

## Special Guest Commissioner's Corner



**Eric Landau**, DEP's Deputy Commissioner for the Bureau of Public Affairs and Communications, is a guest commentator this week.

Last Thursday, I had the privilege to serve as emcee for DEP's 30<sup>th</sup> Annual Water Resources Art and Poetry Contest held at the Tribeca Performing Arts Center on the grounds of the Manhattan Community College. There were a record-breaking number of participants this year—about 1,800 students (grades 2-12) from New York City and Watershed communities were honored for creating more than 1,600 original pieces of artwork and poetry. The submissions showed an appreciation for New York's water resources, the drinking water supply, harbor water, wastewater treatment, and the importance of water conservation. In addition, through the art and poetry submitted, students raised awareness about the importance of maintaining New York City's water supply and wastewater infrastructure.

The Water Resources Art and Poetry Contest allows students to exhibit their wonderful talents by creating original art that demonstrates their knowledge of New York City's essen-

tial drinking water and wastewater systems. This year's record-breaking participation once again demonstrates that our creative young people are genuinely curious and concerned about the environment around them and are well-poised to become future stewards of our waterways.

Students from 100 public, independent, charter and parochial schools participated in this year's Water Resources Art and Poetry Contest. Participants were honored as DEP Water Ambassadors and received certificates recognizing their contribution. Additionally, from the more than 1,600 submissions, a group of judges selected 66 entries representing 184 student group projects as this year's Water Champions. Among those Water Champions was **Jada Pantlitz**, daughter of **Percy Pantlitz**, who works at the Bowery Bay Wastewater Treatment Plant.

DEP's Water Resources Art and Poetry program raises awareness about the importance of clean, high-quality drinking water, and what it takes to maintain New York City's water supply and wastewater treatment systems. The ceremony recognized the students' creative expression of five central themes:

- *Water - A Precious Resource:* To highlight the importance of the quality of our tap and harbor water.
- *The New York City Water Supply System:* To look at the history of the city's drinking water system.
- *The New York City Wastewater Treatment System:* To examine how the City treats more than 1.3 billion gallons of wastewater every day.
- *Harbor Water Quality and Healthy Marine Ecosystems:* To emphasize the need for Bluebelts, explore the relationship between aquatic plants and animals, and understand the impact of pollution in our waterways.
- *Water Stewardship and Climate Change:* To bring attention to the value of water and how we can help to protect our environment.

The ceremony included remarks from **Patrick Dougher**, Program Director of Groundswell, an organization of community artists and activists that create murals to beautify neighborhoods. Also speaking were **Mahogany L. Browne**, a slam poet and writer, and **Tem Blessed**, a musician and poet. Additionally featured were dance and rap performances by two student groups.

I'd like to thank everyone in the Bureau of Public Affairs and Communications that was involved in putting on this wonderful event. I'd especially like to thank **Kim Estes-Fradis** and the Education team for spearheading the contest and delivering a rewarding and entertaining program for the students and their families. See more works of art and photos [here](#).

## Spotlight on Safety

### NYC Bans Use Of Hands-Free Phones by City's Fleet

New York City officials recently announced new safety measures for the City's fleet of more than 28,000 vehicles, which includes a ban on hands-free phone devices by City fleet operators—except for emergencies and emergency responders. New York State law currently prohibits vehicle operation while using a cell phone or texting but offers an exemption for the use of hands-free devices. This policy for the City's fleet goes into effect immediately and will ensure that drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians alike will be safer on our streets.

According to the National Safety Council, distracted driving involving mobile devices causes 26% of all collisions nationwide. Government and academic

research argues convincingly that driving while talking on a hands-free phone can be just as dangerous and distracting as using a hand-held phone or texting. The only safe driving is focused driving, and that is what will be asked of City drivers.

DEP employees in a vehicle with a distracted driver have the responsibility to speak up to encourage co-workers to put down the cell-phones. To combat the threat of distracted driving, keep your phone out of sight to avoid the temptation to talk or text.

To learn more about the fight against distracted driving, visit [OSHA's Distracted Driving Page](#) and read the [NYC Fleet Newsletter](#).



Photo Credit: Jada Pantlitz

At DEP, everyone is responsible for safety. If you or anyone on your team is concerned about your working conditions, it's okay to ask your supervisor or your bureau's EHS liaison how they can help. If you've still got questions, you can call the EHS Employee Concerns Hotline. It's DEP's responsibility to acknowledge and fix unsafe situations, procedures, and practices. With your help, we'll not only get the job done, we'll make it safer for ourselves, our coworkers, our families, and our city. CALL (800) 897-9677 OR SEND A MESSAGE THROUGH [PIPELINE](#). HELP IS ON THE WAY.

