



VIEWS FROM THE HEIGHTS

Volume 36, No. 1
Spring 2025

Jackson Heights
Beautification Group

www.JHBG.org

Jackson Heights – “A Garden in the City”

Time For Spring Cleaning!



Help the JH community by volunteering at our cleanups and other events!
Go to JHBG.org or e-mail info@jhbg.org to sign up!

President's Message	2
Editor's Message	2
Spring Events in JH	3
JHBG Volunteer Opportunities	3
Cleaning Hacks and Tips	4
JH Notable: Zoe Saldaña	4
Jackson Heights Wish List	5
JH Pollinator Pathway	5
En Español	6
Shear Style	8
Avian Apartments	10
City Critters: Canine Companions for Aging Neighbors	10
Spring Thaw: Native Plants	11
Ongoing Events	12
Membership Form	12

On the cover: Art by Kirsten Magnani.

Many changes are happening in 2025 which are beyond our control. We can make a difference in our immediate environment, beginning by taking stock and growing closer through something like cleaning. By working together we can get through this time.

**en español
páginas 6-7**



President's Message

BY LESLIE ELLMAN



Dear Neighbors,

With Spring in the air, we tend to feel a little lighter especially as we shed the winter layers and anticipate warmer days ahead! For many of us, Spring also inspires us to lighten up our environments through Spring Cleaning. For JHBG, every season is one for cleaning and an opportunity for beautifying our beloved community. For over 35 years, we have been able to restore and maintain many of our neighborhood's shared public spaces. This is, of course, possible thanks to the support and hardworking effort of our volunteers and neighbors. You have probably seen some of us tending to street trees and planting urban gardens with Tree LC, cleaning our commercial corridors with Clean Streets, removing graffiti with our Graffiti Busters, collecting food waste at SCRAPS, and showing love to our local parks throughout Friends of Travers Park! If the long winter has gotten you down and the coming of spring has you eager to get out and connect with our urban ecosystem as well as neighbors and potential friends, then I invite you to join us!

We have a very busy Spring ahead and we enthusiastically welcome your involvement and support.
—Leslie Ellman, President

Editor's Message

Sparking Joy in Spring Cleaning BY MELISSA ZAVALA



Decluttering Guru Marie Kondo became a cleanup celebrity thanks to her simple but efficient organizing system promising sparks of joy the more we discard and simplify our idealized lives. An activity not typically associated with joy for some, cleaning is meaningful and therapeutic when done both at home and in service to our community. JHBG originated with cleanups. As we head into our 37th year, we continue the work of tidying up and maintaining our environment and community life. Making a difference in the world is more important than before and can begin with simple acts of service like cleaning. With last year's winter issue underlining the need for hope in new beginnings, springtime is a



promising season for renewal.

This issue therefore highlights new beginnings while calling for volunteerism in the service of change. Some of our articles highlight these themes. One offers cleaning

life hacks, another describes some of the cultural practices from the Indian subcontinent for refreshing energies, while another one considers how barbershops offer fresh new looks and serve as community gathering places. Others report on the importance of pets for maintaining social ties, on sprouting native varieties along 34th Avenue, and more.

We appreciate everyone's support as we embark on another year of change. Spark joy in your life and join us! Please send us story suggestions and ideas for interesting people to feature. Email us your suggestions and feedback to info@jhb.org or write to us by mail at JHBG, PO Box 720253, Jackson Heights, NY 11372.

Spring Events in Jackson Heights

Arts Events En Construcción

Lecturas en español a las 7pm el 3 de mayo en la **Librería Barco de Papel**, 4003 80th Street.

The Jackson Heights Art Club

Meets at St. Mark's Church, 3350 82nd Street, offering classes for children and adults.

Art Retail Therapy

For art classes and community events, visit **Art Retail Therapy**, 84-26 37th Avenue:

Mondays

Life Drawing Sessions
7-9pm. Tiered ticketing starting at \$15 in advance. EVERY MONDAY; \$20 at the door.

Crochet classes

(all ages 7+) beginner-friendly and good for building up to a working project. \$20 including materials, every other Wednesday at 7:30-8:30pm

March Dates: Wed. Mar. 12 & 26

April dates: Wed. April 9 & 23

Check with A.R.T. for future dates:

artretailtherapy.com

Jackson Heights Author Series

Five local authors will be presenting in an upcoming series at the Jackson Heights branch of the Queens Public Library. Books will be on sale at the event. Mark your calendars now!

■ Sat. March 1, 2:30-3:45pm John McWhorter

A sneak preview and discussion of McWhorter's soon-to-be released work *Pronoun Trouble*. With his trademark humor and flair, bestselling linguist John McWhorter guides readers on a journey of how our whole collection of these little words emerged and has changed over time.

■ Sat. March 22, 2:30-3:45pm Pat Auspos

discusses her book, *Breaking Conventions: Five Couples in Search of Marriage-Career Balance at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century*.

