

CITY NEWS

DONOR OF THE DAY | By Pia Catton

Onsite Day Care For Track Parents

Thoroughbred horse racing in New York State moves between three tracks: Aqueduct in Queens, Belmont Park in Long Island and Saratoga Race Course in Saratoga Springs. But 365 days a year, there are horses lodged at the backstretch stables of Belmont and Aqueduct, where employees arrive before dawn to clean stalls, feed the horses and groom them after training.

Often, these employees—many of whom are recent Latino immigrants—are also caring for their children. Because the work day starts so early, many parents are without child care. For years that meant (and still does mean at many other tracks) that children come to work with parents and sleep in cars or hang around the stalls.

But that changed in 2003 with the help of two racing enthusiasts, Michael Dubb and Eugene Melnyk, whose leadership created Anna House, a day-care center open every day for children whose parents are backstretch workers at Belmont and Aqueduct, which are less than 10 miles apart.

In 1998, Mr. Dubb, founder of home building company the Beechwood Organization in Jericho, N.Y., learned from then-jockey Jerry Bailey about the track workers' need for affordable, early-morning child care. Mr. Dubb approached the New York Racing Association, which governs the tracks and surrounding facilities, with plans to donate the construction of a dedicated facility. The Belmont Child Care Association was formed, and permits were sought.

But funding for operating costs was still needed. At an annual fund-raiser during the Saratoga season—which will be held this year on Wednesday—the association found support from Mr. Melnyk, a Canadian businessman who breeds and trains thoroughbreds at his Winding Oaks Farm, in Florida and Kentucky. "They had the land, they had the approvals," he said. "I just said, 'How much do you need?'"

With a \$1 million pledge from Mr. Melnyk, Anna House (which is named for his first daughter) opened in 2003. He has continued to support the education center with regular financial gifts and greater visibility.

Initially, Anna House educated and cared for children from 6 weeks to 6 years old. The head count has been about 50, but it will increase to 70 this fall because of two additions—built and donated by Mr. Dubb—where elementary and high-school students can study English. "The parents are supportive, but they frequently cannot help through the language barriers," said Anna House's executive director, Donna Chenkin.

For the donors, the need to raise awareness continues. Mr. Dubb hopes the message is reaching all the track parents who need the help. "We would also like to expand to Saratoga," he said.

Mr. Melnyk's work continues, as well. "I want to spend my time encouraging other people to give. Go see the backstretch," he said. "It's non-stop."



Anna House

Surge in Flood Insurance

Continued from page A15 to happen here," he said.

Banks have also played a role in the spike, insurance agents and homeowners say. Agents said they've noticed banks are asking more borrowers to purchase flood insurance when they buy a new home or refinance. Banks say they only require it of homeowners in federally designated flood zones.

Steve Siciliano, an Italian marble and tile salesman, said Wells Fargo told him to buy flood insurance when he bought a new home recently in Bay Ridge located about three blocks from the shore of New York Harbor.

He balked and successfully argued against buying the insurance. "I said, 'Wait a second, I'm

in Brooklyn,'" Mr. Siciliano said. "I've never heard of flood damage in Brooklyn. Somehow I was able to convince them."

A spokesman for Wells Fargo said the company didn't have any record of conversations with Mr. Siciliano about flood insurance.

Mr. Siciliano said another bank asked him to purchase flood insurance when he refinanced his home in Sag Harbor. This time, he relented because his home there sits just feet from the water. The cost is \$2,200 a year.

"I said, 'OK, I'm probably tempting fate,'" Mr. Siciliano said. "I'm 30 years closer to that 100-year storm, so when September rolls around I want to have a little peace of mind."



URBAN GARDNER | By Ralph Gardner Jr.

