



MANORMATTERS



By Valerie Meskouris

photo credit: Valerie Meskouris

SPRING IS IN THE AIR

Hello, Manor Residents! It has been a lovely, mild Winter thus far and Spring is peeking around the corner. This time of year when the flowers start to sprout and the colors become a bit more vibrant I yearn for lazy mornings at the Field and walking along Shore Road as the sun sets. We have had stunning rainbows, clever foxes, and even a coyote sighting. As the days get longer and the nights a bit warmer I invite you to enjoy the simple things like fresh air, new blossoms, and old friends.

photo credit: Christos Malaxianis

NEW SECURITY

After an extensive search and interview process (thanks to the Security Committee Members: Pia Thompson & Michael DiFonzo (Co-Chairs), Peter Angelilli, Chris Fillas, Laretta Kennedy-Mulholland, Bob Sweeney, & Margaret Warren) the DMA has signed a three-year contract for roving security services. We are proud to welcome back North Shore Safety & Security (NSSS). The team includes owner Ron Saar who previously lived on Warwick for over 20 years. He is not just security, but he has a history with our community and a clear, vested interest in The Manor. Saar's team includes Bob Wood, Jim Derby, and T.J. Derby. The Derbys are also Douglaston residents; T.J. is a familiar face to many of us as he is a Launch Operator at the Dock. The NSSS roving car has GPS-tracking and all guards have body-cams with video available on demand. Security roving hours are 6pm-2am. For any immediate concerns call **718-423-0311** at any time.

Please introduce yourself when you see our team:

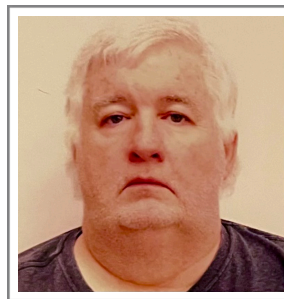
Ron Saar



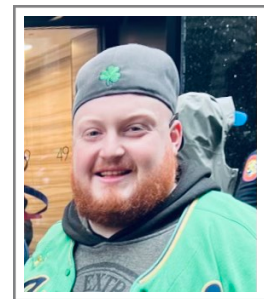
Bob Wood



Jim Derby



T.J. Derby



GOOD NEWS ON SANDHILL ROAD

We are all aware that there are only two ways in and out of The Manor: Douglaston Parkway and Sandhill Road. Sandhill is perhaps better known as "the Backroad". And as far as I can recall it has always been a mess- potholes, craters, every time you dared driving through that *room for only one vehicle curve* you felt you needed to take your car in for an alignment afterwards. Simply a mess!

This has been going on for years. Sean M. Walsh, President of the Douglaston Civic Association, and Bernard Haber, former Chairman of Community Board 11, have tried for years to get the City to pay attention to our Backroad through endless letter writing campaigns and phone calls to numerous departments; enter longtime Manor Resident, Ralph Ruiz. In 2017, Ralph retired from his work on Wall Street to care for his beloved wife of over 50 years, Jo-Ann, who passed on Aug 25, 2022. His civic work, community leadership, and simple love of his neighborhood is how our Backroad finally got the attention it deserved. Ralph, looking to serve his community, joined the DMA Board as the Streets Committee Chair. Both Mr. Walsh and Mr. Haber gave Ralph an enormous amount of support and information on all they had done to get the Backroad repair work started. Ralph persevered, but every time he called Queens DOT the reps would reply "nothing we can do, it's not part of the City. It's a private road." But this is incorrect; it is

"It's not what you know, but who you know."



photo credit: Valerie Meskouris

part of the NYC Parks. Upon this realization Ralph reached out to Commissioner Sue Donoghue of Parks & Recreation who did not respond. But resilient Ralph contacted Councilmember Vickie Paladino and her Chief of Staff, Alexandria Ziraschi. Ms. Ziraschi spoke often with Ralph making sure our complaints were heard and confirmed that Sandhill is within the Parks Dept. Paladino's office reached out to Commissioner Donoghue who finally verified the newfound information but said there were "no funds" for repair. Ralph suggested getting funding from Queens Department of Transportation's budget (Queens Borough Commissioners Nicole Garcia and Albert Silvestri) which Paladino and Donoghue agreed was a great idea if you could even get a response from Queens DOT.

