After the storm...here comes the sun!

Let's all have a great summer!

© Lauren Stevens
IN THIS ISSUE
7 CLASS OF 2020 FIUFS
    Rebecca Hoey
8 LOST AT SEA
    Mariana Dominguez
10 FALLEN IDOLS OF FIRE ISLAND: PART I
    Emma Boskovski

COMMUNITY COLUMNS
9 SALTAIRE
    Hugh O’Brien
11 OCEAN BEACH AREA
    Joey Macellaro
13 OCEAN BAY PARK
    Barbara Gaby Placilla
15 CHERRY GROVE/
    FIRE ISLAND PINES
    Robert Levine

IN EVERY ISSUE
1 ADULT COLORING PAGE
    Lauren Stevens
16 BOOK REVIEW
    Rita Plush
5 EDITOR’S WINDOW
    Shoshanna McCollum
14 EYE ON FIRE ISLAND
    Timothy Bolger
18 HISTORY
    Thomas McGann
17 POLICE BLOTTER
    Shoshanna McCollum

ONLINE THIS ISSUE
www.fireisland-news.com
> DINING REVIEW: BAD BOY BURRITOS AT THE PANTRY
    Shoshanna McCollum
> ENVIRONMENT
    Karl Grossman

Cartoons by Eric Pedersen

“Home of the ROCKET FUEL”
CJ’s - 49 Years Strong
CLOSED THANKSGIVING AND CHRISTMAS DAY
Whether you are looking for a year-round home in a seaside community or a summer beachfront paradise, you need an agent who has lived, worked and played in the waterfront communities of Long Island and on the beaches of Fire Island!

SERVING FIRE ISLAND AND THE SOUTH SHORE OF LONG ISLAND FROM MASSAPEQUA TO MONTAUK

Call me if you are looking to buy or sell a home
631.786.0080
DReilly@signaturepremier.com
95 Main Street, Sayville, NY 11782 • SignaturePremier.com
Office: 631.567.0100 • Fax: 631.567.0101

If your property is currently listed with another broker, please disregard. It is not our intention to solicit the listing of other brokers.

Dawn Reilly
Licensed Real Estate Salesperson
Certified Buyers Representative

LODUCA ASSOCIATES

PRECISION IS THE FOUNDATION THAT YOUR VISION IS BUILT UPON.
Serving Fire Island Communities Since 1989

General Contractors
LODUCAASSOCIATES.COM
631-567-3144
ADMIN@LODUCAASSOCIATES.COM
212-587-5989
Hello and welcome to our debut issue of Fire Island News this summer, reimagined so to be more sustainable for these unusual times we are presently living in. It is a leaner paper without some of the bells and whistles of our previous seasons, but great care has been given to still deliver a news publication of substance.

The color pages are gone for now, but our talented design director went above and beyond to keep it visually interesting. Also put aside is the “round-up” article that other Fire Island newspapers open their season with. Now that we publish online year round, to recap such events felt less necessary. However this paper is not just about prudent reductions. We also get to boast some reclaimed territory with the return of the much beloved Police Blotter! A special thanks to Ocean Beach Police Chief George Hesse and Suffolk County Police Department’s Public Information Office for making this possible.

Every contributor to this paper is to be commended for the sacrifices they made to make this publishing season happen – including our advertisers who returned for another summer or joined us for the first time under conditions when businesses think hard about every dollar they spend. They are the reason we can still offer our newspapers at no charge to the public; please remember them when making purchasing decisions of your own.

We also thank you, our readers, for your continued interest and loyalty during these turbulent past few months in our state and nation, for without a listening audience our words would go adrift in a vast and lonely ocean.

2020 Vision

HELLO AND WELCOME TO our debut issue of Fire Island News this summer, reimagined so to be more sustainable for these unusual times we are presently living in. It is a leaner paper without some of the bells and whistles of our previous seasons, but great care has been given to still deliver a news publication of substance.

The color pages are gone for now, but our talented design director went above and beyond to keep it visually interesting. Also put aside is the “round-up” article that other Fire Island newspapers open their season with. Now that we publish online year round, to recap such events felt less necessary. However this paper is not just about prudent reductions. We also get to boast some reclaimed territory with the return of the much beloved Police Blotter! A special thanks to Ocean Beach Police Chief George Hesse and Suffolk County Police Department’s Public Information Office for making this possible.

Every contributor to this paper is to be commended for the sacrifices they made to make this publishing season happen – including our advertisers who returned for another summer or joined us for the first time under conditions when businesses think hard about every dollar they spend. They are the reason we can still offer our newspapers at no charge to the public; please remember them when making purchasing decisions of your own.

We also thank you, our readers, for your continued interest and loyalty during these turbulent past few months in our state and nation, for without a listening audience our words would go adrift in a vast and lonely ocean.
NETTER
Beach Estates
631-583-6100

Cayuga Street  OCEAN BAY PARK  $650,000

Dehnhoff Walk  OCEAN BEACH  $899,000

Schooner Walk  OCEAN BEACH  $1,250,000

Laurel Avenue  SEAVIEW  $1,999,999

Evergreen Avenue  SEAVIEW  $890,000

Crescent Street  SEAVIEW  $799,000

Bringing Over 70 Years of World-Class Professionalism to the Fire Island Shore
One Founder, One Leader, One Team
NetterBeachEstates.com  ·  Bay Walk, Ocean Beach
WHAT A SCHOOL YEAR this was… The students weren’t the only ones learning this year as everybody’s roles shifted literally overnight. Parents became teachers, kids became homeschoolers, and teachers educated from afar. Yet even with the turbulence of major change, everyone worked hard and the students of Fire Island School have been recognized virtually for their achievements.

Let’s start with the video created by Teacher on Special Assignment/Dignity Act Coordinator Phillip Tamberino and his incredibly talented music class performing the inspirational song, “Have it All,” by Jason Mraz. The performance is nothing short of uplifting. Keep in mind, it’s hard enough to work together as a music class all year long while you’re together in a classroom, but this was created by the students and teacher while being separated at home, making it even more commendable.