■ Sat. April 12, 2:30-3:45pm Mariah Fredericks

reveals the facts behind the fiction in *The Lindbergh Nanny*, her novel about

the young Scotswoman who was the nurse for the Lindbergh baby and, for a time, the prime suspect in his kidnapping.

■ **Sat. May 3, 2:30 to 3:45 PM**
Richard Jeffrey Newman presents "Writing Poems To Make Sense of a Shattered World: Personal Trauma and a Politics of Survival."

■ **Sat. June 14, 2:30-3:45 PM**
Radha Vatsal discusses her new mystery *No. 10 Doyers Street*, a gripping novel of New York City on the cusp of modernity, which tells the story of Archana Morley, a woman journalist from India who finds her most challenging subject yet: the dreaded gangster Mock Duck.

School Events

82nd Street Academics

will open registration for the summer program around May and June. Dates TBD.

The Jackson Heights Beautification Group Presents

JACKSON HEIGHTS ORCHESTRA

WED. MARCH 19, 2025
LEXINGTON SCHOOL

25-26 76th ST
EAST ELMHURST, NY

WED. MAY 21, 2025
TRINITY LUTHERAN

31-18 37th ST
ASTORIA, NY



ALEX WEN
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

7:30 P.M.

Concerts are free
\$20 suggested donation
JHORCHESTRA.ORG/DONATE
to make a gift to the JHO.

Programs including:

BOULANGER D'un matin de printemps
BOLLING Toot Suite Selections
SCHUMANN Symphony No. 1
And more!

@JHORCHESTRA

JHORCHESTRA.ORG



Snap to donate

The Jackson Heights Beautification Group invites you to

Join Us in 2025 For Spring Volunteer Opportunities!

Make a difference, meet friends, and connect with community life by joining:

Tree LC Environmental Sustainability Program

Every Saturday morning

Graffiti Removal

Weekends, when needed

Clean Streets Select weekends, when scheduled

Historic Weekend

This year on June 7th and 8th

View from the Heights

Newsletter Four issues per year

"Summer Sundays in the Park"

Concert Series

Every Sunday in July and August

JH-SCRAPS Community Composting Program

Every Saturday morning, all year

Halloween Parade Every October 31st, and the night before

JH Orchestra About four times a year on Wednesday evenings

Friends of Travers Park

As scheduled, on weekends

Occasional special events

TBD

Volunteering can require **stamina** (for street cleaning, events set-up, light walking); **specialties** (like tree pruning), operating machinery (graffiti removal), writing and design (newsletter); or **strength** (for physical composting work with some heavy lifting [up to 50 lbs.]). All skill levels are welcome!

Please email us at info@jhbg.org

and let us know what activity or activities you are interested in volunteering for, along with your name, email address, and phone number.

And if you are unable to volunteer your time, a financial contribution to the JHBG is always welcome.

You can send a check, payable to JHBG to:

Jackson Heights Beautification Group
Attn.: Membership
PO Box 720253
Jackson Heights, NY 11372

Go to our website where you can use Venmo to contribute:

[jhbg.org/membership](https://www.venmo.com/jhbg-donate)



@jhbg-donate

With Spring fast approaching, it is time to spring clean and prepare for a fresh start in the new season.

It is important to tackle spring cleaning in parts to avoid getting overwhelmed and feeling burnt out. Consider dedicating a day to cleaning different rooms in the house.

Check out some tips below for cleaning and organizing different rooms!

FOR THE KITCHEN

- Begin with the refrigerator, take everything out and wipe everything down
- Rinse the drawers, wipe the shelves
- Don't forget the microwave!

Pro tip: You can make your own DIY oven cleaner to scrub the debris in the oven. Combine equal parts baking soda, dish soap, and water until a paste forms. Let it sit for 30 minutes for improved effectiveness, as recommended by Domestic Diva Martha Stewart.

FOR THE BATHROOM

- You can use a microfiber cloth to wipe down surfaces before cleaning them with any products



Clean and revitalize your home on a budget and in eco-friendly ways by limiting chemicals!

- Use the baking soda, dishwashing soap, and water mixture here as well to help clean surfaces
- Use a toothbrush with this mixture in order to clean the hard-to-reach areas
- Throw out old/expired beauty products at upcoming DSNY's safe disposal events
- Wash shower curtains and liner, bath mats and rugs
- Scrub doorknobs

FOR LIVING ROOM/BEDROOM

- Dust bookshelves
- Vacuum rugs, being sure to get under all beds



- Clean wood furniture with oil or polish to moisturize the wood for longevity. The mixture of dish soap and water is useful for wood as well
- Dust surfaces like ceiling fans, blinds, picture frames, underneath beds that don't always get regular care
- Replace all pillowcases, blankets, and mattress covers

CLEARING OUT AND UPDATING THE WARDROBE

With a new season approaching, some changes to our clothes may be needed!

Consider going through your

closet and donating clothes that do not fit or that you do not use anymore.

Need a place to donate clothes? Check out these places below!

La Tienda Del Pueblo by CSCO NY has both clothing collection and distribution Monday mornings on 77th street and 34th Avenue.