And here is where it pays to be friendly with your neighbors especially in efforts to do what's best for the community: Like a lot of us, Ralph takes walks throughout the Manor regularly. On one of these walks with another Manor resident he chatted about his goals for Sandhill and all the no's he was coming up against. The friend told Ralph it wasn't a problem, he would help. Ralph was put into direct contact with Ydanis Rodriguez, Commissioner of NYC DOT. The needs of the Backroad were heard and Chief Planner Jose Tavor reached out to Ralph for details. NYC DOT contacted Queens DOT and *poof* we now have a beautifully restored, smooth, and safer Backroad. The speed bumps remain partially in efforts to one of our residents who paid individually for it to stay that way. As Ralph repeated that old adage to me, "*It's not what you know, but who you know*", I couldn't help but think it is always a worthy endeavor to remain on good terms with your neighbors. Ralph wanted to make sure that every single person who helped get Sandhill Road repaired was shown recognition. He made it clear that he was not doing any of this for personal acknowledgment, but rather he showed gratitude that he was granted the trust of the DMA that he could get this done. I speak for all of us in The Manor in giving a massive **THANK YOU** to our Chair of the Streets Committee, Ralph Ruiz. Ralph's tireless efforts in using his personal connections to have our issues heard is a wonderful example of what Community leaders can get accomplished by working collaboratively with elected county officials.

DOUGLASTON STORY PROJECT

The Douglaston Local Development Corporation (DLDC) is pleased to announce its second annual Story Project. Lisa Lempel-Sander has created the Douglaston Story Project because she understands the importance of storytelling. As she would say, “it can endear people to one another, bridge difference, and broaden perspectives. And, storytelling builds common ground and strengthens a sense of community—all objectives that are squarely among the goals of the Douglaston Local Development Corporation, commonly referred to as the *DLDC*.”

The show is modeled after NPR’s *The Moth*, which is a radio hour of live storytelling. It is a way to connect people in commonality as well as celebrate our diversity. Through storytelling we create empathy and understanding of our unique experiences in a shared world. The participants in last year’s maiden Story Project event and the participants in this year’s forthcoming event have worked painstakingly to craft their narratives. For months each piece is meticulously written, carefully honed, and rigorously rehearsed. The result is a polished and compelling piece of living art. Zion Episcopal Church has graciously volunteered in offering their auditorium space. Master lighting designer Rob Cangemi will once more design the event with his signature magical lighting and Scott Gramlich from SG Custom Sound will again wire the event for professional sound.

Last year’s story-tellers were Lisa Manhart (*pictured at right*), Stuart Hersh, and Deborah Barchilon. Each story was rich with personal history; meaningful, enchanting, humorous, and profoundly moving. Lempel-Sander already had personal connections to the performers, she explained her vision of the project, and convinced them that they all had engaging stories to tell. And she was right. I read Manhart’s script which opened like this:

In 1968, when I was 14, my mother tore out the kitchen sink and never replaced it. For 15 years, we took our dishes to the slop sink in the unfinished basement and washed them there, putting them on top of the washing machine so they could dry.

After reading her opening I thought I would enjoy reading her entire novel. It’s incredibly engaging from the get-go and you can just tell there is so much more to learn.

Debora Barchilon offered her story to the audience as a question: *To whom do stories belong?*

Barchilon grew up in Buenos Aires during The Dirty War, which was a period of state terrorism in Argentina. Her childhood friend that she equally shied away from and enormously admired was taken by the military during high school and murdered. Her story frames the particular moments in

