

# Office of the Special Narcotics Prosecutor for the City of New York

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## **New PAL Summer Play Street Site Opens at I.S. 229 in The Bronx: Follows Closing of Neighborhood Drug Market**

BRIDGET G. BRENNAN, New York City's Special Narcotics Prosecutor, Bronx District Attorney ROBERT T. JOHNSON, ALANA SWEENEY, Acting Executive Director of New York City's Police Athletic League, New York City Police Commissioner RAYMOND W. KELLY and DR. EZRA B. MATTHIAS, Principal of I.S. 229, announced today a new Police Athletic League (PAL) Summer Play Street site to serve youth in the Morris Heights section of The Bronx.

A ribbon cutting ceremony this morning at I.S. 229, Roland Patterson School, 275 Harlem River Park Bridge marked the opening of the new PAL Summer Play Street site, which runs from July 5th through August 10th. Young people ages 12 to 16 are invited to join in a variety of sporting events, games and cultural activities in a safe environment.

PAL's Summer Play Street program, founded in 1914, is designed to enrich the summer experience for youth in New York City by providing fun-filled places to play and learn. The program is the result of a successful collaboration between law enforcement, local agencies and community members dedicated to protecting the safety of residents and improving the quality of life for young people. Financial support for the new site was derived from narcotics trafficking proceeds obtained during criminal prosecutions by the Office of the Special Narcotics Prosecutor (SNP) and the Bronx District Attorney's Office. Over the past two years, both prosecutors' offices dismantled entrenched drug networks that were operating in the immediate vicinity.

In May 2010, SNP indicted a major drug kingpin and 14 members of his violent organization for selling large quantities of cocaine and heroin from an apartment building on Undercliff Avenue. The arrests followed a seven-month wiretap investigation, in which the crew was implicated in a shoot-out with a rival group that had attempted to rob them. A search of 11 apartments in the Undercliff building yielded over six kilos (13 pounds) of cocaine and heroin, approximately \$175,000 in cash and two guns. The case was investigated by the New York Drug Enforcement Task Force, which is composed of Drug Enforcement Administration agents, NYPD detectives and investigators with the New York State Police.

Subsequently, in January 2011 the Bronx DA's office prosecuted 22 drug dealers following an undercover investigation at the River Park Towers housing complex just a few blocks away at Richmond Plaza. More than 120 sales to undercover officers took place in an open drug bazaar located in a common courtyard shared by four high rise buildings. The investigation by the DA's Gangs/Major Case Bureau and the NYPD's Narcotics Borough Bronx began in June 2010 in response to an escalation of shootings and other incidents of violence at River Park Towers. Most of the 22 drug dealers arrested in the case lived at the housing complex and conducted street-level sales.

By supporting PAL, the prosecutors' offices join in a cooperative effort to maintain the gains achieved when drug organizations are removed from a community, and to improve relationships between young people and law enforcement. The new Play Street site serves as a haven for youth who might otherwise be subjected to gang recruitment and other criminal activity, including violence and drug dealing.

Above all, young people can have fun participating in a wide variety of sports, such as stick ball, volleyball and basketball, as well dance, cultural events, board games and supervised open play. The program also offers a prevention education component designed to reduce risk-taking behaviors and foster life skills. During the weeks it is in session, the site will operate from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. Monday to Thursday. Admission is limited to 120 participants.

New York City's Police Athletic League is the first, finest and largest civilian-run PAL in the country. Founded in 1914, PAL provides recreational, educational, cultural and social activities to over 56,000 boys and girls annually. It is also the city's largest, independent, nonprofit youth organization.

Special Narcotics Prosecutor BRIDGET G. BRENNAN said, "Last year my office indicted a major drug kingpin who lorded over this very neighborhood and sold bulk-quantities of heroin and cocaine on a daily basis. He protected his turf with violence and cared nothing for the safety of law-abiding residents. In one case a member of his crew shot bullets into the street on Underhill Avenue. Today we are taking seized narcotics proceeds and putting those resources back into the community. This Play Street gives young people a chance to enjoy fun recreational activities in a secure environment this summer. We are continuing our commitment to support the Police Athletic League and we thank DA Robert Johnson for joining us in this important endeavor."

"It's clear that in order to insure public safety we have to do more than simply prosecute criminals and keep them off the streets. We have to provide young people with attractive alternatives to the aura of the illegal aspects of 'street-life' and guide them in making choices that propel their lives in more positive directions," said Bronx District Attorney ROBERT T. JOHNSON. "I am confident that this Play Street and its staff of dedicated youth recreation workers will make an important contribution toward that end."

PAL's Acting Executive Director ALANA SWEENEY said, "The Play Streets provide an opportunity for youth to engage in stimulating activities while building positive relationships with other youth, staff and the law enforcement community. They gain confidence, build self-esteem and learn how to make good decisions."

Police Commissioner RAYMOND W. KELLY said, "Removing violent drug dealers from our neighborhood streets is satisfying, and it is especially rewarding when those drug dealers and violence are replaced with opportunities for young people to learn and play in a safe environment."