



# ACE *New York* MetroLINE

Serving the ACE New York City Region

Winter 2009



## THE FUTURE OF CONEY ISLAND?



Conceptual renderings from: [theicdc.org](http://theicdc.org)

# ACE NYC Region First Winter Meetup



*Dennis Vourderis of  
Deno's Wonder Wheel Park*



*Ken Puccia of Rye Playland*



*Bill Galvin*

On Jan 24 about 20 ACers gathered at the Westchester Community Center for ACE's first ever NYC Winter Meetup. While we had presentations from 2 area parks, the intent was to have a more informal gathering in which ACers could get to know each other. While munching on delicious deli sandwiches and a CYCLONE cake, we listened to park presentations that were interesting and timely- as changes are occurring at both Coney Island and Rye Playland.

After a warm welcome from Regional Rep Colleen Whyte, the first presentation was by Ken Puccia of Rye Playland. He entertained us with some historical movie footage of this park taken in the 1930's, including footage of the legendary Aero-plane coaster. He explained Rye's new POP pric-

ing plan, and explained how for many families a trip to Rye would now cost less than it did last year. He also assured us that it would still be possible for non-riders to come and enjoy the park without paying an exorbitant fee. And if they wanted to take a couple of rides, they would still be able to purchase tickets.

His presentation focused on history, and of particular interest was the origin of Rye Playland. Most of us know that Rye is the oldest pre-planned amusement park. And that it is owned by Westchester County. There had been several amusement parks located at this site prior to Playland. They were seedy places, and tended to attract the 'wrong' kind of crowd. The respectable citizens of Westchester Co wanted to rid themselves of this unsavory element, and urged the county to obtain the land to get rid of these places, which it did.

When the county announced that it was planning to build an amusement park, people were upset- because of their memories of the previous parks. So to win over the public, the county had to build a state of the art class act- which in retrospect, everyone agrees they did. (And while some wonderful things have been lost, and new rides added, the basic beauty and integrity of this historic park remains.) Ken also assured us that the classic dark rides that had been rumored to be removed were





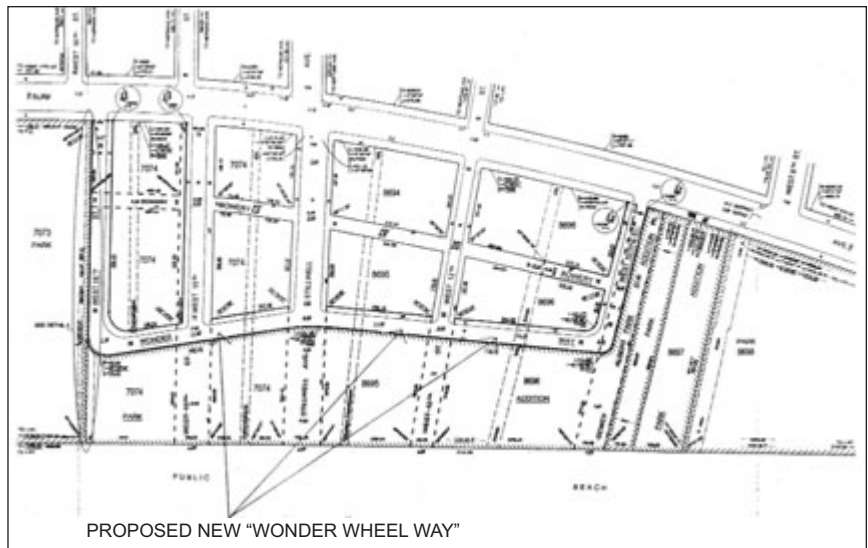
safe for the foreseeable future.

The next presentation was by Dennis Vourderis whose family owns Deno's Wonder Wheel Park at Coney Island. Most ACers know that the Thor Corporation has bought 80 to 90% of the amusement district and wants to build condos. Most ACers also know that the city has told Thor they can't build condos, and the city has its own plan for 're-vitalizing' Coney Island as an amusement zone.

