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# The Park Slope Civic Council CIVIC NEWS

April 2010 Volume LXXII, No. 8 [www.parkslopeciviccouncil.org](http://www.parkslopeciviccouncil.org)

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*From Building New Gardens to Feeding the Hungry*

## PSCC Awards 2010 Neighborhood Grants

The Park Slope Civic Council has awarded grants to 15 neighborhood groups for the year 2010. This year's grants range in size from \$500-1,000 and total \$8,100. In keeping with longstanding tradition, they are entirely funded by money raised by the Park Slope House Tour, which will celebrate its 51<sup>st</sup> anniversary on Sunday, May 16. Over the years, the Civic Council has channeled hundreds of thousands of dollars to the Park Slope community.

Recipients are carefully screened on the basis of applications submitted in the fall, and awards are given to schools, charities, cultural institutions and other organizations for projects deemed of benefit to Park Slope and the people who live, work, learn and play here.

This year's grants were awarded to:

**CAMBA, Inc.:** *Park Slope Women's Shelter Garden Project.* Funds will be used to purchase rain barrels and accessories, contributing to the ongoing garden beautification project at the armory shelter.

**P.S. 124 K PTA:** *Performing Arts.* PS 124, which is more than 100 years old, was built without an auditorium. Our grant will help students mount a production in the nearby Gallery Players performance space, providing them with an important educational opportunity.

**Park Slope Christian Help, INC.:** *CHIPS Pantry Program.* Among CHIPS' many other services, its pantry provides 150 bags of groceries to individuals and families each Friday. Our grant will help fill those bags.

**P.S. 321 PTA:** *School Garden.* The school plans a 300 square-foot garden plot in a sunny spot along 1<sup>st</sup> Street. Our grant will help support the garden's construction and ongoing maintenance.

**P.S. 372-The Children's School PTA:** *African Drum Making.* Our grant will help fund lessons in African drums and drum making with Ibrahima Diokhane, a local drum maker. Students will showcase their skills at a performance for their fellow students and parents. The school will also purchase drums for future use.

**BAX (Brooklyn Arts Exchange):** *Internship Program to Provide Free Festivals for Young Artists.* BAX sponsors programs bringing together artists, students and community members to create and perform new works. Two of its offerings,

*See Grants , page 6*



Peter Bellamy

### *Tupper Thomas: Job Well Done*

When a much-admired person steps down from a job well done after many years, it is expected that the praise and hyperbole will flow. In the case of Tupper Thomas, who has decided to retire from her dual positions as administrator of Prospect Park and president of the Prospect Park Alliance, it is safe to say that the praise and accolades will not do justice to her remarkable 30-year career. Nor will they adequately describe Tupper's success in turning Prospect Park into the world-class gem that we enjoy along with millions of others each year.

For those of us who go back to the dismal days of the 1970s in Brooklyn, the images of a neglected, crime-ridden and scary park are all too well-remembered. Buildings were abandoned, repairs were non-existent, a threadbare corps of park workers could not keep up with the maintenance of 585 acres and the park had few amenities. Some attractions managed to hang on, like the zoo and the skating rink, but both were sad, run-down reminders of better times. You had to have a fair amount of confidence (or ignorance) to walk through parts of the park even when the sun was shining. Those were the days of a near-bankrupt New York, the Bernie Goetz fear factor and garbage and rat

*See Tupper , page 2*

### *The 51st Annual Park Slope House Tour*

*Sunday, May 16, noon-5pm*

The tour funds thousands of dollars in neighborhood grants each year.

Tickets go on sale May 1 at local merchants (see p. 2), or reserve your tickets now at [parkslopeciviccouncil.org](http://parkslopeciviccouncil.org)



**Tupper**, continued from Page 1

infestations that threatened to consume the city.

Many things contributed to the rebirth and renaissance of Prospect Park, but each connected at some point through Tupper Thomas. When the Prospect Park Alliance was created, Tupper was there (and she brought along such Civic Council stalwarts as Henry Christensen III and Barbara McTiernan). Under Tupper's leadership, fundraising entered a new dimension in which it became possible to host operas and orchestras and provide haunted walks at Halloween.