Visual art crafted by the students under the guidance of ESL/Library/Art Teacher Bianca Daidone is also something to be enjoyed. The video on the FIUFSD website takes you through a multitude of beautiful masterpieces students created throughout the school year.

Families and teachers all had to go extra miles this year, and while there was no physical ceremony, a beautifully endearing video was created for the 2020 graduation. Set to the songs “Put A Little Love in Your Heart” and “I Did it All,” no one who watches it can argue that besides a lot of time and effort, there was a whole lotta love put into the video.

As every year, the hard work and dedication of the students was awarded and can be enjoyed through the Awards video. Special honors went to the following students: The Wirostek Award to fourth-grader Angelo La Rosa and fifth-grader Ariel Vizcarroldo. Senior Tess Lambie received the Scope Scholarship, along with the Woodhull Scholarship. The FIA Scholarship went to Olivia Asaro-Apsley. We’re also proud to announce that Kevin Crawson and Emma Beqaj graduated as well. We have been told that graduates Tess Lambie will be attending SUNY New Paltz and Kevin Crawson is headed to Sacred Heart University. We wish all the graduates great success in their future endeavors.

It was an honor to be able to watch all these amazing students in their videos and to see all they accomplished this past academic year. There’s no doubt that the smiles of these children can help us all heal from the challenging year we all endured, so thank you for that! Good luck to all in the upcoming school year.

Editor’s note: To view the graduation videos, visit FIUFSD’s website at fi.k12.ny.us. Also congratulations to longtime FIUFSD Building Maintenance and Operations Supervisor James Fitz and Teacher Assistant Dawn Lippert for entering their well earned retirements. Enjoy the next chapter.

Class of 2020:
Fire Island Union Free School District
By Rebecca Hoey

CALM BEFORE THE STORM
The first seven days went as planned. On March 3, Joan Rashid flew out of New York headed for Buenos Aires. On March 7, she boarded Holland-America’s “MS-Zaandam” for a 31-day South American cruise beginning in Buenos Aires and ending in Fort Lauderdale.

Early in March COVID-19 was a mostly European problem. Rashid expressed concern about the voyage but on calling Holland-America was told she could not get a refund if she canceled. On the day of the ship’s departure from Buenos Aires, New York declared a state of emergency due to the virus.

Upon embarking, Rashid noted that there was passenger screening but it was dependent on self-disclosure. There were no signs of the now all too familiar temperature checks. Passengers were asked if they had been feeling ill and passports were checked to monitor comings and goings from affected countries.

“About 300 passengers were U.S. citizens but most were from Europe; Germany, France and England,” Rashid said. “Most had not canceled.”

THE VOYAGE BEGINS
The first port of call was in Uruguay, followed by the Falkland Islands. On March 14, the “Zaandam” arrived in Punta Arenas, Chile, whose port was still open. (Chile reported its first COVID-19 case on March 7.)

After leaving Punta Arenas, the “Zaandam” headed to Argentina. During the night however, surrounding countries began to lock down. Argentina was closing its ports and Chile’s ports would be closed by 8 a.m. that morning. The ship needed to get back to Punta Arenas before Chile’s ports closed. On March 15, “Zaandam’s” Captain Ane Smit got on the ship’s P.A. system to announce that the cruise would be ending in Chile. Passengers would be disembarking in Punta Arenas and needed to fly home.

This would not end up being the case.

NO DESTINATION
Chile had already closed its ports. Holland-America and Chile tried to negotiate a deal but on March 16, negotiations broke down. The “Zaandam” was not allowed to dock and went back out to sea. From her cabin, Rashid monitored news channels for information about the virus. The panic in the states. The consequent lockdowns. The fear.

“Sometimes we were able to get BBC News on the TV, which gave more information related to us,” Rashid said. For a large part though the ship was in its own bubble, floating at sea.

According to the Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) Global Passenger Report, the average age of cruise passengers is 46.7 years. Cruises tend to appeal to a slightly older and retired group. They allow passengers to make new friends and join activities in a relaxed environment. However, because of the proximity to others and constant interaction between both passengers and crew, a virus can spread quickly and easily on a ship.

On the “Zaandam” things were precariously balancing on normal. The ship had no clear destination and extra precautions were being taken to ensure cleanliness, such as crew doling out portions at the buffets instead of passengers helping themselves and hand sanitizer being easily accessible. After refueling for two days in Santiago, Chile, the “Zaandam” still had no destination.

The ship’s final sense of normalcy was lost when passengers were told to return to their cabins because some passengers and crew were showing symptoms of COVID-19. The crew was delivering food three times a day, and linens were put in a bag outside cabins and returned clean. Passengers were only permitted on deck in small groups for a half-hour each day. For Rashid, this meant staying in her small cabin with no balcony and no fresh air besides the maximum half-hour.

In the middle of the night of March 25, a boat carrying supplies met the “Zaandam” to replenish food and medical equipment. Passengers were not told of the replenishment ahead of time as to not cause mass confusion.

On March 27, Captain Smit announced what most passengers had already feared: COVID-19 was on the “Zaandam.”

THE JOURNEY HOME
On March 27, the “Rotterdam,” a fellow Holland-America ship, was dispatched to assist the “Zaandam.” Upon its arrival the plan was for the “Rotterdam” to take passengers determined to be healthy aboard.

No passengers with COVID-19 symptoms or those who had contact with individuals testing positive were allowed on the “Rotterdam.” Rashid feared maybe she would not pass the test. What if her temperature read high, would she be forced to stay behind? However she was grouped with fellow passengers deemed healthy, who were then taken a few at a time in small boats from one ship to another.

Side by side, both ships traveled together in the Pacific Ocean, still with no port to welcome them. The next day Panama allowed both the “Rotterdam” and the “Zaandam” to pass through the canal. Passengers were instructed to turn off their cabin lights and close any blinds. The ships would have to pass through like ghosts.