On Sundays, the **Jackson Heights Greenmarket** also accepts clothing between 8:30/9AM to 1PM located at 34th Avenue between 79th and 80th Street.

The Salvation Army Queens Temple Corps Community Center collects clothing per request. Located at 86-07 35th Avenue, Jackson Heights, NY, 11372. Call ahead and ask about donation times.

Finally, after throwing away/ donating clothes you do not need, consider going to the tailor service to help polish up your clothes!

Located in the Jackson Heights Shopping Center is Hi-Style Cleaners! They can help with services like dry cleaning, clothing repair/alterations, and more.◆

JACKSON HEIGHTS NOTABLES

Highlighting former Jackson Heights residents of notable interest for the ways in which they represent our neighborhood.

Avatar Zoe Saldaña

BY DAN KARATZAS

While she has been a working actress for over 25 years, 2024 seems to have been a true "breakout" year for Zoe Saldaña. Born in New Jersey in 1978 to a father from the Dominican Republic and a Dominican mother with some Puerto Rican heritage, the family moved to the Dominican Republic when Zoe was a child, after her father's death at age nine. It seems her love of performing began while living there, where Zoe enrolled in a dance academy and fell in love with ballet. The family later returned, moving to Jackson Heights, where Zoe matriculated and later graduated from Newtown High School.



It was a matter of only a few years before she landed her first acting role. Along with many other New York actors, Zoe first appeared on the television program *Law and Order* in 1999. One year later she made her film debut in *Center Stage* (2000), where she played, of all things, an aspiring ballet dancer. From then on, she has landed many Hollywood roles, performing in both the *Pirates of the Caribbean* and *Star Trek* franchises. And until recently, she was perhaps best known for her role in 2009's blockbuster *Avatar* (2009) and its sequel (2022).

In 2013, Zoe and her two sisters formed a film production company called Cinestar Pictures. All three have served as producers, with their films appearing on Netflix, HBO, and the Roku channel. Much of their

focus has been on portraying real or everyday women in a variety of film and television programs. But according to the sisters, their working together remains paramount.

In the 2020s Zoe appeared in a number of Netflix and Paramount+ miniseries, but it was her performance as the character Rita Mora Castro in the 2024 film *Emilia Pérez* that has made her a household name. Saldaña won both the best actress award at the Cannes Film Festival and then in January of this year she won a Golden Globe Award as best supporting actress. The current recognition by her peers, along with her generation-long success in Hollywood, are very impressive accomplishments for this actor from Jackson Heights, to say the least. ◆

A Wish List for a Better Jackson Heights

BY LEN MANIACE

Jackson Heights has a lot going for it: good subway service in an otherwise poorly served borough; a large shopping district; above-average housing, much of it in historic buildings; and an energetic and diverse population.

There's room for improvement though. With the Mayor and City Council seats up for election this year, JHBG hopes this wish list wins enthusiastic support, not just during the campaign season, but after the winners are in office.

A clean, green and vital 37th Avenue.

Though our main shopping street has enough foot traffic to provide plenty of customers, it's covered with litter and sidewalks are obstacle courses; we've got flea-market vendors, parked e-bikes and mopeds, and the city's newly mandated trash bins along curbs 24-7—all illegal. If Roosevelt Avenue can be cleaned up (as of this writing), why can't 37th Avenue? As for green, JHBG is working on that with NYC Parks' help (read about the pollinator pathway in this issue).

A NYC Parks Recreation Center for Jackson Heights. Council District 25 ranks at nearly the bottom in terms of park space, behind an East Side Manhattan neighborhood that's across Fifth Avenue from a pretty nice park—Central Park. Queens is underserved by NYC Parks recreation



Among Jackson Heights' biggest challenges are the redesign of 34th Avenue and the expansion of street vending clogging sidewalks.



centers, too; it has only five of the city's 34 such facilities, even though three in 10 New Yorkers live here. Just Staten Island, with four, has fewer rec centers, but that borough has roughly a fifth of Queens' population.

Northern Boulevard bus lanes that don't jam traffic. JHBG campaigned for faster bus service here in 2023.

The city implemented one of our recommendations—bus lanes in each direction—but did so in a way guaranteed to tie up traffic and rile the public. The Department of Transportation changes left only one traffic lane in each direction. Let's put those bus lanes along the curbs where they belong and make them rush-hour only. The MTA needs to equip more buses with cameras to catch bus-lane and bus-stop

intruders, and DOT must install signals that stay green longer for approaching buses.

