

Published
by the
Queens
Ledger
Weekly
Newspaper
Group

TIMES

Established
in 1873

Also
Serving
Kew
Gardens

FOREST HILLS / REGO PARK

The Reforest Mission in Rego Park

BY MICHAEL PERLMAN
mperlman@queensledger.com

Every community has at least one tree that is the talk of the town, although all varieties uniquely contribute to a larger audience of trees, and every resident has their favorites.

Since 1961, a rare, healthy and most graceful Weeping Beech tree has stood in front of Parkside Memorial Chapel at 98-60 Queens Boulevard in Rego Park.

As this American Institute of Architects-recognized mid-century modern chapel was demolished in January despite a movement to preserve a tributary site to the Sinai desert of Moses, the Israelites and

the Ten Commandments, workers assured residents that the Weeping Beech tree would remain.

Then one day, they cringed to observe their favorite tree being chopped down.

Months have passed, and Rego Park resident Jennifer Verdon courageously launched a fundraiser to plant five new Weeping Beech trees throughout the community in its spirit, while restoring a native species that is a novelty.

The goal is to raise \$10,000, since each tree accompanied by precise planting costs an average of \$2,000.

"I live behind what was the beautiful landmark-worthy Parkside Memorial Cha-

pel designed by the Viennese architect Henry Sandig and Robert Kasindorf, and bore witness to its destruction for overdevelopment, which was devastating. I went outside to speak to the crew weekly, and they assured me that this rare Weeping Beech tree would be safe," she said.

"I watched for a couple of months as the tree was teetering on the edge of the demolition site, hoping for the best. One day I came home, looked out my window, and burst into tears when I realized it was gone. I felt so betrayed and upset, that I knew I had to do something."

The Weeping Beech, known as "Fagus Sylvati-



The once cherished Weeping Beech tree, Photo by Michael Perlman

Continued on Page 18

Program empowers locals with dementia

BY JESSICA MEDITZ
jmeditz@queensledger.com

The community of those living with dementia is often underestimated—due to the lack of representation and positivity surrounding the subject.

A Rego Park resident is trying to change that in her neighborhood and its surrounding communities through "Stories in the Moment," a co-creative dance, movement and storytelling program designed for people living with dementia.

The initiative was founded by Magda Kaczmarzka, a dancer, choreographer, teaching artist and creative aging advocate.

Kaczmarzka dedicates her career to empowering individuals and advocating for brain health-related issues, as shown through her other efforts including "DanceStream Projects,"

"Every Body Moves" and "BrainFM."

She's also a fellow at the Atlantic Institute, focusing on expanding access, confidence and agency around brain health.

"I created 'Stories in the Moment' out of a desire to really extend the resource of dance as a vehicle for connection, community building and storytelling," Kaczmarzka said.

"Dementia is a neurocognitive, degenerative condition. It influences people's ability to feel like they can connect and communicate as fluidly as they may have in other points in their life, it might influence people's fluidity in movement and it can influence memory," she continued. "I think that dance can really be a unifying language, and can facilitate a democratic and equitable space for people to be able to connect, in community and in communication. In



'Stories in the Moment,' we connect around themes and topics that are really universal, and it can be as mundane as hobbies or favorite dishes in the kitchen, or it could be larger, like what community

means for you." Although Kaczmarzka initially formed "Stories in the Moment" two years ago with Dementia Action Alliance, this local chapter was made possible for the For-

est Hills, Rego Park and Kew Gardens communities through a partnership with Queens Community House, a nonprofit organization.

Continued on Page 38

'Stories in the Moment:' the power of movement

Continued from Page 1

Wendy Kwan, director of Social Adult Day Services at QCH, said that the center is proud to partner with Kaczmarska and provide a home to localize her vision.

"Our mission is to really help the members of our community, to give them tools so that they can live successfully. I think Magda's program really ties into that because it helps the members of our program who are physically frail or have memory loss to really engage with each other," she said. "Even those that may have had a little harder time conducting on Zoom, we've seen them actually contribute to the programming in the 'Stories in the Moment.' So that's been really exciting for me."

Kaczmarska is a proud recipient of a grant from the Statewide Community Re-grants program, a partnership between New York State Council on the Arts and Flushing Town Hall.

"It just felt like it's like a stamp of approval from the community saying, 'This is an engagement in the community that matters,' she

said. "And I felt like that was really meaningful."

This Queens chapter of "Stories in the Moment" has been connecting virtually since April 29 of this year, meeting for one hour a few times each month.

Each session begins with an introduction and greeting, followed by warmups, moving together, group storytelling and a cooldown.

The series culminated with "Summer Celebrations," a session to celebrate the community formed.

"I founded 'Stories in the Moment,' but because it's a co-creative, community-based program, I think it's really important to recognize that the program doesn't exist without the individuals," Kaczmarska said.

"It's become and it continues to evolve because of the individuals that bring their voices into it," she continued. "So I facilitate, but ultimately, it's our program."

Kaczmarska currently lives in Rego Park, and emigrated to the U.S. from Poland when she was a child.

She said that being a queer immigrant herself, she's familiar with the feel-

ing of being ostracized—one that folks with dementia often face.

I think as an immigrant, I have experienced what it's like to be an outsider, and how important it is when you find, or you identify communities of belonging," she said.

"They can be chosen communities and may not necessarily be your blood family, but I think over the course of my life, I've been privileged to have several, chosen communities that have felt like home and family to me," she continued. "The heart behind the work that I do is to extend that healing power of community to others, and I do it through dance, because that's my craft."

Kaczmarska and the

team at QCH all feel that dementia is underrepresented—even misrepresented—in society and in the media today.

Bringing programs like "Stories in the Moment" into the community not only helps people living with dementia become connected and empowered, but also shows the public that these individuals are just as capable of expressing their stories, artistry and emotions as they are.

"I've been really, really excited to connect with communities here, especially just recognizing that there's still a lot of stigma in our community and the arts serve as a powerful way to kind of build dementia-friendly spaces to find shared language," Kaczmar-

ska said.

"I wanted to step into that need and partner with an organization—like Queens Community House—that has been really serving this community for years and especially over the course of the pandemic."

Kaczmarska added that she is proud to have received a grant from Queens Council for the Arts, which will support 12 more sessions of "Stories in the Moment" with QCH.

Online sessions will begin later this month.

For more information about "Stories in the Moment" or to inquire about registering, contact Wendy Kwan at Queens Community House at 718-592-5757 ext. 230, or email magda@dancestreamprojects.com.



Lindenwood • Ozone Park • South Ozone Park • Woodhaven • Glendale • Middle Village • Maspeth • Rego Park • Forest Hills • Richmond Hill • South Richmond Hill

Re-Elect JOE ADDABBO

NEW YORK STATE SENATE



Proudly Endorsed by:



Assemblymember Jenifer Rajkumar Assemblymember Andrew Hevesi Assemblymember Stacey Pheffer Amato Assemblymember David Weprin City Councilmember Robert Holden

- ▶ Passed legislation to keep **ILLEGAL GUNS OFF OUR STREETS**
- ▶ Enacted **ANTI-HATE CRIME LAWS** to fight discrimination
- ▶ Held city services accountable to keep streets clean and **PROTECT OUR QUALITY OF LIFE**

Paid for by Addabbo For Senate

Learn more at website JoeAddabboForSenate.com