

now Chelsea

YOUR WEEKLY COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER SERVING CHELSEA, HUDSON YARDS & HELL'S KITCHEN

NCO Program to Bring New Sheriffs in Town

BY SEAN EGAN

In his second Community Council meeting as the commanding officer of the 10th Precinct, Captain Paul Lanot spent the evening of Wed., Oct. 26 examining new problems, addressing old issues, and looking forward to the future.

Getting right down to business,

10TH PRECINCT continued on p. 4

Bucks Trend: Dem Donations Dominate in Chelsea, Clinton

BY DENNIS LYNCH

It shouldn't be a surprise that the vast majority of people in Chelsea and Hell's Kitchen are liberal and support Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton. Those people are showing their support with donations, much more than in previous elections, according to the folks at RentHop

VOTE continued on p. 5

FLECK SHINES IN NEW SHOW



Performance artist John Fleck puts his stamp on the gothic horror gown, in "Blacktop Highway." See page 17.



Photo by Kyle Froman

Masala Bhangra Workout creator Sarina Jain (center) with her students.

A DANCE INSTRUCTOR is a Person in Your Neighborhood

BY DUSICA SUE MALESEVIC

For many New Yorkers, it is a dream to be able to walk to work. Some dance instructors for the Ailey Extension in Hell's Kitchen get to live the reality.

Robin Dunn has lived in Hell's Kitchen since 1992, and literally belted out lyrics when asked about the Ailey Extension opening on W. 55th St. in 2005.

"Can you feel a brand new day?" she sang.

Housed at the Joan Weill Center For Dance (405 W. 55th St., at Ninth Ave.), the extension offers over 20 different dance and fitness techniques, including hip-hop classes that Dunn has taught since it opened.

Dunn, a Woodside native, started dancing when she was 10, after seeing a friend dance a solo at a recital. Her mom signed

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Dance Teachers Tap Routine Just Steps From Residences

AILEY EXTENSION continued from p. 1

her and her sisters up for tap, jazz, and ballet classes at the Charlotte Pollak Dance Studio in Queens.

She was a teaching assistant at Pollak's school and started working professionally as a dancer when she was 17, Dunn explained to *Chelsea Now* in a phone interview. Dunn also took classes at the Ailey School, where she studied ballet, Horton, and Dunham.

In 1989, Dunn was introduced to hip-hop dance pioneers Mr. Wiggles and Buddha Stretch and studied with both, she explained. Dunn said she was blessed with tradition first and then hip-hop, and she "made the translation, created a pedagogical approach. I speak both languages."

In 2003, Dunn started teaching hip-hop at the Ailey School, which offers professional training for aspiring dancers. She taught at the Ailey School until 2012, she said. At the Ailey Extension, she teaches a Beginner Hip-Hop class and an Absolute Beginner Hip-Hop class.

There is nothing typical or ordinary about Dunn's class, which begins with students lying on the floor and meditating.

She laughed when she explained that if people are late, they always ask, "Is this hip-hop? Is this hip-hop?"

After the breathing exercises, there is warm-up and the students learn the choreography. Dunn says she makes sure to "sprinkle" what she called the three gifts — she has her students say, "Ain't nobody flyer than me!" "You are the best there is," and "Don't hold the good hostage."

"When I can make them smile, laugh and dance — I feel good," she said.

Dunn said she credits Pollak for

teaching her how to be an instructor and the importance of a student's experience. She teaches fundamentals so that a student can be prepared to take more advanced classes.

"I'm a farmer — I know how to plant the seeds to help people grow," she said.

In addition to Pollak, her mom, Edith E. Dunn, who passed away last year, was a huge influence.

"My teaching has gone to a whole other level because I feel the two of us teach together," Dunn said. "She's the engine that keeps me going still."

Dunn says she is always encouraging neighbors and local merchants to take her class. She said the extension connects neighbors, and that there is a "sense of community within the building itself."

"The Ailey Extension was created in 2005 to fulfill Mr. Ailey's lifelong commitment to bring dance to the people," said Lisa Johnson-Willingham, director of the Ailey Extension since 2011. She was referring to Alvin Ailey, the legendary choreographer who founded the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in 1958.

The extension's slogan is "real classes for real people," and to that end there are over 80 classes offered to the general public, she said. A person only needs an interest — not a background in dance — to take a class, Johnson-Willingham explained in a phone interview.

"It's a very welcoming environment," she said.

Everything from Beginner Ballet to Zumba Fitness to world dance techniques (such as Afro-Cuban Folkloric and Samba Reggae Workout) is offered — to name just a few choices.

