



VIEWS FROM THE HEIGHTS

Volume 35, No.1
Spring 2024

Jackson Heights
Beautification Group

www.JHBG.org

Jackson Heights – “A Garden in the City”

Spring has Sprung!

The Gardens of Jackson Heights



Help the JH community by volunteering at our cleanups and other events!
Go to JHBG.org or e-mail info@jhb.org to sign up!

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On the cover: Art by Kirsten Magnani.

Global warming made 2023 the hottest year on record. Let's support our ecosystem by planting indigenous plants which have evolved with local insect species. What will you plant in your building's front garden?

**en español
páginas 6-7**

President's Message

BY LESLIE ELLMAN



With the arrival of Spring, I eagerly anticipate the bursts of color that brighten our neighborhood. The mere anticipation of this yearly gift makes me realize how fortunate we are to live in a community with so many gardens!

Highlighted each year during our Historic Weekend tours are our many historic co-ops boasting impressive interior gardens, but those are not the only ones around. Our tree beds and medians are gardens. Gardens in front of private homes are also part of this landscape. Walking through Jackson Heights in the Spring is like walking through an urban garden!

This issue is all about gardens and I want to thank all of the gardeners for taking the time to care for all of these beautiful spaces. When you care for a garden, whether public or private, you add to the health and joy of our entire community. Thank you, Gardeners!

Happy Spring to all!

Leslie Ellman, President



Editor's Message

The Earth Laughs in Flowers BY MELISSA ZAVALA

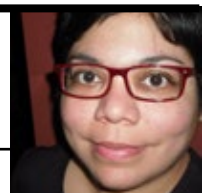
The great American Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson represents Earth's laughter in the form of flowers in his poem "Hamatreya" (1846), reminding us that we are not in control and that in death we must return to earth. Spring represents the fullness of life in different ways, as plants awaken, producing blooms that delight insects, birds, gardeners, and passersby. Religious celebrations also mark the season's spirit of renewal.

As a garden community, Jackson Heights is special. This issue therefore honors our neighborhood gardens, plants, and the community they foster. But as gardeners know, there are also plants that challenge us. Such is the case of *Cannabis sativa* or marijuana. This issue explores the spread of smoke

shops while also reflecting on the betel leaf and the impacts of public garden spaces. It also reports on tree displacements and threats to parkland, announces the launch of new projects like Rudy Greco's law podcast, and more.

A note on our recap of 2023 last winter: the Supermoons in August did not occur during the zodiac sign of Aquarius which happens at the start of the year, rather during the Aquarius moon, considered especially influential on emotions. We regret the error.

As the year unfolds, we wish to thank everyone for their ongoing support. Send us your stories and/or ideas and other suggestions. Do you want to see special neighbors featured here? Please share your thoughts by emailing us at info@jhb.org or writing to us by mail at JHBG, PO Box 720253, Jackson Heights, NY 11372.





Spring Events in Jackson Heights

The Jackson Heights Beautification Group Presents

JACKSON HEIGHTS ORCHESTRA

7:30 P.M. **WED, MAR 13, 2024**
ST. MARK'S CHURCH
 33-50 82ND ST
 JACKSON HEIGHTS, NY

Concert is free
 \$20 suggested donation
 Visit JHORCHESTRA.ORG/DONATE
 to make a gift to the JHO.

CLAIRE MYERS MCCORMICK
SOPRANO

ALEX WEN
INTERIM ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

A journey through the lineage of an American music tradition

COPLAND	<i>Fanfare for the Common Man</i>
ELLINGTON	<i>Selections</i>
BURLEIGH	<i>Three Spirituals</i>
DVOŘÁK	<i>Biblical Songs & Symphony No. 8</i>

@JHORCHESTRA
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Arts Events

JH Art Talks

Mark your calendars for **Wed. April 17** and **Wed. May 15** at Espresso 77, 8 pm. with Happy Hour at 7 pm. For more up-to-date information, visit JHAT's website: jharttalks.com

The Jackson Heights Art Club

meets at St. Mark's Episcopal Church, 3350 82nd St.

- **Painting Demo Sun. April 14, 2pm.**
- **The Members Annual Show Sun. May 19**, all day, Awards and Reception, 6pm.
- **The Summer Annual Outdoor Art Show Sat. June 8**, will be on display on the fence at IS145, 34th Ave. between 79th and 80th Streets. For neighborhood artists interested in displaying their work, contact the JH Art Club at: mjlamy@msn.com
- **The Children's Art Class Saturdays 12:30-2pm.**

En Construcción Reading Series

Spring Events:

- **Sat. April 6, 7pm.** Meetings are in Spanish at Librería Barco de Papel, 4003 80th St.
- **En Construcción's 5-year Anniversary: Sat. May 4.** Mark your calendars!

Gardening Clean Streets

Join Clean Streets on **Sat. April 13** at Louis Armstrong Middle School on Junction Blvd. at 9am and let's keep the neighborhood neat!

School Announcements Open House

82nd Street Academics at the United Methodist Church at (8110 35th Ave.) is hosting an Open House on **Fri. March 8** at 3pm for families enrolling children in the UPK program starting in September.