Dennis showed us the plans for NYC's grand vision for a "new and improved" Coney Island for the future. The City's plans would reduce the outdoor amusement zone to only 9 acres. The city also plans to build a new street called Wonder Wheel Way right through the middle of the amusement district. It would go from the Parachute tower to the CYCLONE past the Wonder Wheel at the exact spot where Deno's Bumping Cars currently are. (That's directly next to the Wonder Wheel- putting a public street with traffic and parking right through the middle of the only land that is privately owned and operated by its owner as an amusement park in Coney Island.) The city's plan also calls for the entire amusement district to be operated by a single company or entity. So the city's plan appears to have no room for the families and business owners who have a proven track record of running amusements at Coney Island. (You can view the plans yourself at [www.thecidc.org](http://www.thecidc.org))

In the discussion that followed, it was quite clear that most ACers understand that what has made Coney Island the great attraction it has been for over 100 years is the competitive nature of it- The CYCLONE was built to top the Thunderbolt, Nathans competed with Feltmans for the hot dog business, and so on. The city's plan is almost as much of a threat to the Coney that we love as is Thor! The plan appears to wipe out the amusement parks that have been the heart and soul of Coney in recent decades.

For Dennis, who has been struggling against powerful forces to



maintain his family's business and the integrity of Coney Island's amusement district, it was good to hear the strong affirmation from ACers who were gathered that day. He and his family have at times felt it was a lonely struggle. Dennis appeared to be buoyed by the strong support of ACers in the region. [ACers elsewhere can also lend a hand- see sidebar on next page]

The irony of the differences between these 2 presentations was not missed by anyone in the room. As Ken was describing the social forces that led to the creation of Rye Playland, Dennis observed, "That's exactly what's happening to us right now!"

After the presentations, Colleen asked us to each share how we learned about ACE and when we joined, how long we've been coaster enthusiasts, and how we came to be coaster enthusiasts. The conversation that followed was very interesting and went on for quite some time. And it fulfilled



Colleen's vision that we would spend time getting to know each other better.

The plan was to have a 'trivia game' of some sort that would engage everyone, not just a few. But by the time the previous discussion was finished, there was only 15 minutes left till the event was scheduled to be over. Since the room we were in was available to us, we decided to do the trivia questions. While there was some competition and prizes given, it evolved into a discussion of park/coaster/ACE trivia that went 2 hours past our scheduled finishing time! And while some folks had to leave because of prior commitments, I think it's accurate to say that everyone was engaged in the discussion and having a good time.

A special thanks to Ken Puccia, Rye Playland and Westchester Co who hosted us, and to Ken and Dennis who made presentations on behalf of their parks and brought lots of goodies for prizes and giveaways! Thanks also go to Carol Albert, owner of Astroland, who also donated prizes. And of course thanks to Colleen and her assistant

regional reps David Finkelstein, Rich Ghazarian and Luko Simlesa who organized the day, and Tanya Regan who brought the cake!

**"Backseat Bill" Galvin**

*NYC continues to hold public hearings about plans for the future of Coney Island. Anyone concerned about the future of Coney Island should write letters to the Mayor and City Council reps as well as the Coney Island Development Corp.*

*Since I am not a resident of NYC, what I say in my letters is that the amount of time and money I spend in NYC is DIRECTLY related to whether Coney Island remains the great amusement park with intense rides that I have come to love. There is no reason for me to drive past a half dozen theme parks to come to Coney if all I'm going to experience is another theme park when I get there. The Coney experience of recent decades (minus the vacant lots and bus parking lots) MUST BE PRESERVED!!!*

**Mayor Michael Bloomberg**  
City Hall  
NY, NY, 10007

**Marty Markowitz**  
Brooklyn Borough President  
209 Joralemon St  
Brooklyn, NY 11201

**Dominec Recchia**  
City Council Rep from Coney  
445 Neptune Ave  
Brooklyn, NY 11224

**Christine Quinn**  
Speaker, NYC Council  
224 W. 30<sup>th</sup> St. Suite 1206  
NY, NY 10001

**Lynn Kelly, President**  
Coney Island Development Corp.  
110 Williams St  
NY, NY 10038



*City's proposed plan for Coney Island redevelopment*





**Statement read by Dennis D. Vourderis,  
On behalf of the Vourderis Family,  
Owner/Operators of Deno's Wonder Wheel Amusement Park**