With financial and administrative engines working in sync, Tupper went on to tackle the Parade Grounds rehabilitation, allowing untold thousands each week the opportunity to play soccer and baseball. The Tennis Center was taken over by the Alliance and is now competently managed. The Boat House, once a shell of a bygone era, was converted into the Audubon Center, and the zoo (excuse me, the Wildlife Conservation Center) is no longer the inhumane home of mangy giraffes, surly polar bears and smelly chimps but a respectable destination for families making up the melting pot that Brooklyn truly is.

Ditto for the Bandshell, which has become a nationally recognized venue for first-rate performers. The Woodlands, the Long Meadow, the Carousel and much more were brought back to a state that its creators, Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, would appreciate.

I have my own personal admiration for Tupper Thomas as a person who worked closely with the Civic Council and who inherently understands that the mission of the Civic Council and the objectives of the park are one and the same. When Christmas tree recycling came to the park, the Civic Council was asked to help, and many of us have fond memories of sipping hot chocolate by the mulching machines. When barbecuing on the streets

adjacent to the park caused a foul wind to blow and made for a quality-of-life issue, Tupper solved the problem with sensibly designated cooking areas. The list goes on and on.

How does one person get so much done for so many years? It might be a testament to her skill that she has thrived under four mayors and a similar number of park commissioners. She certainly has the political instincts of a master politician: Anyone who has attended the Carousel Ball has witnessed the conga line of elected officials queuing up to pay homage (and fund the park budget). But it is more than politics and money. There is the leadership, judgment and fairness that Tupper Thomas has displayed in handling any given issue. Most people are probably not even aware of the flare-ups between sports leagues seeking the limited permit allocations, or the territorial struggles between the early morning dog walkers and the 9am baseball games, to offer just two examples. Tupper deals personally with such issues and handles each one fairly and competently, thank you very much.

Each of us, regardless of what we do, should share the passion for our jobs that Tupper has for the park. I remember a few years ago when a civic issue boiled to the surface because a large group sought to hold a sizable festival on a street adjacent to the park. Some argued that the festival should be inside the park but Tupper anticipated the damage to the Long Meadow would be too great and would not have it. Tupper proved to be correct, and the Brooklyn Pride street festival has thrived for many years on Prospect Park West. During this episode, I teased Tupper that she reminded me of the Alec Guinness character in *The Bridge Over the River Kwai*, who was so proud of the bridge that he and his fellow British prisoners of war had built that he could not bring himself to destroy it to derail Japanese trains. She laughed at the gibe, but those of us who have gotten to know Tupper appreciate how the park has been valiantly protected under her watch.

At the Little League opening day ceremonies on April 10, Assemblyman Jim Brennan declared that Tupper Thomas should be recognized at all upcoming public events. She was cheered that day (and will continue to be) but it will be bittersweet to see her step down. Tupper Thomas has been a great public servant whose success is immeasurable. And that is not an exaggeration.

—Bernie Graham, Trustee and former PSCC President

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## CALENDAR

*For details and additional listings, go to [parkslopeciviccouncil.org](http://parkslopeciviccouncil.org).*

### **PSCC Monthly Meeting**

*Thursday, May 6, 7pm, New York Methodist Hospital  
Executive Dining Room*

### **51st Annual House Tour**

*Sunday, May 16, noon-5pm. Starting point: Poly Prep Lower School, 50 Prospect Park West at 1st Street. Tickets may be reserved through our web site or purchased May 1-15 at Aguayo & Huebener, Astoria Federal Savings, Brenton Realty, Brown Harris Stevens, Dixon's Bicycle Shop, Dizzy's Diner, Ideal Properties Group, tb shaw realty associates, Warren Lewis Realty and Windsor Café.*

### **PCCC Annual Meeting**

*All members are welcome to our year-end meeting for the election of officers and new trustees. Lovgren Awards will be presented to two people who have made significant contributions to the community: one volunteer and one professional. Three scholarships will be awarded to students at the Secondary Schools for Research, Journalism and Law.*

*Thursday, June 3, 6:30 pm, Prospect Park Y Rooftop Meeting Room.*

# News & Notes for the Civic Minded

## Following up:

• **PS133.** Councilmember Steve Levin is organizing a community advisory group consisting of interested parties and stakeholders in the new school to be constructed at Butler Street and 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The school will replace the landmark PS133, which will soon be demolished despite widespread neighborhood opposition, including from the Civic Council. A first meeting has been tentatively scheduled for Monday, May 4, 10am-noon at the offices of the 5th Avenue Committee, 621 DeGraw St., and Levin has promised to schedule future meetings at times more amenable to working families. To confirm the meeting time, call Levin's office at 718-875-5200.

