



# VIEWS FROM THE HEIGHTS

Jackson Heights – “A Garden in the City”

Volume 34, No. 1  
Spring 2023

Jackson Heights  
Beautification Group

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

## *Spring, a Season for Renewal*



**Help the JH community by volunteering at our cleanups and other events!**  
Go to [JHBG.org](http://JHBG.org) or e-mail [info@jhb.org](mailto:info@jhb.org) to sign up!



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**On the cover:**

**Art by Kirsten Magnani.**

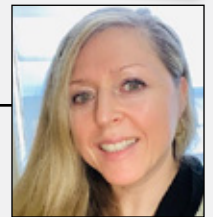
"Inspired by Kees van Dongen's 1908 painting, *Modjesko, Soprano Singer*, at MOMA. Its bold, expressive colors capture the spirit of the singer, dressed in Drag. Spring is a time of renewal and rebirth. How will we as a society emerge?"

**en español  
páginas 6-7**



## President's Message

BY LESLIE ELLMAN



Dear Neighbors,

The seasonal colors of Jackson Heights are a source of inspiration and tranquility for me. Their predictability offers comfort, and yet each season they appear brand new. Every Spring, I eagerly anticipate the white bracts and small flowers from dogwood trees which are quickly followed by the many cherry blossoms bursting with pastels of pink blending with green, before its eventual full green canopy.

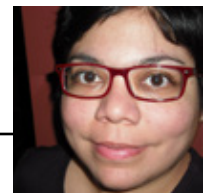
What a sight to witness, this yearly renewal, and what a gift to have all of this beauty around us each year.

JHBG turns 35 this year, and so the annual renewal of our Spring flowers feels even more special. We have a long history of caring for our urban forest and as the flowers bloom this Spring we will celebrate their return and our continued commitment to keeping the neighborhood green and beautiful.

Leslie Ellman, President

## Editor's Message

**Spring Brings Renewal** BY MELISSA ZAVALA



**T**he start of a new year can inspire and also offer hope. This issue consequently considers springtime renewal in Jackson Heights. Following a series of crises, from a long pandemic, foreign wars, political divisions at home, and various urban challenges, how can we improve life locally? Dr. Dave Chokshi, Jackson Heights neighbor and the 43rd City Doctor who served from 2020-2022 during the heart of the global pandemic and economic shutdown, offers a healing vision for countering current social challenges. We celebrate our rich neighborhood life with inspiring stories of renewal, including that of the ongoing support of contributors making JHBG's tree care possible, the energy upgrades unfolding around the neighborhood, and more. For the first time, we are featuring a full-length article in Spanish and English written by

our Spanish language editor, Dr. Julia Erika Negrete Sandoval. She reports on the plight of monarch butterflies migrating from Mexico through our area. We are also introducing a new column highlighting traditional global foods found around the neighborhood and look forward to hearing from you about your favorite dishes!

We are grateful for your support and always appreciate your feedback, stories, and/or ideas on what you would like to read about and how we can better serve our neighborhood. Please share your thoughts 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.**

Happy Spring!  
Melissa Zavala, Editor



# SPRING EVENTS IN JACKSON HEIGHTS

## Jackson Heights Orchestra Concert

**March 15 at 7:30 pm**

at St. Mark's Episcopal Church, 33-50 82nd St. Beethoven's 7th Symphony, Mozart's "Marriage of Figaro" Overture, and the world premiere of Roger Stubblefield's Diversemento for Cello and Orchestra with Louise Dubin as soloist.

## JH Art Talks return!

**Mark your calendars for April 19 and May 17.**

Events will take place at Espresso 77 cafe starting at 8 p.m. (happy hour is from 7 - 8 pm). Additional information on events TBA.

**Stay tuned for updates on this year's Jane's Walk, in partnership with the Municipal Arts Society, held the weekend of May 5-7.**

## Summer Sundays in the Park, 2023, returns!

**Every Sunday from July 2nd through August 27th at 6pm in Travers Park.**

The Jackson Heights Orchestra will open the season on July 2nd! Weekly acts TBD. Stay tuned and follow us on FB and Instagram for more information:

Instagram: [@summersundaysjh](https://www.instagram.com/summersundaysjh)

Facebook: [facebook.com/SummerSundaysJH](https://www.facebook.com/SummerSundaysJH)

Our Summer Sundays in the Park Concert Series was voted "2023 Best of the Boro"!

Join us this summer and enjoy some of the best artists our borough has to offer.



# Helping Hundreds of Trees Grow, Dozens of Curbside Gardens Bloom

BY LEN MANIACE



Even when temperatures hovered around freezing and snowflakes fell, a dozen bundled-up volunteers gardened along the streets of Jackson Heights most Saturday mornings this winter.

What gardening can be done in winter? Tree pruning (something not advisable during much of the year) and litter removal from tree beds, mostly along 37th Avenue (which is always needed).

This year-round effort helped make JHBG's Tree LC the top tree stewardship effort for two consecutive years, besting even professionally

led volunteer groups.

In 2022, JHBG's Tree LC tallied about 1,760 individual tree activities – working soil; adding compost or mulch; watering or pruning trees; planting flowers. (This total does not count work at our two butterfly gardens. See article on page 5.) Our nearest competitor was the NYC Parks Tree Stewardship Team which completed about 1,634 care tasks.

Aside from the numbers, last year was a big year. We established a new planting zone in the low 90s on 37th Avenue, working with local



businesses including a beauty salon, to plant tree beds and care for them.

