

Culture clubbed by fund cuts

Institutions face tough choices

BY ERIN DURKIN

BROOKLYN'S CULTURAL institutions are reeling from deep funding cuts — forcing them to curtail hours, eliminate programs and lay off staff.

The borough's museums, Botanic Garden, aquarium and performance center took budget hits of more than \$2 million for the fiscal year beginning in July.

Now, they are facing an additional 4.2% reduction in city funding — and private donations have fallen dramatically, officials said.

"We're really cutting into bone; there is very little left to cut that doesn't acutely affect the public," said Brooklyn Museum director Arnold Lehman.

A \$629,549 cut forced the museum to trim three staff positions and cancel an exhibition, said Lehman.

But it may not end there. Faced with further reductions, "you're going to see major exhibitions being cut," said Lehman, adding the museum

may have to reduce hours or eliminate educational programs for kids.

The cuts have been compounded by a significant drop in private fundraising, said Lehman, who also heads the Cultural Institutions Group.

"All of those headline names — Lehman, Merrill, AIG, Morgan Stanley — they've all been generous funders of the cultural community," he said. "Funding from those major corporations and many, many, many others will either be significantly reduced or eliminated."

Just a month ago, the Brooklyn Children's Museum celebrated its reopening after an expansion project.

But after suffering a \$215,000 cut, the museum was forced to close on Mondays and Tuesdays. The museum may have to further reduce its hours and eliminate its science and cultural programs on weekday afternoons, said president Carol Enseki.

"It's a particularly difficult time to cut back when the attendance and



Fewer kids will be seen at the Brooklyn Children's Museum as recent funding cuts led to the museum being closed on Mondays and Tuesdays.

the response from the community is so great," said Enseki.

The New York Aquarium lost \$260,572 and now faces further reductions. "These are living collections," said spokeswoman Linda Corcoran. "This is not like putting a drape over an art museum. We cannot tell the animals that we cannot feed them anymore."

The aquarium may have to close exhibits or end a free Friday admission program, CIG officials said.

The Brooklyn Academy of Music ended its Senior Cinema program and cut staff. The economic situation, said director Karen Brooks Hopkins, "is going to affect fund-raising, it's going to affect ticket sales; it's going to affect tourism. . . . You're going to see reductions all over the place."

More Local News

It's time for flu shots

In an effort to limit the risk of influenza this season, Health Commissioner Thomas Frieden suggests parents have children from 6 months to 18 years old vaccinated against the virus.

Studies show children are more likely to spread the virus to other family members and friends. Children in this age group also face a higher risk of flu-related complications.

Flu shots are also recommended for people over the age of 50, pregnant women, those with chronic illness, those in daily contact with kids under 5 years old and nursing home residents and employees.

Pre-K seats available

Councilman Vincent Gentile (R-Bay Ridge) recommends parents consider enrolling their children in the free universal prekindergarten seats available citywide.

Parents can choose among 6,000 full- or half-day seats open citywide. Enrollment is not confined within neighborhood school districts. This allows families to choose a location close to home or work.

Children who reach age 4 by Dec. 31 may be registered. For a map of locations, log on to gis.nyc.gov/doitt/cm/CityMap.htm or call 311.

Alternate side relief

A Department of Sanitation proposal for reducing alternate side parking regulations in Community Board 2 and District 2 was recently approved by Councilwoman Leticia James (WFP-Fort Greene) and her constituents.

Street cleaning frequency in Clinton Hill and Fort Greene will be reduced from twice a week to once.

Current alternate side parking rules will remain in effect in Brooklyn Heights.

Patrick McCormick and Gayle DeWees

Bushwick's Aylin Varela, with grandmother Urania Medal, is breathing easier after her home was cleared of asthma-causing rugs and a moldy bathroom ceiling by workers from nonprofit Make The Road New York.

Photo by Jeff Bachner



Bushwick's asthma sufferers learn how to help themselves

BY RACHEL MONAHAN

SEVEN-YEAR-OLD Aylin Varela's asthma attacks were once so bad she was hospitalized every month.

But two weeks ago, her Bushwick home got a makeover. A moldy bathroom ceiling was replaced. Mouse holes were stoppered. Dust-filled wall-to-wall carpets were removed.

"They like to play on the floors with dolls," said Aylin's grandmother, Urania Medal, 60. "Now, she plays in peace. There's no problem because all the floors are new."

Bushwick has among the city's worst asthma rates, with poor apartment conditions aggravating the problem, local nonprofit Make The Road New York found two years ago in a study.

But the neighborhood may also have gotten a solution to the seemingly intractable problem from a new program run by MTRNY.

Workers successfully advised asthmatics on how to improve their own homes, referring them to pest control firms and advising on how to keep homes clean without strong cleaning products that may aggravate asthma. MTRNY offered legal advice to make landlords obey the law and gave information on how to get proper medical treatment.

Of 180 asthma sufferers helped, nearly 70% reported improvements in a year's time. More than 30% had suffered attacks at least every other day. By the end of the program, they suffered an attack no more than twice a month.

"A lot of these people have huge problems," said Jim Knickman, of the New York State Health Foundation, which funded the program. "It's difficult to get them to worry about prevention."

Community health worker Doris Mejia said living in Bushwick and working for MTRNY helped people trust her to go through their homes and point out problems. Even so, sometimes she'd get turned away the first time.

"The next time, they'd had asthma again. They'd want to know more," she said. "They took it [improving their environments] as a challenge, and it worked."

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