An Open Street that doesn't divide Jackson Heights. JHBG was an early supporter of the Open Street program, but we had concerns, such as mopeds, e-bikes, and motorcycles that move too fast and too close to pedestrians. We wanted this and other issues addressed before further developing the OS. Instead, DOT made many changes, creating the neighborhood's most contentious issue since JHBG's 1988 founding. Before DOT spends \$89 million more on the OS, let's fix these issues. And if we're going to call it Paseo Park, spend some of that money making the OS park-like. Let's widen the medians for more plantings, maybe even making it part of the Jackson Heights Pollinator Pathway. ♦

We're Abuzz About Jackson Heights' Pollinator Pathway

BY LEN MANIACE

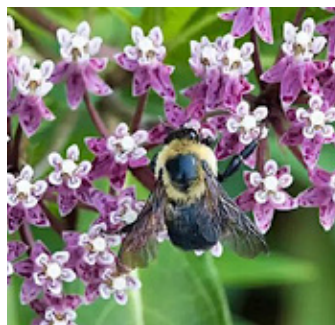
Jackson Heights was built as a garden community a century ago. Now, JHBG is working to turn some of those gardens into a habitat for bees, butterflies and other little critters. We want you to join us.

For more than 10 years, JHBG has been building small and big gardens with native plants and other perennials to attract these crucial but increasingly endangered creatures that carry pollen from plant to plant to fertilize them.

Pollinator Pathways is a national movement to create more homes for these helpful insects collectively known as pollinators. That's not a hard

thing to do; plant those flowers that attract bees, butterflies, etc. (not all do that), while avoiding pesticides and other chemicals that harm them. Creating native gardens that attract pollinators is an important element to our goal of making "Jackson Heights Mother Nature's home in the city."

The JHBG Tree LC team started with small, fenced-in tree beds on 37th Avenue, and beginning in 2018 created much larger pollinator gardens at the Jackson Heights Post Office, also on 37th Avenue. The first of four butterfly gardens at PS 69 blossomed in 2023; and this spring we expect to plant native groundcover on the school's 77th



A milkweed flower blooming in the Jackson Heights Post Office butterfly garden.

Street side to complete a mini-native forest, which also attracts pollinators. It already includes tall tulip poplars that form the mini-forest's upper story, and

understory trees such as spring-blooming redbuds, fall-blooming witch hazel, red chokeberries, and a high-bush cranberry.

Though we were already essentially a pollinator pathway, we didn't know about the label until a recent trip to Nyack, 20 miles north of the city, and spotted part of a local effort surrounding a downtown parking lot.

We encourage other schools, co-op and rental buildings, private homes, and churches to join this effort. The Greystones and Towers co-ops already planted pollinator gardens. Learn more at pollinator-pathway.org; get involved locally by writing to us at JHBGtrees@gmail.com. ♦

Courtesy of Angel Reyes

Mensaje de la presidenta

POR LESLIE ELLMAN

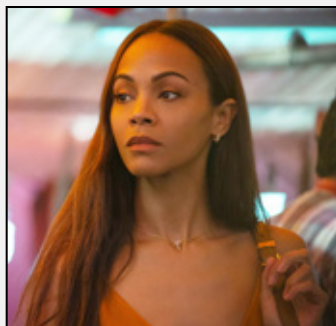
El aire ya huele a primavera, y a muchos esta estación nos inspira a renovar nuestro ambiente con una buena limpieza. Para el JHBG, cada estación brinda la oportunidad de limpiar y embellecer nuestro querido vecindario. Por casi 37 años hemos restaurado y dado mantenimiento a muchos de los espacios públicos de la comunidad mediante programas como Tree LC, Clean Streets, SCRAPS y Amigos de Travers Park. Nos espera una primavera con mucha actividad, así que los invitamos a participar con nosotros y apoyarnos.



postal JHBG, PO Box 720253, Jackson Heights, NY 11372. ¡Puedes escribirnos en español!

Los notables de Jackson Heights: El avatar de Zoe Saldaña

POR DANIEL KARATZAS
Hija de padres dominicanos, Zoe Saldaña nació en New Jersey en 1978. Después de la muerte de su padre, cuando Saldaña tenía 9 años, la familia regresó a República Dominicana. Años después, de vuelta en Estados Unidos, la familia Saldaña se mudó a Jackson Heights, donde Zoe asistió a la Newtown High School. Como muchos otros actores, su primera aparición en televisión fue en *La ley y el orden*, en 1999. Un año después haría su debut en *Center Stage*, y continuaría con papeles en *Los piratas del Caribe* y *Star Trek* hasta su más reciente y conocido personaje en *Avatar* (2009) y su secuela (2022). Aunque ha aparecido en numerosas series de Netflix y Paramount+, con su última actuación como Rita Mora Castro en la película *Emilia Pérez* (2024), Saldaña se ha convertido en toda una celebridad y ha sido galardonada con el premio a la mejor actriz en el Festival de Cannes y como mejor actriz de reparto en los Golden Globe Awards.

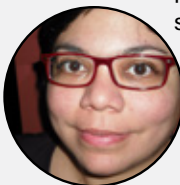


Zoe Saldaña, actriz y modelo dominicana, en la película *Emilia Pérez*. Vivió en Jackson Heights en su niñez, y estudió en Newtown High School.