We plan to do even more this year, taking advantage of our increasing membership. We want to enlist more merchants to clean and, during hot spells, to water tree beds. And we aim to plant lots more pollinator-friendly plants that thrive with minimal care.

Please join us in a project that's much more than a

hobby; it's part of an effort to make Jackson Heights and all of NYC more environmentally sustainable in the face of global warming – because trees are Mother Nature's Air Conditioners. Our volunteers come as often or as little as they want, no guilt. Along with doing good, we have fun, especially at our post-work gathering at Espresso 77.

To join, contact us at [jhbgtrees@gmail.com](mailto:jhbgtrees@gmail.com).



# Ready, Set, Compost Queens!

Sanitation's Queens Curbside Collection SET-TO-RESTART March 27th 2023 BY ASHLEY CRUCE

**N**YC Department of Sanitation proclaimed the Fall 2022 Queens Curbside Organics Program a "MAJOR SUCCESS" that "diverted 12.7 million pounds of materials in its successful first season!" The total amount of NYC's organic waste (yard and food scraps) collected was 14,759,000 pounds during this three-month period. The curbside organics collection in all 14 Districts in Queens represented 86 percent of the city's total.

Queens District 12, which includes Jamaica, Hollis, St. Albans, and Springfield Gardens, collected a whopping 2,220,000 pounds of yard and food waste. Remarkably, eight of the 14 Queens Districts outdid the best performing opt-in district—Brooklyn District 6, which includes Park Slope, Carroll Gardens, and Cobble Hill. BK District 6 has participated in organics collection for nearly a decade, so the new Queens curbside composters dominated the scene!

Our own area, Queens District 3—Jackson Heights, East Elmhurst, and North Corona—collected 280,000 pounds, and like Queens District 12,



was a first timer to Sanitation's brown bin collection. Participation in the Queens program grew 57 percent from October to December, with an added jump during November leaf season.

**With the Queens Curbside Collection set to restart on March 27th, 2023,** we must see (or hope to see) an increase in participation in Jackson Heights and all the Queens Districts. Many of the co-ops, condos, apartment buildings, multi- and single-family homes participated, but there's STILL A LONG WAY TO GO!!

Jackson Heights is fortunate to have many food scrap composting options

and local composters are working hard to keep expanding! We support any and all types of composting to divert NYC's organic waste from landfills to make rich soil amendment for gardens, trees, and parks, and reduce greenhouse emissions.

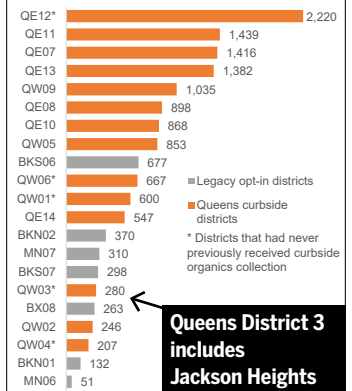
## JH-SCRAPS Community

Compost site every Saturday 11am-1pm on 69th Street near 35th Avenue, and **GrowNYC's Food Scrap Drop-off (FSDO)** at the Jackson Heights GreenMarket every Sunday 8:30am-2pm on 79th Street near Northern Boulevard. The Curbside Composting Outreach Associates at Big Reuse, in partnership with DSNY, are available for educational outreach events in Queens beginning 3/27 (contact them at [compostoutreach@bigreuse.org](mailto:compostoutreach@bigreuse.org)).

*Please note the differences between WHAT is accepted at local community compost sites like JH-SCRAPS and GrowNYC's FSDO at the Sunday JH Green Market [no meat, bones, grease, dairy, etc.] VERSUS the Sanitation Curbside Organics collection in the brown bins, which can handle all food waste at the industrial scale.*

Queens districts are wildly outperforming opt-in districts, some of which have participated in organics collection for a decade.

Organics collected by district since Oct. 3 (total pounds, in thousands)



## JHSCRAPS COMMUNITY

**COMPOST SITE** every Saturday 11am-1pm on 69th St. near 35th Ave. **GROWNYC'S FOOD SCRAP DROP-OFF (FSDO)** at the Jackson Heights GreenMarket every Sunday 8:30am-2pm on 79th St. near Northern Blvd.

Ashley Cruce is a Master Composter (JHSCRAPS, Dunolly Gardens Co-op, & Queens Climate Project's Compost Taskforce)

**NYC Food Scrap Drop-off Sites:** [nyc.gov/assets/dsny/site/services/food-scraps-and-yard-waste-page/nyc-food-scrap-drop-off-locations](https://nyc.gov/assets/dsny/site/services/food-scraps-and-yard-waste-page/nyc-food-scrap-drop-off-locations)

