

BRONX COMMUNITY BOARD NO. 8

MINUTES OF THE LIBRARIES & CULTURAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON NOVEMBER 14, 2013 AT THE BOARD OFFICE

Present

Marvin Goodman
Sylvia Alexander
Robert Fanuzzi
Philip Friedman
Mercedes Zegarra-Soja
Liana Acevedo
Rebecca Brown Barbier
Martha Gonzalez-Buitrago
Peter Pamphiel
Louise Scribner
Tim Tureski

Affiliation

CB8, Committee Chair
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Jerome Park Branch Library
Riverdale Branch Library
Kingsbridge Branch Library
Van Cortlandt Branch Library
Bronx Arts Ensemble
Spuyten Duyvil Branch Library

The meeting began at 7:00 PM.

Philip Friedman, Community Board 8 member, recorded the proceedings of this meeting for the Community Board archives.

The minutes of the meeting of October 10, 2013 were accepted.

The Chair introduced Louise Scribner of the Bronx Arts Ensemble, who replaced William Scribner, who was unable to attend this meeting. Louise Scribner distributed pamphlets to all of the program offerings of the Bronx Arts Ensemble for this current season. Programs include Chamber Music sessions in private homes, Jazz Night sessions and Just for Kids sessions. Many children's programs are at Lovenger Theater at Lehman College, and school buses bring students from all parts of the Bronx. The current season runs through June, 2014. Louise Scribner described how the Bronx Arts Ensemble started in 1972 as a quintet at the Ethical Culture Society and gradually developed to a larger group and orchestra. There are year round concerts. These programs began in Riverdale, but now are in all sections of the Bronx and in many schools as well, where they teach not only music, but also visual arts, dance, and extended arts activities, including sewing. Free concerts are offered to all during the summer as well. There has been a residency program at Fordham University since 1979, where indoor concerts are offered during the summer. Free outdoor concerts are offered during the summer at Van Cortlandt Park. Originally these were held on the grounds of Van Cortlandt Mansion but are now at Rockwood Drive Circle, just beyond the horse stables. The jazz concerts, now at the Ethical Culture Society, started out at the Russian residency building auditorium. There is an annual competition for young musical performers each year between the ages of 14 and 20. The winner receives a \$500 reward and as chance to perform with the Bronx Arts Ensemble, either as a soloist or with the group. This award was originated by former Congressman Jonathan Bingham, who had lived near Wave Hill and had represented this area. Committee members were invited to attend a Chamber Music Concert at a family home on November 17th.

Louise Scribner indicated that funding for the Bronx Arts Ensemble comes from public funds from New York City and New York State departmental resources, as well as allocations by Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz, Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz, Jr., and Councilmembers Fernando Cabrera, Melissa Mark-Viverito, Oliver Koppell, Joel Rivera, and James Vacca. Many public and private organizations provide funds and many individual contributors help with contributions.

The Chair pointed out that printed information from NYPL indicates that branches have a variety of programs ranging from activities for pre-school children to those for senior citizens, and often given bilingually.

The Chair introduced each of the branch library managers to give details of the activities ongoing in their library branch.

Peter Pamphiel of the Van Cortlandt branch described the programs to help library visitors, including computer classes for beginners and advanced users, as well as seniors, and tech services to help download e-books. Computer classes are in Spanish also. There is a teen writing program. There are Saturday matinee movies. There are arts and crafts and arts programs.

Liana Acevedo of the Jerome Park branch noted their programs. There is a “kids cooking” program to teach healthy cooking. There is a science program to encourage students to try experiments. There are bilingual programs for adults and computer programs, both basic and advanced, for adults. There are read-aloud programs and arts and crafts programs. There are games for kids on computers, including Monopoly and Candyland. There is a family cooking program.

Rebecca Brown Barbier of the Riverdale branch indicated that they were hoping to have an exhibit in the spring about the history of the Riverdale Library, including its location and its architecture. The library was originally in Riverdale Neighborhood House, directly across the street from the current library. The library held a musical concert for the community, featuring a classical guitarist. There is a read-aloud program for very young pre-school children, after which the parents have a socializing opportunity. There are e-reader classes and private tablet help. She noted that participants have ranged in age from 3 weeks to 92 years. There is a school visiting program: students from P.S. 81, located nearby have class visits. The branch has its librarians visit local schools and senior centers also, such as Riverdale Country School and Riverdale Senior Center. There is an after-school science program. There is a teen-study lounge. There is a knitting club and a scrabble group. There is a book discussion group for adults. In the summer, tai-chi and yoga are offered, as well as summer concerts with local performing artists. A dance group for seniors was offered last month.