Mensaje de la editora: Alegría en la limpieza de primavera

POR MELISSA ZAVALA

Aunque algunos no asocian la limpieza con la alegría, limpiar es terapéutico y tiene un sentido cuando se hace en casa o como servicio a la comunidad. El JHBG nació con la limpieza. Iniciamos hace casi 37 años y seguimos trabajando para que nuestro ambiente y nuestra comunidad estén siempre limpios. La primavera es un tiempo de renovación, por eso, en este número, destacamos los nuevos comienzos con artículos que ofrecen tips de limpieza y prácticas culturales para renovar la energía, además de las secciones dedicadas al medio ambiente y a personajes destacados de Jackson Heights. Ponle alegría a tu vida y únete al JHBG. Envíanos tus historias, sugerencias o comentarios a info@jhb.org o la dirección



Si buscas tener impacto en tu comunidad, JHBG ofrece varios programas desde limpieza comunitaria, al cuidado de árboles y jardines públicos, creando abono, o ayudando de otras formas. Contacta a info@jhb.org o contribuye usando Venmo ([@jhb-donate](https://www.venmo.com/jhb-donate)).

La ruta de los polinizadores en Jackson Heights

POR LEN MANIACE

Jackson Heights fue construido como jardín comunitario hace un siglo. Ahora, el JHBG trabaja para transformar algunos de nuestros jardines en hábitat para abejas, mariposas y otros insectos. Por más de diez años, hemos construido jardines con plantas nativas y otras plantas perennes para atraer a estas importantes criaturas en peligro de extinción que llevan polen de una planta a otra para fertilizarlas. Pollinator Pathway (la ruta de los polinizadores) es un movimiento nacional para crear más hábitats para estos benéficos insectos. Tú también puedes colaborar sembrando plantas con flores que los atraigan y evitando el uso de pesticidas y otras sustancias químicas que los dañan.

Invitamos a más escuelas, edificios, casas e iglesias a que se unan en este esfuerzo. Para más información visita pollinator-pathway.org o escríbenos a JHBGtrees@gmail.com

Una lista de deseos para un mejor Jackson Heights

POR LEN MANIACE

Jackson Heights tiene muchas cosas buenas, pero podría estar mejor. Con las elecciones para alcalde y concejales de este año, el JHBG espera que su lista de deseos sea apoyada con entusiasmo, no solo durante la campaña, sino cuando los representantes electos estén en sus puestos. Deseamos una Avenida 37 limpia, verde y llena de vida; un centro recreativo de NYC Parks para Jackson Heights; carriles para autobuses que no entorpezcan el tráfico en Northern Boulevard; y una calle

peatonal que no divida a Jackson Heights (con menos tráfico de bicicletas y motocicletas, y más áreas verdes).

Limpieza de primavera con esencias sagradas

POR ZAIN SHEIKH

Y KELLY ARMENDARIZ

En muchas culturas, la limpieza de primavera tiene un significado profundo y, con frecuencia, sagrado. En los hogares del sur de Asia, los rituales de purificación combinan lo espiritual y lo práctico. Uno de los ingredientes más comúnmente usados es la hierba aromática *tulsi* o albahaca santa, que ha sido usada durante siglos por sus propiedades medicinales, para armonizar espacios y limpiar la energía negativa. Los incienso usados en muchas tradiciones religiosas también nos conectan con las prácticas antiguas de sanación y nos ayudan a recibir el espíritu de revitalización de la primavera. Si quieres impregnar tu espacio con alguno de estos ingredientes mágicos, Jackson Heights cuenta con varias alternativas, como **Butala Emporium**, ubicado en el 37-46 de la calle 74.

En comunión con las criaturas de la ciudad: el beneficio de la compañía de los perros en adultos mayores

POR GAIL SIEGEL

Me he convertido en alguien que necesita un perro para mantenerse sano. Como parte de la recuperación de una caída que tuve hace tiempo, un perrito me ayudó a hacer mis caminatas cuatro veces al día. Incluso para una persona que no pueda salir de su casa, un perro podría ser una buena compañía. El problema es arreglárselas para tener una

mascota cuando es complicado desplazarse. Por eso, he estado promoviendo lo que llamo "mascotas compartidas". Si pasas mucho tiempo fuera de casa, podrías compartir tu mascota con amigos o vecinos que vivan cerca, especialmente con quienes estén jubilados y puedan cuidarla. Compartir los gastos sería un beneficio más. Espero alentarlos a que adopten un perro que necesita un hogar acogedor y seguro donde vivir.

Limpieza de primavera con estilo

POR MELISSA ZAVALA

La limpieza de primavera trae nuevos comienzos, y a veces también viene con la preparación de nuevos estilos de cortes de pelo para recibir un clima más cálido. Jackson Heights ha atestiguado la expansión de barberías en los últimos años, muchas de ellas con propietarios dominicanos y dirigidas tanto a hispanohablantes como a angloparlantes. Su creciente popularidad se debe no solo a que han sabido adaptarse

a las necesidades de sus clientes, sino también al influjo de dominicanos en la ciudad que frecuentan estos espacios como lo hacían en su país. Enhorabuena a las barberías dominicanas, que han tenido la fuerza de voluntad para trabajar en un país nuevo y construir comunidad empezando con un corte de pelo.