# Retrofitting Century-Old Buildings: Moving Towards a Green New Deal in Jackson Heights

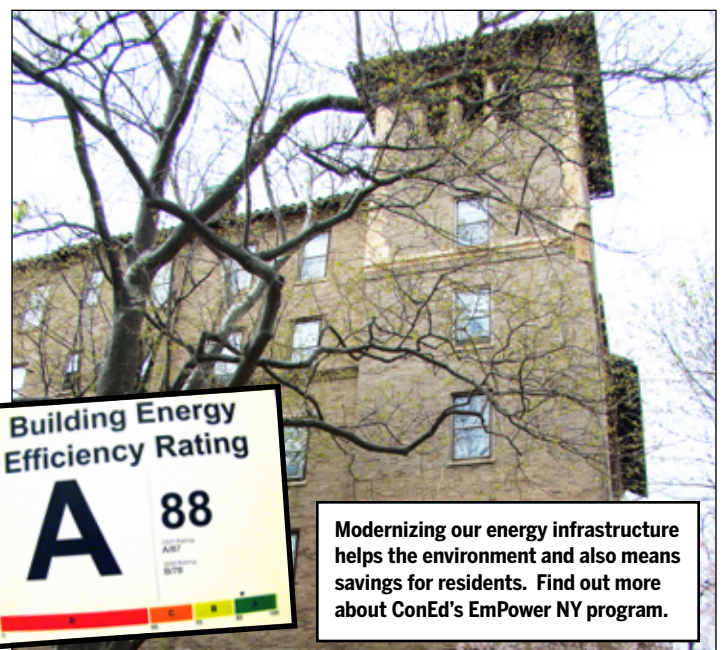
BY KIRSTEN MAGNANI

**W**hat is Local Law 97? If you don't know, don't worry, it is new to me too. Passed by the city council under Former Mayor Bill de Blasio in 2019, Local Law 97 is part of his Green New Deal to address the enormous amount of greenhouse gasses, 80% citywide, emitted by buildings' energy use. The goal is for NYC to be carbon neutral by 2050.

Under this law, most buildings over 25,000 sq. ft. will be required to meet new energy efficiency and greenhouse gas emission limits by 2024, with stricter limits coming into effect in 2030, and stricter yet in 2035. Fines will be imposed when buildings do not comply with the specific year markers. Did I get your attention? Thankfully the city offers many resources. The NYC Accelerator is a good place to start: [accelerator.nyc.gov](https://accelerator.nyc.gov).

This site was launched in 2012 by the NYC Mayor's Office of Sustainability to work with thousands of buildings across the five boroughs to lower pollution and carbon emissions. It offers assistance for finding contractors, provides financial and technical expertise, and helps with general navigation for making buildings more sustainable.

My co-op already complies with the 2024 restrictions and is now planning for the stricter 2030/2035 rules. We're working with our NYC Accelerator representative as a first step to find the appropriate company to perform an energy audit. What energy upgrades will best fit our particular 100-year-old buildings? Will we have to electrify our heating system? Will we install solar panels? Will we have to upgrade our electrical capacity? We will soon see.



Modernizing our energy infrastructure helps the environment and also means savings for residents. Find out more about ConEd's EmPower NY program.

# Making a Home for Butterflies in Jackson Heights

BY LEN MANIACE

**W**ork on the garden began in 2022, with a big assist from Queens Borough President Donovan Richards' office, which arranged for a partnership among PS69; the Long Island City-based Town and Gardens Landscaping; and JHBG's Tree LC team.

The first step in the multi-year project was the creation of a swath of flowers in front of the flagpole on the school's west side. It was planted with many of the same perennials that are magnets for butterflies at the post office garden, including

Echinacea, Black-eyed Susans, Salvia, and Russian sage.

Town and Gardens Landscaping provided 50 pollinator-friendly perennials, 45 bags of topsoil, and the muscle to remove a portion of the lawn to make room for the garden.



Then JHBG volunteers worked topsoil and compost (thank you, JHBG's SCRAPS community compost center) into the soil and planted the flowers.

Town and Gardens President, Richard Pacailler, said the collaboration will not be a one-time deal and the company intends to return this year to



Richard Pacailler and his crew from Town and Gardens work with volunteers to build a butterfly garden at PS69.

help us expand the butterfly garden. Hats off to Richard.

We also want to acknowledge major assistance from PS69 principal Nicole Ciorciari,

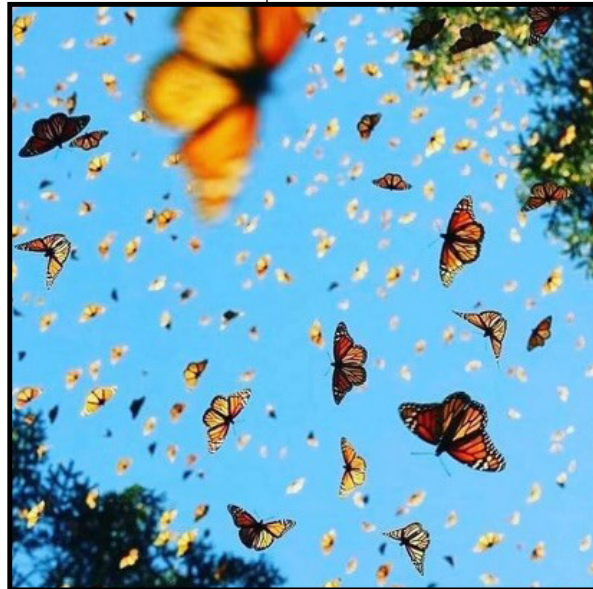
Alcohol and Substance Abuse Counselor Pallavi Shastri, and Building Engineer Frank Vushaj.