Public Hearing of CB 13 March 3, 2009

Thank you Councilman Recchia, Borough President Markowitz, members of the NYC Economic Development Corporation and the Coney Island Development Corporation for giving me the opportunity to speak tonight. It's always a pleasure to see officials from New York City getting involved in the future development of Coney Island. Even further, I am deeply appreciative of the input and care that the general public has shown in the area. Whether we agree or disagree with the recent planning set forth, it is important to recognize and be thankful for the tremendous attention Coney Island has received from people around not only Brooklyn, but the entire country. Coney Island is recognized by all as both the crown jewel of New York City's amusement history, and the crown jewel of amusements everywhere. A tiny part of a massive, historic borough, its name is famous throughout the world as a place for excitement, thrills, and just plain fun. So, tonight, I would like to thank each and every one of you in attendance for showing the area your love and support.

For the past several years, we have been presented with varying plans for the future development of Coney Island. Some of the ideas have been met with lavish praise, and others with extreme disapproval. There have been plans put forth by owners and developers in the area, and plans by officials of the City of New York. Tonight, I wanted to speak with you on my family's behalf regarding the latest proposal by the Coney Island Development Corporation.

Overall, I must say that the plan by the CIDC is a step, if not a leap, in the right direction for Coney Island. First, it establishes that amusements will remain in Coney Island for many years to come. Second, it puts an emphasis on the three remaining iconic centerpieces of an area that has lost too many over the years. With the Cyclone, Wonder Wheel, and Parachute Jump all being put front and center at the same time, we have a guarantee that many future generations can appreciate what these landmarks mean to our City.

Of course, as with any grand plan affecting such an important area, there are sensitive issues that must be addressed. As a family, we have certain concerns about the plan, and how it affects our amusement park. However, we are confident that we can work together with the City, to resolve these issues, so that Coney Island can move forward as quickly and effectively as possible.

Diving into the intricate specifics of the plan would be a task too great and time consuming for me to accomplish tonight. I would rather take this opportunity to express my genuine hope for the area as a whole. I strongly believe in the spirit of Coney Island, America's Playground. My belief in the area is echoed by my family, as well as millions around the world. Now is the time that we must all work together toward restoring our beloved Coney Island into the glorious destination it should be. In the years to come, I know we will look back and see that Coney Island's brightest days were always in its future, and not in its past. Thank you all once again for giving me the opportunity to speak on behalf of my family, as well as the Island we so deeply care about.

Thank you to my Nephew, John Vourderis, who assisted me in the preparation of this statement.



# Freedomland: The one park that I don't miss...

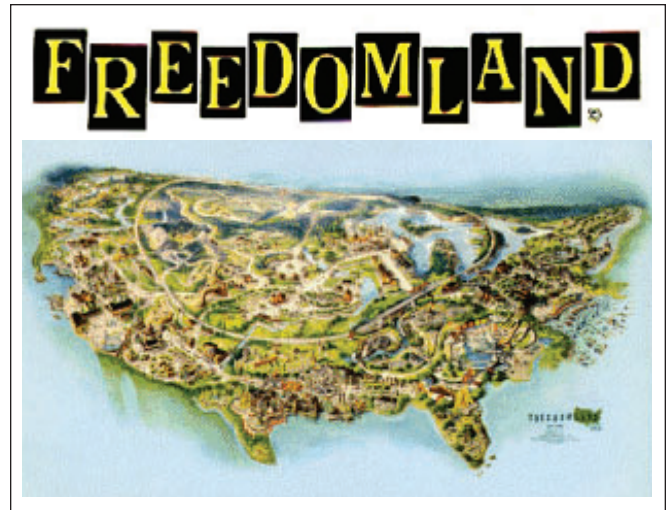
In a galaxy far, far away...ok, not that far away, just the northeastern part of The Bronx where Co-Op City is now, there was an amusement park by the name of Freedomland U.S.A. Freedomland opened to the public on June 19, 1960 and closed at the end of 1964. And I am glad it closed. Don't be upset with me just yet, I will eventually explain it after a little history lesson.