Universal PreK

PreK for All: Children eligible to participate in the 3-year-old

preschool program in the 2024-25 school year must turn 3 years old on or before December 31, 2024. For UPK they must turn 4 years old on or before December 31, 2024. These programs are FREE, sponsored by the Department of Education, New York City. Students are accepted at no cost to families. The 3K and UPK programs are **open daily, Monday through Friday**. All programs have a duration of 6 hours and 20 minutes. There is no part-time option. For more information please contact 718-457-0429.

Summer Scientist Program

Summer Preschool 2024!

Summer is a great time for families to work on the transition challenge because of the fun and engaging atmosphere at 82nd Street Academics. This Summer Preschool experience offers children a happy start to preschool using science activities! Classes run for 8 weeks, from **July 1 to August 23**. Students will explore and develop the theme "Summer Scientists". For more information on summer learning and fun, please contact 718-457-0429.

An Alternative to the Cohen Casino We Can Build On

BY LEN MANIACE

Opponents of a mammoth casino complex proposed next to Citi Field have a new cause to rally around—the creation of a 50-acre park on the same site, the stadium parking field.

This alternative plan preserves the parking spaces now at Citi Field, creating above-ground garages, one of which would be covered by hillside that would be part of the park, which despite its current use, is official city parkland. Still a work-in-progress, the proposal is called *Phoenix Meadows*, a reference to the mythical creature that rises from ashes, and the site's past life as a large ash heap.

Phoenix Meadows is proposed by FED UP, a coalition of groups and the non-profit organization Guardians of Flushing Bay concerned about the impact of several large developments proposed for the area, including the casino-hotel-entertainment plan of hedge-fund billionaire and Mets owner, Steven Cohen.

The park proposal represents a third choice to what the Cohen team has said is limited to either his glittering development



The proposed park would cover 50 acres and would contain trees, lawns, rain ponds to capture runoff, and a hillside covering a parking garage located to the left of Citi Field in image. It would also include recreation areas atop two other garages.

or an asphalt parking lot. The Guardians' executive director, Rebecca Pryor, presented Phoenix Meadows to several JHBG board members in January. Cohen representatives

made their pitch to JHBG in August.

Pryor's presentation included more details on several features of the casino plan not fully outlined in the Cohen team's description: the proposed development would cover 18 acres, the same footprint as the Javits Convention Center; it would include two towers, from 15 to 26 floors; and a key piece of parkland between the casino and Citi Field would be compromised considering the need to build the structure on a 12-foot elevation because of growing climate change risks. The difference in elevation between the complex and nearby Citi Field, which rests on ground level, would result in a hillside that would make current parkland less usable, Pryor said.

What's more, the proposed hotel could include up to 2,300 rooms, according to a planning document submitted by the Cohen team, further crowding an area already underserved by city amenities.

See the current version of Phoenix Meadows at queensforall.com/phoenix-meadows-vision-plan ♦

Beauty Throughout Winter and Into Spring at The Towers

BY DAVE WATSON

The Towers has many beautiful plants in its front gardens which include:

Calico aster
(*Symphotrichum lateriflorum*)
Northern sea oats
(*Chasmanthium latifolium*)
Bluestem goldenrods (*Solidago caesia*)
Golden ragwort (*Packera Aurea*)
Joe-Pye weed (*Eupatorium maculatum*)
Swamp milkweed
(*Asclepias incarnata*)
Goldenrods (*Solidago*)
Seaside goldenrods
(*Solidago sempervirens*)
Bluestar (*Amsonia*)
Purple coneflower (*Echinacea*)
New England aster
(*Symphotrichum novae-angliae*)
Obedient plant
(*Physostegia virginiana*)

These gardens also incorporate the plant big bluestem, which is the most widely distributed of all the prairie grasses. Its leaves and stems change colors with the first frost, turning a deep reddish bronze. This tall grass provides interest well into the winter.

The Towers also has many plants in the areas between the buildings. One of them is the Common blue wood aster or crooked stem aster. This inhabitant of woodlands, stream banks and moist meadow provides great fall color. Another beautiful specimen is blue-purple flowers growing on stems one to three feet tall. Besides these, there are also the following:

Sedge (*Carex*)
Goat's beard (*Aruncus dioicus*)

Christmas fern
(*Polystichum acrostichoides*)
White wood aster
(*Eurybia divaricata*)
Ostrich fern
(*Matteuccia struthiopteris*)
Columbine (*Aquilegia*)
Black cohosh
(*Actaea racemosa*)
Mapleleaf viburnum
(*Viburnum acerifolium*)

All of these plants, especially together, make for great habitat for area insects and birds. The ecological benefits of changing dependency on chemicals, reducing watering, and less maintenance, are all great reasons for choosing native varieties. Planting different types of plants is an investment in our future. ♦



Coneflowers and native species are creating habitat around more conventional garden areas.



JACKSON HEIGHTS NOTABLES

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

Gene Simmons

The Demon from Jackson Heights

BY DAN KARATZAS

He probably has one of the most famous tongues in the world. In fact, his tongue became, more or less, his trademark. That person is performer and former Jackson Heights resident, Gene Simmons, of the rock band KISS.

Born in 1949 in Israel, Chaim Witz and his by then-divorced mother, emigrated to the United States in 1957. Upon arrival, his mother changed her son's name to Eugene Klein. They eventually found their way to Jackson Heights, residing at 33-51 84th Street. Gene attended PS92, IS145, later graduating from Newtown High school. His bar mitzvah was held at the Jewish Center of Jackson Heights.