## La extinción de la mariposa monarca

POR JULIA ERIKA NEGRETE SANDOVAL

**H**ace algunos meses, como parte de mi trabajo, colaboré en la edición en español de un bello libro titulado Monarca, una sencilla pero conmovedora novela ilustrada que comparte un mensaje urgente sobre las mariposas. Más allá de la historia y sus personajes, el libro nos invita a conocer más sobre esta majestuosa especie, los peligros que enfrenta en su migración anual y el reto más devastador que representa la humanidad. Según la información que los autores comparten, miles de mariposas mueren en el trayecto debido a fenómenos naturales. Sin embargo, cientos de miles mueren durante su cruce por las carreteras, donde son arrasadas por los vehículos a alta velocidad, o debido a la contaminación y el uso de pesticidas que están ocasionando la escasez del algodoncillo (planta que les sirve de alimento y de resguardo para sus huevecillos), pero principalmente debido a la deforestación de su santuario en Michoacán, México, para la obtención de madera o el cultivo de aguacate. Las estadísticas son impactantes: en la década de los 90 había alrededor de 1000 millones de mariposas, pero hoy quedan menos de 35 millones. Ya que, en su migración, las mariposas llegan a volar sobre la Ciudad de Nueva York, mantener áreas verdes es cada vez más importante. Los residentes de Jackson Heights pueden aportar su granito de arena si durante los meses de agosto y septiembre cultivan plantas como algodoncillo y flores silvestres en áreas exteriores donde las mariposas puedan alimentarse. Es importante también reducir el consumo de aguacates o comprar aguacates orgánicos que sean cultivados sin alterar el hábitat de las mariposas. Con acciones pequeñas podemos ayudar a la supervivencia de esta especie en peligro de extinción.



## The Extinction of Monarch Butterflies

BY JULIA ERIKA NEGRETE SANDOVAL

**A** few months ago, as part of my job, I helped edit into Spanish a beautiful book called Monarch, a simple but heartwarming illustrated story that communicates an urgent message about monarch butterflies. Beyond the plot and its characters, the book invites us to learn more about this majestic species, the dangers encountered during their yearly migration, and the most difficult challenges posed by human beings. According to the authors' data, thousands of butterflies die during their migration from natural events, but hundreds of thousands die while crossing highways where they are hit by cars, or from pollution and the use of pesticides which causes a scarcity of milkweed—a plant that provides food and habitat for their eggs. But the main culprit is deforestation of their largest sanctuary located in Michoacán, México, for wood harvesting and for growing avocado trees. The numbers are shocking: in the 1990's there were more than 1 billion butterflies, but today there are less than 35 million. Since butterfly migration sometimes passes through NYC, it is important to take care of our green spaces. In Jackson Heights, residents can help by planting milkweed and wildflowers that bloom in August and September so that butterflies can feed on them. It is also important to reduce our consumption of avocados or buy organic ones, which are grown without disturbing butterfly habitats. With small actions like these we can help this species from going extinct.

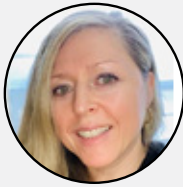


# EN ESPAÑOL

## Mensaje de la presidenta

POR LESLIE ELLMAN

En Jackson Heights, los colores de cada estación son una fuente de inspiración y tranquilidad. Qué espectáculo admirable es esta renovación y qué regalo tener esta belleza a nuestro alrededor cada año. El JHBG cumple 35 años, así que la renovación anual de las flores se siente incluso más especial. Por eso, esta primavera celebraremos su regreso y nuestro compromiso continuo para seguir manteniendo verde y hermoso nuestro vecindario.



tradicional, a **JHBG, PO Box 720253, Jackson Heights, NY 11372**. ¡Bienvenida, primavera!

## Queens está listo y equipado para hacer compost

POR ASHLEY CRUCE

El Departamento de Sanidad de la Ciudad de Nueva York declaró el Programa de Recolección de Basura Orgánica de Queens como un "GRAN ÉXITO", pues "desvió 12.7 millones de libras de materiales en su primera temporada". El programa regresa el 27 de marzo de este año. Se espera ver un incremento en la participación de Jackson Heights y de todo Queens. Nuestro vecindario tiene la fortuna de contar con varias opciones para el compostaje de desechos de comida. El sitio de compost **JH-SCRAPS**, ubicado en la calle 69 cerca de la Avenida 35, abre los sábados de 11:00 a 1:00, y el depósito **GrowNYC (FSDO)** está disponible los domingos de 8:30 a 1:00 en el Mercado Ecológico, en la calle 79 cerca de Northern Boulevard.

## Los destacados de Jackson Heights: Lillian Eichler Watson, pionera de las reglas de etiqueta

POR DAN KARATZAS

Nacida en 1901 de padres húngaro-judíos, Lillian Eichler creció en Harlem y se convirtió en una exitosa mujer de negocios a los 20 años. En 1919 recibió su primer empleo en la poderosa agencia de publicidad Ruthruff & Ryan donde probó su talento, pero no fue sino hasta que entró en el mundo de la etiqueta y publicó su libro *The Book of Etiquette* cuando se dio a conocer en todo el país. En 1928 se casó con Tobias Watson, un doctor de Jackson

**¡No botes tus desperdicios! En vez, conviértelos en abono! Frutas, vegetales, comida, café, té, conchas de huevos, y hasta servilletas y filtros, serán recolectados por DSNY.**



Heights que trabajaba para un hospital ubicado en Calle 73 con la Avenida 34, donde ahora se encuentra la escuela IS230. En 1941 la pareja construyó una mansión en la esquina de la Calle 74 y la Avenida 34, que quedó en manos de una organización religiosa después de la muerte de Lillian en 1979. En 2011 la casa pasó finalmente a manos del gobierno de la Ciudad de Nueva York y la mansión fue demolida; en su lugar se estableció un anexo a la IS230. Aunque Lillian Eichler Watson no consiguió el renombre que tuvo su rival Emily Post, fue sin duda una pionera de principios del siglo XX.

## Modernización de edificios centenarios: hacia un Nuevo Acuerdo Ambiental en Jackson Heights

POR KIRSTEN MAGNANI

¿Qué es la Ley local 97?