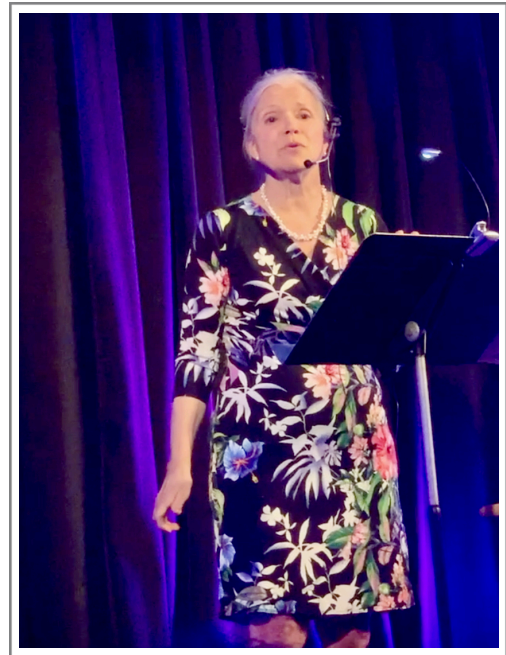


photo credit: Lisa Manhart

life that form who we will become as humans with free will but also who we are when we lack any choice at all. As stated by Barchilon:

Our early experiences with pain and loss created in me a profound sense of duty. It has been my calling to help others heal from trauma, to be a tireless seeker of truth and meaning, even when in the face of the most abject aspects of human behaviors.

Stuart Hersh is a prolific travel writer. When we spoke he said he was preparing for a ten day excursion to the Panama Canal. His background as a “writer who travels combining business and pleasure” brought him work with numerous magazines as well as the Travel Section in *The New York Times*. When he first began his career his editors were always trying to shorten his pieces; he said that was a strength in writing for the Story Project. Under Lempel-Sander’s direction and a lot of rehearsal time he found the audience incredibly appreciative in his storytelling abilities and the entire experience utterly gratifying. He hopes to be in attendance at this year’s show to see what our next storytellers have to share.

This year the storytellers are all Manor residents: Andi Licari-LaGrassa, Michel Fiechter, and Brian Hainline. Running time is about an hour. A pre-show wine and cheese reception will be at 7:30PM with a show start at 8:30PM. Single tickets are available for purchase on their website. Tickets to the event are also being gifted in exchange for the purchase of membership in the DLDC. Annual membership is \$120 per individual; \$150 per family. The Douglaston Local Development Corporation is a small, not-for-profit 501(c)(3) corporation. Donations and memberships are urgently sought to support programming like this and other community-based events. Please visit the website for details at www.dougLDC.org.

WHEN: Saturday, April 22 at 7:30pm

WHERE: Zion Episcopal Church

TICKETS and MORE INFO: www.dougldc.org

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

The DMA extends a warm welcome to our newest residents!

111 Hollywood (12/12/22, Robertson to Delespaul)

336 Hollywood (11/9/22, Rosse to Dibs)

350 Kenmore (1/26/23, Godfrey to An)

348 Manor (12/15/22, Panacciulli to Boyd)

36-15 West Drive (12/30/22, Carmine to Farimani)



Welcome the Farimani-Moosivand Family



Welcome the An Family

DMA ANNUAL MEETING

WHEN: Tuesday, May 9 at 7:00PM, Doors open at 6:30PM

WHERE: Fellowship Hall at the Community Church of Douglaston, 39-50 Douglaston Parkway

Join us for the DMA's 113th Annual Meeting. The DMA Nominating Committee is seeking those interested in running for a board of director position. Candidates must be a member of the association for at least two years and currently in good standing (dues paid). Please contact DMA or click Volunteer Sign-Up on the website. We look forward to seeing you at the meeting and having your voices heard.

MY SEPTIC TANK ODYSSEY

By Sharon Lee

Septic tanks and cesspools are a curious part of life in The Manor. We are only one of a few NYC communities that don't have sewers. Septic tanks are large underground receptacles that separate solid from liquid waste, allowing the liquid to be absorbed into the ground. With the help of natural bacteria, most of the solids break down in the tank. The remaining solids must be pumped out by a professional service provider. Cesspools are a simpler, older version of the modern-day septic system. When new families move into The Manor, they learn about their cesspool or septic from their contractors, the DMA, their real estate agents, neighbors, the Internet, or a combination of these groups. But the workings and upkeep of cesspools and septic systems remain a mystery to many of us.