Aves de ciudad

POR MELISSA ZAVALA

Se cree que los hábitats humanos dañan a los animales. Es cierto en algunos casos, pero a veces ocurre lo contrario, como es el caso de aves como el gorrión común, que se encuentra en las ciudades de todo el mundo y ha sobrevivido gracias a los humanos. El gorrión común se alimenta de semillas y desperdicios, y ahuyenta con agresividad a otras aves de sus nidos y sus fuentes de alimento. Nativos de Europa y Asia, estos pajaritos fueron traídos a Brooklyn en 1851 para acabar con las polillas de tilo y rápidamente se expandieron por el continente. Debido a la disminución de insectos y la

industrialización de las granjas, la población de gorriones comunes se ha reducido a 150 millones solo en Norteamérica.

Deshielo de primavera: plantas nativas de enero a abril

POR DAVE WATSON

Mientras hace frío, las raíces vivas de las plantas trabajan bajo tierra en enero, febrero y marzo. Este es el momento para agregar semillas. Los jardineros ponen capas de tierra y hojas secas en enero y febrero. La tierra tiene una compleja mezcla de materiales inorgánicos provenientes de seres orgánicos vivos y muertos, así como rocas dejadas por la erosión del suelo. Los restos descompuestos de plantas son materia orgánica o humus. Esta mezcla de tierra es fuente de vida para las plantas y una de las partes más importantes de su ambiente. De enero a abril, se pueden esparcir semillas, como las que recibimos del vivero Prairie Moon. La franja medial de la Avenida 34 es un buen lugar para plantar diferentes variedades de semillas. ♦



Hay mucha variedad de barberías en el vecindario, de dominicanas a punjabi y demás.

Spring Cleaning in Shear Style!

BY MELISSA ZAVALA



Combining scissors, blades, and clippers, Dominican barbers sculpt hairlines and layer hair of different textures with ease.

A season of new beginnings, spring means plants awaken, different animals mate, others hatch after winter dormancy, and splashes of refreshing rain mix with sunshine resulting in bright colors, making for joyful associations. Seasonal nest preparations parallel other spring-cleaning activities ritualized in various parts of the world (see spring cleaning with sacred scents article in this issue). Spring-cleaning sometimes also means fresh haircuts in preparation for warm weather as heads no longer need hats or extra hair for warmth. Jackson Heights has seen the spread of barber shops in recent years, some catering specifically to particular groups like Bangla speakers, but many of them Dominican-owned and aimed at both Spanish- and English-speaking clientele. What is behind the rise and popularity of Dominican barber shops?

A Colombian barber gave me his explanation as to why so many new shops are Dominican-owned saying, "Porque ellos [los Dominicanos] son los que saben hacer esos cortesitos de cocos pelados", or "Because they [Dominicans] are the ones

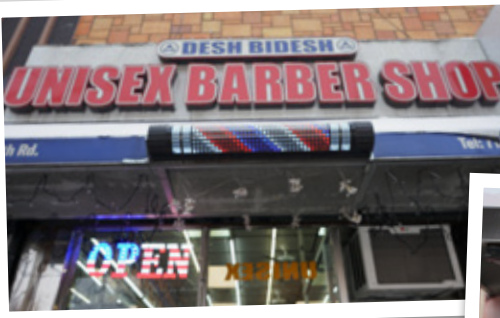
specializing in the bare coconuts style." But there is more to the abundance of these barber shops than rapidly sheared heads. While Dominicans have been migrating to the US in large numbers since the 1960s following the death of president and political strongman Rafael Trujillo, it wasn't until recently that new arrivals settled in neighborhoods beyond Washington Heights. In Queens, Corona attracted Dominicans given the economic support the area provided them, with nearby Jackson Heights offering additional community as they moved beyond there. A growing influx of Dominican migrants to the city, along with

a cultural attentiveness to hair care, and low start-up costs for barbershops have met with a demand for affordable haircuts at flexible hours. Moreover, these shops have also served as community hubs where men in particular can openly talk about topics best not discussed in mixed company. These factors have resulted in the growing success of barbershops in an age prioritizing self-care.

Barber services catering to specific ethnic groups are nothing new in the city. Divides have always existed in this sector, both due to a history of racism and segregation as well as to hair care specialization given the diversity of scalp hair types. While all humans are covered with hair, the texture of these fibers really varies. The diversity of hair curvature is not well understood despite broader knowledge of hair as protection from sunlight and for thermo-regulation, which combined with sexual selection, have influenced hair type and distribution over time, making body hair different from scalp hair. This separation and distinctiveness of scalp and facial hair from other body hair led to the use of straight razors for cutting, which has been regulated in changing ways over time and place, with razors treated



For Bengali-speaking hairdressers, Ruposhi Bangla is located at 35-62 73rd Street.



Punjabi shops are also common in JH. These are around 74th Street, Roosevelt Avenue, and 37th Road.



as medical devices early on. Before cosmetology licenses differentiated women's hairdressing from men's, *barber* was the general term for all professionals also engaged in dentistry and other medical interventions like bloodletting, among others, restricting the trade to those who could safely wield a sharp blade.