The man with the plan for Freedomland was Cornelius Vanderbilt Wood (1922-1992). He previously worked at Disneyland. Wood was hired by Walt Disney in 1953 and Wood picked the sight in Anaheim, California where Disneyland would be built. Over the next two years, the two men became good friends but due to some differences, (several theories exist as to why), they had a falling out. By January 1956, Wood was fired by Disneyland.

In 1956, Wood began planning and building three of his own amusement parks across the country. In 1958, he opened Magic Mountain in Denver. It was closed in 1960 but revitalized in 1971. Then there was Pleasure Island in Wakefield, Massachusetts, opened in 1959 and then closed in 1969, and then Freedomland in 1960. Can you image the miles on the car or the frequent flyer miles....Wow! Oh, he did have a partner; his name was Milton T. Raynor. He was a television sports producer and attorney, who served as Freedomland's president.

Freedomland's concept was history-based and the layout was to resemble the map of the United States. Guests would enter around Washington D.C. The park's eastern edge, (Baychester Avenue), was the US/Canadian border.

On June 18, 1960, the park was dedicated in a ceremony with 5,000 people in attendance. The park officially opened with 65,000 visitors. Co-Op City is home to around 55,000 residents, that is a lot of people at the park. On the second day of operations, they had to stop selling tickets because of traffic jams leading to the park. Sounds like Bay Plaza during the hol-



idays. They were open 9:30am to midnight, seven days a week, from May through October.

There were seven different themed areas that would later become eight. They represented a different location and era of U.S. History. They were: Little Old New York (1850-1900), Chicago (1871), The Great Plains (1803-1900), San Francisco (1906), The Old Southwest (1890), New Orleans-Mardi Gras, Satellite City-The Future and State Fair Midway (added in 1962). A Movie Lot section and a Florida section was planned but never constructed.

Each section had rides and attractions to go along with its theme. There were antique car rides, boat rides, horse-drawn carriages that provided transportation to and from other areas of the park, live street shows that used audience participation, dark rides, games, souvenir shops, themed eateries and snack bars. Even a spaced-themed roller coaster, well he did work for Disney.

Freedomland began having major problems that started in its opening season. The problems ranged from various lawsuits, a robbery and competition from the 1964 New York World's Fair. By 1961, the park was \$8 million dollars in debt, so they decided to appeal to the teenagers by adding more traditional amusement park rides including bumper cars, roller coasters and such. Those changes did bring attention to the park, in the form of a lawsuit by Benjamin Moore in 1962. Does any of this sound familiar to anybody yet?

On September 14, 1964, citing competition from the 1964 New York World's Fair, Freedomland filed for bankruptcy and was torn down. The real reason it was torn down was probably because they realized that



the land would generate more money if it was sold for real estate purposes. No, not for condos, but for co-ops. (Bells and whistles going off yet? They say history repeats it's self).

Co-op City began construction on the land that was Freedomland, and a landfill before that, in 1968. It was completed in 1971. My parents moved into Co-op City with my brother in November of 1971. I would follow a little while later. With all of the sad and bad news coming from the amusement park world today, I could see why some people long for the years past

when parks would not become strip malls, condos or hotels. But in this case, I am glad the park is gone. If the park was still here, about 55,000 people including myself, would be homeless now, ok not homeless, just living somewhere else. So yes, I am sad that an amusement park is no longer here, but then I am kind of glad also. So, when I think I hear the rumble of a long, gone coaster racing around the track that might have been behind my building, I will realize that it is time for dinner because that is my stomach....