The Writing on the Wall



There are few things more depressing than a beach resort in bad weather, especially when you're paying for the privilege. The Lido's saving grace is that Venice is but a short boat ride away. If you can't tan there's always shopping, and once you're tired of shopping you can visit one of its museums, or churches, or scuola, most of them bristling with Titans, Tiepolos and Tintoretos (though I'm willing to admit that the priorities of some high-minded tourists travel in reverse order—the absorption of culture considered more urgent than buying Murano glass, or a knock-off Hermès bag from one of the Piazza San Marco area's ubiquitous street vendors).

But Venice also offers another distraction. This one possesses some of the allure of an exotic vacation, a museum romp, and even shopping opportunities: a visit to the Biennale, the every-other-year celebration of art and artists from around the world, a sort of World's Fair of art, many of the nations represented boasting their own permanent pavilions.

We discovered many years ago—no disrespect meant to the hard-working and occasionally even talented participants showing here—that the Biennale is an excellent bad-weather alternative to the beach, especially when you have small children who demand to be amused. One may think that the requirements of, say, a 3-year-old and an adult with a B.A. aren't necessarily the same. But what we learned was that the art that packed the greatest punch with our kids was also our favorite, and not just because it prevented them from whining that they wanted to go home.

No one or two pieces over the years stand out—though

we still have a photo taped to the refrigerator of our rambunctious toddler Gracie happily racing around towers of metal junk composed from crushed automobiles (forgive me for forgetting the artist and the proud nation he represented). Suffice it to say that it's hard to go wrong with any installation that includes smoke machines, labyrinths, mirrors, sound effects, something you can climb or interact with, and a water feature; preferably all at once. Come to think of it, perhaps my favorite was Iceland's entry one year where opening drawers produced the roar of the particular waterfalls pictured inside.

Conversely, and perhaps this is just my ignorance, I think that whoever curates these shows should summarily reject any proposal that turns on small drawings or photographs that require you to focus, or explanatory texts, particularly if the words are the work. If I'd wanted to read a book, I could have stayed back at the hotel watching it rain and dozing off.

I dare say that our standards for this year's Biennale were even higher and harsher than in previous years, both because we were now traveling with a fully fledged art-history major—our daughter Lucy, recently graduated from college—and also because the beach suddenly beckoned; a stiff wind had blown away the morning's storm clouds and, as we awaited the vaporetto to take us two stops to the Lido to the Giardini, the area of Venice where the Biennale is held, a brilliant 50-SPF Adriatic sun had appeared.

The quandary of much of contemporary art is that it's sometimes hard to distinguish it from its surroundings, so topical and multimedia has it become. I'm thinking in particular of the Spanish pavilion, our first stop. Its main work

was giant letters or perhaps they were words on a parquet floor. But sitting at a table atop the same floor was a young gentleman on a computer. Was he part of the work? The artist himself? Or simply a Biennale intern responding to his email?

And what of the stacked chairs in the corner? Were they a commentary on mass production and society's insidious homogeneity, or left over from a lecture or cocktail party? We didn't linger long enough to find out.

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Shall we skip Belgium—not that there was anything wrong with it—and go straight to Holland, which boasted a two-story structure within. It immediately satisfied everybody's jungle-gym requirement (so what if our kids are now 18 and 22). Achieving the summit one could also gaze down upon a mirror, which reflected this sentiment painted on the show house's ceiling:

Big
Bad
Wolf
Red
Yellow
Blue
Virginia
Wolf

Your guess is as good as mine, though the short form catalog, the only one I was willing to schlep around Europe, explained that support for the Netherlands' public-art system is declining. I'm concerned their Biennale entry may not be enough stanch the bleeding.

On the other hand, there

were riches galore in the Padiglione Centrale, a large building with a funhouse feel devoted to individual artists, including Cindy Sherman and Jacopo Tintoretto (yes, that one). My vote for the pavilion's grand prize was split between Briton Nathaniel Mellors's work of a couple of what appeared undead animatronic hippie heads tossing banalities at each other such as "You're very nice and everything you're doing is very interesting," and Italian Maurizio Cattelan's approximately 200 stuffed pigeons, with fake pigeon droppings no less, staring down from the rafters. Pigeons get old fast in Venice. But these fellows single-handedly seemed to elevate the proceedings, lending them a sense of timelessness, if not quite permanence.

