FRIENDS OF FORT TOTTEN PARKS
P.O. Box 604984 BAYSIDE, NY 11360
(718) 670–3684

FALL ISSUE - 2006

FORT TOTTEN FACE LIFT

Fort Totten is changing and for the better thanks to over $7 million being allocated for various improvements to the park. Construction on building 502, more commonly known as the museum, will begin this fall. Renovations will include repairing the roof, installing a wheelchair accessible bathroom and ramp, interior painting, ancillary electrical work, and regrading and repaving the ordinance yard surrounding the building. This $850,000 renovation has been funded by Borough President Helen Marshall. Once the work is complete, this building will serve as the home to the Fort Totten Urban Park Rangers and will serve the public as a visitors’ center.

Even more exciting is the $6.6 million facelift that the “North Park” area of the fort will be receiving. Thanks to funds provided by Mayor Bloomberg, the NYC Department of Parks & Recreation will be creating a conceptual plan to determine how best to open up the vistas of the area now dotted with townhouses built in the 1950s for soldiers and their families living at the fort. Parks anticipates the removal of most of the 1950s houses to create open park space. A couple of the buildings will remain for historical purposes, one most likely will be converted into a comfort station for the public. Once the main demolition is complete, the area will be “turned green” with grass and trees planted. A portion of the money will also be used to renovate the Chapel, including the installation of a wheelchair accessible bathroom and ramp. Once this project is complete, the Parks Department hopes to continue to further develop the fort as a park, with amenities such as a playground and a meditation area that could be dedicated to the Native Americans who once lived on this land.

Janice Melnick

ALL ABOARD! - PUBLIC TRAM IN THE FORT

We received very encouraging news that Queens Borough President Helen Marshall has allocated approximately $300,000 to purchase a tram that will provide increased accessibility in and around Fort Totten park. The tram will be a welcome site and will address requests by Seniors and Persons with Disabilities allowing them more freedom around the park.

Janice Melnick, Northeast Queens Park Administrator, has stated that the tram will most likely be electric or some other form of alternative fuel vehicle and most importantly will be wheelchair accessible. The tram will allow the Parks Department to offer programs and services to individuals who might not otherwise be able to access the fort. Stay tuned for more developments! —Phil Konigsberg

~ The FOFT Newsletter— All the news that fits, we print ~
THE BAYSIDE MARINA

If you've walked down Joe Michaels Mile along the Cross Island Parkway, you've probably seen the Bayside Marina in Little Neck Bay. The Marina is leased, owned and operated by Marty Castillano & Jimmy Miranda and has been in its present form of operation since just after the Halloween storm of 1994. The previous marina which essentially was a moored barge was swept away by that fierce storm.

A wonderful walk from the Fort Totten parking lot, the marina also has a snack bar offering drinks and goodies. Take a break and watch the fishermen anxiously dreaming of the one that got away. Watching sailboats tack across the harbor has an unusual calming effect on many as well as the excitement of watching water skiers skim across the tops of the water. The Marina also hosts events sponsored by the Bayside Anglers Group where junior fishermen get their first taste of catching a meal as well as their involvement in the cleanup of the bay. There are seasonal as well as daily rental slip and mooring for those with a boat. Please contact the Marina for more details.

Bayside Marina ~ 2805 Cross Island Parkway ~ Flushing ~ NY 11360 (718) 229-0097

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Tours of Fort Totten

The Urban Park Rangers offer free tours of the grounds of Fort Totten Parks every Saturday at 2PM and Sunday at 1PM. No reservations required. For additional information please call (718) 352-1769 ext 16

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Visit us at our updated webpage
Www.FortTotten.org

Check our calendar, pictures of events, newsletter, and upcoming events.

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FORT TOTTEN FACT—1924

On April 25th, 1924 five American aircraft attacked Fort Totten in a mock attack. The raiders were successfully "repelled" by anti-aircraft troops who were stationed at the fort.

More than 500 civilians witnessed the "battle", which celebrated Anti-Aircraft Day. Visitors were led on tours of the Fort and watched troop inspections after the air show.

