FRIENDS OF FORT TOTTEN PARKS
P.O. Box 604984 Bayside, NY 11360

PREMIER ISSUE — SPRING 2006

FORT TOTTEN IS A NEW YORK CITY PARK

The City of New York Parks & Recreation finally opened 49.5 acres of pristine land in Fort Totten, a historic military base in Bayside, Queens to the public on Monday, June 13, 2005. This is in addition to the 10 acres of wetland that was acquired in 1976. This park is now open to the public for their enjoyment.

The jewel of this civil-war era fort is the coastal battery, jutting into Long Island Sound on the tip of Willet’s Point. Remarkable for their architecture and evolution, the Batteries were in continuous construction and redesign between the Civil War and WWI. They were never completed because the technology of war outpaced the speed of construction. The battery has just undergone a $790,000 capital renovation making it safe for the public to visit. The capital improvements included lighting, handrails, and screens at the parapets. The Battery was designated a NYC Landmark in 1973 and is eligible for the National Register.

The park property includes a 13-acre Parade Grounds with soccer fields, gazebo and a small outdoor pool. The pool is primarily used by the Flushing YMCA for their summer camp and Beacon programs, however we were able to offer free public swimming several times a week. The enclave of 11 historic buildings, some of which will be offered to non-profit organizations for use, includes a chapel, the Officers’ Club, and the Parks Administrator’s office. There are also 23 buildings that were built in the 1950s with no real historic significance. Plans call for the demolition of many of these buildings and the development of that land into the “North Park”. There is a scenic esplanade overlooking the sound that is open to pedestrians, bicyclists, etc. The NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission designated a substantial portion of this property as a New York City Historic District in June 1999. The Officers’ Club, home of the Bayside Historical Society, was designated as a city landmark in 1973 and was listed as a landmark on both the National and State Registers of Historic Places in 1986.

The fort is shared by several entities. The 77th Regional Readiness Command, the largest U.S. Army Reserve Center in the country, maintains 38 acres and includes the Ernie Pyle Building. The Eastern Paralyzed Veterans Administration maintains a building on the fort as well. The Fire Department has been a presence in Fort Totten since 1999 and will maintain 39 acres of land including many of the beautiful old buildings. The Coast Guard still maintains an enclave on 9.6 acres of land which is being utilized by the NYPD. However, in 2003, the U.S. General Services Administration issued a notice of surplus determination for this property. The Parks has expressed an interest in this waterfront property.—Janice Meinick
Capital Improvements to Fort Totten

Things are moving very quickly at our new park in Fort Totten. Mayor Bloomberg has provided $3.6 million in Fiscal Year 2006 funds for the development of the park. Proposed work includes demolition of some of the 1950s townhouses, handicapped access into the Chapel, and the establishment of a comfort station.

Borough President Helen Marshall has also come through for the park with $850,000 to renovate the museum building. This renovation will include repairing the roof, creating a wheelchair accessible ramp into the building and installing a wheelchair accessible bathroom. This building will eventually serve as our visitor center and home for our Urban Park Rangers.

Outside of the park, Mayor Bloomberg and Council Member Tony Avella have acquired $1.3 million dollars to fund a comfort station in Little Bay Park. This will greatly benefit park goers. This money is part of a Federal Transportation Bill which is also funding work at the Cross Island Parkway entrance/exit ramp into the fort. - All of this will help make Fort Totten Park a true treasure.

WE'RE GETTING A COMFORT STATION!

City Councilman Tony Avella (D-Bayside) and Parks Commissioner Adrian Benepe recently announced plans to build a comfort station in the Fort Totten/Little Bay Park. The facility will be funded by $1.3 million secured by Councilman Avella in the capital budget.

With the recent opening of the new city park at Fort Totten, the need for a comfort station gained a certain urgency. "We're really ecstatic," said Warren Schreiber, President of the Friends of Fort Totten Parks civic organization. He said his group along with The Bay Terrace Community Alliance, headed by Philip Konigsberg at the time, had been lobbying local elected officials for permanent restrooms for the last three years.

Councilman Avella agreed that the community had sought the comfort stations for a while and acknowledged the assistance of the Friends of Fort Totten and Bay Terrace Community Alliance to obtain funding.

Councilman Avella stated, "I am extremely pleased that with the assistance of Mayor Mike Bloomberg, I was able to obtain funding for this project. This park is enjoyed by thousands of New Yorkers and the addition of a comfort station will only enhance the park's family-friendly environment."

