

THE VOICE OF WESTERLEIGH

NEWSLETTER OF THE WESTERLEIGH IMPROVEMENT SOCIETY
P.O. Box 140-043 Staten Island, NY 10314 www.wisonline.org

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WESTERLEIGH - A PREVIEW OF THE NEW YEAR

by Dan Rieu

THE WESTERLEIGH IMPROVEMENT SOCIETY *Proudly Commencing Its 114th Year*

With its many years of past achievements to build on, the Society is looking forward with ever increasing confidence to yet another banner year. President Michael Morrell, under whose capable and proficient decade long leadership the Society has grown to new highly respected heights, is eager to maintain the Society's dedication to serving the Westerleigh community. By introducing modern technology to Society's everyday efficiency and his more effectively utilizing the skills and expertise of the Society's talented Board of Directors, the community can look forward to being well represented in the coming year.

With these thoughts in mind, the Board of Directors encourage our members to promptly renew their 2007 dues upon receiving their notices. Richard Cirbus, the Society's membership chairperson, has worked diligently preparing his computerized records to assure accuracy. The Directors also greatly appreciate having our members contacting their neighbors to interest them in becoming members. Printed information about our civic organization is available for distribution and online at www.wisonline.org

Recalling Westerleigh's past history entails a major step in preserving its future. During recent years, former Vice President Larry Dober and former Society historian Victoria Barrack successfully authored historical publications that provided our members with valuable information about our community. Immediate response for copies was overwhelming. The Society's present historian, Lou Motola, is in the process of accumulating documents from his extensive archives that will further provide information about our community's proud history. The Voice of Westerleigh as it has consistently done during the past decades, will also print articles that remind its reader of Westerleigh's unique past.

Changes in our community can always be expected even though, overall, old timers will say with satisfaction that over the years Westerleigh shows little environmental change. In agreement, we can also say that our community remains to this day one of the most desirable communities in which to reside.

DECEMBER MEETING OF COMMUNITY BOARD #2 WITH CHRISTINE QUINN SPEAKER OF THE NYC COUNCIL

On December 12, 2006 the following members of the Westerleigh Improvement Society Board of Directors attended the December meeting of Community Board #2: Mark Anderson, Joe Ficara, Mike Morrell, Eric Patterson, Rick Wexler, & Betty Winsch. The guest of honor was Christine Quinn, Speaker of the NYC Council. Also attending were Councilmen Mc Mahon & Oddo and Borough President James Molinaro.

It is Ms. Quinn's intention to visit all five boroughs to be in touch with residents of the local New York City community. Her intention is to explore how the residents want to have budget money allocated. So far she has determined that all communities pretty much want the same things such as; traffic enforcement, tax abatement, affordable senior housing, senior service programs, and after school programs.

Ms. Quinn discussed items specific to Staten Island such as introduction of light rail transportation; the fact that Staten Island is the only borough without a municipal hospital, and the impact that has on the other hospitals in our community.

Ms Quinn explained that the Budget Negotiation Team meets on an ongoing basis, not just at budget time.

President Morrell posed the question to Speaker Quinn concerning the plan we submitted to the City Planning Commission for rezoning the Westerleigh community to R2. Up to the date of the Community Board #2 meeting we had not yet had a response from City Planning Chairwoman Amanda Burden. This zoning would permit only one family homes on larger size lots. Ms. Quinn is aware of the work of the Growth Management Task Force and their work in trying to contain growth on Staten Island. Speaker Quinn indicated at the CB #2 meeting that she would meet personally with

Ms. Burden to discuss our plans.

It is the feeling of those board members who attended the CB#2 meeting that Speaker Quinn is "in touch" with the residents of New York City, and supports quality of life issues in our community.

DEFEATING NASCAR – A MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

Soon after the announcement of a proposed 80,000 seat auto racing stadium, Westerleigh residents became aware the severe environmental problems would adversely affect our community. The proximity of the proposed project made it urgent for the Society to respond quickly to defeat it. The challenge facing the Society was huge. From the outset, powerful financial and political interests were aligned to support construction on the already purchased site. It was determined by the Society's Directors that a display of overwhelming opposition by residents and civic groups throughout Staten Island was essential for success. Articles appearing in the Society's newsletter clearly indicated that the Society was undertaking a leadership role. Public opposition to the NASCAR project rapidly mounted. Society officers were active in voicing their opposition at the multitude of meetings that spring up throughout the island. This prompted our political representatives to also speak out in opposition. Eventually, it was apparent that the project was inappropriate. Its final defeat spared Staten Island what was foreseen as an environmental disaster.