(Source: an article originally printed in the Long Island Star-Journal which ceased publishing in 1968)
STEPPING STONES LIGHTHOUSE

A Native American legend tells the story of how the brave Siwany Indians battled with Habboamoko (the devil) for possession of Connecticut. Although the devil had many tricks up his sleeve, the brave Indians were able to back Habboamoko against what is now known as Long Island Sound using potions and wizardry. The devil looked over his shoulder towards Long Island and noticed a trail of stepping stones. Perhaps due to this legend or the deadly weather to ships in this narrow body of water, Colonial maps listed the area as the "Devil's Belt" and the reefs surrounding it "Devil's Stepping Stones".

In 1874 the US Congress appropriated $6,000 to build Stepping Stones Lighthouse in its current location. On March 1, 1877 the lighthouse was lit with a red light and in 1932 the light was changed to green.

The Devil's Belt has had it's share of bad weather and it's effects on shipping. On February 9, 1934 the temperature dropped to 14 degrees below zero. Charles A. Rogers, the light keeper, couldn't row ashore due to the frozen waters surrounding him and his family who lived at the lighthouse as well. By February 20th the weather only got worse and dumped 17 inches of snow on the lighthouse. They were trapped with only two days of food rations left.

On March first, Rogers hung the American Flag upside down hoping someone would see the distress signal. Fortunately, Captain Sloss of the tug 'MUXPET' spotted the signal and gradually broke through the ice to the lighthouse. The captain offered Rogers food, but Rogers refused stating that it was the Lighthouse Service's responsibility, and asked that the depot at St. George, Staten Island be notified of the situation. The tender 'HICKORY' eventually made its way to the station with relief supplies.

One hundred twenty eight years later, the thirty eight foot lighthouse is still maintained by the US Coast Guard and stands as a sentinel for mariners passing nearby. Visitors to Fort Totten need only to walk to the North shore of the Park and look Northeast to see this piece of maritime history. Bring binoculars for a good close look. - Pat Riot

YOGA IN THE PARK - returned for a series of eight classes on Saturday mornings that ran from May 6 through June 24, 2006 in the Little Bay Park Roller Rink lasting for an hour and a half. Free classes were taught once again by Hot Yoga Paradise in the Baybridge Commons Mini Mall. The classes were sponsored by the NYC Department of Parks and partially funded by a grant from Queens County Savings Bank. Maggie Solomon, of Hot Yoga Paradise reported over 80 people attended the first class and was quite pleased with the turnout. For more information please call Hot Yoga Paradise at 718 428 0075 or the NYC Parks Department at 718 352 4793 ext 16. LKL

DANCING UNDER THE STARS

Dancing Under the Stars returned for its third and most successful year. Every Wednesday evening from June 21 through August 16 at 7:00 pm the public was taught a variety of ballroom dances from Cha Cha and Merengue to the Tango by certified dance instructor Betina Hershey. The series culminated with a live concert by the band "One Night Stand" where dancers were able to practice what they learned while others were able to just enjoy an evening of music.

This program was funded by Council Member Tony Avella and organized by Janice Melnick, Northeast Queens Park Administrator. They both promise to offer this popular program again next year!
Nature & Wildlife Corner

BLUE FISH BLUES

If you've never seen a "bluefish blitz" then you are missing something truly spectacular. It happens when a large school of blues goes on a feeding frenzy. The water appears to come to a boil. The feeding frenzy becomes so intense and savage that an observer is fascinated and at the same time frightened. These sharp toothed blues will snap at almost anything, including each other.

Bluefish are one of the Northeast's most popular saltwater game fish, second only to striped bass. They usually appear in our region in May with Memorial Day traditionally a great time to catch blues of 10 pounds or more. In early fall, just before they migrate south or east, huge schools of blues again storm the beaches. Late September through early November is the best time of year to catch blues weighing up to 20 pounds.

So, where does one go to reel in some of these beauties? Well, the next time you take a stroll through Fort Totten Park or Little Bay Park, take notice of some of the people standing or sitting on the rocks that jut out in Little Neck Bay. They're not sunbathing out there. They're catching bluefish. However, a favorite spot of many anglers is at the foot of Utopia Parkway, under the Throgs Neck Bridge. They call this spot "The Wall" because you can simply throw your line over the embankment and pull them in.

Ok, so at the end of the day, let's say you've caught yourself a few blues. The sport is over. Now it's time for dinner. Herein lies a problem. Some people find bluefish a little oily and strong-tasting for the table. However, in the proper hands, they make a great tasting fish. Some cooks marinate the fish in milk to absorb some of the strong flavor. Then you can broil it, fry it or steam it. A great recipe can be found on the Fort Totten Website - Bluefish with Gin! The recipe calls for ½ cup of gin, (not to be consumed by the cook, but added to the mixture!). Sounds interesting and I'm aiming to try it.

