

Hey 'Idol,' don't knock the new Bronx

HERE we go again.

The Bronx took yet another knock on national TV last week, and of course Borough President **Ruben Diaz Jr.** is spitting bullets — er, maybe that's a bad choice of words.

He sent out a press release scorching "American Idol" for suggesting the Bronx might still be — Horrors! — a dangerous place, and stressing how far the borough has come in recent decades.

"Idol" did its best to dramatize a contestant's negative comments with video of open hydrants, wailing sirens and a side-walk candle memorial.

Meanwhile, new "Idol" judge and former *middle class* Bronxite **Jennifer Lopez** — a.k.a. "Jenny from the (Castle Hill) block" — sat on her million dollar booty and uttered nary a peep of protest or apology. Then again, she's been AWOL forever from the borough that made her.

Former BP **Freddy Ferrer**, who had to deal with similar knocks on the Bronx while he was busy working to rebuild it, told us he doesn't watch the show, but saw the clip. "It was unnecessary," he said.

If anyone knows how far the Bronx — still poor and unhealthy in too many neighborhoods, but



vital and thriving in so many more — has actually come, it's **Tom Walker**.

Tommy was the police captain who wrote the book "Fort Apache," about the 41st Precinct in the heart of "The Bronx is Burning" years. He sued — and lost — to get royalties from the movie "Fort Apache, The Bronx," which starred **Paul Newman**. But that's another story.

Anyway, I remember Tommy telling me about those *really* bad old days.

"The night belonged to the drug dealers and the felons and the gangs," he said. But the one thing that inspired and sustained him and the other cops back then was "seeing the hardworking, decent people coming out in the morning, dropping their kids at school and heading to the subway for work."

"That always gave you a feeling of hope, that this is a situation we can improve."

And if you look around these days, it most definitely has.

Can we talk?

Are BP Diaz and Democratic Party Chief **Carl Heastie** not talking to each other?

Looks like they didn't consult on their social calendars.

While Bronx developer **José Pérez** and his wife **Elsie** were tossing a fund-raiser for Ruben last Thursday night, Heastie and Bronx Dems were holding a winter fund-raiser at Michaelangelo's on Arthur Ave.

Location, location, location

New state Sen. **Gustavo Rivera** is still shopping for a district office, after passing up ex-Sen. **Pedro Espada's** Bainbridge Ave. spot ("bad mojo," joked one Rivera camp member).

Meanwhile, he's holding some meet-n-greet sessions this week in his West Bronx district.

With citywide crime on the rise, it couldn't hurt that he'll be the ranking Dem on the Crime Victims, Crime and Correction committee.

Movin' on

Some of the best local Bronx news (other than the Daily News Bronx section of course) is being pumped out by the Bronx News Network, which puts out some local neighborhood papers and a daily blog, with its own reporting and stories from other media (www.bronxnewsnetwork.org).

That said, funding is a struggle for the nonprofit, which sadly is losing one of its star reporters, James Fergusson, who saw the grant money that was paying his salary recently run out. Good luck, Jim.

Bye Bye BoogieDowner

Erin and **Lou Cicalese**, the Bronx boosters behind the sometimes irreverent, often informative BoogieDowner blog (boogiedowner.blogspot.com) have bailed for Queens.

With a new child (their second), the baby-sitting services of a nearby Long Island family made too much sense, and we're sure they're leaving their Mosh-olu 'hood with heavy hearts.

Ex-state Sen. **Pedro (the Was-cally Wabbit) Espada**, who kept a Bronx pied-à-terre co-op on the floor above them, probably won't miss the Cicalese. Then again, he has other issues on his mind these days — like that federal indictment.

Erin says local realtor **Gregory Tsougranis**, "lifelong Bronxite and realtor extraordinaire," will hopefully continue the blog, with its mission "to be an honest and optimistic forum for Bronx discussion, cheerleading, and information." And we hope just as irreverent.