• **The empty lot at Sackett Street and 4th Avenue.** In January, the *Civic News* contacted the city's Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), asking about the status of the empty lot cleared more than 10 years ago for construction of an access shaft to Water Tunnel 3. The city promised then that the lot would eventually be turned over to the community as a public space, but the date had been pushed back several times, most recently to 2009. We were told the date has been pushed back again, this time to 2013, but we were given no explanation for this latest delay. CB6 District Manager Craig Hammerman wrote DEP asking for details and has received this reply from Deputy Commissioner Matthew Mahoney:

*I understand the community's interest in gaining access to this property and maintaining the upkeep. DEP shares in your interest and has worked with the community to create a mural that would provide a visual setting. We understand the community's desire to build on that visual and construct a community garden. DEP has not deviated from that position. Once the tunnel is activated (projected for 2013) the equipment will need to be tested under operating conditions to guarantee delivery of quality water to the residents of NYC. Any devel-*

*opment of the site prior to testing would have to be demolished during the testing phase; we certainly do not want to bulldoze the hard work and resources of the community. DEP wants to continue to work with the community to insure the site is well maintained. We have contacted the contractor regarding cleanup and maintenance.*

• **Atlantic Yards Lawsuit.** *BrooklynSpeaks*, a community coalition that includes the Civic Council, has posted a statement on its website excerpted here:

On April 8, a group of BrooklynSpeaks sponsors, elected officials and individual petitioners filed a motion asking that the Court reconsider its decision not to reverse approval of the Atlantic Yards Modified General Project Plan (MGPP). The petitioners are asking [Supreme Court] Judge [Marcy] Friedman to review new evidence that was not considered when she made her decision.

The new evidence consists of a master development agreement that was executed between the developer, Forest City Ratner (FCR), and other parties in the Atlantic Yards project, after the Empire State Development Corporation (ESDC) had already agreed to approve the Modified General Project Plan. That agreement was withheld from public disclosure until after the hearing in the case.

"Now that the agreement is available," said Jo Anne Simon, Democratic Leader of the 52nd Assembly District, "it's clear that ESDC's approval of the Atlantic Yards' Modified General Project Plan was illegal. The ESDC didn't require the developer to prepare a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) even though the agency was willing to agree to allow construction to extend well beyond the 10-year period that had been evaluated in the 2006 EIS."

In her ruling, Judge Friedman relied heavily on a representation in the MGPP that the leases for the 16 separate building parcels would contain a covenant requiring FCR to use "commercially reasonable efforts" to

See *News & Notes*, page 7

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## Viewing Brooklyn

# Prospect Park's Carousel: A Roundabout History

**S**aturday, April 10, I watched Tupper Thomas lead the annual Little League baseball parade up 7th Avenue to 9th Street and then into Prospect Park for what may be her last time: Thomas recently announced that she will

retire soon as park administrator and as president of the Prospect Park Alliance. I thought it would be appropriate this month to focus on the carousel, one of the Alliance's first reclamation projects.

The park's first carousel opened in July 1874 in the Children's Playground, which was set in a natural glacial hollow along Flatbush Avenue just below Grand Army Plaza. The playground also included a small pond for model boats, a seven-sided summerhouse, an open lawn for children to play in, a maze and a croquet area. The pond was "formalized" in the early 1890s to create the Vale of Cashmere, and the playground became the Rose Garden in 1895. That first carousel had 24 wooden horses and four coaches and was powered by real horses.

Though children used the playground, there was much more activity elsewhere in the park, especially when picnickers flocked to the Long Meadow and to the Picnic Woods, across the meadow from where the Picnic House now stands. In 1885, the carousel was relocated to a hill in the Picnic Woods to be nearer to those crowds. Lawn tennis was a major activity in the Long Meadow at that time, and the basement of this second carousel included locker space for tennis equipment—a need that disappeared when the Tennis House was built in 1909-10. In 1915, the carousel was replaced by a newer model in the same location.