Esta ley, aprobada por el ayuntamiento de la ciudad durante el gobierno de Bill de Blasio en 2019, es parte del

Nuevo Acuerdo Ambiental para tratar las enormes cantidades de gases de efecto invernadero emitidos por el uso de energía de los edificios. Bajo esta ley, la mayoría de los edificios de más de 7600 metros cuadrados deberán cumplir con los nuevos límites de eficiencia de energía y gases de efecto invernadero para el 2024. Entre los muchos recursos que la ciudad ofrece, está el NYC Accelerator ([accelerator.nyc](https://nycaccelerator.org)), lanzado en 2012, que ofrece asistencia para buscar contratistas, apoyo financiero y experiencia técnica para hacer que nuestros edificios sean más sustentables.

## Hacer de Jackson Heights un hogar para las mariposas

POR LEN MANIACE

Un segundo jardín para mariposas creado por el JHBG crece en Jackson Heights y se encuentra en la escuela PS69, a una cuadra de nuestro primer jardín en la Oficina de correos de la Avenida 37. El

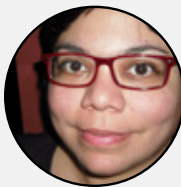
## Mensaje de la editora

POR MELISSA ZAVALA

Este número explora lo que es la renovación de la primavera significa en Jackson Heights.

El reportaje especial sobre el Dr. Dave Chokshi, residente de Jackson Heights y 43º

Doctor de la Ciudad (de 2020 a 2022), destaca la necesidad de una visión reparadora para contrarrestar los actuales retos sociales. Subrayamos la riqueza de la vida de nuestra comunidad con inspiradoras historias de renovación, incluida la del apoyo actual de los colaboradores del JHBG que hacen posible el cuidado de los árboles. Estamos agradecidos por todo el apoyo y apreciamos las recomendaciones, historias e ideas acerca de lo que te gustaría leer en nuestro boletín y de cómo podemos servir mejor. Comparte tus opiniones enviando un email a [info@jhb.org](mailto:info@jhb.org) o, por correo



trabajo en el jardín comenzó en 2022 y contó con el apoyo del presidente del distrito de Queens, Donovan Richards, quien estableció una asociación entre PS69, Town and Gardens Landscaping de Long Island City y el equipo de Tree LC del JHBG. Agradecemos a todos los que han participado en este proyecto.

### **Ayudemos a miles de árboles a crecer y a docenas de jardineras a florecer**

POR LEN MANIACE

Los esfuerzos a lo largo del año han ayudado al programa Tree LC del JHBG a ser el guardián de árboles número uno por segundo año consecutivo. En el 2022 Tree LC sumó cerca de 1760 actividades, como trabajar con la tierra, fertilizar con compost o mantillo, regar y podar árboles, plantar flores, etc. Este año queremos invitar a más comerciantes a limpiar y regar los árboles de las aceras. Deseamos sembrar más plantas que atraigan insectos polinizadores y sobrevivan con el mínimo de cuidado. Únete a nuestro proyecto, sé parte de nuestro esfuerzo por hacer de Jackson Heights y de toda la Ciudad de Nueva York espacios más sustentables. Contáctanos en [jhbgtrees@gmail.com](mailto:jhbgtrees@gmail.com).

### **Hacer comunidad con los animales de la ciudad**

POR GAIL SIEGEL

Parece haber menos gatos por el vecindario que hace unos años. Era común ver gatos cruzando las calles y comida afuera en pequeños recipientes, pero las cosas han cambiado. Quizás el ataque a las ratas ha implicado que, al comer ratas envenenadas,

los gatos también mueran. Es importante que los gatos callejeros sean capturados y castrados para que sus crías no tengan que sufrir por su sobrevivencia en las calles. Con frecuencia hay gatos disponibles para su adopción, y pueden hacer una gran diferencia en la vida de las personas que están solas. Necesitamos un lugar en la comunidad donde la gente pueda pasar un rato con perros o gatos y sentirse más conectado. Si te interesa comenzar un proyecto para compartir mascotas, contáctanos en [info@jhb.org](mailto:info@jhb.org).

### **La renovación de un jardín**

POR DAVID WATSON

Hace dos años el comité de nuestro jardín decidió cortar la invasiva enredadera inglesa de un área muy grande. Queríamos cubrir el área con pequeñas plantas perenes, que fueron elegidas según su época de florecimiento: primavera, finales del verano y otoño. Muchas de esas plantas tenían bellas texturas, especialmente junto a otras áreas. Todavía queremos agregar más tipos de plantas en algunos lugares. También queríamos plantas que atrajeran



Unos de los gatitos callejeros de JH que ahora forman el centro de un hogar.

insectos para alimentarse del néctar y el polen de las flores. Es maravilloso sentarse en las bancas frente a estas plantas y apreciar los insectos y pájaros que se posan en ellas.