Construction is expected to begin in the Fall of 2006. Before long we'll be able to say "goodbye port-a-potty" and "HELLO comfort station." - I just cant wait. - Irv Gotago

Friends of Fort Totten Parks Mission Statement

The Friends of Fort Totten Parks will strive to make Fort Totten the best park possible.

Our organization will work directly with the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation to provide a variety of passive recreational experiences, cultural events, educational programs, services, facilities and lands that meet the needs of our community.
REVAMPING OF THE CROSS ISLAND PARKWAY ENTRANCE AND EXIT RAMP PROJECT.
A MESSAGE FROM U.S. CONGRESSMAN GARY ACKERMAN

It is hard to believe that more than 25 years have passed since I first visualized Fort Totten as a sprawling public park. But after a quarter century of hard work and endless perseverance with the community, this dream has finally become a reality. Twas back in 1980 when threats of decommissioning Fort Totten as an active army base first occurred. I was a State Senator who petitioned the federal government on behalf of the community to either keep the base open since the neighborhood always lived comfortably with Fort Totten as a military facility, or to transform this breathtaking piece of property into a park, rather than auction off the land to Industrialists or high rise developers. Although we were successful in convincing the Pentagon to keep the fort open for many years, the Department of Defense finally shut down most of the base in 1995.

Through the mid and late 1990's, I was honored to chair the Fort Totten Advisory Committee, a panel of community leaders which recommended future uses for the decommissioned property. We spent countless hours, late into the night in the basement of the fort's chapel, vetting virtually every type of proposal imaginable. And after fighting off plans which included everything from commercial development to college dorms to housing for the mentally ill, the addicted and the homeless, we formally decided on a park which would be open to all in the community.

The parking lot project will among other things more than double the number of parking spaces (from 136 to 285), install new sidewalks, lighting, landscaping and plantings, create a new bus turnaround, provide enhancements to the proposed greenway and reroute circulating vehicles to exit onto the Cross Island Parkway service road.

Under the Cross Island project, the parkway's bridge overpass will be completely redesigned and reconstructed and two additional lanes will be created on 212th Street. This will also allow the two sides of 212th Street at the Bell Boulevard intersections to finally line up. The results of the project will improve the capacity and operation of 212th Street between Bell Boulevard and the Cross Island Parkway service road as well as the 212th Street intersection.

It has been a long road for our community to get to this point but the frustrations, bureaucratic battles and long wait have been worth it; because the area has inherited from the federal government, one the most prime pieces of waterfront real estate in the entire New York region.

Whether exploring Fort Totten's rich history or simply going for a stroll, I look forward to many years of enjoying our magnificent new park together. I hope to see all of you out there!

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Fort Totten Fact

"THE MINES"

The main gate to the Fort Totten is flanked by two granite columns topped by decommissioned submarine mine casings that were developed and tested at the Fort in the 1870's. These devices were used for the testing of underwater weapons systems.

In 1879 these weapons were tested using the Schooner "OLIVE BRANCH", anchored off Willets Point. A single submarine mine sunk and destroyed that ship.

They were also used to mine the waters off Fort Totten in the defense of the United States against Spain in 1898. During peace times, the mines were stored in vaults in the Fort.

- (taken from "The History of Fort Totten" - by Norman Brouwer, Published by The Bayside Historical Society and available for purchase)
Nature & Wildlife Corner
Wildlife Flourishes at Fort Totten Park

No, this doesn’t mean that a string of discos will open in the park. I’m referring to what amounts to an avian melting pot right here in our own neighborhood.

Fort Totten is part of a unique urban oasis here in Queens. Ideally situated in close proximity to some of the finest wildlife preserves in Queens County, Fort Totten Park has a lot to offer for bird watchers.

It is one of the best places to observe the seasonal migration of many types of birds. More than 325 species of birds have been observed flying over Fort Totten Park as they migrate South in the fall and back North in the Spring. You could call this an Avian detour.

Many of these delightful winged visitors come from nearby Udall’s Cove Wildlife Preserve in Douglaston and Alley Pond Park in Little Neck. In fact, Udall Cove’s 135 acres is home to many birds including egrets, herons, laughing gulls, swallows, Canadian geese, the endangered piping plover. The curiously named lesser yellowleg, as well as the osprey, (huge fish eagles) are residents to the area. Ospreys are large, powerful birds with wing spans up to six feet and have frequently been observed fishing in Little Neck Bay adjacent to Fort Totten Park. Even Peregrine Falcons have been observed playfully swooping down on flocks of seagulls. (Playfully?).