- Bob Sansosti

The Little Bay Park Dog Run

There is an indefinable quality when dogs freely interact with their environment. So said author Frances Sheridan at Barnes and Noble Chelsea last August where an audience of dog lovers gathered to hear Ms. Sheridan discuss her book "Unleashed: The Dog Runs of New York City" - The newest dog run to open in the city is right here in Little Bay Park. The Northeast Queens Parks & Recreation Administrator, Janice Melnick, said that the dog run was installed on a six-month trial basis. She has worked closely with the community and Council Member Tony Avella to respond to the requests of many local dog owners, who banded together to form The Freedom Run Association. "It's going very well. People seem to love it," said Ms. Melnick. She also noted that Council Member Avella has allocated $500,000 for the dog run's future, meaning that the run may likely become permanent in Little Bay Park.

As with all dog runs, there are rules that the dog owners must follow:

1. Only dogs that are licensed may use the run.
2. Dogs must be properly inoculated and parasite-free so as not to infect other dogs in the dog run.
3. Owners must clean up after their pets and pay close attention to their actions.
4. Prior to entering the run, owners should inquire about any dogs already in the run that are unfamiliar to them to avoid unnecessary dog fights.
5. Dogs should wear a basic flat buckle collar with city license, rabies and identification tags. Pinch and spike collars are not allowed so that other dogs are not injured.

Upon leaving the run, owners must leash their dogs. The rules are simple and will insure that the run will be a safe haven for "man's best friend" and also a little bit of doggie heaven. - Bob Sansosti

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LOCAL RESIDENTS HONOR CANCER SURVIVORS
AT AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY 2nd ANNUAL RELAY FOR LIFE AT FORT TOTTEN

Participants at this year's American Cancer Society Relay For Life at Fort Totten did more than just walk in circles in the rain all night. They joined a national movement that has raised over $1.8 billion since its inception for the fight against cancer. Cancer survivors celebrated their triumph over the disease by walking in the Survivors Lap to kick off the Relay. They were then joined by participants who took turns circling the Parade Grounds throughout the night in honor of cancer survivors, and in memory of those who have lost the battle with cancer. More than $46,000 was raised during the annual event.

In an emotional ceremony, hundreds of candles were lit in an emotional luminaria service/candlelight vigil. Funds raised from the Relay For Life event help support American Cancer Society research programs, as well as education, advocacy and local patient service programs for cancer patients and their families. “The American Cancer Society is appreciative of the overwhelming show of support from the Bayside community,” said Leslie Orlovsky, Relay For Life Director. “We are especially grateful to the many volunteers and their families for all of their hard work to make Relay For Life a reality. They represent hope that those lost to cancer will not be forgotten, that those who face cancer will be supported, and that the disease will one day be eliminated.”

For more information about Relay For Life, call the American Cancer Society 1-800-ACS-2345.
For 24-hour cancer information, the public can call 1-800-ACS-2345 or visit www.cancer.org.

The Throgs Neck Bridge

Throgs Neck, a community in the southeast Bronx, was named for John Throckmorton. In 1631, John Throckmorton and his wife, Rebecca, sailed from England with Roger Williams and seventeen other passengers aboard the “Lyon” and arrived in John Winthrop’s colony in Massachusetts. Because of religious persecution in Massachusetts, Throckmorton moved with Williams to Rhode Island to form a new colony based on religious tolerance. Fearing imminent invasion by the Massachusetts colony, Throckmorton fled to the southeast Bronx in 1642.

In 1643, the Dutch governor of New York bestowed Throckmorton a grant and he started his own colony with 35 families and was called Throckmorton’s Neck. (The Old English origin of “Throckmorton” derives from “thropp”, which meant drain). Hence, the settlement’s name was eventually changed to “Throgs Neck.”

The settlement was short lived however due to Indian uprisings, which killed many of the settlers including one of Throckmorton’s children. The colony only lasted one year and in 1644, the Throckmortons returned to the safety of Providence, Rhode Island. John’s two sons, John Jr. and Job, eventually moved to New Jersey and were among the earliest settlers of Middletown. While visiting his sons there sometime between March and April, 1683 or 1684, John Sr. died and was buried there.

