

BRONX BORO NEWS
EDITORIAL

Paint vandals in a corner

Graffiti has been around a long time, probably as long as there have been walls, and it hasn't improved with age.

It plagued ancient Rome, and Romans felt about the people responsible pretty much the way most of us do today. There was a saying that can be translated: "Fools' names and scrawls stick to all the walls."

The NYPD puts them in a different category. It calls them criminals, and last year arrested more than 4,000 of them citywide, a rise of 10% over the previous year.

That is welcome news, because graffiti isn't just ugly and stupid. When lowlives and dimwits see it, they often get the idea that they are in a place where the rules have been suspended. That's the dynamic behind the so-called broken-window theory of policing: signs of vandalism encourage more vandalism and other crimes.

So the police department is right to take graffiti seriously. Unfortunately, it is one of those crimes that is easier to move along than to stamp out completely. When the heat is on in one place, graffiti jerks move to another.

The cops could use a few more tools in the fight against graffiti. Stiffer penalties and legislation that made it easier to go after graffiti vandals — or their families, when they are minors — for the cost of cleaning up their messes would be an excellent start.

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BE OUR GUEST: JOAN EDWARDS, advocate for the homeless

More help for the homeless needed during tough times

The economic crisis has cast a pall over the city in recent months, and nowhere is this more evident than in its homeless shelters.

The number of new families showing up at shelters each month began to increase about five months ago. It is now the highest it has been in 25 years, according to the Coalition for the Homeless advocacy group.

In the last decade alone, the homeless shelter population increased by 65%, from 21,100 people in 1998 to 35,200 in 2007. In November 2008, according to the coalition, more than 36,600 homeless men, women and children were sleeping in city shelters, including 15,800 children, 14,100 adult family members and 6,700 single adults. Potential state budget cuts to homeless programs could seriously compromise a system already stretched way too thin.

And, based on reports from the financial sector and the government, the situation will most likely get worse before it gets better.

To help homeless people leave the streets for a better life, the city Department of Homeless Services conducted the Homeless Outreach Population Estimate (HOPE) last night.

I assisted them as part of a team of students and professors from Touro College Graduate School of Social Work, where I am a second-year student. Vital information was collected as volunteers canvassed parks, subways and other public spaces to count the number of people living unsheltered in the city.

I was homeless at one time, so I know from experience the struggle it is to pick oneself up from despair and become a contributing member of society. I also know that homeless women with children are challenged on many levels to keep their families stable. I also know there are many myths that people harbor about homeless individuals.

Many mistakenly think most homeless people are men, when more than two-thirds of people in city shelters are families with children.

And how many times have you heard homeless people are just "shiftless" and "lazy" and just don't want to work? The reality is that many homeless people do have jobs but cannot afford housing in New York City.

Some of them have had to resort to illegal activities to support themselves and their families and have lost their homes as a result.

Compounding the problem is that many homeless people suffer from mental health issues or abuse drugs and alcohol.

Almost all of the women I counsel have expressed a strong desire to do whatever it takes to keep their families together. Sadly, many lack the necessary support systems. I was fortunate to have support from my family, but many others are not as fortunate.

There are no easy answers to the problem of homelessness, as every case has its own set of problems. But studies have consistently shown empowerment and support systems are crucial in getting someone off the streets and into stable affordable housing.

Now more than ever, with the worst economy in decades, attention must be focused on the problem of homelessness in our city. Of course, we can't expect to solve the problem overnight, but acknowledging the problem is the first step to understanding it.

Joan Edwards is a second-year graduate student in social work at Touro College in Manhattan. She interns as a counselor at the Lehman Brothers Residence, a women's shelter in the Fordham section of the South Bronx, and at the Women's Center for Substance Abuse and Wellness at Casa Rita, an outpatient clinic in the Mott Haven section of the South Bronx, both divisions of Women In Need Inc.

'Many homeless have jobs but can't afford housing.'

VOICE of the PEOPLE

Give us a break on parking rules

Obviously, Hizzoner recognizes the great setup he has initiated to raise more revenue from parking violations.

The incredible removal of thousands of legal street parking spots under Mayor Mike's administration has created a situation where a legal street parking spot is a premium. This forces many to park further away from their destinations.

As a result, minutes might make the difference between getting a ticket or not when returning. Combine this with alternate side of the street parking rules, the new bicycle lanes (barely being used) and the extremely aggressive way the meter/revenue agents write tickets, then you can see why he will not allow for the grace period. The traffic mess in Manhattan is self-inflicted. Give us a break, your honor. Give us the grace period.

Rick Frost

Democracy means nothing to mayor

About Federal Judge Charles Sifton's ruling on Mayor Bloomberg's third term that the people get to have

their say in November, the people already voted on this, but it seems to Sifton and others that democracy means nothing. If the mayor loses the election in November, will the City Council overturn it? Some people think the public has no say. What's next?

Christopher Cerio

New Mets' stadium didn't hurt anyone

The Yankees are bad when it comes to spending money, but it feeds into the notion that the rest of Major League Baseball and the country has about New York in general — we're greedy and excessive.

The new Yankee Stadium was built on land that used to be a large public park. At least Citi Field was built in the parking lot next to Shea, and didn't inconvenience anyone in the process.

Chris Sutton

Public hearings are a waste of time

The MTA holds hearings so the general public can argue rate hikes. Why waste our time? They're going to do whatever they want regardless of what the public says.

Felix Baez

Councilman's actions are shameful

Shame on Brooklyn Councilman Lewis Fidler for chastising members of the Ancient Order of Hibernians, who, in good conscience, came before the City Council to ensure Christian symbols are rightly displayed in public schools alongside those of other faiths.

Rather than address the issue before him, and treating those that took the time to plead their case with the respect they deserved, Fidler chose to demean those before him and the entire AOH.

Damian McShane



Celebrating the life of Dr. King

The Rev. Marshall Morton and Calvary Hospital's gospel choir celebrate the life of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on his birthday, Jan. 15, at the hospital. The Rev. Demetrius Carolina, of the First Central Church on Staten Island, was the keynote speaker and paid homage to King's work on civil rights. The choir serenaded patients with "Lift Every Voice and Sing" and "We Shall Overcome."

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