At IS145 Gene Klein enjoyed working on the school newspaper but found his true calling in music class. He helped form a band called the Missing Links, ultimately leaving it, joining, and leaving a few other bands. While at Newtown High School

he joined the choir. Gene's rather straight-arrow persona during his teens remains in stark contrast to his antics as a member of the band KISS. But his "behind-the-scenes" lifestyle has never changed; Simmons remains a teetotaler to this very day.

After high school, Gene obtained an associate and then a bachelor's degree. He held a variety of jobs, but music remained his passion. He played at a number of local venues, including the Beehive Club in Flushing. Eventually he joined with Paul Stanley to form the band Wicked Lester. They were signed by Epic records, but their first album was never released. They forged on, and Peter Criss and Ace Frehley later joined them. It was this foursome that became the band we know as KISS.

KISS' first album came out in 1974, and the band became a huge success



The entrance to Gene Simmons' childhood home on 84th Street, just off 34th Avenue.

in the 1970s. All four group members wore makeup and dressed in elaborate costumes for the first decade or so of the band's existence. Gene played bass guitar, vomiting blood, and exposing his very long tongue, among many other well-known antics. And though their music has been criticized for different reasons, the band has amassed a vast number of fans over the last fifty years.

Inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2014, Simmons has always been regarded as an astute

businessman, with a net worth in the hundreds of millions of dollars. Unlike other musicians, he avoided drugs and alcohol, focusing instead on a variety of business endeavors: author, songwriter, comic book publisher, among other activities.

In a 2006 episode of his reality TV program *Family Jewels*, Simmons, his wife the former Playboy model Shannon Tweed, and their two children visited Gene's old apartment building in Jackson Heights. A touching moment for Gene Simmons, a local boy who made good! ♦

Street Trees are Getting Kicked Off Curbs

BY LEN MANIACE

Talk about strange sights: four trees mysteriously planted in the middle of an Astoria sidewalk—right where people walk and push baby carriages.

Faced with resident uproar, NYC Parks pulled the trees as quickly as they were planted. An agency spokesperson explained the unusual site was chosen because underground power lines prevented trees from being planted near the curb.

What does this tale have to do with Jackson Heights? Plenty. Many curbside locations here are also off-limits to new trees. In those places, trees die, stumps rot, and trees are never replaced. One of the neighborhood's pricier developments, The Towers, is not getting new trees on either 80th or 81st Streets. That's not the only place where resident tree requests are rejected due to "infrastructure conflict".

So why does this matter? There's a big push in NYC to increase tree canopy to better cope with global warming. Simply put, trees are Mother Nature's air conditioners. Neighborhoods with many trees are significantly cooler than those lacking them. But how will New York meet this goal with fewer places to plant street trees?

Underground infrastructure, such as gas and electric lines, is just one of a growing



Finne Murphy



An uproar greeted four trees planted mid-sidewalk in Astoria. Street trees are not being planted in Jackson Heights with similar red or yellow sidewalk markings, indicating electric and gas lines respectively.



number of threats to planting more street trees. More than 2,000, 32-foot tall 5G Wi-Fi towers are being installed along curbs; thousands of underground pits, also along curbs, are being dug to prevent flooding or reduce sewer plant overloads; Citi Bike docks and various city street furniture are taking up more spaces where trees could have been planted. And the list goes on.

Under pressure to plant trees to make the city more environmentally resilient, NYC Parks is looking for new ways to get trees into the ground in off-limit areas, though a solution has yet to present itself. ♦

Love, Deuce, Smash! Let's Play Tennis, Jackson Heights!

BY MELISSA ZAVALA



The origins of tennis are not entirely known. With roots in 12th century French monasteries, later popularized by Henry VIII's court in England, the sport has uncommon terms, evolving equipment and playing surfaces. From white to yellow balls, real or artificial grass to clay, and from using the palms of the hand to rackets made of different materials, the sport keeps changing. One misconception is that tennis is for the rich. Associations with exclusive clubs contradict its accessibility. With a can of balls and a racket as inexpensive as \$20, players can enjoy this outdoor sport, enhancing their health, coordination, and social connections.

Unlike the private courts created for the exclusive community envisioned by the President of the Queensboro Corporation, Edward Archibald

MacDougall, the neighborhood features two courts adjacent to the Garden School in an expanded Travers Park. Before its 2019 renovation promoted by former Council Member Danny Dromm, local tennis enthusiasts played daily in a corner of the open asphalt playground. A spirit of friendly competition grew under the late Sergio Lamarque, JHBG's 2015 "Good Neighbor" award winner, remembered as the unofficial founder

of the Neighborhood Tennis Group. The current fenced-in tennis courts became a reality after the lobbying efforts of Ralph Feliciello and Juttana (Moo) Rimreartwate. The courts served as a safe meeting place for a growing group of neighbors during the pandemic, building community. The Tennis Group promotes the sport by mounting what they hope will be an annual tradition: the Travers Park Tennis Tournament

under the leadership of Monica Vergara. The tournament occurred last October, but residents can expect the next one this summer.