NYC Master Planner Robert Moses first planned the Throgs Neck Bridge in 1945, six years after his last project, the Bronx Whitestone Bridge, was completed two miles to the west in 1939. Moses commissioned famed New York City bridge designer Othmar Ammann, to design the new bridge. Ammann was the man behind the George Washington, Verrazano Narrows, and Triborough Bridges as well. This was Ammann’s first long span job after 1940, which saw the collapse of the Tacoma Narrows Suspension Bridge (known as ‘Galloping Gurdy’ in Washington State. To insure that such a catastrophe would not be repeated, Ammann constructed the Throgs Neck Bridge with 28 foot deep stiffening trusses under the deck which allowed any wind to simply blow through, instead of against, the bridge. Construction began in 1958 and was completed in 1961 at a cost of $16 million. The bridge officially opened to traffic on January 11, 1961. The bridge’s Bronx neighborhoods are the residential communities of Throgs Neck and Locust Point and the S.U.N.Y. Maritime College at Fort Schuyler. On the Queens side are the residential communities of Beechhurst, Bayside, and Little Bay Park as well as historic Fort Totten (the city’s newest park). Stan Isso
Cord Meyer's Ties to Fort Totten
by Anthony J. Colletti

In 1823 Charles Willets, an ancestor of Cord Meyer, purchased 170 acres in Bayside, Queens then known as Thorne's Point. The property's name was then changed to Willet's Point. It was sold to the Federal Government in 1857 for $200,000. Construction of a fort began on the property in 1862 and was known as the Fort at Willet's Point until 1898 when the fort's name was changed to Fort Totten. Charles Willetts is buried in Fort Totten. Cord Meyer Development Company owns the nearby Bay Terrace Shopping Center and many surrounding leases. Therefore, given the history and location it is no wonder that the Company is very interested in today's Fort Totten Park.

Several years ago New York City, while trying to decide what to do with the property, solicited RFP's (requests for proposals) from the developmental community. However, it was clear that the residents wanted a park to thrive and expand there. Cord Meyer's proposal was to build an entertainment center on the grounds and to form a non for profit corporation with the proceeds funding the administration, improvement and maintenance of a public park. It has taken a while but the City has given the people a beautiful park. Cord Meyer feels strongly that commercial establishments like ourselves should support this endeavor. We feel that the Park is similar to our proposal. That is why we have help fund the "Friends of Fort Totten Parks" family days this year and last year. Several of our employees and their families have attended and enjoyed the park. My daughter has enjoyed playing soccer there. Cord Meyer has also funded the Moosehall Theater Company's presentations at Fort Totten so they could put on free plays for the residents.

Cord Meyer is very grateful to be a small part of this wonderful oasis and incredible community. We look forward to continuing and expanding our relationship in the years to come. We have been here over 100 years and hope to be here for another.

This issue of The Friends of Fort Totten Newsletter was printed in part with the help of Crystal Clear Printing Co.
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The Friends of Fort Totten Newsletter

Contributing Editor  Lily K. Louis

Contributing reporters & writers
Stan Isso, Janice Melnick
Robert Sansosti, Phil Konigsberg, Cynthia Romito, Joe Branzetti, Anthony Colletti, Pat Riot
GENERAL JOSEPH G. TOTTEN ~ US ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

In 1825 a US ARMY Lt Colonel named Joseph G. Totten took command of the construction of Fort Adams in Newport, Rhode Island. In the years to come, he researched materials and construction designs which allowed him to develop the “Totten shutter”. This shutter system allowed for better protection for the gunners while allowing a great arc of firing range. Totten then published his findings in 1838, was promoted to General, appointed Chief of Staff of the Corps of Engineers and relocated to Washington D.C. General Totten became responsible for developing forts on both sides of the United States after the victory in the Mexican War of the 1840’s which allowed the United States to span the continent.

High on the General’s list was a fort to be built across from Fort Schuyler. Between the proposed new fort and the existing Fort Schuyler, the east approach into New York Harbour would be secure from attacking forces.

In May of 1857 the Willets farmland was purchased for the purpose of building this fort. Two names later linked to the Confederacy would be part of the original design of this new fort known then as “The Fort at Willets Point”. Robert E. Lee, an officer in the Corps of Engineers at the time, was involved with the preliminary designs and Jefferson Davis as Secretary of War, presented Congress with the concept of the fort to have funds approved.