Today, different ethnic barber shops blend popular hairstyles with cultural practices—anything from musical beats from home regions to hot towels and threading services in southeast Asian shops, as well as scalp massages and herbal treatments in Chinese ones. Like cuisine, fashion, music, and other areas, the cultural practices in these shops also impact barbers' methods and their customers' experiences. Jackson Heights residents can select from available choices for cuts, fades, and ambience from the multiple shops seemingly on every block.

From this bevy of storefronts, **Headz Ain't Ready Barbershop**, located at 81-13 37th Avenue, is among the most visible Dominican shops around. Established in 1995, the barbershop has survived economic downturns, city tragedies, and beyond but has managed to stay in business thanks to the influx of Dominicans arriving in the city. Victor Benitez, assistant to the owner, says about the growth of the shop as many Dominicans moved to NYC from their home island, "Everybody needed work".

By 2010, the city's population grew to its largest at over eight million people, according to the US Census. Dominicans made up seven percent of the city's population, topping Puerto Ricans who have been migrating to the city following the Spanish-American War. Though mainly concentrated in Washington Heights and the Bronx, a growing community developed in Corona and its border with Jackson Heights.

Benitez says of the shop and its varied clientele, "People like this type of thing. Everybody's different". Despite ranging

cultural differences, the shop continues to evolve and cater to various groups.

"I've been here for 25 years in this business. There's balance. Sometimes things are good, other times they're slow," Benitez continues.

Spending any amount of time with the shop's young barbers—which include women specializing in men's haircuts—provides a look into community life for new immigrant arrivals as well as for younger residents of Jackson Heights. Though some customers want a quick haircut, others enjoy joking with barbers and other customers.

From Afro-Caribbean to Latin barbers and other ethnic groups, hair care techniques have been preserved across generations. From shape-ups (precision cutting along the hairline for a clean look) to braids, these and other methods are now more mainstream. They are nevertheless rooted in the cosmopolitan aesthetics of minority populations that have preserved and professionalized their traditions. While conventional hairdressers are not always proficient in cutting and styling deep curls and dense hair, part of the success of Dominican barbers has been that they are attuned to diverse needs for very regular customers who visit barbershops and salons frequently in the Dominican Republic and continue doing so here.

Short on customers in January, by summertime Headz and other barber shops will be busy with customers needing relief from the heat, or fresh new looks for special events, vacations, or life's new starts. Look around at the shops in our area and think about how they are influencing the latest trends as well as your own look, compliments from Dominican barbers with a strong will to work in a new country where building community can begin with a haircut and lead to other fields of dreams including the baseball field! ♦

Spring Cleaning with Sacred Scents

BY ZAIN SHEIKH & KELLY ARMENDARIZ



As our city shakes off winter's chill and awakens to the promise of a floral spring, we turn to rituals of renewal to restore balance. Closets are purged, bookshelves decluttered, and to-do lists pruned, all in the name of a fresh start. Marie Kondo's now famous philosophy inspires us to discard what no longer sparks joy or is obviously useful in daily life.

The act of spring cleaning carries deeper, often sacred significance in many cultures. In South Asian households, purification rituals blend the spiritual and practical. One instrument of spring cleaning commonly used is the aromatic herb tulsi, also known as holy basil or *Ocimum tenuiflorum*. Tulsi, also celebrated for centuries for its medicinal properties, harmonizes surroundings and cleanses spaces of negative energies.

More than a plant, tulsi is revered in Hinduism as the goddess Tulasi, a manifestation of Lakshmi, deity of prosperity. Traditionally, tulsi, referred to as the 'queen of herbs', is often displayed in domestic courtyards on raised platforms as prescribed by *Vastu Shastra*, an ancient Indian architectural and design system. For those of us in NYC apartments (obviously without private courtyards!), tulsi incense or essential oils offer accessible ways to channel its energy.

Incense burning transcends religious traditions. In Muslim homes, oil-soaked wood chips like oud and bakhour similarly fill family spaces with warmth and welcome as the weather changes. These rituals—whether tulsi, oud, or another herb—connect us to ancient healing practices and help us embrace the season's spirit of revitalization.

If you're looking to infuse your space with aromatic magic or searching for a new incense holder (after Kondo-ing your old ones, of course), our neighborhood has some great sources. Perhaps stop by **Butala Emporium**, 37-46 74th Street, to explore an array of incense and ritual items to help you welcome spring with open arms and noses. ♦

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Avian Apartments

BY MELISSA ZAVALA

Human habitats are often assumed to infringe on those of different animals. This can generally be true but sometimes human structures have surprising effects. For some songbirds, they can be beneficial. Such is the case for house sparrows (*Passer domesticus*). Broadly found around the world, house sparrows are successful precisely because of their association with humans, as their second scientific name suggests. On a stretch of scaffolding left in place for two and a half years on 78th Street, sparrows built about 19 nests in one summer alone. A successful exploiter of human environments, feeding from scraps as well as seeds, house sparrows aggressively chase away other songbirds from nesting boxes and feeders, sometimes ganging up on pigeons and starlings for food scraps despite being outsize by them.