Once they were through to the Caribbean, the ships had a new obstacle, where they were going to dock in the States? The most obvious option was Florida, but Gov. Ron DeSantis did not initially wish the Sunshine State to receive sick passengers. However Florida ultimately did agree to let the ships dock, and the slow process of disembarking began. It took almost two weeks to get all passengers off both ships. After disembarking on April 4, it took Rashid one shuttle and two flights to return to New York.

EPLOGUE
The only refund Carnival Cruises, Holland-America’s parent company, gave Rashid was about $3,000. She also received a future cruise bonus worth $25,000. That is, if she decides to cruise again. If she chooses to use the promotion she would still need to pay for beverages and any shore excursions she wished to do.

In total, four individuals died aboard the “Zaandam” with three testing positive with the CDC for COVID-19. Thirty guests and 117 crew members were tested through like ghosts. In mid-May Holland America Line President Orlando Ashford announced he would be resigning at the end of the month.

Rashid returned to New York City during some of its darkest days as the epicenter of this pandemic. It would take time to decompess after returning home, but she was back in her own space. She used the quiet time to process the ordeal while also catching up on daily tasks such as going through her mail. Her son in Texas invited her to stay with him, but she felt it best to isolate away from him and her young grandchild. Shortly before Memorial Day Weekend, she boarded another large watercraft – this time a ferry for her journey back to Fire Island, and her home in Ocean Beach.
OHMYGODTHEREAREONLYFOURISSUES-
thisyearandcolumnsanonlybe500wordsandwe-
don’thavespacetoreporteverythingbutifweccami-
tallinlikethis'llbecompromiseforanyonetoread. Ac-

According to the computer’s word count, that entire line constitutes one word, thereby proving the 500-word limit can be manipulated. But let’s play by the rules.

Just as the paper’s been curtailed, so has our summer – or, as those Saltairians who moved out here at the beginning of March call it, fall. Due to the COVID crisis – excuse please, the Hunan flu our Stable Genius has totally beaten – the festivities with which our summers are normally flecked have been canceled, cut back or reconstituted. Thus, the field is now a park and you can’t play organized sports like softball, soccer or rollerball in a park, so only small groups of huddled masses yearning to breathe free of masks are presently permitted, at the requisite that removed. The playground is open for swingers only because the Jungle Jim is simply a hotbed of potential infection that has to stay off-limits.

Elsewhere on our cut-back calendar, SCA’s summer activities have been canceled, as have other faves such as the July bonfire, the fireworks, the Fire Company’s pancake breakfast, pretty much everything with “fire” in it, except there’ll be a scaled-back fire parade July 18: no band, no food, maybe no music, just a few guys with flags on go-carts, but the spirit will be there. So don’t despair. After all, the Market’s running; Patrick Adams has done a fabulous job getting the place up to contemporary snuff, except the supply of snuff has sold out. The Club’s open, likewise the Post Office and Library, an innovative recreation program is getting underway, and there’s always the beach to revive body and soul even as the days start growing shorter.

In short, follow the rules, and keep abreast of developments, which does sound kind of dirty. A lot of folks are trying to make this memorable summer one you’ll never forget, because you’ll live through it. They say Saltaire doesn’t want to become another Kismet, Fair Harbor another Saltaire, the Pines another Grove, no one wants to become another Ocean Beach, everyone wants to become another Point O’Woods but won’t admit it, and Oakleyville positively detests Whalehouse Point, but one thing none of us wants is to become another Texas. So when asked to cover up politely reply, “Thank you, Masked Man,” which is toto-mont to acknowledging our fate rests on your face. As someone sort-of said at last week’s Board meeting, it’s almost appreciated.
Fallen Idols of Fire Island (Part I)

By Emma Boskovski

ONLINE PETITIONS HAVE reignited community debate on the legacy of Long Island’s historical titans – as well as the region’s lingering racist roots in the wake of Black Lives Matter protests – individuals with strong ties to Fire Island. One such example being Robert Moses, who remains a controversial figure decades after his passing in 1981.

While the petitions themselves may be fairly recent, the debate is not. Early last December, New York State Assemblymen Daniel J. O’Donnell (D, 69th District Manhattan) sponsored a bill to create a committee to explore possible new names to replace that of Robert Moses’ namesake state park located on the western end of Fire Island. The search to find “a new name be chosen that reflects the history of Long Island,” according to the verbiage of the bill.

The bill proposal justification further reads that Moses “repeatedly abused his power to entrench racial and economic segregation, inhibit communities of color from sharing in New York’s postwar prosperity and ensure that many of the great public amenities he helped build stayed inaccessible to poor people and people of color.”

While O’Donnell did not respond to our calls for comment, one of several articles published on the subject by Newsday at the end of 2019, quotes O’Donnell saying that as a young Commack resident, he grew up on making the voyage to Robert Moses, under the impression that Moses was a hero. He went on to share with Newsday that he feels “our public institutions should honor those who work for all New Yorkers.”

Moses is credited with construction of 416 miles of highway, 13 bridges, 658 playgrounds and housing for 150,000 people. Among these accomplishments are Shea Stadium, the United Nations and Lincoln Center. Significant as these achievements are, clearing the way for his projects displaced hundreds of thousands of minority Americans under the guise of urban renewal, while further segregating New York City and Long Island. A journal entry posted in the Fordham Political Review in December of 2018, estimates that 250,000 people were displaced by Moses’ projects. Yet ironically the Cross-Bronx Expressway also paved the way to create new public housing projects for many of the same low-income individuals that faced systematic displacement on his behalf.

In a 2012 essay published by The New York Times, Jonathan Mahler asserts that “it is impossible to talk about the landscape of modern New York without talking about Moses.”