The civil war was in its second year in 1862 when construction began, and with the firing on Fort Sumter in 1861 President Abraham Lincoln issued a statement for volunteers. The Fort at Willets point was already a busy military base being used as a staging area for training and deployment. (a function the fort still serves today). In 1898 The Fort at Willets Point was renamed Fort Totten after General Totten who died in 1864. - PAT RIOT

FORT TOTTEN RANGERS

The rangers joined Fort Totten Park in July of 2005. In addition to carrying out animal rescues and enforcing park regulations, the rangers have been busy leading tours of the fort and engaging school groups in nature and cultural lessons and public tours on the weekends.

In the Summer besides the nature lessons, the rangers also conduct history lessons, focused on Fort Totten during the Civil War era. During the winter months the rangers head into the classrooms, bringing supplies and samples to ignite the children’s curiosity of the natural world. We are very pleased about the positive feedback from the schools regarding these lessons.

On the weekends the rangers offer free programs for the public in addition to the tours of Fort Totten. The objective of these tours is to offer the public some additional knowledge and perspective of New York City’s parks. Recent programs have focused on the Throgs Neck Bridge, urban wildlife, coastal ecology, and mammals.

Looking back on the past year, we are very pleased with what has been accomplished since last July. In the immediate future, the Rangers at Fort Totten are planning on providing canoeing excursions in Little Neck Bay during the summer. We also plan on providing programming for local youth groups. As we continue to grow, we are looking forward to providing more opportunities for the public to enjoy their parks.

- Jacqueline Ahern

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BACK TO SCHOOL FESTIVAL - SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 9, 2006 12 NOON—4PM

Councilman Tony Avella & the Northeast Parks Administrator will sponsor and host this year's "Back to School Festival" in Little Bay Park. The morning event will be highlighted with rides, games and crafts geared to take the edge off going back to school.

Come one—come all and have a ball.

~ Crafty Totten Kids ~

Crafty Totten Kids is an educational program sponsored by the Parks Department & Friends of Fort Totten Parks. Crafty Kids will strive to promote cultural and environmental awareness among children from nursery school to 5th grade by engaging children with a "hands on" approach. Some of the subjects will be arts and crafts, story telling and interaction with the natural environment. It is the hope that Crafty Totten Kids will have a better understanding of the environment in which they live.

The program will take place at the Fort Chapel which is located near the Historical Society Building. The group will gather at 12 noon and the craft class will last till 1.30 PM. There is no fee for this program but it is requested that you register by calling 718 670 3884. The following two class dates will focus on the following themes. Register early! As space is limited.

September 16, 2006 - Patriot's Day ~ November 18, 2006 - Native American Culture

RETURN OF THE FORT ON HAUNTED HILL

SATURDAY - OCTOBER 28, 2006 12 NOON TILL 4PM
Haunted Lantern tours—6—8 PM

Last year's Fort on Haunted Hill was a huge success. Attended by hundreds of people during the day enjoying free hay rides, costume contests, art & crafts, goodie bags, sack races and pumpkin patches & haunted at night by the Rangers and the Friends of Fort Totten. This year's Halloween celebration should prove to be just as much fun. Bring the whole family for this free day and evening of haunted merriment. Don't forget to wear your ghoulish garb — prizes will be given for best costumes. In the evening from 6—8 PM a haunted lantern tour of the battery will be given by the Park Rangers and the Friends of Fort Totten. Wear your costumes, and beware of the dark & haunted corners of the battery. ~ Screaming is optional and encouraged.

Hosted and sponsored by Councilman Tony Avella, The Northeast Queens Park Administrator & The Friends of Fort Totten Parks.

DOG COSTUME EVENT ~ HALLOWEEN ISN'T JUST FOR HUMANS ANYMORE!

Sunday - October 29, 2006 10 AM—12 NOON

Whoever said it's a 'dog's world' wasn't kidding when it comes to the Dogs Halloween costume event to be hosted in the dog run on the Western edge of Little Bay Park. All dogs are encouraged to have their owners bring them to the event all dressed in Halloween attire so they can compete against other dogs in a prize giving event to rival the runways of high fashion. The event is sponsored by The Friends of Fort Totten, The Freedom Run Association, Whitestone Pets/Groom & Board & The City Animal Control Center. Free giveaways as well as prizes for 1st, 2nd and 3rd place best costumes.