## Engineering Excellence



The \$138 million Gilboa Dam rehabilitation project was recently recognized with a national award for engineering excellence from the American Council of Engineering Companies (ACEC). DEP, along with consulting engineers from Gannett Fleming and Hazen and Sawyer, were honored with the Grand Award at the council's annual Engineering Excellence Awards. The ACEC award is the third earned by the Gilboa Dam project since it was completed in 2014, two years ahead of schedule. The project had previously been honored with top awards from the American Council of Engineering Companies of New York, and the Association of State Dam Safety Officials. [Read more here.](#)

## A Mental Health Roadmap for All

A note from **Kaitlyn Maceira**, LMHC, CASAC, with the NYC Employee Assistance Program (NYC EAP)

There are commercials on television and advertisements on the subway. The Mayor mentions it during press conferences and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) has an entire work division devoted to it. ThriveNYC is making a change in New York City, a change that desperately needs to be made. Bipolar disorder, depression, schizophrenia, anxiety, alcoholism and drug addiction; these are just some of the common mental health illnesses that New Yorkers experience daily. A statistic stating that at least one in five adult New Yorkers is likely to experience a mental health disorder in any given year was responded to by DOHMH Executive Deputy Commissioner **Dr. Gary Belkin**, as "a conservative figure." Mental health issues run rampant among people living all over the world and New York City is no exception. A DOHMH report states that, "major depressive disorder is the single greatest source of disability in New York City. At any given time over half a million adult New Yorkers are estimated to have depression, yet less than 40 percent report receiving care for it." The reasons that people do not seek help for their mental health issues are endless, but one of the main reasons is the

negative stigma that goes along with it. "The stigma of mental illness has been found to have serious negative effects on hope and an individual's sense of self-esteem. Stigma also increases the severity of psychiatric symptoms and decreases treatment adherence" as cited in a DOHMH report issued by the Mayor's Office. The stigma associated with mental illness needs to change, and New Yorkers need to be the ones to change it. In 2015, **Mayor Bill de Blasio** and **First Lady Chirlane McCray** partnered with DOHMH to release ThriveNYC: A Mental Health Roadmap for All. This initiative is geared toward supporting the mental well-being of New Yorkers and diminishing the negative stigma associated with mental health issues, but none of this will happen without educating New Yorkers. Next month I will discuss Mental Health First Aid, a public education program that introduces people to risk factors and warning signs of mental illnesses, builds understanding of their impact, and provides the support systems that can better equip New Yorkers, and people throughout the world, to help those around us. As always, if you or a loved one is seeking help, information and/or support, NYC EAP can be reached by phone at (212) 306-7660 or by email at [eap@olr.nyc.gov](mailto:eap@olr.nyc.gov).

## Rain Barrel Giveaway in Queens



This past Saturday, the Bureau of Public Affairs and Communications joined New York City Council Member **Paul A. Vallone** and New York State Assemblyman **Edward C. Braunstein** to distribute rain barrels to approximately 240 homeowners in the neighborhoods of Douglaston, Little Neck and Bayside. The 60-gallon rain barrels are easy to install, and connect directly to a property owner's downspout to capture and store the stormwater that falls on the rooftop. The water collected in the rain barrel can then be used to water lawns and gardens, or for other outdoor chores. Since 2008, DEP has distributed more than 5,100 rain barrels to New York City homeowners. Saturday's event was held at the Alley Pond Environmental Center in Queens and the rain barrels were provided free of charge. [Learn more here.](#)

## Welcome Aboard!



Yesterday 18 new employees attended orientation and received an overview of the department from Deputy Commissioner for Human Resources and Administration **Zoe Ann Campbell** and Director of Planning and Recruitment **Grace Pigott**. We hope everyone will join us in welcoming them to DEP!

**LaNeice Cleveland** and **Carmen Cruz** with BCS; **Daniel Byrne**, **Devin Day**, **Rajith Mukundan** and **Jacob Waruch** with BWS; **Sherry Abdelmalek**, **Wahid Azees**, **Pamela Elardo**, **Donna Parsons**, **Chandrasekhar Persaud** and **Mark Sandy** with BWT; **Ralph Granata**, **Joseph Spetly** and **Samuel Wylde** with CDBG; **Algenis Marinez** with FDC; **Vladimir Vilsaint** with OD&HR; and **Christopher Farao** with Sustainability.

**We welcome your feedback! To submit an announcement or suggestion, please email us at: [newsletter@dep.nyc.gov](mailto:newsletter@dep.nyc.gov).**