Many of Moses’ principal achievements that once warranted his widespread recognition were exposed to have racist motivations in Robert A. Caro’s 1974 Pulitzer Prize winning biography about Moses, “The Power Broker.” In one of the book’s most notable portions, Caro accuses Moses of ordering his engineers to build low-bearing overpasses over the parkway to keep New York City buses from reaching Jones Beach because of the low-income clientele that mass transportation attracts.

Caro claims to have obtained this information from Sidney M. Shapiro, a close Moses associate and former chief engineer and general manager of the Long Island State Park Commission. He makes many other claims in his 1,300-page biography that accuses Moses of engaging in behavior that led Caro to name Moses “the most racist human being I had ever really encountered.”

While evidence exists to support the claim that Moses built low-bearing overpasses fueled by his racist motivations, Village of Babylon Historical and Preservation Society recently came to Moses’ defense by sharing a 1930 postcard image on Facebook. The postcard depicts a painted rendition of the Jones Beach pencil paraded by buses. Another post shares a newspaper clip from the Brooklyn Daily Eagle in 1931 describing the “bee line” bus route from Brooklyn to Jones Beach.

According to an article published last month by Newsday, almost 100 protesters gathered to chant “Robert Moses was a racist” in front of the Babylon Village Hall where Moses’ statue was erected in 2003. Protesters aimed to express their desire that Moses be dethroned as New York’s master builder and rather recognized for his racist tendencies.

The Babylon Village Public Arts Commission utilized $190,000 from a Suffolk County grant to erect the 7-foot bronze statue. The group was unable to be reached for comment in time for publication. Created by sculptor Jose Ismael Fernandez, the statue stands tall above a plaque that honors Moses as “responsible for more buildings than any single person since the pharaohs ruled Egypt.” The plaque does recognize Moses as an often “controversial force.”

Once a Village of Babylon resident, the statue depicts Moses with a firm stance, gripping blueprints in his left hand. In a 2003 article by The New York Times, Babylon’s County Legislator David Bishop said he was aware of Moses’ reputation as a “petty tyrant... but you come back to Babylon and people have the opposite perception. He had flaws. But he was what New York needed.” The statue stands to honor his contributions to New York State.

It is debatable as to whether or not Moses’ cataloged bigotry warrants the renaming of Robert Moses State Park. In fact, a Newsday article shared on Facebook by the Fire Island News last December attracted controversy between more than 150 commenters.

“As polarizing and conflicted as Robert Moses was as a man, there is no part of New York or Long Island that wasn’t made accessible by Robert Moses,” said Craig Sherman, who lives in Manhattan and summers in Ocean Beach. “As stubborn and awful as he could be, the man should still be recognized for the unprecedented contributions he made to Long Island south shore beaches and the parks system. There are too many monuments of his works to name that we all use every day. For being a creator, he should be recognized in my opinion. As a man, he should never be forgiven for his behaviors that were corrupted by power and abuse of power.”

Stephen Tepper, on the other hand, who has friends in Cherry Grove commented, “Well, if Robert Moses had his way, all your cute towns on Fire Island would have been paved over for a highway, so maybe he’s not the best person to be honored with a park.”

Indeed Robert Moses is one written explicitly in Fire Island’s history, as his decades long obsession to transform our barrier island into a parkway persisted up until he met with legislation signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson to establish it as a national seashore under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service. In the book “Saving Fire Island from Robert Moses,” Christopher Verga tells the extensive tale of how grassroots activism spread throughout Fire Island to protect the unique identities of each community.

THE OCEAN BEACH community is rising like a phoenix this summer as we work together to save lives and move forward amidst the coronavirus pandemic. Without the helping hands of our frontline workers and first responders, this renaissance could never have been possible.

“We’ve seen triple the usual amount of mail since March,” said Ocean Beach Postmaster Dale Wyckoff, whose staff has worked additional hours to serve local residents who sheltered in place. She asks that postal customers check regularly for packages, as space is very limited at the post office.

Some young members of the community have also stepped up and become a part of the solution. Nicole Scheinblum, 10, with the help of brother Zack Roesch, 21, has been producing custom-printed face coverings out of her Ocean Beach home. Her specialty is masks featuring photos of the lower half of customers’ faces, which allow the wearer to be more easily recognizable. Scheinblum employs friends Gabby and Gracie Romano in conducting sidewalk sales, selling hundreds of masks a day, and offers local delivery service by bicycle and shipping across the country.

Ocean Beach artist Owen Brahe, 9, also has been doing a brisk business, creating and selling home décor formed from driftwood and shells he collects on the beach. After he and brother Tyler decided to take a break from their lemonade stand during the pandemic, Owen found a market for his unique artwork online.

“I love experimenting with different kinds of shells,” said Owen, who typically works with mussel, nautilus, and purple quahog shells, affixing them to his own driftwood plaques. Many of his customers have submitted special requests, and he’s most recently strayed away from shark and seahorse designs to incorporate roosters and owls into his work.

The Brahe family was among many others who celebrated the Fourth of July a little differently this year. Holly Etlin of the Ocean Beach Community Fund explained that her organization worked with the Ocean Beach Association to create “Stars and Stripes on Our Streets,” a rworked home-based version of the children’s parade traditionally held every year.

The Fire Island School District is celebrating the graduation of Kailah Chenault, Noah DiDio, Amelia Holland, Chase Martin, Fallyn Moran, Kieran Ryan, and Hudson Smith from its pre-kindergarten program; and Jonathan Athing, Emma Beqaj, Kevin Crawson, Tess Lambie, Brandon Ramirez-Sanchez, and Cora Robbins from Bay Shore High School.

The Ocean Beach Northwell Health office is operating on a reduced schedule, Monday through Thursday, from 9 to 11 a.m.; Friday, from 4 to 6 p.m.; and Saturday and Sunday, from 9 to 11 a.m. and from 4 to 6 p.m. Patients may not remove their face coverings during visits.

The community is mourning the loss of longtime Kline’s owner Ed Lindberg, on May 20. His son Matt will continue to run the store.