### **El Dr. Dave Chokshi, líder en salud pública y vecino nuestro, reflexiona sobre la pandemia y la renovación en la comunidad**

POR MELISSA ZAVALA

Como Doctor de la Ciudad, Dave Chokshi hizo historia como el primer comisionado de salud de ascendencia asiática. Cuando lideró la respuesta a la pandemia, extendió una campaña de vacunación histórica que salvó miles de vidas al mismo tiempo que diseñó estrategias de tratamientos al lado de un complicado plan de reapertura económica, todo mientras servía como portavoz público, en inglés y español, de las estrategias de salud del gobierno de la ciudad. En este número, comparte su perspectiva sobre cómo reconstruir una ciudad más fuerte después de la pandemia. En su opinión, la recuperación incluirá un pensamiento visionario y formas significativas de restablecer la confianza, como el fortalecimiento de los lazos sociales y el ataque a las fuerzas que debilitan nuestra conexión interpersonal. Originario de Louisiana, Dave Chokshi radica en Jackson Heights con su esposa, oriunda de Queens (y de raíces latinoamericanas). Como profesional de la salud, tiene un historial impresionante en liderazgo y labor clínica. En Jackson Heights, es esposo de la directora asistente de una escuela pública en

Queens y padre de una niña de tres años. Su vida personal y profesional moldea su perspectiva centrada en la justicia y el servicio.

### **Un platillo de la comida internacional en Jackson Heights.**

*Destacamos los platillos tradicionales de entre la riqueza culinaria que se encuentra justo aquí, en Jackson Heights*

#### **Biryani: semillas de unidad cultural**

POR MELISSA ZAVALA

La Asociación de Padres y Maestros (PTA) de la PS398 organizó hace poco una cena multicultural para crear lazos comunitarios en la escuela que abrió justo durante la primera oleada de la pandemia. Los padres compartieron platillos tradicionales de sus países de origen. *Biryani* sobresalió, no sólo por su sabor sino por sus múltiples variaciones, desde Pakistán hasta el norte y sur de la India, Bangladesh y Malasia. La estrella de ese platillo es el arroz. Frito en especias de la India, el biryani es aromático y lleno de sabor. Puede llevar mutton (cabra o cordero), pollo, res o sólo verduras. Para quien no haya probado este delicioso platillo, no es difícil encontrar buenas opciones en Jackson Heights: Angel Restaurant, 74-14 37th Road (versión de la India) o Kababish, 70-64 Broadway (versión paquistaní). ¿Tienes algún platillo favorito que te gustaría compartir? ¿Sobre qué comidas y culturas quieres leer? Envíanos tus historias y comentarios a [info@jhb.org](mailto:info@jhb.org) o, por correo tradicional, a JHBG, PO Box 720253, Jackson Heights, NY 11372.

# Public Health Leader and Neighbor

## Dr. Dave Chokshi

### Reflects on the Pandemic and Renewal in His Home Neighborhood

BY MELISSA ZAVALA



In March of 2020, on Friday the 13th, a day generally associated with doom, a national emergency was declared as a new coronavirus strain spread across the country. New York became ground zero, with Jackson Heights the epicenter of the epicenter. Four months later, Dr. Dave Chokshi replaced Dr. Oxiris Barbot as Health Commissioner of New York City, following her sudden resignation over differences with then Mayor, Bill de Blasio, over his handling of the unfolding catastrophe. As the City's Doctor, Dave Chokshi made history as the first Health Commissioner of Asian descent. While leading the city's response to the pandemic, he spearheaded a historic vaccination campaign that saved tens of thousands of lives while designing treatment strategies alongside a complicated economic reopening plan, all while serving as the public spokesperson for the city's strategies—in English and Spanish. The plans he helped devise came to be duplicated in other parts of the country. A leader in public health with an exceptional record of healing, Dr. Chokshi is a very busy neighbor. In this issue, he offers his thoughts on how to rebuild a stronger city post-pandemic using the neighborhood as a positive model.

I met Dr. Chokshi for coffee on a cool rainy day to learn about his life in the neighborhood and the pandemic lessons in resilience Jackson Heights offers. Serving the city both as a physician and a public health expert, his experience of the pandemic guides his approach to healing and policy. The healthcare crisis brought on by COVID-19 has changed our world revealing multiple fracture points, further stressing our social ties. The continued erosion of trust and the epidemic of loneliness that followed so many deaths

continue to present challenges. The pandemic is not completely behind us. This winter, we faced a triple threat of viruses: respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), the flu, and COVID-19. While vaccines and related medical services are still necessary, we face additional demands not necessarily considered directly related to the pandemic. But this crisis consists of multiple interconnected pressures. This will require new ways of thinking about health and community, beginning with how we will respond to crises of mental health, loneliness, and alienation.

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The pandemic produced collective shock. Recovery will involve visionary thinking. Our efforts need to honor the lives lost and the many who made numerous sacrifices, beginning with health workers, and others on the frontline. He says, "I think about these things [health and public policy] not just as a doctor treating patients, but also as a father, husband, son-in-law. The effectiveness of any policy hinges on trust over generations. This is one of the legacies of Covid. We should think about trust and what kinds of opportunities to develop it we can build upon." Recovery for him is dynamic, centering remembrance as a way of honoring each other and our

collective experience of the damages suffered. Focusing on strengthening social ties, and resisting the forces that weaken our interpersonal connections, are meaningful ways to build trust.

This tragedy has produced a critical opening for creating a new society. But this will require transformative change. Loneliness and alienation can only be combated by shifting our thinking, for instance starting to talk about belonging and connection as vital to our well-being. In the case of policy, we should conceive of certain costs as investments in our communities. We simply cannot go back to "normal" given that the staggering number of deaths of people of color, immigrants, and those living in poverty were the result of profound and pervasive inequalities. Reflecting on what has happened and honoring those lost as well as those who put their lives on the line to stem the worst of the pandemic, requires that we never forget the shared traumatic experience that has left so many feeling disconnected, distrustful, and especially alone.