Aurora Pond, situated in Udall’s Cove is undergoing a major restoration by the Parks Department. Once completed it will welcome back the birds as well as muskrat, frogs, toads, salamanders and turtles that formerly lived in Aurora Pond. This will quite naturally, increase Fort Totten’s wildlife population because, let’s face it, birds do fly.

So it is gratifying to know that we still have lots of beautiful, open space in our corner of Queens, here at Fort Totten Park, and that we can see a host of other bird wildlife in this extraordinary part of the greatest city in the world.

-Robert Sansosti

Photo - Dennis Fitzpatrick

FAMILY FUN DAY

To celebrate the opening of Fort Totten Parks to the public, the City Department of Parks and the Friends of Fort Totten Parks sponsored its first “Fort Totten Parks Family Fun Day” on Saturday July 28, 2005.

Park officials estimated over 600 people attended the event on this picture perfect summer day. Festivities included free health screenings, police and fire safety education, arts and crafts, martial arts performances and tours of Fort Totten.

Warren Schreiber, president of The Friends of Fort Totten parks especially thanked Cord Meyer L.L.C., Independence Bank, Dunkin Donuts and restaurants Pappazio’s and Era-wan for their generous help in funding the event.

According to Matthew Silverstein, chairman of The Friends of Fort Totten Events Committee, the park plans on holding many more events next season. They also hoped that day’s turn out as well as future events will result in more funding for various social and educational programs such as the restoration of the Willets Farm House.—LKL

TOURS OF FORT TOTTEN

The Urban Park Rangers offer free tours of the grounds of Fort Totten Park, including the Historic Battery, every Saturday at 2 pm and Sunday at 11 am.

No reservations are required. The Rangers will schedule additional tours upon request. For additional information or to schedule a program, please call 718-352-4793 ext. 18.
The Fort on Haunted Hill—Halloween at Fort Totten

On Saturday October 29, 2005, the New York City Department of Parks with the Friends of Fort Totten Parks hosted its First “Fort on Haunted Hill” Halloween event. The event was made possible in part by a generous donation from the offices of Councilman Tony Avella (D – Bayside) who was also on hand for the event. The festivities held on the Parade Grounds of the park included hayrides, goody bags for the children, arts and crafts, face paintings, games, a pumpkin patch, tours of the Battery and sack races. Music, scary noises and announcements were provided by the ever energetic D.J. Obefami "Abdullah" Wright. Councilman Avella served as the Judge for the sack races as well as for the Parade of Costumes. Lending a very helpful hand with the day’s event were the members of the Benjamin A. Cardozo High School La Crosse team.

The chilly weather did not affect the steady stream of families coming out to celebrate Halloween on Fort Totten. Almost all the children attending (and many adults) were dressed in their Halloween’s finest. Spidermen, Princesses, Sheiks, Darth Vader types, Angels, Devils, Police Officers and Convicts all turned out in scores for the event.

The event was capped off with evening Lantern Tours of the Battery by the Urban Park Rangers. The tours were scheduled for 6:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. but due to the great turn out of families wanting to tour the Haunted Battery of Fort Totten, the tours ran until 9:00 p.m. The Battery was haunted by Urban Park Rangers and Friends of Fort Totten volunteers dressed as ghouls, witches and one very frightening werewolf.

Northeast Queens Park Administrator Janice Melnick called the event a huge success estimating that over 2700 people enjoyed the days’ festivities while another 400 to 500 people came out for the evening Lantern Tour of the Battery—LKL

Bayside Snapper Tournament In Little Neck Bay

On Saturday, August 20th, 2005 The Bayside Anglers Group Ltd. (aka—BAG) hosted its 5th Annual Snapper Derby at Bayside Marina. Neighborhood kids were invited to come and experience some of the outstanding Little Neck Bay fishing that local sportsmen have tried to keep secret from the masses. BAG was able to introduce over 50 local kids (and their families) to the joys of catch and release fishing available right in their own backyard.

After a brief fishing lesson by BAG members, kids were in hot pursuit of their finned quarry with loaner rods provided by the DEC, and using bait generously provided by Pro Fishing of Flushing. Fishing ran hot and cold over the course of the event, but every entrant got a bite, and most managed to hoist at least one fish over the rail. When fishing slowed, kids were energized with prizes and giveaways provided by Pro Fishing and Fisherman Depot of College Point, and when fishing was fast and furious the kids had their eyes glued to their bobbers in anticipation of winning one of the 3 trophies awarded by BAG and presented by City Council Member and event supporter Tony Avella, for the greatest number of fish caught. The kids actually had to be forced from their rods by parents in order to partake in the free pizza lunch charitably donated by Matty of The Bayside Marina, and then went right back to fishing!