Martha Gonzalez-Buitrago of the Kingsbridge branch indicated that this branch offers the same type of general programs noted at the other branches, but also some that are different. There is a teen advisory group where students discuss books. The library gives book talks there and also visits schools for these book talks (with displays of the book under discussion). There are meditation forums. Film screening is also done weekly. There is a creative writing workshop for seniors, which has been so well attended, that funding for the program seems to be a certainty. There is a wi-bowling program for seniors and a STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) program for teens. Computer classes are in English and in Spanish.

The Chair noted that the Kingsbridge branch is housed in a newly constructed building. A rooftop garden was planted there, but inaccessible to the public.

Tim Tureski of the Spuyten Duyvil branch was the next presenter. There are two theories as to the origin of this Dutch name from the area of its location. One had it translated as “Spitting Devil” because of the swirling waters long ago in the Harlem River. The other translation was “in spite of the devil” from a tale of the Dutch ferryman who vowed to get a passenger across the river despite the swirling waters. Because of this branch’s location near P.S. 24 and 141 (middle school and high school) there are many students after school. There is a book discussion group. There is an adult program weekly, with a concert, lecture or film. There will be a writers’ group. There was a creative arts forum, with a reception with snacks. The Chair noted that Spuyten Duyvil Library had been built on the grounds of the former Seton Hospital.

Under New Business – The Chair noted there was no further information on the funding projects for our branch libraries. The organization called Citizens Defending Libraries has been holding rallies at City Hall and other locations to protest actions planned by NYPL. One protest centered around NYPL's plans to sell-off the mid-Manhattan branch and the SBLI branch to real estate developers and have the public use the main library. Another plan involved having the NYPL main branch be available for catered party events only, at times. NYPL hired a wedding planner to see if it could be done. Another protest centered on the NYPL's plan for a floating plan of book rotations called book-ops, which, it claims, would result in far fewer books at each branch. Libraries would need to get books from these centers on an on-going revolving plan to meet the requests of library books borrowers, who would have to order in advance.

The library managers indicated that the NYPL has canceled plans for possible usage of the main library for catered party events. An informational release to the public by NYPL detailed the advantages of closing down the two branches, the mid-Manhattan and the SBLI branch, and moving all the collections to the central library. The library managers indicated that this book-ops program has enabled them to get more books, more rapidly, on a circulating basis, to satisfy book borrowers more quickly.

Citizens Defending Libraries gave a lengthy quote from Mayor Bloomberg on the importance of libraries, but noted that he seems to be doing the reverse of what he says. While shrinking libraries he extols their expansion.

The Chair asked the library managers to indicate what they were doing, besides the book discussions programs mentioned, to try to enhance reading by students and adults. It was noted that the book talk was an introduction to that book. It stimulated reading of the book. A read-aloud of a story to young students impelled them to read it on their own. If a book has become a movie, interest in reading the book increases. Libraries, and schools, have book clubs, and readers are encouraged to come and tell about what they are reading. Parents are encouraged to read to students, and then have students read. When librarians visit schools for book talks, copies of the book are placed on reserve for borrowers. All felt that reading to early childhood classes stimulates an interest in reading by children.

The Chair next asked the branch librarians to indicate what involvement they have had with schools in our community and what could be done to stimulate this interest to a higher level of involvement. A number of things are noted.

Bob Fanuzzi, Chair of CB8, noted that the Community Board had many members who might be willing to volunteer at these libraries with many of these projects. School librarians receive training and there is much information on-line to assist teachers with these programs. Bob further asked the librarians to indicate how they are working with schools to implement the common core programs including levels of books and parental involvements.

The Chair then asked about the level of involvement with charter schools. Public schools and private schools had been noted in these discussions, but not charter schools. The library managers noted their involvements with charter schools too, as they had with the others. The Chair noted that some charter schools do not have school libraries of their own and depend on the public library system for their students.

The Chair asked about training for teachers and school librarians in the cataloguing of books.

The Chair then asked about what happens with books that remain on the shelves for a long time and are not taken out for circulation use. The solution, for some managers, was to swap these books with other branches or stow them away. Some new books are actually leased from a supplier. The library is allowed to keep some copies of each book and the rest is sent back to

the vender. One library manager noted that the branch has a program on family literacy. Parents are encouraged to familiarize themselves with books, read to children, and encourage children to read. Some of these programs are carried out by the librarians during and after school hours and at community centers. Another program at branch libraries involves homework help for students on a daily basis. The aim is to make each library branch as friendly as possible for usage by each age group. Each library indicates a heavy usage of all available seating space, especially after school hours. Van Cortlandt branch needs more seating space due to this increased usage. Rebecca Brown-Barbier indicated that the circulation of children's books has increased by 15% within the last year at the Riverdale Branch.

It was agreed that the next meeting of the Committee would be on December 12, 2013 at 6:00 PM. at the Riverdale Branch library.

The meeting ended at 8:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Marvin Goodman, Chair
Libraries and Cultural Affairs
Committee

MG:pm

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