

AT A GLANCE

WOODLAWN — Interested in growing your family tree?

Woodlawn Cemetery historian Susan Olsen will present a two-hour workshop tomorrow on how get the most out of cemetery records.

The workshop, \$25 per person, will be at 1 p.m. Meet at the Jerome Ave. entrance (near Bainbridge Ave., across from the last stop on the No. 4 train).

For reservations, contact Brian Sahd, Friends of Woodlawn Executive Director, (718) 920-1470, friends@thewoodlawncemetery.org.

BAY PLAZA — The Bronx Council on the Arts' Bronx Writers Center will present a free workshop on selling and publishing children's books next Friday.

Topics will include:

copyright, illustration, self-publishing, and developing an income stream.



The workshop will be held at Barnes & Noble at Bay Plaza from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. Admission is free and all are welcome.

For additional information on this workshop or other events presented by the Bronx Writers Center, call (718) 931-9500 ext. 21, e-mail bronxwriters@bronxarts.org or visit the Bronx Writers Center's web pages at www.bronxarts.org

LEHMAN COLLEGE — Don Pasquale, a revival of Donizetti's comic opera, will be transmitted live in HD from the stage of the Metropolitan Opera tomorrow at 1 p.m. in the Lovinger Theatre of Lehman College.

"The Met: Live in HD" broadcasts at Lehman are free to college students as well as high school students, parents and teachers.

Tickets may be reserved by calling the Lehman Stages box office at (718) 960-8025. For more information, visit metopera.org.

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Joseph Vitolo will return to grotto at 3091 Grand Concourse where he first saw the Virgin appear to him 65 years ago. Photo by Viorel Florescu

HIS BLESSED VISION

BY MIKE JACCARINO
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

65 yrs. since divine sighting

THE YEAR WAS 1945, and 9-year-old Joseph Vitolo was playing in an empty lot on the Grand Concourse when he said The Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to him.

The story made headlines around the world as nearly 25,000 faithful showed up to what became known as the Queen of the Universe Shrine at 3091 Grand Concourse.

On Sunday, more than 65 years later, the faithful will gather at the same spot to celebrate the anniversary with an outdoor Mass at 3 p.m. at the old grotto shrine, which now stands amid apartment buildings and stores.

"It was a beautiful experience and I'm glad it happened because it kept me religious," Vitolo, 74, said yesterday. "I came from a family that wasn't religious. My father was a drunkard."

Vitolo said the Virgin appeared to him on Oct. 29, 1945, as the country tried to recover from the horrors of World War II, telling the young boy to return for 16 straight nights to pray the Rosary for world peace.

The youngest of 18 children from an immigrant Italian family, Vitolo complied, even as the story of the appearance made world news — both Time and Life magazines published articles.

"It happened at Lourdes [in France]. It's happened in a lot of places around the world," Vitolo said. "Why not the Bronx?"

Vitolo says he did the Blessed Virgin one better, returning every night for the next 60 years at 7 p.m. to pray. He still lives in his childhood home, a short walk from the site.

"All my life, I kept saying, 'Why me? Why me?' I really don't know other than to say I was privileged."

A retired housekeeper at Jacobi Medical Center, he is no longer able to make nightly visits to the grotto. He underwent heart

surgery last year and is battling prostate cancer.

His body is tired, he said, and he regularly rests in the afternoons.

But this Sunday, he said he will rejoice with the other faithful who attend the Mass, not only to mark the Blessed Virgin's appearance, but for a more personal reason, as well.

Vitolo said he will also celebrate what that vision has meant to so many other people through the years. It's sort of his life's work.

"It's meant a lot to a lot of people," he said. "From what I've seen, it's kept them religious. For some, it changed a lot of people's lives. It brought them closer to God."

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Yonkers power play for mayor riles contenders

BY ABBY LUBY
SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

SOME POTENTIAL mayoral wanna-bes are less than happy that Yonkers Mayor Phil Amicone can now sidestep them should he step down early.

Yonkers voters on Nov. 2 overwhelmingly approved Amicone's plan to tap his appointed deputy mayor to succeed him if he leaves before the end of his term.

Amicone spokesman David Simpson said that the Republican mayor has no intention of leaving the job before his term expires in December 2011.

If Deputy Mayor Bill Regan can't fill the post, next in line would be Democratic City Council President Chuck Lesnick, who op-

posed the measure because it forces a special election 90 days after the acting mayor takes office, thus circumventing a primary.

"A special election would put the power in the control of the party bosses," said Lesnick, who is said to be eying the mayor's seat but has not formally announced a run. "My hope is that Phil does not step down."

Former Charter Commission member Eric Schoen wanted the council president to be next in line.

"Most of us were against the proposition, but the commission went ahead and put it on the ballot anyway," said Schoen. "If Phil resigns so that Bill would be his heir apparent, it will look like it was a setup. Phil would not do anything that stupid."

Yonkers Democratic Councilwoman Joan

Gronowski said she voted against the proposal "on principle."

"Just because you are a lame duck mayor, you still have an obligation to fulfill your term, barring any personal or health issue."

Amicone solicited the city's Charter Commission in August to revise the law and get it on the November ballot. He had argued that the deputy mayor was the most logical person to step in if needed because he was well-versed in the day-to-day operations of the city.

Amicone tried earlier to change mayoral succession when he weighed a run for state Sen. Andrea Stewart-Cousins' seat.

Besides Lesnick, other possible contenders for the mayor's seat include Democratic Assemblyman Mike Spano, GOP Councilman John Murtagh, Democratic County Board Chairman Ken Jenkins and Gronowski.