This third carousel was destroyed by fire around 1935, and the park went without one until an eight-sided building was constructed in 1951-2, just inside the Willink Entrance, to house the carousel we have today. Its parts, including 51 carved horses, a giraffe, a deer and chariots pulled by dragons, were taken from two Coney Island carousels built by the well-known Brooklyn designer Charles Carmel in 1915 and 1918. It twirled until 1983, when a lack of funds for much needed repairs stopped the faded animals in their tracks.

The newly created Prospect Park Alliance raised \$800,000 for the carousel's restoration. Will Morton, famous as a conservator of carousels, hand-stripped up to 20 coats of paint from each figure, carved new sections when needed and painted the animals in the original colors used when they were made in the 1910s. Included in the restoration were two historic paintings, which were uncovered on the repaired Wurlitzer Band Organ. In 2001, the Carousel received a new roof and other repairs were made with funds raised by the Alliance. Their 2000 Carousel Ball was a gala event that kicked off a "horse adoption and grooming program" to secure funding for future maintenance.

The Alliance's website asks kids and adults to "take an old-fash-

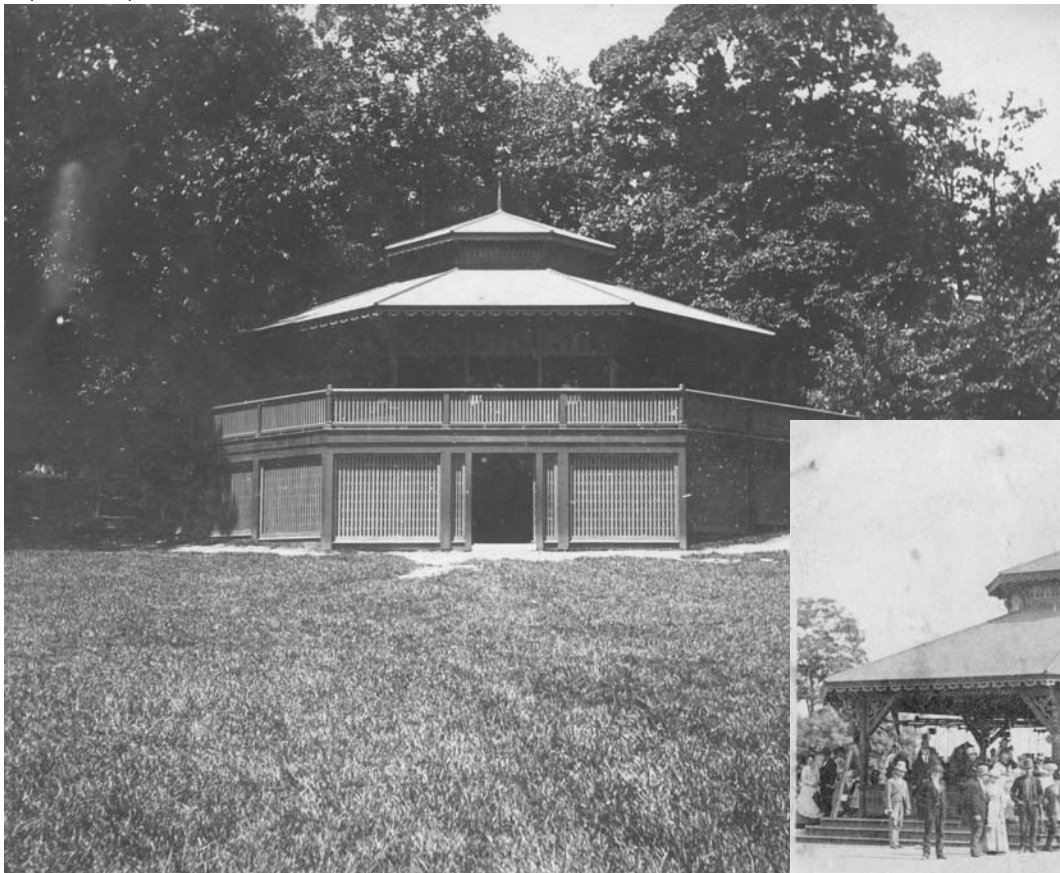
ioned ride back in time, to the golden age of carnival excitement," but few people realize how old carousels actually are. According to Frederick Fried's *Pictorial History of the Carousel*, 12th-century horsemen in Arabia and Turkey played a game where little clay balls, filled with scented water, were tossed among the riders, the goal being not to drop them. The game was brought back to Europe by the Crusaders and given the name "carousel," derived from an Italian word meaning "little war." Italian pages in the court of King Charles VIII introduced the game to France in the late 1400s, where it was transformed into an opulent masquerade and equestrian pageant that included a "ring-spearing tournament," whose goal was to lance a ring suspended on brightly colored ribbons between two posts. Around 1680, the tournament boasted a mechanical device, initially used to train young nobles for combat, with wooden horses and chariots suspended by chains from arms radiating from a center pole. A horse, mule or man supplied the power. Later, the English applied steam power and launched the carousel into modern times. The dragons in Prospect Park's carousel may be a visual link to its medieval origins.

