

From the Mayor's Desk...September 21, 2012

Ah, the last day of summer is here, the chill is certainly in the air and the pace of life has certainly picked up from the hazy, lazy days of August. Along those lines, it is going to be a very busy weekend in Irvington.

Opening of the O'Hara Nature Center

After a decade of working on the idea, then the design and then the construction, we will be officially opening the O'Hara Nature Center tomorrow, Saturday, September 22nd at 11am.

The site where the O'Hara Nature Center now sits was originally part of a large estate which stretched from Broadway to Peter Bont Road and was owned by Isaac Stern, a department store mogul in the early 20th century. The Irvington High School / Middle School campus now sits on a portion of the estate, which should give you a good sense of just how large of an estate Mr. Stern owned. The remaining acreage, including the cottage that once stood where the Nature Center now stands, was purchased in the late 1970s for development as a residential subdivision by Riverview Investors, a partnership including Irvington residents James Dinan and Leo Harmonay. With their development effort on hold due to the poor economic conditions in the early 1980s, Messrs. Dinan and Harmonay offered the cottage and 40 acres surrounding it as a donation to the Village. Nearly all of the open space transferred to the Village in 1981, while the cottage remained in the name of its residents, Mary and Mildred Morabito, who could continue to live there for the remainder of their natural lives, after which the cottage would transfer to the Village. When that happened in 2002, the Village began making plans to develop the site as a nature center. In 2003, with significant funds from the County of Westchester, Scenic Hudson, the Open Space Institute, and the Irvington voter-approved open space bond, another 25 acres of the former Stern Estate was preserved as passive parkland.

In 2008, with the help of Congresswoman Nita Lowey, Irvington secured a grant for \$239,000 for construction. Even with this generous grant in hand, and with donations from generous residents, we were still short the estimated \$300,000+ in building costs. This deficit was soon filled when former Irvington Trustee Rick Rasulo asked the O'Hara Foundation a sizable donation to a worthwhile project. Like so many times before, when called upon by the Village, the O'Hara Foundation came through, pledging \$60,000 to make the new nature center a reality.

As you can imagine, building any sort of building (including demolition of the existing building) for \$300,000 is very challenging in Westchester County. Actually it would have been impossible without countless hours of skill and labor donated by people like former Irvington Trustee John Malone (architect), Peter Copp (contracting) and Joe DeNardo (contracting) and many others too numerous to mention here. The project run by Building Inspector Ed Marron and was overseen at various stages by Recreation Superintendent Joe Archino with assistance from Village Administrator Larry Schopfer.

The great message of the O'Hara Nature Center, is that it has taken the efforts of many, many people to get it built and opened up tomorrow. While I risk missing many worthy people, I would like to publically thank the following people and organizations that made it possible that I have not mentioned earlier in this email:

Irvington Trustees: Ken Bernstein, Mark Gilliland, Connie Kehoe and Walter Montgomery

Irvington Recreation Employees: Scott Brennen, Laura Coapman, Chris DePaoli, Maureen DePaoli,

Other Irvington Employees: DPW Superintendent Greg Nilsson and Water Department Superintendent Jim Englishby.

Other Individuals: Anne Acheson, Storm Field, Former Mayor Dennis Flood, Mary Harrington, Sven Hoeger, Recreation and Parks Advisory (RPAC) Chairperson Larry Lonky, former Mayor Erin Malloy, former Mayor Jonathan Siegel, Sheri Silver, Anthony Vulpone and MJ Wilson.

Organizations: Atlantic Construction, Costa Engineering, Creative Closets, Earl Ferguson Architect, Greenfield Plumbing, Hahn Engineering, the Irvington Boy Scouts, the Irvington Girl Scouts, Irvington Hardware, Racwel Construction, River Rock Supply and Tilley Electric.

Finally, special thanks goes to the Irvington Woods Committee who have worked tirelessly and will continue to do so on our behalf in the future: Alex Goldsmith, Patricia Brennan, Former Mayor Nikki Coddington, Anne Jaffe-Holmes, Barbara Defino, Former RPAC Chairperson Bob Munigle, Former Trustee Rocco Rasulo, Allyson Felix, Gerri Shapiro, Marco Forlenza, Jim Gilligan, David Zwiebel and chairperson Rich Goldman.

So, please join us tomorrow morning at 11am to celebrate this community effort. **Please note there will not be any parking available at the O'Hara Nature Center. The Make-a-Wish Foundation has agreed to let us park in their lot on Broadway just north of Sunnyside Lane.** A shuttle bus will bring you up to the nature center. There will also be guided tours of the trails starting at 1pm.

Annual Film Series Kickoff

After celebrating the opening of the nature center, grab something to eat at one of the wonderful Irvington restaurants and attend the season premiere of the Irvington "Best of" Film Series at 8pm at the Irvington Town Hall Theater. The opening night film is the new music documentary "Neil Young Journeys" directed by Oscar-winning filmmaker, Jonathan Demme. Saturday's kickoff also serves as the fundraiser for the annual film series to help defray costs so tickets are \$25. The ticket also gets you into the after party at Mima Vinoteca. They will sell out, so buy your tickets now (I was shut out last year)! The website is www.irvingtontheater.com.

Adele Warnock Award

I had the honor of awarding the Adele Warnock Good Citizenship Award to Earl Ferguson last Wednesday. Earl has served on countless Village boards and has reliably advised the Village on historical and architectural matters on many occasions. Earl was very deserving of this prestigious award and I was very happy to present it to him. All I asked is that he continues to serve and he has assured me that he will – Congratulations Earl!

As always, please contact me with any questions or comments about things going on in the Village.

Brian C. Smith, Mayor
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