The Ocean Beach Chamber of Commerce recently launched a promotional campaign, titled “Love Where You Live” — and we really do. I hope to see you on the beach very soon.
WHEN THE EDITOR OF the Fire Island News, Shoshanna McCollum, contacted me regarding the direction the paper is taking this summer, I remarked that we are all embarking on a new kind of social experiment and we are all in this together.

This winter, Steve and I spent two weeks island hopping in the Caribbean and less than a week after our return, the statewide lockdown commenced. For all of us, the arrival of spring on Fire Island was a very rude awakening. Instead of what so many of us look forward to, the return of old friends, increased activity and the warmer weather, everyone who was in Ocean Bay Park was hunkered down quarantined in their homes. And even though an increased number of homeowners fled the city and opened their houses early, there was absolutely no socialization. One night Angelo Sakonas drove OBP FD rescue vehicle #7 around to see how many houses had lights on so that the FD had an idea of who was here in case of an emergency. “Must see TV” was Governor Cuomo’s daily briefing, even though the news was increasingly grim. Happy Hour was replaced by sunset down at the bay beach park. If you had formed your own “COVID bubble” (and depending on your politics) the other highlight of the day was Dr. Fauci and/or screaming at the TV, cocktail in hand, during the White House press briefing. Zoom took over our lives and is probably here to stay. A virtual COVID pod was formed by a group of OBP homeowners who started a weekly, by invitation, Zoom cocktail party. Since the OBP FD firehouse was closed, except for emergencies, the Association spring meeting was Zoomed and so will the upcoming summer meeting.

The long awaited beach replenishment project was sidelined for a time by the detour of the dredge to an area near Mar-a-Lago in Florida, but it eventually returned and I am happy to report that the beach project has been completed. The blue rubber crossover mats have been replaced by stairs including a handicapped ramp at Champlain and the beach looks great.

It is sad to note the passing of long-time residents of Ocean Bay Park, among them Gerry and Selma Abramowitz, Alan Dennis, and the indomitable Rita Addo. They are all missed.

Due to the pandemic, we will not have: the annual spaghetti dinner, the Auxiliary plant sale, graduations, traditional weddings, July 4th barbecues, Community Fair, 5K run. The list could go on, but I always try to see the glass as half full, so here’s to the Brave New World we will all experience this summer of 2020. Rather than mourn what we will miss, I hope we all experience enhanced community spirit, renewed appreciation for taking things slowly, good books to read, friendships nurtured and gardens planted and tended. As always, contact me with community news so that we can all keep up with what’s happening in OBP. Stay safe and please WEAR A MASK!
SURREAL.

That is the best word to describe the past three months of reporting around the clock on the horrid details of a historic pandemic, navigating the ensuing economic calamity, and taking previously foreign preventive measures to keep my family from contracting a virus with ever-changing expert opinions on transmission risks. My lovely but anxious wife, boisterous 4-year-old daughter, and two ill-tempered dachshunds that bark every time the wind blows spent the time trapped together in a two-bedroom apartment-turned-dual home office/remote preschool classroom. But our struggles paled in comparison to those who experienced how deadly COVID-19 could be.

“I never thought I’d be in the position as county executive ... to be talking about morgue capacity, the space that we have there, and the need to expand that space,” Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone told reporters during one of his daily coronavirus news briefings.

There was lots of comparing the crisis to the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks and Superstorm Sandy when the outbreak first arrived locally. But coronavirus felt like mix of both: The cascading unpredictable catastrophe of a natural disaster mixed with infuriatingly rampant unfounded conspiracy theories. If the virus itself didn’t make you want to lock yourself in your house, then the viral mass hysteria would.

There were silver linings to what felt like more than 100 days of back-to-back-to-back Mondays. The trend of people decorating their homes with rainbows as messages of hope came shortly after my kid decided rainbow is her new favorite color. The return of Suffolk County police officers on foot patrol in local downtowns gave comfort to those of us who are Main Street dwellers.

We managed to squeeze in our daughter’s fourth birthday party days before the lockdowns began. Ironically, the last time we were in Manhattan – we had traveled to Midtown to have our daughter’s birthday brunch at American Girl Doll cafe – was on March 1, the day the island recorded the first confirmed COVID-19 case in New York State.

It seemed there were four types of people that emerged from the outbreak: Hoarders who inexplicably stocked up on toilet paper to fight a respiratory illness, price gougers who charged $60 for surgical masks, media blasmers in denial about the severity of the health crisis, and those who simply kept calm and carried on.

The deniers were not as hard to find as TP. The weekend before the restaurants were closed, outside the packed Bay Shore bars on the day the St. Patrick’s Day parade was canceled a group of guys were overheard shouting obscenities, while girls danced with irreverence.

Groceries weren’t the only thing that came right to our front door. The U.S. Navy Blue Angels flew directly over our apartment during the demonstration squadron’s New York flyover to lift spirits. The current unrest sparked protest paranoia locally. While I covered one march, a woman who didn’t believe I was a journalist falsely accused me of being a white supremacist infiltrator there to disrupt the rally.

Yet strained race relations were a hot topic well before the Floyd protests. Interestingly, we saw an uptick in anti-Asian hate crimes after COVID-19 emerged from Wuhan, but there was no sign that New Yorkers were attacking pizzerias after officials said they suspect the strain of the virus in New York came from Italy.

Tension was also intra-regional. The White House Coronavirus Task Force ordered anyone who’d been to New York City to self quarantine for two weeks just as city residents were flocking to their second homes in the Hamptons and officials on Fire Island urged seasonal homeowners not to try to self-quarantine on the barrier island, where basic services are scarce in the off-season.

The yearning for normalcy was overwhelming. Once the rate of cases was low enough that Long Island entered Phase II of reopening from the coronavirus shutdown, we eagerly celebrated the return of outdoor dining by eating out twice in one day. We were no longer alone.