Currently, construction is underway on a 10,000-square-foot expansion of the Joan Weill Center For Dance that



Courtesy Alvin Ailey Extension

A rendering of the \$25 million expansion of the Joan Weill Center For Dance, at 405 W. 55th St. at Ninth Ave.

will add three floors to the west side of the building, according to a press release. The expansion will add four dance studios, two flexible classrooms and administrative offices, and renovate existing lounges, locker rooms, restrooms, and the company's costume shop.

The \$25 million expansion is slated to open in fall 2017, according to a spokesperson.

In May 2015, Community Board 4 denied a variance for the expansion, which

AILEY EXTENSION continued on p. 10



Photo by Kyle Freeman

Robin Dunn (center) has taught at the Ailey Extension since it launched in 2005.



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the Board of Standards and Appeals eventually approved. When asked about this, Johnson-Willingham said that "any changes we're going to communicate [to the community] throughout the expansion and construction."

She added, "This community has been so supportive and great coming into the building and taking classes."

Johnson-Willingham called it a "win-win situation" for the extension to have instructors who live in the neighborhood.

Peter Brandenhoff has been teaching ballet classes at the extension for beginners, advanced beginners and intermediate students for two years, and has lived in Hell's Kitchen for about four.

Originally from Denmark, Brandenhoff studied at the Royal Danish Ballet School. After graduation, he moved to the United States in 1991, he told Chelsea Now in a phone interview. For 15 years, he was with the San Francisco Ballet, and got his first taste of teaching when the company did outreach in South Africa, he said.

At the extension, he teaches the basics of ballet with an emphasis on dancing, he said.



Photo by Kyle Freeman

Peter Brandenhoff works with a student during one of his ballet classes.

"Ballet is hard because it has a very slow progression," Brandenhoff explained.

Especially for adult classes, he tries to incorporate an element of athleticism. Ballet, he said, can be difficult to do once your body has gotten settled.

For Brandenhoff, the most rewarding part of teaching is "when I see somebody figure something out — how to master a step — that's the best thing there is. To see the smile on their faces and the light

in their eyes — priceless."

When he moved to New York City five years ago, he tried other neighborhoods and boroughs before settling in Hell's Kitchen. He said he tries to get his neighbors to come to his class, especially when at one of his favorite haunts, Kahve, a coffee shop at 774 Ninth Ave. (btw. W. 51st & W. 52nd Sts.).

"I do my best to recruit people when I've been there," he said.

Preconceived notions about ballet — tights are required, you have to have a special body type, or be able to do the splits — make it harder to pitch to people than, say a Zumba or a spin class, he said.

No tights are required for his classes at the extension, Brandenhoff noted.

"One of the things that sets the Ailey Extension apart in my experience is [the students] like having a good time; they like taking risks," he said.

He said that is indicative of people who live in Hell's Kitchen with many residents who are still young at heart.

A cardiovascular workout from dance is key for Sarina Jain, an instructor at the Ailey Extension since 2009 and the creator of a workout called Masala Bhangra — "the original Indian dance program," Jain said in a phone interview.

Her parents came to the United States in the 1970s from India, and Jain was born and raised in California. She created the Masala Bhangra Workout in honor of her father, who died when he was 47, she said. "I found my calling when everything happened with my dad," she explained.

Jain called the workout "old-school aerobics meets India," and says she takes the class on a journey — channeling scenes from Bollywood movies. Class starts with a warm-up, and then Jain teaches a series of movement.



Photo by Joe Epstein

Ailey Extension Director Lisa Johnson-Willingham.

"We put it all together at the end and jam it out," she said.

Jain says most anyone can pick up the choreography and then perform it, and that she doesn't want anyone to walk out feeling frustrated by the moves.

She loves teaching at the extension, where she has had two classes per week since she started.

"The friendship[s] I have built there over the years [are] mind-blowing," she said. "Something about the energy at the Ailey Extension stands out."

Forging close ties with her students has been helped by Jain living in Chelsea since 2005, after moving to the city at the tail end of 2000. Jain loves the uniqueness of the shops and restaurants that still populate the neighborhood.

Her students push her to think about music selection, creating new steps and routines, and how she can challenge them.

"It's such a satisfying feeling to know I make a difference in their world," Jain said.

For more information about classes and times, visit aileyextension.com.



Photo by Christopher Daggar

Students from The Ailey School perform 2016's "roofbreaking" ceremony for the Ailey Extension.

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