When I moved in almost 9 years ago, I was told to pour a little Rid-X powder into my septic tank and to pump it every so often, but no one told me how to do it or how often. I heard horror stories of neighbors who had waste backup from full or collapsed cesspools and others who could only do one load of laundry per day so as not to overload their system. Some neighbors, I was told, had to pump every month! When I asked around about how often I should pump, no one could tell me. They said it depended on the number of people in the household, the usage and my system. I tried to imagine what my cesspool looked like and where it was located. The previous owner had installed a huge system for her large family, so I felt confident that our waste removal was in good working order. Confession: I did nothing to my system for the first 3 years because we had zero problems. When I called the service provider to pump my cesspool, the workers who came told me there was almost nothing in the cesspool. Since I had done nothing to maintain it, I figured that's what I should keep doing. Then two things happened: a cleaning cloth was accidentally flushed down a toilet and the pandemic started. We recently noticed that our basement toilet had problems flushing. Could it be that the errant towel was clogging the septic line? With everyone stuck at home and cooking 3 meals per day, could it be oil and grease had gunked my system? Suddenly, we were having to pump the septic more frequently. The plumber checked for leaks that might be filling the tank with water. There were none. My septic pumping servicer patiently listened to my story and suggested that, as part of the troubleshooting, I flush a toilet after his workers pumped and then listen to whether water was flowing into the system. I didn't need to do that because the worker called me over to the riser (a pipe that extends from the septic to just above the ground to allow access for pumping) and told me he was confused about why there was still the sound of running water in the septic tank when no one in the house was using water. When I heard that water, I exclaimed, "It sounds like a waterfall!" Well, I called a septic tank specialist, and he explained what I

heard was the sound of the water from my leaching pool, which was filled to capacity, flowing back into the cesspool. His conclusion: The leaching pool is not working as it should. What's a leaching pool? It's a second tank that helps dissipate the water. Not every house has one. The solution was not to further investigate and try to diagnose the problem. The specialist did a treasure hunt on my front lawn, found the leaching pool and installed a second riser so the pumping company could clean out that tank, too. If functioning correctly, this leaching pool is supposed to eliminate the water. So while I never found out what was causing the problem, I got to speak to a number of professionals who gave me a lesson in what happens under the ground of my front yard and how to take care of it. The "prescription" for my system is: 1) pump the cesspool + leaching pool every 6 months, 2) after pumping, sprinkle the contents of 2 small packs of Rid-X into the leaching pool and add water from my garden hose to make sure it travels down the riser. Note: This care plan is unique to my system. You'll need to fiddle with your cesspool or septic and get to know it intimately to find out what approach is best for your system.

Hope you now understand a little more about cesspools and septic tanks than I did when I moved in. The biggest takeaway is: "KYC," or Know Your Cesspool!

Please read below for tips from the experts.

Q&A with Kevin Wolfe, architect and Manor resident:

1) What is the history of cesspools and septic systems in The Manor? Why don't we have sewers?

I looked through records, and no one ever mentioned cesspools in the historic material. In the early 20th Century, with industrialization well under way, New York City expanded its sewer system. The Manor was all farmland if you look at maps. "It really was country, and there were no sewers because there was nothing around us." Historically, we were cut off from being able to have sewers by the LIRR rail line and the shape of our peninsula. "I really think the answer mostly lies in geography. The peninsula was really separated from the rest of the world. We are probably the only community in Queens today that doesn't have sewers." As an architect who is interested in history, I looked at the 1910s and '20s, and there was a movement to hygienics, clean drinking water and sewer systems, known as the "Sanitary Movement." In the mid-19th Century not everyone had a toilet in the house. "To have a shower was to be modern and contemporary." People didn't wash their hair every day; that only happened after WWII. Although household size was bigger in those days, with children and live-in help sharing a home even among the middle classes, people used water more sparingly. "People didn't take showers and baths the way they do today." Now families may participate in sports and other activities that require more frequent showering and laundry. "Some of these kids are in the shower twice a day. They're in the gym." Nowadays, people like large soaking tubs which use many gallons of water for one bath. "There's a level of luxury that wasn't in place back then." Lot size was also bigger in the past when the neighborhood was new. The larger property size facilitated the work of septic systems.

