

# Changing Brooklyn One Acre at a Time

BY KRISTEN MERIWETHER  
EPOCH TIMES STAFF

**N**EW YORK—Shatia Jackson's family has lived in a brownstone on Halsey Street in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood of Brooklyn since her great-grandmother Nellie "Fran" Norris moved in during the late 1950s. Every generation of her family since then has been born and raised there.

Since the late 1970s, one of Jackson's not-so-fond memories includes passing the vacant lot sitting at 462 Halsey Street.

"We have all grown up with that lot being vacant and not thinking that anything can be done or transformed," she said on Monday.

**If you live in the neighborhood, you can come by and pick produce for yourself and it's free of charge.**

Shatia Jackson



Neighborhood volunteers lay out pallets to build community gardens at 462 Halsey on Jan. 7.



Co-founders and co-presidents of 462 Halsey Street Community Gardens Shatia Jackson and Kristen Bonardi Rapp.



Bricks scattered on the empty lot where a house once stood at 462 Halsey on Dec. 10, 2011.

land resources surrounding residents of Brooklyn and helps unite neighbors eager to make changes in their community.

"We try to get people through the process of 'Wow, there is a vacant lot here and I can do something. How do I start?'" Segal said.

Segal, who had grown tired of a vacant lot near her home in Wallabout Bay, Brooklyn, decided to take action. She used information from MapPLUTO, a New York City Department of City Planning tool, but refined it to suit the needs of the community, not the developers it was made to serve.

In June 2011, Segal went into the

community she wished to impact and hung the maps with contact information for 596 Acres at 25 lots in Brooklyn, using her website and social media to get her message out. The hybrid of grassroots and high-tech allows her to reach "the people who access their world by walking around the block and the people who access their world by checking Facebook," she said.

#### Strangers Unite For Change

Last September, Segal facilitated a meeting between Jackson and Kristen Bonardi Rapp, a fellow Bed-Stuy resident who had also inquired about 462 Halsey Street.

raised nearly \$1,600. In addition, they received a \$1,000 Love Your Block grant from the city.

Last December, the duo began clean up on the lot with other neighborhood volunteers. With help from the unusually warm winter, Jackson was able to work through the winter. The Community Gardens at 462 Halsey will open its gates Sunday, April 1.

Jackson said the once vacant lot is now largely made of community garden beds for her fellow neighbors.

"If you live in the neighborhood, you can come by and pick produce for yourself and it's free of charge," she said.

"Bed-Stuy has a large population of low income families and the idea is to try and help supplement the produce that they cannot afford from grocery stores in order to promote healthier eating habits," she added.

Jackson said for paying members, there is space for private gardening beds as well.

#### Seeds of Change

The community garden at 462 Halsey Street is not the only success story from 596 Acres community outreach. Three organizations, Feedback Farms, Small Green Patch, and the Textile Arts Center are utilizing three spaces at 348 Bergen Street. Java Street Garden has begun work on a project at 59 Java Street in Greenpoint, Brooklyn.

Brooklynites can watch their neighborhoods transform from empty lots to community hot spots by viewing the map at 596acres.org.

Jackson's son Sean Rosado, who helped transform 462 Halsey Street, will be the last generation in almost 30 years to grow up with the unsightly vacant lot on Halsey Street. He will also be the first generation in that time whose memories will include a garden there with fresh vegetables grown just a few blocks from his home.

## NYC IN BRIEF

### 52 Members of Violent Narcotics Network Arrested

After a six-month investigation state authorities busted a violent narcotics trafficking network based in the Albany region, but with branches statewide, they announced on Tuesday.

Some of the 52 members arrested are affiliated with the Albany-based gang called the Original Gangsta Killas (OGK). Two leaders were affiliated with another gang, the Bloods.

They moved great quantities of heroin, cocaine, and various illegally obtained prescription drugs. New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman announced 261 counts of indictment.

Richard "50 Cent" Gibbs was one of the main subjects of the investigation, but was killed by a rival gang in February.

### Poetry in Motion Returns to Subways

Subway riders will be treated to poems around the subway system with the return of Poetry in Motion, announced the MTA and the Poetry Society of America on Tuesday.

"Our customers tell us again and again that even a small investment in art and music underground makes a huge difference to them," said MTA Chairman Joseph J. Lhota in a statement. "It can really improve the entire experience of riding the subway. And the beauty of this program—and of poetry and art in general—is that it can really transport you."

Poems will appear in subway cars in the square poster wells at eye level of seated passengers, at subway stations paired with other art, and on the back of 12 million Metrocards a year.

## High-School Seniors Compete in Five-Star Kitchen

BY ZACHARY STIEBER  
EPOCH TIMES STAFF

**N**EW YORK—Twenty high-school seniors got a taste of the pressure, timing, and perfection required in five-star restaurants during a citywide cooking competition on Tuesday at the Institute of Culinary Education.

"It was exciting, nerve-wracking, but it feels rewarding; after we practiced for so long and to get here and do well is rewarding," said Tianna Ottley, a senior at Food and Finance High School.

Within two hours, the students had to prepare from memory a two-course French meal: Hunter's chicken with turned, sautéed potatoes, and crepes with pastry cream and chocolate sauce. Local executive chefs, such as Amy Eubanks of BLT Fish, and others involved with the industry judged the competition.

"I was incredibly impressed," said Eubanks. "Honestly, in someone that young I haven't seen that kind of cooking in a very long time."

Richard Grausman, founder and chairman of Careers through Culinary Arts Program, which held the competition, congratulated the students. "These dishes are gorgeous," he said. "On the whole, this is the best competition I have ever seen. You all have a future in the industry."

The field of students was whittled down from 60 in the



High school seniors present their dishes on Tuesday.

February preliminaries. At stake are cash and scholarships to the top cooking schools in the nation—Culinary Institute of America (CIA), and Johnson and Wales University. Results will be revealed on April 5 at an awards breakfast.

At Food and Finance, the only city high school that specializes in culinary arts, students learn about baking and cooking, and intern at restaurants around the city in their senior year. The competition's mimicry of a prestigious restaurant's kitchen makes the experience crucial to seniors interested in a career in the field.

"It was very stressful," said Luis Lopez, a senior at Food and Finance who interns at Amy's Bread. "Here it is a lot more fast-paced. Very fast. At school we have time to do what we want,

fix flavors if we don't like them, but here it is go-go-go," he said, snapping his fingers.

Lopez contemplated dropping out during the competition but stuck with it. Afterward, he said he felt relieved.

Michael Lynch, a chef instructor at the school, said competitions like these give students crucial funding for culinary schools. At CIA, tuition starts at about \$30,000 per year, while Johnson and Wales currently costs \$26,112.

Students at Food and Finance won scholarships worth \$200,000 last year, including a four-year scholarship to Johnson and Wales for one student. Over the past four years, they've received \$750,000.

Additional reporting by Nadia Ghattas

## Cuomo, State Lawmakers Agree on Budget

**BUDGET CONTINUED FROM A1**  
A state investment of \$232 million will go to rebuilding roads and bridges. Statewide, 32 percent of bridges and 40 percent of the paved surfaces are rated deficient. Federal funding of approximately \$900 million will supplement these projects and additional

funds are already dedicated to rebuilding the Tappan Zee Bridge in Westchester.

Last year, Cuomo created Regional Economic Councils to come up with localized five-year plans with \$785 million in combined funding opportunities. This year's budget makes available

\$440 million in dedicated funds for the councils, as well as more than \$500 million through existing programs across the various state agencies.

The budget also includes \$770 million in MTA funding and \$16.2 million for energy research and development.