Bayside Anglers Group is a non-profit fishing club dedicated to the promotion of environmentally sound recreational fishing practices. Based in Bayside, but with members from around Queens and Long Island, BAG members actively fish throughout the South Shore as well as Long Island Sound.

For more information about Bayside Anglers Group, please visit www.baysideanglers.com

-Peter Scala
More Parking Planned for Fort Totten

Parking for visitors to Fort Totten Park just got a little bit easier with the passing a national transportation bill signed by President Bush recently.

Leading the quest to help make the park the best park it can be, Congressman Gary Ackerman was a key figure in securing the funds needed to expand the parking facilities just outside Fort Totten from 136 to 285 parking spots. Trees, sidewalks and lighting will be part of the $2,24 million allocated for this phase of the overall project.

In addition, Congressman Ackerman’s quest helped secure $3.37 million in funds to revamp the traffic flow in and around 212 street & Bell Blvd. All of these changes are designed to reduce congestion on surrounding streets in the neighborhood and provide better access to the park with minimal impact to the community.

The improvements are expected to begin in 2006—Pat Riot

Mayor Bloomberg likes Fort Totten Park

Mayor Mike Bloomberg mentioned Fort Totten in his State of the City address on January 11, 2005. In part the Mayor stated “Last year we (The City) added 150 acres to the biggest and best parks system in the nation—much of it along our 578 miles of waterfront. They include Fort Totten—whose dramatic views of Long Island Sound make it destined to boast—to be one of the most beautiful parks in the city.” Thanks Mayor Mike, we think so as well!—Pat Riot

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City of New York Parks & Recreation Foundation

Yoga in the Park

Hot Yoga Paradise and the NYC Dept of Parks sponsored six weeks of classes outdoors in the shadows of Long Island Sound this past fall. The classes were held Saturday mornings in the hockey rink and lasted an hour and a half. The Yoga focused on flexibility, alignment and strength while relieving tension and building energy. All levels of yoga students from beginner to expert were side by side at the class working at their own pace. The fresh air, morning sun and pleasant temperatures, topped off the total feeling of well-being and peace.

These classes were given free of charge through the generosity of Hot Yoga Paradise located in the Baybridge Commons Mini Mall as part of the opening of Fort Totten to the public.

We’re happy to report that we are planning to expand the program for 8 weeks – every Saturday morning in May and June at 9:00 am. The classes will again be offered to anyone interested thanks to the generosity of Hot Yoga Paradise, the Queens County Savings Bank, and the NYC Department of Parks & Recreation.

For more information, please call Hot Yoga Paradise at 718-428-0075 or the Parks Department at 718-352-4793 ext. 16. You can also visit their websites at www.hotyogaparadise.com or www.nyc.gov/parks.

Stories, Email, comments and suggestions can be Emailed to the following address. Info@FortTottenPark.org

Or can be mailed to
Friends of Fort Totten - PO Box 604984 - Bayside NY 11360
**Fort Totten Park Guidelines**

According to NYC Parks Dept. NE Queens Administrator Janice Melnick, Fort Totten Park will be open to the public for enjoyment with a few guidelines to ensure the safety of park users and the preservation of the quality of life for surrounding neighbors. These guidelines will be modified as needed.

* Fort Totten Park is open to the public from 6 am to 9 pm daily.
* No Cars (except for those with permits) are allowed in the fort.
* No Barbecuing Allowed.
* Permits are required for groups of 20 people or more.
* Dogs must be leashed at all times and owners must clean up dog waste.

For additional information on rules & regulations, as well as events and activities, please call Janice Melnick, Northeast Queens Park Administrator at 718-352-4793 ext. 16. or visit the website www.nyc.gov/parks

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**Crafty Totten Kids**

Crafty Totten Kids is a new ongoing educational program sponsored by the Friends of Fort Totten Parks. Crafty Kids strives to promote cultural and environmental awareness among children from nursery school to 5th grade. Crafty Totten Kids will engage children through hands on arts and crafts, story telling and interaction with the natural environment. We hope that children will leave Crafty Totten Kids with a better understanding of the environment in which they live in.