Brought to Brooklyn to feast on linden moth caterpillars in 1851, much like invasive European starlings, house sparrows quickly spread across North America, becoming one of the most common bird species across the continent. Natives of Europe and Asia, their population exploded in the 1940s but is now down to 150 million in North America according to the Audubon Society's most recent counts.

Drops in insect populations and the industrialization of farms across the country might be two of the leading factors for this decline.



Given their associations with buildings and people, house sparrows are among the most common birds in North America.



These adaptable, tough birds in some ways reflect the tone of the city, where survival on sidewalks and small living quarters is required of humans and birds alike. ♦

COMMUNING WITH CITY CRITTERS

A Dog Whisperer reports on the healing connection between people and pets.

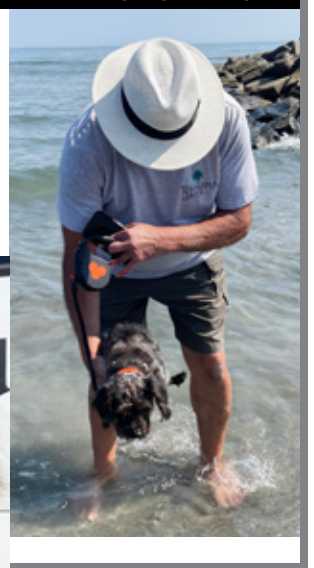
Dog Companions Benefit Aging Neighbors

BY GAIL SIEGEL

I've become the older adult who needs to have a dog to be able to be my healthiest. I had a fall some time ago, and as part of my recovery a small dog helped me to take long walks around four times a day, which helped me maintain my physical and social life, to get fresh air, and explore more of the city as I traveled around town.

This time around, I'm hoping to have a team to help me. Someone who can't get out could nevertheless benefit from having a small dog as company. The dog would have the job of comforting the person in need. It is a bit daunting to consider being a pet owner when it is tough to get around. It requires a lot of thought and planning, but I think the reward is worth the effort. I have been promoting pet-sharing for a while. Families spending a lot of time outside their homes could share

pets with neighbors and friends nearby, especially those older adults who are retired and can provide care, walking and loving dogs during the day when both dogs and older people would otherwise be home alone for hours. Sharing expenses would also be beneficial for families or individuals worried about the costs of having pets. I'm hoping to encourage others to adopt a dog in need of a loving home, especially now that so many dogs from California will need a safe place to live. ♦





Spring Thaw: Native Plants from January Through April

BY DAVE WATSON

While the cold persists, the living roots of plants are working underground during January, February and March (which is when some plants may start to come up). We can then add more hidden things, especially seeds.

Gardeners can put down some more layers of soil and molding leaves in January and February. Soil has a complex mixture of inorganic materials consisting of living and dead organic beings, as well as rocks derived from the erosion process that are weathered well. The decomposed remains of plants are organic matter or humus. Soil is the source of life and helps plants grow faster.

Soil The soil is one of the most important parts of a plant's environment—its medium—in which roots are anchored and from which nutrients, water and oxygen, are obtained.

What is your soil situation? Soil is key to plants' success. The more you understand its value, the more you will learn to contribute basic components to it so that it will provide for plants' earliest needs. However, soil is a tremendously complex topic, much deeper than you'll need to understand in order to grow and care for healthy plants.

Seeds for January through April

Prairie Moon Nursery just brought us native plants and seeds during the 2025 winter. You can buy Prairie Moon seed packet collections. We can grow a lot of these little seeds on the 34th Avenue Median. Here is the collection I'm working with:

Spring Blooms Collections including Columbine, Ozark Bluestar, Pale Corydalis, Lance-leaf Coreopsis, Foxglove Beardtongue, and Golden Alexanders. ♦



Wild plants are appealing at all stages, including post-bloom, as these Foxglove Beardtongue, Ozark Bluestar, and others (clockwise from top) show.





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VIEWS FROM THE HEIGHTS – Spring 2025

ONGOING EVENTS

Saturdays, 11am-1 pm

JH-SCRAPS (composting)

69th St. & 35th Ave.

For info on what is compostable,
contact info@JHBG.org

Most Saturdays, 10 am

Tree LC Meets at the NE corner of
80th St. & 37th Ave.

Schedule may vary and include some
Sundays. Check the

[JHBG Facebook page](#)

for complete information.

Saturdays 10 am

Clean and Green

For complete details,
go to info@JHBG.org.

Saturdays 10:30 am

Meet at the gardens at St. Mark's
Episcopal Church on 34th Ave.,
between 81st and 82nd Streets.

Daily

JH-CREW dog run

69th St. between 34th & 35th Aves.

To join, go to info@JHBG.org
for application. Suggested donation,
\$25/year.

FRIENDS & NEIGHBORS:

Please join us or renew your membership (there are 2 ways):

Go to [JHBG.org/membership](https://www.jhbg.org/membership) and pay by credit card.

It's quick and easy! Mail a check with this form
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