As soon as summer returned, we decided to get out of dodge for a much-needed change of scenery with a trip to Hatteras in the Outer Banks. What did I learn on my summer vacation? My family will have to quarantine for 14 days when we get home because we went to North Carolina on the week Cuomo announced an incoming travel advisory due to the increased coronavirus rate in the Tar Heel State and eight other COVID-19 hot-spot states.

It’s a fitting way to start what’s sure to be a summer like no other.
THE GROVE AND PINES are now experiencing a quiet new lifestyle that we are not accustomed to. Our lives have changed on Fire Island. When people think of our communities, they think of a busy social schedule filled with cocktail and dinner parties, meetings, contests, shows and the like; we take our busy lifestyle for granted. Now most days it seems we are living in a quiet area like Nova Scotia or Mustique.

We came out in early April when it was still chilly, and held weekly social distance gatherings at the dock to thank all the essential workers.

In early June the Grove assembled once more to take part in a Black Lives Matter rally of our own to honor the life of George Floyd. Then on June 16, another remarkable day in LGBTQ history as the Supreme Court made the landmark ruling that reaffirms gay and lesbian people are protected from job discrimination under the Civil Rights Act.

Many local businesses opened in March and were fully stocked. Many residents of both communities opened their houses much earlier than before. Shops and nightlife started to get up and running with a soft approach with take-out dining only at first, thankfully with the option of cocktails to go as well. Outdoor dining only followed, but that’s very much normal operation for many Pines and Grovites anyway. Masks and social distancing of course is required.

On June 20, the Grove began to tick. We celebrated Gay Pride, again on a reduced scale, but chock full of color and excitement. Our new 2020 Homecoming Queen Ikea was elected virtually. Kudos to Davita Jones and Lavonia Jenkins who were runners up.

Thank you Northwell for hosting a successful coronavirus test day in late May, for all those who registered.

Sadly the Invasion on July 4th had to be canceled this year. However Panzi came up with the idea of having a small-scale alternative. A limited group from the Grove arrived on a small boat. We were welcomed with cheers from the neighborhood. Next year we will return with all the feathers, glitz and glam with fabulous drag queens everywhere. However with this new eating at home the new trend on Fire Island, we will never fit into our gowns and costumes the same way again.

As we look around the Pines we see a new group of millennials who are blending and mixing well with the old stalwarts of the community. Andy Cohen’s boys of Bravo were seen in the Grove enjoying drinks and social distancing.

Andrew Kirtzman appeared on the Brian Williams Show in January to discuss his soon to be released book about Rudy Giuliani, which will be a sequel to his “Emperor of The City,” published 20 years ago.


Before the shutdown the Arts Project of Cherry Grove (APCG) managed to have their annual In Town cocktail party on March 8, at The Monster in NYC, and the Out-of-Town party two weeks before, on Feb. 23, in Ft. Lauderdale. Alas both Fire Island Pines Arts Project and APCG have suspended all shows and activities until further notice, but it’s for the greater good – so we can all go on to sing another day.

A sad farewell to those who will not be returning to our shores again: In Cherry Grove Yolanda Attianese, Joe Clinton, Dominic DeSantis, Rob Ferreri, Deborah Murrell, Terrence McNally, Mary Tangari, and Pat Wagins all passed away over the winter. In the Pines Jerry Herman, Gilbert Parker, Michael Schaible, and Larry Kramer also passed — people who all left their mark on this world.

1. David Menkes shows his pandemic pride.
2. Social distance dock gatherings in early spring.
BOOK REVIEW >> by Rita Plush

“Frozen Charlotte” by Susan de Sola
Poetry
Abel Muse Press

SUSAN DE SOLA, a native New Yorker, now living in Holland, but her connection to Fire Island goes back generations. Her grandfather, Rabbi David de Sola Pool, conducted religious services on the island before the Seaview’s Fire Island Synagogue was founded by Herman Wouk. The island turns up in her prize-winning poem “Buddy” as “…our sandy, summer island village….”

“Frozen Charlotte,” the title poem in the collection, takes its name from popular 19th century ballads that speak of a vain young woman who froze to death in an open sleigh because she refused to cover her ball gown with a blanket. True story. The incident was reported in an 1840 New York Observer article that describes a woman who froze to death while traveling 20 miles in a sleigh to a New Year’s ball. Dolls were made in her image. She floats now in a child’s bath:

I am a doll of ivory bisque. I was a girl, but was too bold. To preen in silks, I dared to risk the open sleigh. I don’t grow old. A girl of flesh who died of cold.

Grim yes, but though de Sola does not shy away from the ghastly — there’s a poem about the Holocaust — her first full-length collection shows a range that is varied in both theme and feeling.

Here you will find Cary Grant and camels, a birthday party for a piglet, torn lingerie, and a “Closely Observed Postman,” who leaves the red rubber bands that had cinched the mail hanging on branches “as though they had grown. / Each round, openmouthed, / elasticized sphere / speaks for the postman: / Look well, I was here.” Her keen eye and graceful language has elevated the postman’s daily rounds to a higher sphere and a grace of its own.

Among her many strengths is de Sola’s ability to connect with a reader. She expresses her own emotions, beautifully and evocatively, and had me thinking time and again, I know what you mean. In “Daniel,” a woman who has lost an infant boy remembers “those first few hours / which were also the last hours. / Small and slow-blinking, eyes bewildering / blue, with slips of fingers that would not curl.”

She’s funny and dark, a poet of many moods and messages, whose varied sensibility allows her to humanize rocks and an ATM.

“Nib Nok Nok” is a poem’s title and rock-talk for, “Knock knock, who’s there?” Yet with all the rock’s flair for language, it “remains a rock.” An ATM is “Somehow…sexual, the rim crotch-high…an onanism of cash, walls with mouths.”