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 online fortotten@gmail.com. The following class dates will focus on the following themes:

- May 6, 2006 - Make Every Day Earth Day
- September 16, 2006 - Patriot's Day
- November 18, 2006 - Native American Culture

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**Executive Committee of The Friends of Fort Totten Parks**

- Warren Schreiber President
- Rosemarie Brennan 1st Vice President
- Al Evans 2nd Vice President
- Lucille Kernahan Treasurer
- Carol Rupp Recording Secretary
- Matthew Silverstein Corresponding Secretary

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Join the Friends of Fort Totten
Look for events, register for events, and changes on the web at www.FortTottenPark.org

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Friends of Fort Totten / NY Parks Dept
Schedule of events - 2006

Yoga in the Park
Saturday Mornings 9—10:30 AM
May 6 - June 24—Little Bay Hockey Rink
(sponsored by Hot Yoga Paradise & Queens County
Savings Bank)

Shakespeare’s—Much to do about nothing
Sunday—June 18—7PM (performed by Moosetball
Theater) Fort Totten Parade Grounds (near gazebo)
(made possible with funding from Cord Meyer Devel-
opment Corporation)

Dancing under the stars series
Every Wednesday 7—8:30PM
June 21—August 19 Little Bay Hockey Rink
Lessons & dancing (Salsa, swing, rhumba & more)
(made possible with funding by Councilman Tony
Avella)

Dancing under the stars—finale
Wednesday Aug 19, 7—8:30 PM The finale to the series with dancing to a live orchestra

Family Fun Day
Saturday July 22 — 12 noon—4PM
Fort Totten Parade Grounds
Arts, crafts, games, animal adventures, community groups and more.
Details can be found at www.FortTottenPark.org

The Hunchback of Notre Dame
(performed by the Moosehall Theater)
(made possible with funding by Chord Meyer Development Corporation)

Fort on Haunted Hill - A Halloween Festival
Saturday October 28 , 12 noon—4PM
Fort Totten Parade Grounds Bring the whole family & enjoy hay rides, pumpkin patch, arts & crafts & games!
(made possible with funding by Councilman Tony
Avella)

Please check our website for more information
www.FortTottenPark.org

The Joe Michaels Mile
The Joe Michaels Mile is a strip of land and a pathway from the Fort Totten entrance to the Bayside Marina and is named in honor of Joseph Michaels (1941-1987), a health activist and longtime resident of Queens. Early in his life, in the 1960s, Michaels was the drummer for Jay and the Americans, a band that sang in the style of the 1950s doo-wop groups. The band is best known for their 1964 hit “Come a Little Closer”, a chart success that led to their inclusion on the Beatles first American tour during that year.

In 1969, at the age of 27, Michaels suffered his first heart attack, and would have six more before deciding to do something to try to remedy the problem. Michaels worked along with Dr. Norbert Sanders, a former New York City Marathon winner, who Michaels called his “inspiration and coach”. With Dr. Norbert’s help, Michaels was able to lower his cholesterol from over 700 mg/dl to 200 mg/dl and his weight from 220 lbs. to 150 lbs.

Michaels was able to accomplish this incredible feat through running. Through his involvement in the sport, Michaels went from having seven coronary bypass operations in twelve years to running a marathon every 12 months. Michaels became one of the founding members and the first president of the Alley Pond Striders, now a 250 member running and walking club. In 1985, he founded another organization, the Cardiac Runners. The group whose goal it was to help others “run away from heart disease” had members throughout all the world who would come to New York to run the marathon every November.

In addition to running marathons, Michaels raised money for charity and spread his message of cardiac fitness by participating in longer running events. He competed in a 581-mile ultra-marathon from Toronto to New York, and a 202 mile trek across Long Island that began in Montauk and was timed to end on the ice at Nassau Coliseum during the intermission of a New York Islanders game. These runs were remarkable achievements for any athlete, but were particularly amazing due to the fact that Michaels’ heart worked at only 30% capacity.

Michaels once told a reporter, “If I have to go, I’d rather do so while running, not while sitting in an armchair, I don’t want to be rehabilitated for the purpose of looking out the window”. Sadly, the prolific runner, health activist, and Queens resident succumbed to a heart attack in January of 1987 at the age of 45.

On April 24, 1988 this path along the shore of Little Neck Bay was named in honor of Joseph Michaels.

- Robert Sansosti

Contributing Editor Lily K. Louis
Contributing writers Congressman Gary Ackerman, Irving Gutago, Stephanie Jones, Janice Melnick, Pat Riot, Maggie Saloman, Robert Sansosti, Peter Scala, Mona Shyma