The Willink Entrance, on Flatbush Avenue near the junction of Empire Boulevard and Ocean Avenue, is named for a family who lived nearby. It was once also known as the Malbone Street Entrance, before Malbone Street was renamed Empire Boulevard. The name was changed because real estate developers didn't want people reminded of the Malbone Street wreck, the worst mass-transit accident in U.S. history. In May 1918, between Ebbets Field and Prospect Park, nearly 100 people lost their lives when a motorman lost control of a train going down a short hill and around a curve.

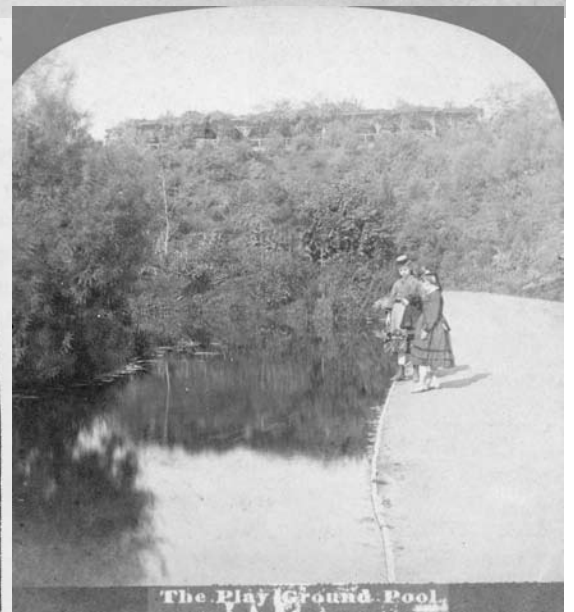
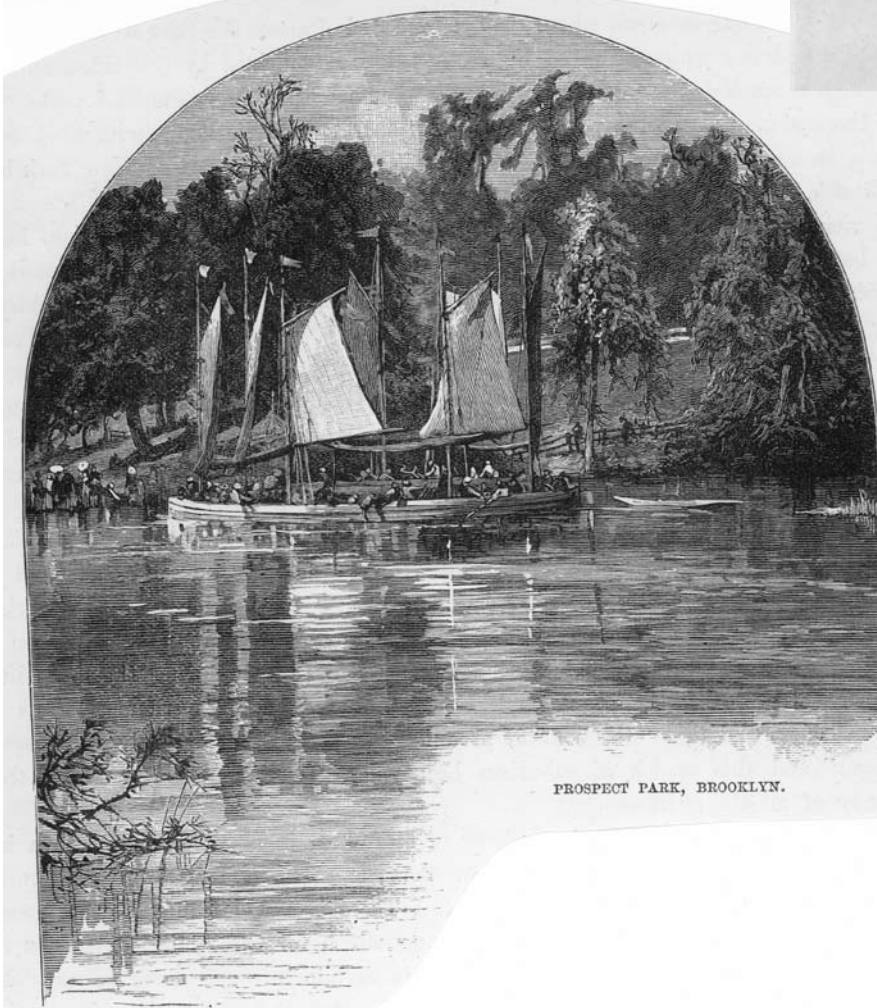
To be perfectly accurate, the park actually had a fifth carousel, opened in 1874. Though it went round and round like the other carousels, it did so on water. This "Circular Yacht," also known as the "Water Carousel," was propelled by sails and oars and floated on a body of water known as the Pool. The Pool was later dammed and enlarged to create Swan Boat Lake. The lake still sits behind the Long Meadow, and the water flowing out of it creates the Ambergill and runs through the Ravine, both of which are also among Tupper's successful reclamation projects.