DOWNZONING SETBACK IN WESTERLEIGH

The effort to preserve the look and character of Westerleigh's architectural heritage suffered a devastating blow recently when the City Planning Commission denied a request to change the area's current zoning and permit only one-family homes to be built in the community in the future. The ruling, which would have applied to the area roughly bordered by Manor Road, Forest Avenue,

Willowbrook Road, Jewett Avenue and Victory Boulevard, came as a shock to the Board of Directors of the Westerleigh Improvement Society, who had helped draw up the new application and who put in many hours of hard work to convince the Planning Commission to make the change. The new zoning would have changed the area's current R3X classification to R2.

Society President Michael Morrell said he didn't understand the commission's logic in denying the request, since it had approved a similar one for a section in Queens. City Councilman Michael McMahan, who represents a portion of Westerleigh, also expressed his disappointment, saying the Commission's action will only make it harder for the community to prevent future tear-downs and multi-family dwellings on lots where only one house currently stands.

Mark Anderson, a member of the Society's Board of Directors and an architectural historian, said the denial would only lead to more problems as Westerleigh tries to preserve its traditional look and character. "It puts more pressure on us as we try to cope with things like overcrowding in our schools, more traffic congestion and problems with mass transit," he said.

As a case in point, Anderson described the present situation on Jewett Avenue, near College Avenue, where a number of changes have already occurred and more threaten the area in the future. He cited 707 Jewett Ave., which was built originally as the residence of District Attorney Edwin S. Rawson and later became known as "Marie's Place." It has been torn down in the past year and is giving way to four two-family houses. "Eight families where one used to live," he said. "Think of the additional cars, the people," he said. It is also changing the visual effect of the street. The old house, he pointed out, was built well back from the street. The new houses, however, will start practically at the curb.

He also pointed out that another house a few doors down – the Ella Boole House, the first to be built in Prohibition Park, fronting on Jewett, Maine and Wardwell avenues – has been sold. The new ruling would have prevented multi-family homes from being built on the property, he said, but now at least two two-family houses are in the planning stages. In addition, a number of other houses along that same strip on Jewett Avenue, are currently for sale.

There is, however, a glimmer of hope for the future. Both Anderson and Morrell are exploring the possibility of applying for a relatively new zoning classification, R2A. According to both, this would significantly cut down

the size of homes that could be built – eliminating the so-called "McMansions" according to Morrell. It also would make a new home be set back from the curb to conform with the existing houses on the street, which in Westerleigh could be as much as 25-30 feet. That, too, would limit the size of any new construction.

In the meantime, however, don't look for much else to change. Even with the current slump in home sales, Westerleigh properties remain desirable targets for builders who care little for history and nothing for preserving the character of a community. And, as evidenced by its latest ruling, it appears the City Planning Commission feels the same way.



This and That...

- After the Society requested evaluation of the surface of Jewett Avenue, the Department of Transportation has scheduled the street for resurfacing after July 1, 2007.
- A zoning variance was filed by the owners of the home at 389 College Avenue for a permit to build an extension to their home. A variance is required since the extension would be built in the bed of the mapped but unbuilt portion of North Avenue. The home would remain a one family home.
- Speed bumps have been installed in the parking lot of the Burger King restaurant on Jewett Avenue to discourage drivers from cutting through the lot to access Watchogue Road.
- The Defensive Driver Course is once again being offered by AARP at Immanuel Union Church on the following dates: February 24, April 14, May 19, July 21, September 22 and October 27. Laney Dahl is the instructor and may be contacted regarding registration at (718) 442-1753.



THE SANITATION DEPARTMENT KEEPING OUR CITY CLEAN

Westerleigh homeowners are certain to remember how they labored last fall raking and bagging and mountains of leaves for curbside disposal by the Sanitation Department. The many trees that line our streets and grow in our yards create a massive annual undertaking. We give thanks to the Sanitation

Department for scheduling extra collection dates to help us accomplish the job.