Join the Tennis Group and play a healthy sport that is more than recreational. Now turning out a generation of young players, this group encourages new friendships and a dedication to improving the park for everyone to enjoy. ♦



Tournament participants celebrate the first neighborhood competition, soon to be an annual tradition.

Courtesy of Ralph Feliciello

Mensaje de la presidenta

POR LESLIE ELLMAN

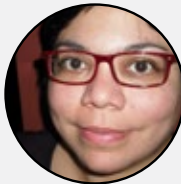
Con la llegada de la primavera, espero con entusiasmo la explosión de colores que enciende a nuestro vecindario. Caminar en Jackson Heights durante la primavera es como caminar en un jardín urbano; por eso, este número es sobre los jardines. Quiero agradecer a todos los jardineros que se toman el tiempo para cuidar estos bellos espacios. Cuando cuidas un jardín, ya sea público o privado, contribuyes al bienestar y la alegría de la comunidad entera. ¡Muchas gracias, jardineros, y feliz primavera para todos!



Mensaje de la editora: las flores son la risa de la Tierra

POR MELISSA ZAVALA

La primavera representa la plenitud de la vida de diferentes maneras: las plantas despiertan y florecen para deleitar a insectos, pájaros, jardineros y viandantes. Las celebraciones religiosas también señalan su espíritu de renovación. Como comunidad de jardineros, Jackson Heights es especial. Por eso, este número es un homenaje a nuestros jardines, plantas y la comunidad que los cultiva, entre otros temas. Queremos agradecer a todos por su apoyo. ¿Te gustaría ver a un vecino especial en el boletín? Envíanos tus historias, ideas, sugerencias o comentarios por email a info@jhb.org o por correo tradicional a JHBG, PO Box 720253, Jackson Heights, NY 11372.



Los notables de Jackson Heights: Gene Simmons, el Demonio de Jackson Heights

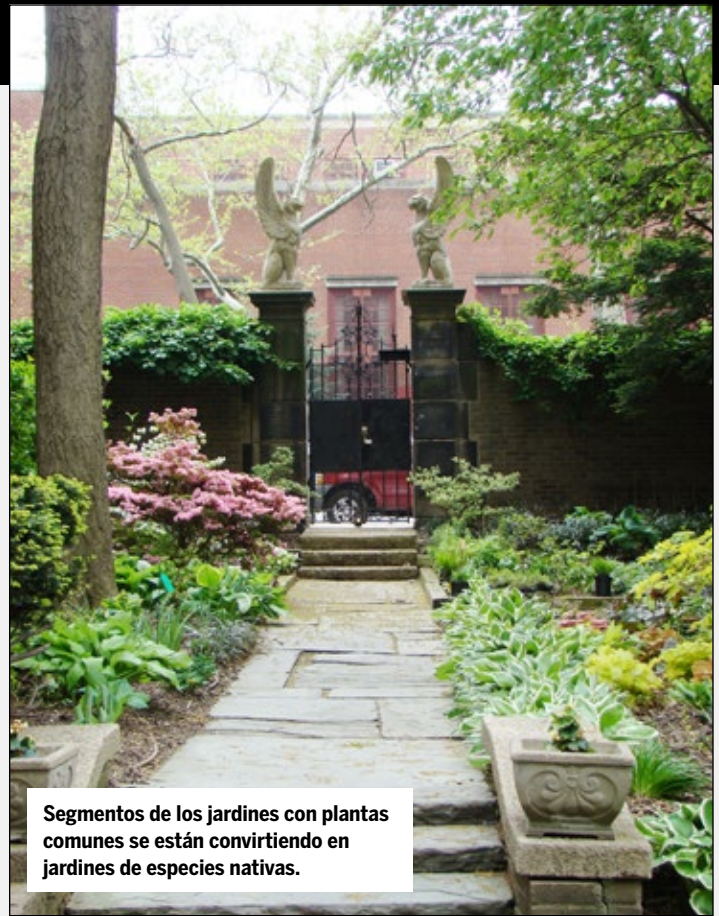
POR DAN KARATZAS

Tiene una de las lenguas más famosas del mundo. De hecho, su lengua llegó a ser, más o menos, su marca. Se trata del músico Gene Simmons, integrante de la banda de rock KISS, quien residió en Jackson Heights. Nacido en Israel en 1949, Chaim Witz y su madre emigraron a los Estados Unidos en 1957. Después de su llegada, su madre le cambió el nombre por Eugene Klein. En Jackson Heights encontraron un hogar en el 33-51 de la Calle 84. La música siempre fue su pasión: tocó en varios recintos, como el Beehive Club in Flushing, hasta que formó la banda Wicked Lester con Paul Stanley, a la que más tarde se unirían Peter Criss y Ace Frehley, y finalmente sería conocida como KISS. En un episodio de 2006 del programa de telerealidad *Family Jewels*, Simmons, su esposa Shannon Tweed y sus dos hijos visitaron el viejo apartamento de Gene en un edificio de Jackson Heights. Fue un momento conmovedor para Simmons, un chico del barrio que la hizo en grande.