The DMA looked into having sewers numerous times in the past, but there are at least 3 reasons why this never happened. Firstly, because city officials have repeatedly denied requests for sewers over costs, and secondly, because people fear sewers might open up The Manor to overdevelopment with multiple-family dwellings and high-rises. "There's a strong anti-development link to people living here opposed to having sewers." A third reason is people didn't want to kill the existing street trees. "Even when I was a kid growing up here, there were multiple times when

people wanted to have sewers, and it was rebuffed.” Our lack of sewers might also hamper the implementation of a current proposal by Governor Hochul to allow accessory dwelling units and apartments close to LIRR stations. Septic systems require a lot of underground space. “Even the biggest lots are tight for a septic system.” When you increase the footprint of the house, there’s even less room.

2) What should homeowners consider when moving into The Manor and renovating their houses?

“People have to be as educated as possible as to what having a septic system means.” Make sure the septic system is part of the planning when making renovations. Soaking tubs hold gallons and gallons of water. The first thing you need to do is have the septic system checked out to find out if it’s old, new or failing and needs to be replaced. Be cognizant of possible septic problems. If you are pumping every 2 months, you need a new septic system. Be smart about how you use water, and try to conserve. “You can’t use water with abandon the same way you would if you had a sewer.” Have a plan for maintaining the septic system as well as surface water flow and retention. Make sure gutters are clear, and that water falling on the house and property is carried to dry wells in the ground or away from the house. Think about how above-ground structures affect water flow. “The more paving you cover your lot with, the more impervious your site is, and that’s bad for the environment, too.”

Q&A with Livio Forte, president, A&L Cesspool & Recycling, and a Manor resident:

1) What should new owners do with their cesspool as soon as they buy their house?

They need to adjust to life with a cesspool. Most people that live in the 5 boroughs have lived for many years with a house or apartment where their sewage waste went into a city sewer and did not have to be concerned with a cesspool filling up. They might want to take showers instead of baths, purchase new appliances that use less water.

2) How do they properly maintain their cesspool?

Do not flush anything down the toilet that does not decompose like sanitary napkins, paper towels or waste cooking oil. Also to help extend the life of your cesspool, add Rid-X or any similar product to the cesspool to help break down the solids that accumulate in the septic system.

3) How do you know if you have a problem with your cesspool?

If your cesspool fills up, the waste will come up out of the lowest fixture in the lowest level in the house. Usually this would be a shower or a toilet in a finished basement. If your cesspool is filling up more often than you think it should then check for leaks in the house. It could be a leaky toilet and the flapper doesn’t close correctly or the float inside of the toilet tank is not at the correct height and the water fills up over the top of the overflow tube inside of the tank of the toilet. Either problem will cause the water to constantly run and fill up your cesspool rather quickly. To check for leaks shut all of the fixtures off, sinks, toilets, dishwasher, washing machine, and showers. Then check the water meter. If the dial is moving, then you have a leak and you need to call your plumber right away.

4) Describe the pumping process and what it accomplishes.

Most houses in Douglaston and Little Neck have had their cesspool pumped several times by now and they had a pipe-up installed so that the lawn does not have to get dug up and destroy the lawn and flowers. If not, and you don’t know where the cesspool is, then you might want to find out the location from the previous owner. If you still cannot locate the cesspool, when the cesspool is NOT full, we can insert a camera through the main line and locate the area where the cesspool is located.

The cover will have to be exposed to pump the cesspool, and it might be a few feet down under the ground. Once it is opened, you might want to “Chimney” up the cover or install a pipe up from the cover for easy access. Once the cesspool is pumped and emptied (sometimes this might require two truck loads of waste to be removed), then the cover or cap can be placed back on until the next cleaning.

Q&A with Fred Heitz, cesspool and septic system contractor for the past 25 years and a Douglaston resident:

1) What's the difference between a cesspool and a septic system?

