.JHBG.org/membership) and pay by credit card.

It's quick and easy! Mail a check with this form  
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Membership includes a subscription to *Views from the Heights* and helps fund our numerous  
community activities. JHBG is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, so your contribution is tax deductible.

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