In “Blind, She Considers Her Lover,” an ode both sensual and loving, de Sola turns her gaze (and her hands) to her husband in the dark “where half a marriage is spent… First there is that silky fringe / of forward falling hair— / you are a horse, fetching- / gowned. / You shake your head and your forelock falls / forward, steed. / … Then the smooth skin of your back / and chest, it sings with softness. / You are bolts and drapes of some rich fabric…yes you are a draper’s treasure. / Lower there is warmth…”

Poem to poem, there is life and liveliness.

“At Brighton Beach,” an account of immigrants in New York, her free verse reads more like a story. And what are poems if not stories, but shortened, emphasized, packed with emotion and meaning?

Little Russia, Little Odessa, little something? A busy Sunday on those bustling streets, where each shop undersells another. So many shoes, so much plastic leather Sold by brothers in short sleeves, By babushkas whose ovid lines, Made for other climes are poor At dispersing the summer heat.

Even if you don’t know the difference between free verse and blank verse (blank verse has a consistent rhythm, free verse does not), and even if you always thought poetry was too obscure and la-de-da, fuggedaboutit! You will take to Susan de Sola’s poetry, her wit and her insights. She’s attuned to the world and generous with her feelings. Pain, pleasure, whimsy or wonder, she unflinchingly puts it out there. But don’t take my word for it; pick up a copy and see for yourself. I think you’ll warm to “Frozen Charlotte.”

---

The Free Union Church of Ocean Beach, Fire Island, has been serving the community since its establishment as an inter-denominational Christian church on February 25, 1916. Today, as Free Union celebrates its 103rd season, we invite you to join us each Sunday at 10:45 a.m. for worship that is upbeat and relevant to those of any age. Let us be your “church home-away-from-home” this summer.

Take Thou our minds, dear Lord, we humbly pray. Give us the mind of Christ each passing day; Touch us to shed abroad Thy deathless love; Use us to make the earth like heaven above.

Ocean Breeze & Midway
Ocean Beach • 680-8074
freeunionchurch.org

SGM Interiors
Home Remodeling Services Available

Finest Painting and Carpentry Services License # 44442-H
Fully Insured
(631) 335-7809

Scott McBride
Owner
sgminteriors95@gmail.com

Christmas Vacation in Santa Fe
Magical

Rachel’s Beautiful, Traditional Santa Fe Home (I will be in Q.B.) or Summer Vacations 2021,
Multiple Weeks
Skiing in Winter
Very Green Oasis in Summer
Call me @ (631) 334-7975 for details and photos.

MEZZACORONA
The Land of Trentino In Every Glass.

Our Heritage, Our Promise, Our Passion. It’s born in Italy’s Alto Adige region amidst the misty mountains, where the twin beauty and energy of Trentino is captured. We choose a fragrance, crisp, delicate, delicate and rich wine for your enjoyment. This is Italy’s original Estates Green Bottle Grigio. Native.
Navigation Hazards and a Vandalized Volvo

Ocean Beach*

APRIL 5
› Property damage reported.
› Boat tanks in the bay.
› An order of protection is possibly violated.

APRIL 6
› Summons issued for unauthorized construction at 360 Surf Road.
› Summons issued for unauthorized construction at 200 Bay Walk.

APRIL 15
› Complaint received of a loud utility.

APRIL 23
› Complaint received of harassment.
› A burglary is reported.

MAY 3
› Complaint received of an illegally moored boat.

MAY 17
› Complaint received of a navigation hazard in the bay.
› Complaint received of an illegally moored boat.

MAY 25
› Disorderly conduct reported.

MAY 26
› Possible stalker reported.

MAY 30
› Fire alarm at Woodhull School.
› Smell of gas reported at house on Bayberry Walk.

Also reported in May: Two stolen bikes, two disturbances, two burglaries, six instances of found property, one missing golf cart, four instances of neighborhood trouble, five noise complaints, and one call about a lost child.

JUNE 6
› Officers monitor the Black Lives Matter protest march coming from Ocean Bay Park to Ocean Beach.

JUNE 7
› Gas leak reported on 318 Wilmot Road.
› Man yelling for help on his bicycle.

JUNE 8
› Officers undertake a custodial interference investigation.

› A domestic dispute complaint is received.

JUNE 26
› A violation of an Order of Protection is investigated on Wilmot Road.
› Department assists Suffolk County Police with a disturbance in Atlantique.

JUNE 28
› An alleged illegal rental permit is investigated on Ocean Road.

Also reported in June: A cart blocking the road, a barking dog, ball playing on the beach, two complaints of garbage on the beach, seven instances of found property, one instance of neighborhood trouble, two panic alarms reported, four disturbances, six complaints received of failure to follow social distance guidelines, two no mask complaints, one missing wagon, three reports of stolen property, three excess garbage complaints, one case of drug activity, 21 cases of open alcoholic beverage in public and/or under age drinking, one case of construction without a permit, three bikes stolen, one stolen bicycle returned, one possible break in, and 28 noise complaints.

Suffolk County Police Beach Activity**

JUNE 5
› Black Lives Matter graffiti reported at the nationally landmarked Cherry Grove Community House Theatre.

JUNE 7
› A 27-year-old East Patchogue man was arrested in Davis Park for disorderly conduct and violent behavior.

JUNE 12
› Graffiti incident reported from Atlantique Beach.

JUNE 17
› Criminal mischief reported with a 2016 Volvo vandalized at Fire Island Ferry Terminal in Bay Shore.

* Ocean Beach police blotter records prior to April 1, 2020, were not available. ** Suffolk County police blotter records prior to June 1, 2020, were not available.

A criminal charge is an accusation, and defendants are presumed innocent unless proven guilty.
Pandemics and Fire Island: A Brief History

AS ISOLATED AS FIRE ISLAND is it has had more than its share of pandemics. COVID-19 is only the latest, and thanks to the leadership of mayors, police officers, business owners and just plain folk, Fire Island is skirting most of the damage being inflicted on the rest of the world. Actual cases of the disease here on the island have been few with no reported deaths, but damage to the commercial sectors is ongoing. Presently, most retail stores are back open and restaurants now provide outdoor dining with limited indoor dining as well. Masks are required and social distancing encouraged as much as possible in our crowded communities.