Alternativa al Casino Cohen sobre la que podemos construir

POR LEN MANIACE

Los oponentes a la construcción del casino a un lado de Citi Field tienen una nueva causa por la que solidarizarse: la creación de un parque de 50 acres en el mismo sitio. Este plan alternativo preserva los espacios del parque ahora en Citi Field con la creación de estacionamientos elevados, uno de los cuales será cubierto



Segmentos de los jardines con plantas comunes se están convirtiendo en jardines de especies nativas.

por ladera que será parte del parque, que pese a su uso actual es parte de las áreas verdes. Esta propuesta hecha por FED UP, una coalición de grupos y la organización sin fines de lucro Guardians of Flushing Bay, lleva el nombre de *Phoenix Meadows*. La directora ejecutiva de Guardians, Rebeca Pryor, presentó el proyecto a varios miembros del JHBG en enero. Para ver la versión actual de Phoenix Meadows haz clic aquí Hyperlink: www.queensforall.com/phoenix-meadows-vision-plan?mc_cid=ec4d2c192d&mc_eid=7ea34d3c82

Belleza desde el invierno hasta la primavera en The Towers

POR DAVE WATSON

El edificio de apartamentos The Towers tiene muchas plantas hermosas al frente y en las áreas entre los edificios. Todas esas plantas crean un

hábitat para los insectos y los pájaros. Los beneficios ecológicos de cambiar la dependencia en los químicos, reducir el agua y dar menos mantenimiento son muy buenas razones para elegir variedades de plantas nativas. Cuidar nuestras plantas, es sin duda, una inversión para el futuro.

Árboles arrancados de las banquetas

POR LEN MANIACE

Cuatro árboles aparecieron plantados misteriosamente en medio de una banqueta en Astoria, justo donde la gente camina y empuja los carritos de sus bebés. Ante las quejas de los residentes, NYC Parks arrancó los árboles casi tan pronto como los habían plantado. Un portavoz de la agencia explicó que esa inusual ubicación había sido elegida porque el cableado eléctrico subterráneo impedía plantar los árboles cerca de la orilla de

la banqueta. El Gobierno de la ciudad está ejerciendo presión para incrementar el número de árboles a fin de enfrentar el calentamiento global, pero ¿cómo va a alcanzar esta meta Nueva York si hay cada vez menos espacio en las calles para los árboles? Aunque NYC Parks está buscando nuevas maneras de plantarlos, el problema está todavía por resolver.

Regresa Clean Streets

POR JOHN MACAFFREY
Nuestra iniciativa Clean Streets (calles limpias) comenzó donde ahora es Diversity Plaza, siguió por la Calle 74 y la Avenida 37 hasta Junction Boulevard. Después de meses de limpiar, varios propietarios de negocios empezaron a barrer el frente de sus establecimientos. La Asociación de Comerciantes de Jackson Heights alentó a otros a hacer lo mismo, y la limpieza de las calles se convirtió en un rito de iniciación para cualquiera que se postulara a un cargo político. Este año queremos expandir nuestros esfuerzos en Roosevelt Avenue (más información en: [acenewyork.org/about-ace/our-mission-and-history](https://www.acenewyork.org/about-ace/our-mission-and-history)). Únete a Clean Streets el 13 de abril con la legisladora Jessica González-Rojas en la escuela intermedia Louis Armstrong en Junction Boulevard a las 9:00 a. m.; si no puedes, te esperamos el tercer sábado de cada mes. Visita nuestro sitio web para estar al tanto: [jhbg.org](https://www.jhbg.org).

Paan: mensaje en una hoja

POR ZAIN SHEIKH Y KELLY ARMENDARIZ
Nur Jahan, la emperatriz indostana del siglo XVI comenzó la tradición en



su corte real de comer el refrescante bucal (quizás afrodisíaco) conocido como *paan*: la hoja crujiente de betel envolviendo una fragante mezcla de ingredientes en una forma perfectamente triangular. El *paan* es un fenómeno cultural que abarca épocas y jerarquías sociales, y forma parte del simbolismo, las festividades y la música del sur de Asia. Jackson Heights tiene el privilegio de contar con docenas de tiendas de *paan* donde puedes deleitarte la próxima vez que visites Diversity Plaza.
Playlist: <https://t.ly/2gOXY>

De la familiaridad surge la consideración

POR GAIL SIEGEL
En 2018 hice algunos cambios en el jardín afuera de mi edificio. Decidí poner etiquetas a los arbustos y plantas que florecen, y quedé gratamente sorprendida por los resultados.



Uno de los rótulos colocados frente a las plantas para promover su familiaridad.

Mis vecinos apreciaron la información, y la respuesta fue inesperada: la gente pasaba y leía las etiquetas de las especies de plantas que no reconocía. Deseo motivar e inspirar a los jardineros locales a reconsiderar lo que están plantando, tomar decisiones ambientalistas y encontrar mejores maneras de quitar la maleza, regar y mantener el suelo en buenas condiciones. Transmitamos el conocimiento sobre las plantas de nuestra región para promover su apreciación.

Mari Juana / Mary Jane, o como lo quieras ver: los negocios de cannabis se están expandiendo como mala hierba

POR MELISSA ZAVALA
¿Será que los zorrillos están abandonando los parques e invadiendo las calles de la ciudad o qué es ese olor? La propagación de tiendas de productos derivados de la planta *Cannabis sativa* en la ciudad está invadiendo nuestras calles. La legalización de marihuana en Nueva York en 2021 ha alentado la creciente explosión de negocios que promueven su uso recreativo. Sin embargo, la venta ilegal se ha disparado también a tal punto que se estima que el año pasado se abrieron 8,000 nuevos establecimientos.