I want to wish Tupper Thomas the best of luck in her retirement, and I hope that she returns as a volunteer in Prospect Park in the near future. I too will soon be "retiring" as a trustee of the Park Slope Civic Council and want to thank the many people who have stopped me to say thanks for the column or those who have given me ideas or interesting facts to write about. Since the trustees have placed term limits on their lengths of service, I am leaving this group after more than 25 years with a heavy heart for the organization that no longer seems to feel that institutional memory is important—a strange concept for a group that has always taken so much pride in Park Slope's historic nature.

—Bob Levine, Trustee and PSCC Historian



The photo below, half of a stereopticon circa 1880, shows the park's first carousel, which was in the Children's Playground. The second carousel (left) was on a hill in Picnic Woods. This photo shows the open door to the basement area, where tennis equipment was stored before the Tennis House was built.



The pond in the Children's Playground (above) was eventually transformed into the formal pool of the Vale of Cashmere. The photo on the left (from a book from around 1880 entitled "The World: Its Cities and Peoples") shows the "Water Carousel" or "Circular Yacht" in the small lake on the east side of the Long Meadow, near where the baseball diamonds are now. The yacht, powered by sail and oars, was christened in 1874, the same year as the park's first carousel.

Grants, continued from Page 1

YOUTHWORKS and the Teen Arts Conference, have grown to the point where administrative support is required. To that end, our grant will fund two, six-month internship positions for college-age students.

**Good Shepherd Services Family Reception Center:** *Teen Girl's Workshop.* Dr. Patti Feuereisen, Brooklyn-based co-author of *Invisible Girls: The Truth about Sexual Abuse*, is working with the center to establish a support group for sexually abused girls. Our grant will help train staff so that Dr. Feuereisen's work can have a greater impact within the program and on local residents.

**GallopNYC: Dance Project.** Our grant will help fund an event kicking off a partnership between GallopNYC, a therapeutic riding

program, and the Equus Projects, a dance program. The event will introduce local children to Gallop and Equus, offer riding and dance experiences and serve as a recruitment tool for after-school programs.