Lunch—panini bought from a kiosk on the premises and consumed at tables overlooking a scenic canal—restored us sufficiently to tackle the U.S. pavilion. Sadly, our timing was off: We were too early for the afternoon show, which apparently consisted of a female gymnast in a sparkly outfit performing an Olympic-style routine atop a replica of a couple of American Airlines business-class seats.

What the deeper meaning was I can't say. Ditto the working ATM machine. It was set inside a towering pipe organ that produced a majestic sound whenever anyone made a cash withdrawal.

A minor contretemps flared between Lucy and the rest of the family when we decided to ditch the rest of the Biennale, including the British, Japanese and German pavilions, for the beach. She continued on alone and reported that we'd missed the best stuff. All things considered, I can't help but think we made the right decision.

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LUNCHBOX | Currywurst Bros.

Wurst of the Village

Currywurst, is so revered in Berlin that it merits a museum there. Now the dish has hit the Village, making its home in a fast-food storefront decorated in lime green, yellow and red.

"Mexicans have tacos, Greeks have their pitas, Germans have currywurst," says Currywurst Bros. manager Margarita Amam, a native of Bremen, Germany, explaining the sausage's hotness.

Customers order a sausage (pork, veal, beef or chicken), which is sliced and doused in a tomato sauce (\$7; \$12 for a double portion). The meat is topped with one—or two—of eight curry powders, which range

from the very mild Purple Curry to the fiery Dragon Star, made with habaneros. Most stick to the middle of the seasoning scale, with choices such as the Curry Jaipur (made with chile, garlic, lemongrass, fennel and mustard seeds, cinnamon and cardamom).

Sides—sweet-potato fries, mashed potatoes and potato salads—are extra. For those who insist, Heinz ketchup is available.

—Monica Williams

Currywurst Bros., 182 Bleecker St. (near Sullivan), is open 11 a.m. to 1 a.m. and until 3 a.m. Thursday to Saturday; 917-265-8317



Pork bratwurst with maharaja curry powder at Currywurst Bros.

EPA to Review Drinking Water Mandate on City

By PERVAIZ SHALLWANI

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has agreed to review regulations to protect municipal water sources across the country, a month after Mayor Michael Bloomberg criticized a \$1.6 billion federal mandate.

The decision reverses the EPA's previous statements that it would stick by regulations forcing New York and other municipalities to spend billions on projects that mayors complain are not needed and provide few

health benefits.

In a letter sent Friday to Sen. Charles Schumer, EPA chief Lisa Jackson said she agreed that "we should and can find cost-effective ways of achieving these public health protections."

The EPA review of regulations would include a federal mandate that the city to place a 90-acre cover over the Hillview Reservoir in Yonkers. It provides some of the city's drinking water.

The regulation was set in 2006 under the Safe Drinking Water Act. The city argues there are

cheaper ways to protect the water. An EPA spokesman Sunday said Ms. Jackson's letter was the agency's statement on the matter.

In a statement Sunday, Mr. Bloomberg called the decision a "significant step" in Barack President Obama's pledge for a comprehensive review of federal relations. "We are confident that the EPA will ultimately come to the conclusion that a one-size-fits-all rule is inappropriate in this case, and New York City does not need a 90-acre concrete cover to protect the water we are already

successfully keeping clean," Mr. Bloomberg said.

The Hillview Reservoir is one of the examples cited by Mr. Bloomberg in a 15-page letter his administration sent to Ms. Jackson this summer that argues such regulations "unnecessarily" drive up city costs for water forcing cities to raise rates.

Federal mandates have forced the city to spend more than \$15 billion on capital projects. Mr. Bloomberg has blamed the regulations for water rates that have increased by 134% since 2002.