La venta ilícita socava el ingreso derivado de los impuestos y la falta de vigilancia ha popularizado los vaporizadores y otras drogas recreativas entre consumidores cada vez más jóvenes. Descriminalizar un mercado explotador sin la vigilancia adecuada nos deja entre el humo.

¡Juguemos tenis, Jackson Heights!

POR MELISSA ZAVALA
Una de las ideas equivocadas sobre el tenis es que se trata de un deporte para los ricos. A diferencia de las canchas creadas para la comunidad exclusiva concebida por el presidente de la Corporación Queensboro, el vecindario actualmente cuenta con dos canchas junto a la escuela Garden School en la extensión de Travers Park. El Grupo de Tenis que antes jugaba en la cancha de la esquina del área de juegos en el parque asfaltado, siguen promoviendo el deporte mediante lo que esperan se convierta en una tradición anual: el torneo de tenis de Travers Park. El último torneo se llevó a cabo en octubre pasado y se espera el próximo para este verano. Únete al Grupo de Tenis este año y practica un deporte que ha demostrado ser más que recreativo: promueve la amistad y la dedicación. ♦



Mari Juana / Mary Jane, *By Any Other Name*

Smoke Shops Spread Like Weeds BY MELISSA ZAVALA

Are skunks moving out of parks and scattering across urban streets or what is that smell? Described by connoisseurs as an earthy scent, even fruity, others liken it to skunk spray. The potency of processed marijuana results from different variables, from harvest time to consumption form. The spread of smoke shops across the city has streets smelling like concert halls. What is behind the explosion of these shops and the need for weed?

A hallucinogenic plant central to some religious rituals, popular among artists, marijuana is an important member of the Asian herbal pharmacopeia. From all of the exotic Asian plant varieties now adorning American gardens (from bamboo to lilacs), consumed as foods commonly found in supermarkets (from rice to bok choy), few plants are more commonplace than *Cannabis sativa*, or weed. Also known as *hemp* in its form beyond drugs, cannabis is versatile. The plants' seeds yield oils used in beauty

products, while its fibers are found in anything from paper to clothing, bicycles, and beyond. The *Cannabaceae* family consists of flowering, wind-pollinating plants with males and females mostly occurring separately. But determining sex in cannabis is no simple matter, given the plant's complex sex system, sex reversals, and more. And if sexual reproduction is complicated for animals, it's even more so for plants, so let's instead consider the history of cannabis in medicine and its recent recreational uses.

With roots in Central Asia, records of marijuana use date back to 2800 BC prescribed by the Father of Chinese Medicine, Emperor Shen Nung. Other civilizations like Indian Hindus, Assyrians, Greeks, and Romans, have

also relied on its therapeutic qualities to treat anything from arthritis to depression, appetite loss, asthma, and other maladies. Cannabis is such a potent herb, it is considered by some Hindus to be Shiva's favorite plant, and with fevers thought to be linked to the hot breath of the gods, the use of cannabis as treatment for bodily conditions blended with religious ritual. Cannabis became such an integral part of religious rites in Hinduism that to rule it out by law would be to outlaw religious rituals themselves.



This is not the only close connection between religion and cannabis. The plant also has a fundamental place in Rastafari, only recognized as a religion in the U.S. late last century but dating back to the 1930s in the streets of Kingston, Jamaica. An Abrahamic religion, Rastafarianism is interpreted through the Pan-Africanist movement most powerfully promoted by activist Marcus Garvey, a Jamaican-born Black Nationalist active in New York City during the Harlem Renaissance, a critical moment of political and artistic production in the city. A rejection of established norms and a turn towards spirituality over dogma, has made the ties between ganja, Black empowerment, and a new consciousness embracing political struggle, a tightly bound lifestyle beyond religious boundaries.

Ties between cannabis and the Black experience woven through religion, music, and political struggle have also meant that the War on Drugs, an urban policing strategy heavily promoted in the 1970s, was disproportionately practiced on the Black community. American society rebuked marijuana in popular culture in films from the 1930s, as well as legally, particularly in the case of the Marijuana Tax Act of 1937. This law sought to severely cut back hemp production through heavy taxation. These burdensome taxes also impacted physicians and pharmacists, deepening the association between cannabis and narcotics. This past winter, federal scientists recommended easing Schedule I restrictions applied both to marijuana and heroin which treat them as equally addictive and harmful when marijuana has medicinal uses and no longer carries severe criminal penalties.

Decades of targeted and racialized persecution has led to disproportionate prison populations where 25 percent of Americans are imprisoned, with Black inmates making up 38.6 percent of prisoners from 13.6 percent of the country's overall population (these

numbers are cited from the Federal Bureau of Prisons). Addressing this imbalance has led to the decriminalization of weed in 27 states, and its legalization in 23 states, two territories, and the District of Columbia. In New York, the legalization of recreational marijuana in 2021 has fanned the recent explosion of smoke shops promoting recreational use.

The lack of oversight on unregistered head shops has popularized vaping and recreational drugs among ever younger consumers.