**Tanya Regan**

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## **Playland Amusement Park in Rye, NY announces pay-one-price pricing**

### **Press Release - Nov. 12, 2008**

The amusement section of Playland Park will no longer be funded by tax dollars under a comprehensive new "pay one price" plan for the historic Rye park unveiled by County Executive Andy Spano.

"Westchester property taxpayers will no longer subsidize the amusement park," said Spano. "Instead, visitors to the amusement section of the park will pay all costs, both operational and capital. This will save our county property taxpayers about \$3 million next year."

In 2005, a card system (replacing tickets) was implemented, so that revenues could be better monitored. In 2007 and 2008, the county changed its financial relationships with owners of the rides, buying some (rather than leasing) to generate more revenue to the county. As a consequence, the amount of taxpayer subsidy to the amusement area of the park has gone down. It was \$4.37 million in 2006; \$3.49 million in 2007; estimated at \$3.17 million in 2008.

Spano's proposal would affect only the amusement section of the park.

There would be a one-price entrance fee of \$25 for residents and \$30 for non-residents that would allow for unlimited use of the rides all day. There would be a \$5 reduction for both residents and non residents who come at twilight. The one-price fee for residents would also include miniature golf and entrance to the beach. Visitors from outside the county would have to pay extra for golf and beach entrance.

Non-riders entering the amusement section of the park to walk, watch the park's entertainment or to



chaperone others would pay a modest entrance fee of \$3 for residents and \$5 for non-residents. If they later want to go on a ride they can purchase a ride card at \$1 a point.

As is the case now, there will be no charge for going to the boardwalk, pier, fishing arcade, seaside walk, museum, Fountain Plaza, fireworks viewing, food court, lake boating, Read Sanctuary, boathouse, kayak launch, public picnic areas, Captain Hook's Restaurant or the area by mini-golf. Skating fees will continue for the Ice Casino, although there will still be no entrance fee.

Under Spano's plan, children who are under 36 inches tall will be allowed in free, irrespective of whether they are residents or non-residents. These youngsters must be accompanied on the Kiddyland rides by an older person who would have to pay.

In addition, parking fees will be reduced to \$4 weekdays and \$5 weekends. (Currently they are \$5 on weekdays, \$7 weekends and \$10 on holidays.)

"People who spend many hours at the park on rides will save money with the new price structure," Spano said.

Playland is the only amusement park in the nation owned by a county government. It presently has National Historic Landmark status. It dates back to 1923-25 when the then county Parks Commission acquired 313 acres of property along Long Island Sound that included two existing amusement areas.

"We are not privatizing the park. We are saving tax dollars as we continue to make sure Playland is affordable and family-friendly," said Spano.

## **Local park information**

### **Adventureland**

2245 Route 110, Farmingdale, NY 11735

Phone: (631) 694-6868

Opens March 28!

### **Boomers! Family Fun Center**

655 Long Island Ave, Medford, NY 11763

Phone: (631) 475-1771

Open for the season!

### **Cyclone at Coney Island**

834 Surf Ave, Brooklyn, NY 11224

Phone: (718) 265-2100

Opens March 5!

### **Deno's Wonder Wheel Park**

3059 Denos Vourderis Place (Formerly W 12th St),  
Brooklyn, NY 11224

Phone: 718-372-2592

Opens March 5!

### **Krazy City**

Palisades Center, West Nyack, NY

Phone: (845) 353-5700

Open all year!

### **Playland Park**

Playland Parkway, Rye, NY 10580

Phone: (914) 813-7010

Opens May 9!

### **Victorian Gardens**

Wollman Rink, Central Park, Manhattan, NY

Phone: (212) 982-2229

Opens May 28!

### **Splish Splash Waterpark**

2549 Splish Splash Drive, Calverton, NY 11933

Phone: (631) 727-3600

Opens May 23!



### **Regional Website:**

[www.ACEonlineNY.org](http://www.ACEonlineNY.org)

### **National Website:**

[www.ACEonline.org](http://www.ACEonline.org)

### **Regional Rep**

Colleen Whyte

### **Asst Regional Reps**

David Finkelstein

Luko Simlesa

Richard Ghazarian