Cesspool - A cesspool is a big pit in the ground that leaches liquids into surrounding soil. It's an older technology. Built of rubble stone, brick, cinder, or concrete block. They work well for a good period of time, but since there's no grease separator or baffle wall, the grease, fat and solids eventually build up and need to be pumped. How often depends on cesspool size and other variables, such as how big the cesspool is, how it was used before you bought the house, whether the ground around your house is sand or clay. There are so many factors. Old cesspools may be a problem. It's unknown until you open them up and inspect the condition. Regular cesspools can last indefinitely, if the owners live like misers. In 1910, there was a different lifestyle. They didn't use the volume of water we do now, and phosphates in soaps have come into the picture in modern times. Septic – This is the newer technology. A septic system is a sealed tank with a grease separator. It allows microbes and bacteria to decompose the fats and solids before water goes into the leaching system. They presently have precast products and better domes (Old ones were made by hand and tend to fail.). Around 1963, New York State enacted a building code which required a septic tank (sealed tank with grease separator and baffle wall) and a leaching system. Many houses in the 1960s, 70s, even 80s may have metal septic tanks. They have to be replaced after 30-40 years due to decomposition. New septic systems, properly maintained, should last indefinitely. Some homes have leaching fields instead of a leaching pool. This is a series of pipes on sand and gravel with no storage ability. Leaching fields are sometimes installed if a house sits close to the water table and there is no ability to dig the deep hole required for a leaching pool.

2) How often should I pump my septic tank?

Pump every 1-2 years (depending on the number of occupants in the house), if you are not having trouble, and more if you have a problem. How do you know you have a problem with your cesspool or septic tank? “Typically it shows up in the basement...the lowest point.” You might see a backup in the toilet or tub. Septic tanks need to be maintained; cesspools not too often. Pumping a cesspool isn't always a great thing if you are not monitoring who's on the other side of the hose. It could cause a cesspool collapse if you pump out all the sand. “Don't let them suck the material (sand and mud) out of the bottom of the pool.” Listen for the sand and mud being sucked up, and tell the provider to stop pumping if you hear that sound.

3) What else can you do to maintain your septic system?

Minimize the time you spend in the shower. Be conservative about the volume of water you use and what you're putting into the septic. It does decompose over time, but “bacteria can only do so much – it's a very slow process.” Keep an eye on leaks in toilets, sinks and showers. “Make sure none of your water fixtures are running.” A lot of people have a running toilet, and it will quickly fill up the septic system. Try to use single-ply toilet paper and limit the amount of solids you put into the cesspool, regardless of what they are: No wipes, paper towels, feminine products, condoms.

Limit grease (bacon grease, vegetable oil). When you cook a steak, wipe the pan with a paper towel and throw the towel into the garbage. If you put a spoonful of grease into a coffee filter, water won't pass through it, and that's what's going to happen when you put grease into a septic tank. "If you make a soup and put it in the fridge, what do you have the next morning? That's what you have in a septic tank." Septic treatment products like Rid-X don't hurt, but put them into the leaching system if you can; otherwise, the septic tank or cesspool is fine. Don't use acid in your tank. Ask your septic pumping company to clean your tank once a year or every several years. This involves them agitating the solid materials in the tank and making the contents viscous so they can be fully removed during pumping sessions. It's not enough to just pump it, but if you pump the tank frequently, you don't need to clean it so often.

4) How do you choose a pumping company?

Long Island companies tend to be a bit more expensive. Tip the guys, especially when they clean the septic tank because that's a hard job.

5) What should new owners do with their cesspool/septic system as soon as they buy their house?

When people buy their house and they hire an engineer, they should ask what septic system is in place, how old it is, has it ever been replaced, how often was it pumped. "If they buy an older home, and they want to do improvements, that's the time to investigate the septic system." Assess before you do any capital improvements. The septic tank should be large enough to accommodate the number of people who live in the house. The more occupants in the house, the bigger the septic tank should be.

We appreciate our experts sharing their vast knowledge with the community! And finally, a more eco-friendly consideration for when the time comes to completely replace your septic system this new low-nitrogen option is now available. Here is some information on how to reduce nitrogen levels in water using alternative systems:

<https://www.epa.gov/snep/pound-prevention-stopping-nitrogen-source-advanced-septic-systems>

[https://www.nature.org/en-us/about-us/where-we-work/united-states/new-york/stories-in-new-york/long-island-water-quality/where-does-it-go-when-i-flush-/](https://www.nature.org/en-us/about-us/where-we-work/united-states/new-york/stories-in-new-york/long-island-water-quality/where-does-it-go-when-i-flush/)

Remember to stay friendly with your neighbors, enjoy the smooth Backroad, and get to know your cesspool. We hope to see you at both the Story Project and the Annual Meeting. Til Summer, enjoy these glorious days of Spring!

©Douglas Manor Association, Inc. 2023 All Rights Reserved