THE FIJI’S OF FIRE ISLAND
The first documented pandemic on Fire Island was one not of its own making. Early September 1892, the steamship “Normannia” from Hamburg, Germany, arrived off New York with five passengers sick with cholera, and with another four already dead. Cholera, caused by bacteria, is a particularly deadly infectious disease with a mortality rate approaching 70 percent. To protect the public the ship was ordered to quarantine in lower New York harbor. While there, the remaining 600 or so passengers who showed no signs of illness, it was decided to transfer them to a sanctuary ashore. In a quick, secret, closed-door meeting, New York’s Governor Roswell P. Flower purchased the Surf Hotel, located near Democrat Point, Fire Island, as the location for quarantining the passengers.

However, the proceedings of that secret meeting were leaked to the public and the shellfish, fishing, and charter boat industries in the Great South Bay area took an immediate economic hit as existing commercial contracts were cancelled. A purported 5,000-6,000 jobs from Babylon to Patchogue were in jeopardy.

Islip Town officials filed an injunction to prevent the ship from landing on Fire Island, and ordered 20 armed constables to enforce the injunction, but the following day the NYS Supreme Court vacated that injunction.

Meanwhile, some passengers on the “Normannia” had been transferred to a smaller vessel, the “Cepheus,” with directions to land them at the hotel’s dock. Some baymen attempted to burn down the Surf Hotel and when the “Cepheus” arrived the following day it was met by an angry mob. The heavily-armed crowd of 300-400 refused to let the ship dock.

In the Oct. 1, 1892, edition of Illustrated American, an article, entitled “The Fijis of Fire Island” reported the incident as follows: “Panic took possession of the inhabitants of Islip, Bay Shore, and Babylon and drove them insane temporarily. That is the best excuse that can be made for their heartless, brutal cruelty... [T]hey were ignorant savages. Such acts as theirs are committed by barbarians in China and the South Seas...Their behavior was a disgrace not only to American manhood, but to civilization.” (Keep in mind this article was published over 125 years ago, hence some language would not be acceptable by today’s standards.)

CAMP CHEERFUL
The next pandemic that landed on Fire Island shores occurred in 1926, amid an outbreak of polio-myelitis. In response the New York Rotary Club established a camp for children stricken with polio and called it Camp Cheerful. Each year more than 300 youngsters from NYC were cared for there at the expense of the Rotary Club. Every two and half weeks a new group would arrive to take advantage of Fire Island’s fresh air, salt water and sandy beaches with hopes of helping to heal the afflicted. Unfortunately, after only 12 years of operation the camp was destroyed by the hurricane of 1938, and was never rebuilt.

However that was not the end of it. Oral history accounts from Fire Island indicate that families in the New York City area increasingly sought refuge from the threat of polio outbreaks during the hot summer months, contributing to the emergence of the Fire Island communities in the early 20th century. The trend continued long after medical researcher Jonas Salk developed a vaccine in 1955.

HIV/AIDS
But no pandemic devastated Fire Island more than the HIV/AIDS epidemic that decimated the gay populations of Cherry Grove and the Fire Island Pines.

In the late 1970s, the Stonewall riots were already a decade old. The LBGTQ community was filled with pride, and their lifestyle was slowly gaining more public acceptance. The Grove and the Pines seemed like paradise. There was disco dancing, costumed carousing, a tea party every afternoon, and a pool party every night – all night.

Then the party ended like the curtain coming down mid-show. In 1980, one of the first cases in the U.S. occurred in the Pines when all the gay men sharing a house came down with some mysterious disease and died within weeks of each other. The disease was unknown and nameless.

Friends started dying – one weekend they were out on the dance floor, the next week there was a for-sale sign in their front yard. If you called and learned that a phone had been disconnected you did not wonder why. It was a plague that no one wanted to talk about.

In 1981, The New York Times published the first article that detailed the extent of the epidemic, pointing to gay sex as the method of transmission. The reality of the situation could no longer be ignored. A “gay cancer” had come for a visit with no signs of leaving.

The Centers for Disease Control recognized a disease pattern that was killing gay men in LA and NY and called it AIDS, an acronym for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. AIDS itself does not kill, but a weakened immune system allows infectious diseases to attack the body, usually with deadly consequences.

Scientists in both the U.S. and Europe were searching for the causes of the disease and in 1985, jointly discovered the virus responsible. They named it the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). Research continued, the doctors now searching for cures. First there was AZT, then the HAART cocktail of pills and finally in 1997, a pill that prevented infections in 90 percent of gay men became available.

However it was not a pill that saved Fire Island’s gay communities. The lesbian sisterhood stepped up and assumed less conventional roles. In 1996, an article in the New York Times indicated that firefighters in the Cherry Grove Fire Department were predominately female at that time. They lived alongside the men who were dying, marched with them, and refused to allow policy makers to marginalize the horrific disease. Compassion and inclusivity is what made the once ravaged Fire Island communities more resilient than ever. AIDS is still with us, but regarded as a condition that can be managed with proper treatment.

That was then, and this is now. A new pandemic, COVID-19, haunts us and some things will never be the same. But life goes on. Celebrate by doing the right thing – wear your mask, maintain social distancing, and wash your hands – often.

Remember, history is watching.
Bay Shore

32 Miles of Sun, Surf, and Fun

Restaurants • Hotels • Beaches

Fire Island Ferries
fiferries.com • 631.665.3600
The adventure begins here.

Fire Island Water Taxi
fiwatertaxi.com • 631.665.8885
Beach to beach just minutes away.

99 Maple Avenue, Bay Shore, Long Island, New York 11706
The Palms Hotel
Fire Island
631-583-8870

Bring the Family

Visit us at CJ’s
49 Years Strong

palmshotelfireisland.com
168 Cottage Walk, Ocean Beach, NY 11770