The country is facing a paradox of prevention, spending more on healthcare than other wealthy nations but only managing illness at very high costs rather than enhancing health and wellbeing. Investments must redress this. Tackling the inequalities laid bare will require improving funding for housing, mental health, community life, the arts, and other vital areas. These are the types of necessary infrastructural changes required for improving the lives of New Yorkers, enhancing overall public health, and strengthening social ties. The investments our local civic groups make in our neighborhood are one of





Courtesy of Dr. Dave Chokshi.

the ways in which Jackson Heights also provides lessons in public health. A rich civic life represents a model for growing togetherness and countering isolation.

Dave Chokshi has found himself in Jackson Heights unexpectedly but is glad to be here. Originally from Louisiana, and having spent time around the country as well as abroad, living in New York City was not what he planned, but for his wife who is a Queens native (with Latin American roots) whom he met in Botswana. They see themselves, and now their daughter, represented everywhere in the South Asian and Latin American communities living side by side, making their life here make special sense to them. Asked what he likes most about the neighborhood, he

**Dr. Dave Chokshi feels at home in Jackson Heights where he values the diversity and community found in the neighborhood.**

says, “The people. It may sound cliché, but it’s true. The exposure my daughter gets to food/cuisine, different cultures, languages, and traditions is important to us. It’s also a very walkable place and there is a lot of kinship here”. The strengths of the neighborhood of residents living together in a dense neighborhood, turned into weakness by the pandemic, will once again form the basis of our recovery as a city.

As a medical professional, Dr. Chokshi has a stellar record of leadership and healing. He served as a White House Fellow in the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and as appointee of President Obama

to the Advisory Group on Prevention, Health Promotion, and Integrative and Public Health in 2016. Trained in internal medicine, he also holds an MSc in global public health, and was a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford. He is currently a clinical professor and practicing physician at NYU Langone Health. Last year, he was appointed to CUNY’s School of Public Health and Health Policy as a Senior Scholar. In Jackson Heights, he is a husband to a Queens public-school assistant principal and father to a three-year-old daughter. His professional and personal lives shape his worldview centered on justice and service.

## A Garden Renewal BY DAVID WATSON

**T**wo years ago, our garden committee decided to remove invasive English ivy from a large area. We wanted to cover the ground with short native perennials.

The plants were partially chosen for their bloom times—spring, late summer, and fall. Many of the plants had nice textures, especially when adjacent to other areas. We still want to add more plant types in some spots.

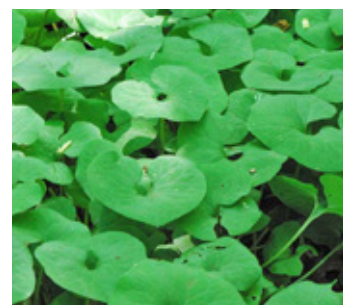
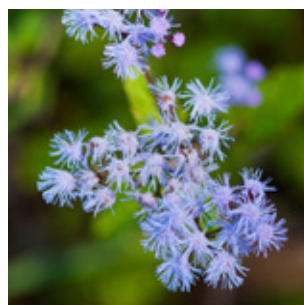
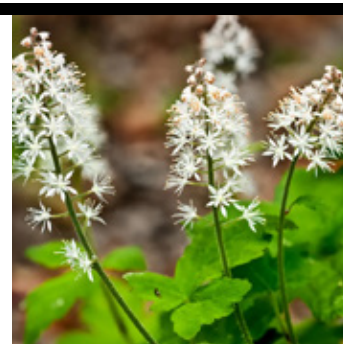
Below are the plants found in the garden now:

- Creeping purple phlox
- White wood aster
- Foam flower
- Pennsylvania sedge
- Canadian wild ginger

Pennsylvania sedge has grass-like leaves. It is beautiful next to Canadian

ginger, which has larger, heart-shaped leaves. Foam flower has misty white flowers. White wood aster blooms in the fall. Creeping purple phlox sends out stolons that increase the size of their patch. The phlox shows a beautiful purple carpet in the early spring.

We also wanted plants that attract insects to feast on the nectar and pollen of flowers. The birds swoop down to pick up some caterpillars. Rather than getting rid of insects, we do just the opposite. Sometimes big bumble bees clamber through the white asters. It is wonderful to sit on the benches in front of these plants and watch the insects and birds. If anyone is worried about stings, it has not happened in our garden over the last two years.



**Clockwise from top left: Creeping purple phlox, foam flower, Canadian wild ginger, blue mist flower.**



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# The Dish on World Foods in The Heights!

Highlighting traditional dishes from the rich global cuisines found right here in Jackson Heights.

## Biryani: Kernels of Cultural Unity

BY MELISSA ZAVALA



The Parent Teacher Association (PTA) at PS398 recently held a Multicultural Dinner to build community at a school that opened as the pandemic first struck, depriving everyone from fully coming together. Parents shared traditional dishes from their countries of origin. Biryani stood out not just for its taste, but because of its many variations from Pakistan, northern and southern India, Bangladesh, and Malaysia. Muslim and Indian families alike enthusiastically described their family recipes.