**Brooklyn Conservatory of Music:** *"NYC in Short" Concert Series.* Our grant will underwrite a pilot performance of a concert series offering 15 to 30-minute operas addressing issues of contemporary life in New York City, such as homelessness, education and poverty. The pilot concert will be a way to gauge audience interest in the format and topics.

**Green-Wood Historic Fund:** *Coney Island and Beyond.* The fund and Park Slope's Puppeteer's Cooperative are planning an event celebrating the halcyon days of Coney Island. Our grant will help create a 30-minute video of the event to be used as an educational tool about Coney Island's history and its ongoing role in our borough.

**P.S. 39 PTA:** *"Story Pirates."* Our grant will help the school and the Striking Viking Story Pirates offer writing workshops to 3rd, 4th and 5th graders, and to mount a school-wide assembly performance. The Striking Viking Story Pirates adapt and perform stories written by kids to celebrate the words and ideas of young people, to promote literacy as a vital part of early childhood education and to preserve the spark of youthful creativity often lost in the transition to adulthood

**Chickpeas Childcare Center:** *Children's Garden.* Our grant will help the cooperatively run preschool, established in 1981,

build raised-bed gardens around the school on 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue in the South Slope. The gardens will provide opportunities to learn about botany, healthy eating, cycles of life, math fundamentals and interpersonal relationships. Some of the beds will be on the street side, providing a welcome sidewalk amenity.

**P.S. 10 PTA:** *Auditorium Sound Project.* Our fund will help the school purchase three microphones for use in the school auditorium.

**Chocolate Chip Chamber Music:** *Education-Day Program and Guide.* The group introduces young children to live ensemble music in a way that is both enjoyable and playful. Funds will be used to create teachers' guides to help teachers extend the concert experience into their classrooms.

**BRIC Arts|Media|Bklyn:** *Honoraria for Storytellers, Ezra Jack Keats Family Concert.* The concert has become an annual tradition and the centerpiece of Celebrate Brooklyn's family programming. Our grant will help fund honoraria for the celebrity storytellers who read from the works of Ezra Jack Keats before the concert begins.

*This year's Grants Committee was chaired by Greg Sutton and included Nathaniel Allman, Alexa Halsall, Nelly Isaacson, Robert Levine, Eric McClure, Lauri Schindler and Gilly Youner.*

*The application for grants for 2011 will be posted on the Civic Council website in the fall. For information purposes, the 2010 application and guidelines remain posted on the site (go to [parkslopeciviccouncil.org](http://parkslopeciviccouncil.org) and click on "Grants").*

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**News & Notes, continued from Page 3**

complete the entire project by 2019. "The master development agreement now confirms that the 10-year construction period to which ESDC limited its analysis of construction impacts is a fiction," said Lauri Schindler of the Park Slope Civic Council.

To read the statement in its entirety and for additional details, go to [www.brooklynsspeaks.net](http://www.brooklynsspeaks.net).



**Movers & Shakers:** Trustees invited 85 of their friends and neighbors to a cocktail party on April 8 to acquaint them with the Civic Council's work and to entice them to become involved. Organizers Susan Fox, Linda Gnat-Mullin and Alexa Halsel reported that the event, held in the Prospect Park Y's rooftop meeting room, resulted in several new memberships and numerous inquiries about PSCC's many projects. They also reported that the drink specially concocted for the event, the Park Slope Passion, was a big hit. They have promised to reveal the ingredients to anyone who joins in the coming weeks, urging everyone to remember that New York Magazine would not have named us the city's best neighborhood if lots of people hadn't worked very hard over many years. To join that ongoing effort, go to our website, or call 718-832-8227.

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# Civic News

Park Slope Civic Council

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## The Park Slope Civic Council

Organized as the South Brooklyn Board of Trade in 1896, PSCC is one of the oldest civic associations in Brooklyn. We identify and address quality-of-life issues important to the community; create and support projects geared to improving and protecting the neighborhood; and assist local non-profit organizations that benefit those living and working in Park Slope. Our many ongoing programs include the Halloween Parade, the Clean Streets campaign, community forums, and a holiday toy drive. Our annual House Tour raises thousands of dollars for neighborhood initiatives. All are welcome to join. To learn more, go to [parkslopeciviccouncil.org](http://parkslopeciviccouncil.org).

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