Last year, the New York City Council estimated illegal smoke shops at 8,000. The illicit sales of marijuana undermine the tax revenues and community reinvestment funds generated by the 13 percent tax on sales. Beyond wiping criminal records and undermining targeted policing, illegal shops have also undercut the economic benefits intended to remedy the over-policing of Black and Brown communities. Instead, the lack of oversight on unregistered head shops has popularized vaping and recreational drugs among ever younger consumers. Without a full understanding of the chemicals in vape

pens and their effects on health, these products, too, should be closely monitored.

Last fall, Mayor Eric Adams began pursuing the closure of these shops by sending notices to 50 building owners across the five boroughs warning them about liabilities, imposing more than \$7 million in penalties, as well as seizing \$3.9 million in illegal products, according to the Mayor's Office. A Google search of smoke shops in Jackson Heights yields lists of several outlets in the area. How many more will open in 2024? What will be done to curtail their spread and their damaging effects? Queens District Attorney, Melinda Katz, tackled mobile dispensaries last year. One of the trucks shuttered was in operation in Jackson Heights. Many of the packages of merchandise confiscated have the appearance of candy packets, some containing the word *candy* in their brands. Last March, *The Washington Post* reported a spike of 29 percent in the city's public schools, with an even higher percentage in middle schools. With children especially vulnerable to poisoning, and increased levels of bacterial contamination in illegal drug products, from salmonella to E. coli, and heavy metals, these stores represent a problem in need of immediate remedy. Decriminalizing an exploitative market without oversight leaves city neighborhoods in the weeds. ♦



**Jackson Heights
Beautification Group**

P.O. Box 720253
Jackson Heights, NY
11372-0235
(347) 766-9129
info@jhbg.org

Newsletter Committee

Edwin O'Keefe Westley
Jerry Goldman
Melissa Zavala
Rommel Alama
Kirsten Magnani

Design & Production

Rommel Alama

Distribution Director

Edwin O'Keefe Westley

Translator &

En Español Editor

Julia Erika Negrete Sandoval

Contributors

Kelly Armendariz
Leslie Ellman
Rudy Greco
Dan Karatzas
Len Maniace
John McCaffrey
Zane Sheikh
Gail Siegel
Dave Watson
Melissa Zavala

Paan — Message in a Leaf

BY ZAIN SHEIKH & KELLY ARMENDARIZ

Nur Jahan, the 16th Century Empress of Hindustan, the Marie Antoinette of her own time, the only Mughal empress with her name on the minted coin, began a tradition in her royal court of eating the mouth freshener (perhaps even an aphrodisiac) named *paan*—a crisp betel leaf enveloping a fragrant blend of ingredients folded into a perfectly triangular shape.

Whether it be as a delicacy Desi grandmothers still prepare with nostalgia from their paan daan (a betel case), or a lavish post-dinner digestif impatiently expected by families at a wedding, or through the elaborate cinematic homages paid to the



betel leaf's vineyard of symbolism, paan is a cultural phenomenon that spans eras and social strata.

The paan's ancient use as a messenger of sweet love's beginnings, and a lament of heartbreaking break-ups, or just as a simple palate cleanser—all is still popularly celebrated and echoed through decades



of South Asian music. And of course, through the paanwalas, the makers of these delicacies themselves, which luckily, Jackson Heights has been blessed with abundantly. Perhaps a dozen paan storefronts are located just in and around Diversity Plaza, tucked behind colorful ingredients and leaf graphics—with backend shops yet to be leafed through.

If next time you fancy a remise en bouche, but would like to make it regal like Nur Jahan, make your way to the local paan shops in JH. Here's a link to a selection of paan-tastic tunes that'll put you in the right musical mood:

<https://t.ly/2gOXY> ♦



Familiarity Breeds... Consideration

BY GAIL SIEGEL

In 2018, I made some changes to the garden in front of my building. I had been working for several years to improve the soil, as well as nurture a diverse group of plants along with what had been growing there previously. I decided to add labels to the shrubs and flowering plants and was delighted with the results. My neighbors appreciated the information, and it created a surprising treat: people would stop to read the labels of plant species they didn't recognize.

This year there's scaffolding in front of my building resulting in the need to redo the entire front garden. Once the scaffolding is removed I'm looking forward to starting over. I'm hoping to focus on

native plants that will provide support for bees, birds, butterflies, and beneficial insects. I want to add labels again and possibly encourage the labeling of the trees in the neighborhood and/or park. My hope is for year-round interest with every season bringing something into bloom or metamorphosing into something worth watching as it changes with each season and the weather. I want to encourage and inspire local gardeners to rethink what they are planting, and along with making more environmental choices, also figure out the best way to weed, water, and keep the soil healthy. Our local gardens have been getting better every year and I'm looking forward to the next generation of



planners and planters rethinking our urban ecosystems. The saying "familiarity breeds contempt" suggests that things that are too common can become overexposed and as a result, regarded less. But familiarity can also instead breed interest and attention. Let's spread knowledge about our region's plants to promote appreciation. ♦

Clean Streets Returns

BY JOHN McCaffrey

Our Clean Streets initiative reconvened last winter after several rain delays last fall. Mother Nature forced us to reschedule, but Assemblymember Jessica Gonzalez-Rojas, her dedicated staff, and JHBG volunteers, closely monitored weather apps.