So, what is biryani? Popular in south India especially, rice is the star of this dish. Fried in Indian spices, biryani is aromatic and flavorful. Slow cooking allows flavors to blend. It can include mutton (goat or lamb), chicken, or meat, or simply vegetables like potatoes and onions. The long-grained basmati rice domesticated in India 10,000 years ago is different from other rice species. It is fragrant and fluffy, and when spiced with blends of cardamom, nutmeg, and saffron, it evokes celebration. The precise origins of this dish are unknown, but linguistic studies suggest it may derive from Persia, present-day Iran, where the name of the dish blends the word for *rice* and the term *to fry*. It spread across Muslim trade centers throughout the subcontinent and beyond. A competing hypothesis traces it to Central Asia where Turkic tribes slow-cooked meat and rice over open fires. It is such a versatile dish that it is no wonder there are so many variations of it as people from different regions personalize it in various ways. Its rich flavors elevated its status, making it a favorite among Mughal emperors for whom Persian flavors were mixed with pungent Indian



spices, establishing its cooking as an art form. It is a dish made to serve large groups, which is why it is closely associated with celebrations. It also provides nutritional balance, blending not just ingredients, but traditions—even among neighboring groups sometimes living in strife.

For anyone who has never tasted this beloved dish, it is not hard to find exceptional options around Jackson Heights. Visit **Angel Restaurant, 74-14 37th Road**, or **Kababish, 70-64 Broadway**, to try Indian and Pakistani versions respectively.

Do you have a favorite dish you would like to share? What foods and cultures do you want to read about? Send us your stories and comments by emailing us at [info@jhbg.org](mailto:info@jhbg.org) or by writing to us by mail at **JHBG, PO Box 720253, Jackson Heights, NY 11372.**



Parents prepare their various biryani dishes at the PTA's multicultural dinner at PS398.

Courtesy of Victoria Medelius



# Communing With City Critters

A Dog Whisperer reports on the healing connection between people and pets.

## Let's Build a Pet-Sharing Community BY GAIL SIEGEL

**T**here seem to be fewer cats around the neighborhood compared to a few years ago. The 14-building complex where I live used to have feral cats that were caught and neutered, fed, and provided with shelter, living many years in and out of the back garden. It is very important for stray cats to be caught and neutered so that their populations don't grow too much and their offspring don't have to struggle to survive on the streets.

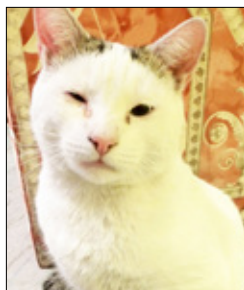
It was common to see cats crossing streets, and

food left out for strays, but things seem to have changed. They seem to have disappeared and may have passed away without being replaced. Perhaps the assault on rats has meant that if cats eat poisoned rats, the cats also die. I have no idea what happened and if anyone can provide a clue it could update a mystery.

Cats are often available for adoption and may make the difference for people between living lonely solitary lives or having loving companions for support. If cats could be prescribed as a needed



antidote to loneliness and despair, it could be a therapeutic aid for lonely people to have a place to go to pet cats or take dogs for walks. Perhaps we need to have a site in the neighborhood where people could drop in to spend time with cats or dogs to feel connected. For anyone interested in starting a pet-sharing system, contact us at [info@jhb.org](mailto:info@jhb.org).



## JACKSON HEIGHTS NOTABLES

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

### Lillian Eichler Watson

**An Etiquette Pioneer** BY DANIEL KARATZAS

**H**er life reads like a true Horatio Alger story. Born to Hungarian-Jewish immigrants in 1901, raised in Harlem, and smart as a whip, Lillian Eichler was a business success by the age of 20. After graduating from Morris High School in the Bronx, she was hired by the powerful Manhattan advertising agency of Ruthrauff & Ryan in 1919. She soon proved to have a knack for advertising copy, working for such clients as Rinso laundry soap, Lifebuoy soap, and Cocomalt vitamin supplements.

It was when she branched out into the field of etiquette, however, that she became nationally known. After writing an advertising copy for Doubleday's unsuccessful etiquette book, she decided to write one of her own. In 1921, Lillian Eichler's, *The Book of Etiquette*, proved to be just what the Jazz Age wanted. By the end of the decade, it had sold over 2 million copies. Sales continued, in revised editions, through the 1950s.

She married Dr. Tobias Watson in 1928. Her husband practiced at Physician's Hospital in Jackson Heights, which was located at the southeast corner of 73rd Street and 34th Avenue. Today, it is the current site of IS230. In 1941, they built a neo-Tudor mansion at the northeast corner



of 74th Street and 34th Avenue, diagonally across from the hospital. This was their home residence and Dr. Watson also had an office there where he would see patients. And although Lillian more or less "retired" from the world of advertising by the time of her marriage, she continued to write other books – on literature, letter writing, and social manners – over the next few decades.

Physician's Hospital was torn down and replaced with Intermediate School 230 in the early 2000s.

The Eichler-Watson mansion, which had been left to a religious organization after Lillian's death in 1979, suffered from years of neglect, and its large 100' by 100' lot was no doubt eyed by many real estate developers over the years. A neighbor was seriously interested in purchasing the house to use as a residence. However, the property did not have a clear title and he was unable to close on it. That is likely the reason why the house had never been "redeveloped" into an apartment building during the years between Eichler's death and the construction of the school building. The property was ultimately taken by New York City in 2011, via eminent domain, and the mansion was demolished. On the site rose the IS230 Annex.

While Lillian Eichler Watson never achieved the renown and longevity that her rival Emily Post has had, she was, without doubt, an extremely successful pioneer businesswoman of the early 20th century. A self-made millionaire by her 20s, she was also a Jackson Heights resident!



The Eichler-Watson mansion when it was home to the couple was replaced by the IS230 Annex.





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**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  
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**Saturdays 10 am**

**Clean and Green**

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**Daily**

**JH-CREW dog run**

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

To join, go to [info@JHBG.org](mailto:info@JHBG.org)  
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