The Sanitation Department's ambitious leaf pickup project is in addition to the already huge everyday job of disposing the scraps and trash that we also place at curbside. They tell us that 2,250 trucks are used to collect the estimated 12,000 tons of garbage that New Yorkers put out every day, costing the city almost \$1 billion. This vast load of garbage has to be transported to transfer facilities and landfills in nearby states. Under a recently approved Waste Management Plan, however, garbage is due to be entirely rerouted to marine and rail transfer stations located in each borough. This project, soon to be fully activated, will greatly minimize truck traffic in and out of the city, thereby greatly reducing the amount of pollution that threatens our health. The Sanitation Department is constantly considering improvements for garbage disposal. But don't expect to see an end to sanitation trucks lumbering down our streets in the foreseeable future.

WILLIAM SCHORKOPF PRESIDENT OF THE SOCIETY FOR 30 YEARS

We were all saddened to hear that William Schorkopf, who served as president of the Westerleigh Improvement Society for 30 years, had died on December 12, 2006.

Although he had already achieved recognition for outstanding bravery as a soldier in World War II, for which he was awarded the Silver Star, and had already embarked on a promising career as an educator with the NYC Board of Education, Bill did not hesitate to take on an active role in his community. In 1962, when he heard that the Westerleigh Improvement Society – which had become inactive – was making plans to resume operation, he immediately became involved. In 1964, he was elected the Society's president, a position he held for the next three decades.

The following years were active ones for both Bill and the Society. Under his leadership, the Society initiated numerous civic projects and various community events. As a result, the respect for the

Society became widely acclaimed and membership rose sharply. At the same time, Bill's professional career was flourishing, and he was named principal of PS 29 in neighboring Castleton Corners.

Bill, however, was modest about his contributions to the Society. He was quoted as saying, "I consider my greatest achievement to be developing the steady stream of excellent directors who served the Society. They were essential in assisting me in maintaining its continued progress."

Those who served during Bill's tenure as president will always remember his fine, agreeable personality and deeply cherish his tireless and unblemished service to the Westerleigh community.

JUDGE ALEXANDER GRAVES – REMEMBERING WESTERLEIGH

Announcement of the death of former officer of the Society Judge Alexander Graves came on December 13, 2006. Both he and his congenial wife Jean were dedicated to Westerleigh, and their contributions, both to the Society and our community, commencing in the 1960s, were important and well appreciated.

In his article written for our newsletter shortly after he relocated to Fleishmanns, N.Y., in 1994, Judge Graves reminisced fondly about his life on St. John Avenue. As he explained, he purchased the house in 1955 because "it best suited his family's needs, the price was right, the neighborhood appeared stable, had a pleasant mixture of both young and old residents and contained homes of various sizes, ages and styles."

On return visits to Westerleigh, he took time to visit with his friends, which helped him remember his former satisfying life. Judge Graves indicated that he wanted to go on record as enthusiastically endorsing the Society and its fine work.

"Westerleigh families are indeed fortunate to have an active civic association and officers who keep up to date on actual and potential problems in the community," the judge said, "and do an excellent job of protecting the interests of Westerleigh residents."

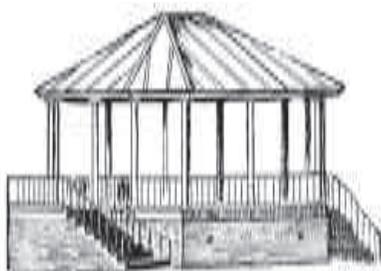


*some candid shots from our
Annual Holiday Celebration*



Westerleigh Improvement Society, Inc.
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Staten Island, NY 10314

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Serving the Community for 114 years

WESTERLEIGH HOLIDAY RECEPTION SOCIETY MEMBERS AND FRIENDS CELEBRATING THE HOLIDAY SEASON

The annual end of the year event, at which the Society extends its thanks to its members for their year long support, was once again a joyous occasion. Dining, music, dancing, singing, prizes and games were featured during the evening's festivities. The attendees gratefully extended their thanks to committee chairperson Sharon Heule and her volunteer staff of assistants who coordinated the preparations and decorated the Immanuel Union Church hall. Their expressions of cheer and well wishes give encouraging promise for continuing success during the New Year.

Westerleigh Improvement Society, Inc. Officers:

President... **Mike Morrell**
Vice President... **Rick Wexler**
Treasurer... **Joe Ficara**
Secretary... **Evelyn Otten MacDonald**

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Please enroll me as a member of

Westerleigh Improvement Society Inc.

P.O. Box 140-043, Staten Island NY 10314

Annual Dues:

Regular Membership **\$10** Associate Membership **\$20**

Membership # (3 digit number from upper left of mailing label)

Name

Address

Phone# (optional)

email (optional)