While walking from Louis Armstrong Middle School on Junction Boulevard to 75th Street, the Assemblymember and I reminisced about the many years since JHBG's clean streets project began, kicking off in what is now Diversity Plaza, moving up 74th Street, and along 37th Avenue to Junction Boulevard. The exact year now forgotten, fed up with trash levels along Diversity Plaza and 37th Avenue, volunteers like Jessica, Danny Rojas, Li Yu, Dave Watson, former Councilmember Danny Dromm, Jill Yardley, now Councilmember Francisco Moya and his brother Edgar, and other dedicated volunteers spent an average of two hours removing trash, returning over the next few months.

After months of clean-ups, several store owners began sweeping their storefronts. The JH Merchants Association encouraged others to do the same. Cleaning our streets became a rite of passage for anyone running for political office.

Two weeks later, Councilmember Shekar Krishnan and Assemblymember Catalina

Cruz, who recruited newly elected Assemblymember Steven Raga, co-sponsored a second outing. We worked along 69th Street and 37th Avenue. Our elected officials, their staff, and families joined JHBG volunteers. We found a large screen TV, wooden chairs, and containers filled with unknown substances. We raked leaves, bringing them to JHBG's SCRAPS composting site.

Thanks to Councilmember Krishnan's funding, the staff of the Association of Community Employment Programs (ACE) cleans along 69th Street/BQE, as well as other main district corridors like 37th and Roosevelt Avenues, 73rd and 74th Streets, and along Broadway, sweeping and trimming the foot-high weeds. This year we want to expand efforts along Roosevelt Avenue. (Read more about ACE: acenewyork.org/about-ace/our-mission-and-history).

As NYC faces budget cuts, trash cans will overflow, and streets will get dirtier. It is critical for everyone to confront this head on.

This year, we will clean along Roosevelt Avenue and Junction Boulevard. We're coordinating with Councilmember



Assemblymember Cruz and Councilmember Krishnan, (top left, first two along front) as well as Assembly member Gonzalez-Rojas (below photo, far right) lead their staffers and other volunteers in keeping JH clean!



Krishnan, and Assemblymembers Cruz, Gonzalez-Rojas, and Raja to return to Northern Boulevard and 69th Street. We also plan to work with State Senator Jessica Ramos, Congress members Grace Meng, and Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez.

Join Clean Streets on Saturday, April 13 with Assemblymember Jessica Gonzalez Rojas at Louis Armstrong Middle School on Junction Boulevard at 9am. We meet on the third Saturday of the month (weather permitting). For updates, check jhb.org. ♦

Judge Rudy Greco Celebrates His Golden Jubilee Anniversary With Release Of His Podcast Memoir *Uncommon Law* (Lessons They Don't Teach in Law School)

This year marks the Golden Jubilee 50th Anniversary of retired NYS Supreme Court Justice Rudy Greco's admission to the NYS Bar. Judge Greco, the first in his family to go to college, has a unique perspective on the law. A NYS Regents Scholar, he was academically expelled from law school after only one semester. After three tumultuous years teaching in a Fort Apache South Bronx middle school, he embarked on a four-year law office study clerkship, passing the bar exam on his first try. His

mentor was the late, esteemed Executive Director of the Queens County Bar Association, William W. "Bill" Weinstock. Turning down job offers from both the Legal Aid Society and US Attorney Southern District of New York he went directly into private practice where the need to pay monthly rent meant taking on a broad spectrum of cases and clients. He appeared at every level of state and federal courts including successful appearances in the NY Court of Appeals and the Supreme Court of the United States.

In his recently released podcast-memoir, Judge Greco draws upon his long and richly varied career to discuss true cases, characters, and situations drawn from his 33 1/2 years in private practice and 13 years on the bench as a trial judge in NY Civil and Supreme Courts. His clients are a fascinating range of people including killers, an Irish rock band, boxers, jockeys, rogue cops, artists, con men, gangsters, and war heroes, to name but a few. The stories, nearly 100 in number, average about 20 minutes each in length. They

fall into roughly five categories: true crime, humor, colorful characters, justice for all, and biography. They are intended to appeal to a general audience of lawyers and anyone who enjoys tales of law and human nature in all its aspects.

Listen to *UNCOMMON LAW (Lessons They Don't Teach in Law School)* and spread the word. Nearing his 80th birthday Judge Rudy Greco is not about to waste his time or yours. : uncommonlaw.podbean.com ♦





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VIEWS FROM THE HEIGHTS – Spring 2024

ONGOING EVENTS

Saturdays, 11am-1 pm

JH-SCRAPS (composting)

69th St. & 35th Ave.

For info on what is compostable,
contact 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 info@JHBG.org.

Saturdays 10:30 am

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

Daily

JH-CREW dog run

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

To join, go to info@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 and pay by credit card.

It's quick and easy! Mail a check with this form
for the membership level you select to:

JHBG—Membership • P.O. Box 720253

Jackson Heights, NY 11372

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.

Please check membership level:

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual \$50 | <input type="checkbox"/> Patron \$250 | <input type="checkbox"/> Sponsor \$1,000 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family \$100 | <input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor \$500 | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |

Please print the following:

Name: _____

Address (Include apt. #): _____

City/State/Zip: _____

E-mail address: _____

If you're interested in being contacted about any JHBG activities, please email
info@JHBG.org.