Pipeline

Joe McManus, state committeeman at the Liberty Democratic Club in Morris Park and a member of Local 638 of the Steamfitters Union, asks us to mention that longtime Local prez **Jack Torpey** is retiring as union head effective Jan. 31.

Cultcha Vulcha

Lehman Center for the Performing Arts is presenting a special 30th Anniversary Season event next month with Salsa singing legends **Ruben Blades** and **Gilberto Santa Rosa**.

On stage together for the first time, the multi-Grammy Award winners will be performing their major international hits in the premiere performance of their *Una Sola Salsa 2011* tour on Sat., Feb. 26 at 8 p.m.

Call the box office at (718) 960-8833 or go to www.LehmanCenter.org.

Bronx Quote

"That's the Fordham section of the Bronx, my home, a world on to itself. Every borough's 15 minutes from here, but they might as well be 3,000 miles away. That's Mt Carmel Church, and the sounds of the bells would fill the neighborhood."

— "A Bronx Tale" (1993)
rkappstatter@nydailynews.com

Pols won't let fun park ride off into the sunset

BY **ABBY LUBY**

WESTCHESTER has been waiting for a white knight to rescue the financially-beleaguered Playland, and so far none has come forward.

But some county legislators forged ahead last week with their own plans to save the famous Rye playground, where Bronxites and city residents flock each summer for the amusement rides and each winter to ice skate.

Legislators at a parks and recreation committee meeting moved forward on plans to house the Westchester Children's Museum in one of Playland's rebuilt bath houses.

"We started to work on the language for the museum lease," said Judy Myers, Westchester County Legislator for Rye.

"We will continue along this path."

Myers said the committee was looking at issues such as parking for the museum.

"We will continue to discuss the plan and make whatever changes are necessary," she said. The final plan for the museum will need county approval.

However, Peter Tartaglia, director of marketing and public relations for Westchester County Parks, said that until the county gets proposals from developers, the children's museum plan will be on hold.

The renovations of the two bath houses are costing the county \$8 million.

There has been some interest — but no commitments — from developers. They have until March 10 to submit proposals.

"There's been a wide array of interest from different sectors, including people with backgrounds in running amusement parks, developers and local communities," said Tartaglia.

While Playland takes in about \$12 million a year, more than any other park in Westchester, it also loses an average of \$3.5 million annually. According to Tartaglia, projected earnings for 2011 are about \$13.8 million. The park employs 1,200 people.

Despite rumors and media reports, Tartaglia said the county was not interested in closing the park. "There is no call for that. The county wants to make the park cost-effective."



Westchester County moved forward on a plan to save cash-strapped amusement park Playland. Pols agreed to house Westchester Children's Museum in one of fun park's rebuilt bath houses. Photo by Robert Sabo

To increase park revenues, a few months ago Westchester County Executive Rob Astorino offered Pier Restaurant and Tiki Bar at Playland more space on the boardwalk. The move angered Rye residents, who feared losing public access to the shore.

The group "Sustainable Playland," was started by Sandhya Subbarao and her husband, Dhruv Harain, who oppose mega-developer schemes that could ultimately change the park.

Subbarao said she wants

Playland to be preserved, keeping the park's family appeal.

"We are strongly vested in what happens in our backyard. We want to see Playland become a mini-Central Park," Subbarao said.

Astorino has temporarily withdrawn the Tiki Bar proposal.

Myers blames the Astorino administration for not including either herself or Rye residents in talks about a plan to save Playland.

"Rye and the county legislators haven't been included in

discussions about Playland," Myers said. "We should have an open and inclusive process of reviewing proposals for the park."

Tartaglia said, "Ultimately the county will make a recommendation based on proposals we receive. We will be as open as possible."

The 280-acre park includes a lengthy strand along Long Island Sound, an Olympic-size pool, boardwalk, fishing piers, boating, dining and picnic areas, and indoor ice skating rinks.