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The Piermont Newsletter

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JANUARY 1998

Realtor Sues Mayor and Planning Board

Piermont Realtor Dolores James, frustrated in her attempts to develop an oddly shaped piece of property along the Erie right of way, slapped members of the village Planning Board and Mayor Dennis Hardy with a \$10 million lawsuit. She accused them of violating her civil rights.

"I'm just not being treated fairly," James angrily declared. "I felt that from the very beginning in 1994 when I purchased the property from the

VFW. Every time I go one step forward, I take three steps back. This whole process has cost me a fortune in attorney fees, application fees and legal documents. I want to do something with my land."

Village Attorney Ray Icobelli doesn't think she has much of a case. "Dolores James bought this property unconditionally. There was nothing in the sales agreement about her getting any sort of zoning approvals. She came in and applied for a three-lot subdivision. The

Planning Board ultimately approved that." Reportedly, one of her recent proposals asks for 17 additional dwelling units in two buildings.

Board Chairman William Herguth believes James is poorly advised by her attorneys. "Regardless of the outcome of any lawsuit," he said, "the real winners are going to be her lawyers."

By any measure, James' nine-acre parcel is a tough one to build on. It begins as a wide roundish piece near
continued on page 11



A railroad ran through it. See page 3. Sally Savage photo.

President's Corner



There's a copy of a Norman Rockwell painting of a New England town meeting hanging in the Piermont Village Hall. The work of the famed *Saturday Evening Post* illustrator usually speaks of another time in America, but this one mirrors what goes on today in our meeting room.

The picture shows a leather jacketed citizen standing up and speaking out. Other folks listen with hushed respect to what this plain workingman has to say. Rockwell, an old Yankee, is telling us that everyone in New England, no matter how humble, has a chance to tell the government what's on their mind.

Well, here in Piermont, at 8 pm on the first Tuesday of every month, and frequently more often, our Village Board listens to what we have to say. These meetings are always informa-

tive, often tedious, sometimes dramatic and occasionally even wildly funny. This is messy live theater. Unlike television, no one knows how it's going to end once the show starts.

Take the meeting about adding some height to the pier's Building 28. Now I'm not going to try and tell you how many feet the builders wanted to tack on. Believe me, that number was passionately debated for many — too many — hours. All I recall is it was less than seven and more than four. Building 28, in case you don't know, was the hulking wrecked factory on the river. It is now stripped to its skeleton and being converted into a large condo.

The meeting was unexpectedly packed. The Village Board was about to approve extra height when all hell broke loose. Besides being against the change, people said they hated the new building's design. The Architectural Review Committee was in a snit because it felt its suggestions had been ignored. Residents of the neighboring DeVries building feared the new 28 would block their view and lower their property values.

The Planning Board had already signed off on the project. Jamie Howarth, one of its members, later said that he thought much of the sound and fury came from people who realized that this was their last chance

to blow off steam about the entire pier project. After hours of listening, the Village Board decided to ask the Planning Board, the Architectural Review Committee and the developers to come up with some improvements.

The vibes at the next meeting were much less hostile. The developers presented revised plans. These won't win them any prizes but the building is somewhat better looking and slightly lower. Most people seemed willing to accept these changes to finally see the end of pier construction.

A few were still very angry. Although it had been decided years ago, they mistakenly thought we were discussing whether to build 28 at all. A young woman, who recently bought an older house with her husband near Grand View, argued passionately that 28 would destroy all the qualities that had attracted them to the village. A guy who had moved into DeVries just the week before — I'm not making this up — wanted to kill 28 to preserve the old Piermont. A longtime resident supposed it was too late to rip down all the condos.

Before the Board approved the change, they were all heard. Norman Rockwell would have found it very familiar.

~ Bob Samuels

The Newsletter is published four times a year by the Piermont Civic Association, Box 454, Piermont, NY 10968

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Editor's Desk

A RAILROAD RAN THROUGH IT

Until I saw the page 1 photograph of Sally Savage's, I hadn't really noticed the rail road crossing sign near the Thrift Store. Piermont's Main Street is such a serendipitous collection of details, I had simply missed this one. Trains really did chug by this spot. It seems almost unimaginable now.

The crossing opposite Mom Miraglias witnessed the opening of the Erie Railroad's ambitious line connecting the east coast via the Great Lakes in Western New York with the Western and Central United States. In 1885 a newspaper reported on trains loaded with supplies for starving European allies: "On the Pier and switches to Piermont there are 5000 loaded cars waiting for clearance to New York"

As recently as 1983 I remember clambering up the slope opposite my house for a walk along the tracks, only to meet face to face with locomotive pulling 2 boxcars and a caboose, moving slowly and quietly toward the mill, stopping traffic at the crossing.

It is hard to know if the crossing sign remains in place by oversight or on purpose. The site plan for Piermont Landing clearly identifies the track bed, and Piermont's Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan does call for preservation of artifacts of Piermont's history. Piermont may not be a village of famous burial plots, or churches, but we do have our monuments. It seems very PIERMONT to me, that this rail road crossing sign happens to be one of them.

~ Margaret Grace



CALENDAR

Piermont's Democratic Caucus will take place on Tuesday, January 27th at Piermont Village Hall at 8 pm. Two village trustee positions are up for election or re-election, those seats now held by Ronnie Hickey and Rod Johnson. For information, contact Piermont Democratic chairman Greg Toner, 365-3011

Piermont Village Elections will take place on St. Patrick's Day, March 17th. Polls will be open from 6 am to 9 pm at Village Hall.



READERS WRITE

Dear Editor:

We live in an age of POWER!. Power lawn mowers, buzz saws, snow plows and blowers, electric hedge clippers and now power leaf blowers have replaced our hand tools. But with these blessings come an increasingly painful curse!

While there is no Village ordinance that legally limits these noisemakers, I would like to suggest that, out of consideration for one's neighbors, these peace-disturbing tools not be used before, say, 10 a.m. or after 6 p.m. on week-ends.

Can we try to be more considerate, and if not, should we consider a new ordinance.

Sally Savage

PCA's Newcomers' Party

Sunday, February 1st, 4-6 pm

at the *Turning Point*

Who's a newcomer? Folks who have moved to the Village since our last party in 1994! Join us to meet new neighbors, make new friends



Cocktails and hors d'oeuvres



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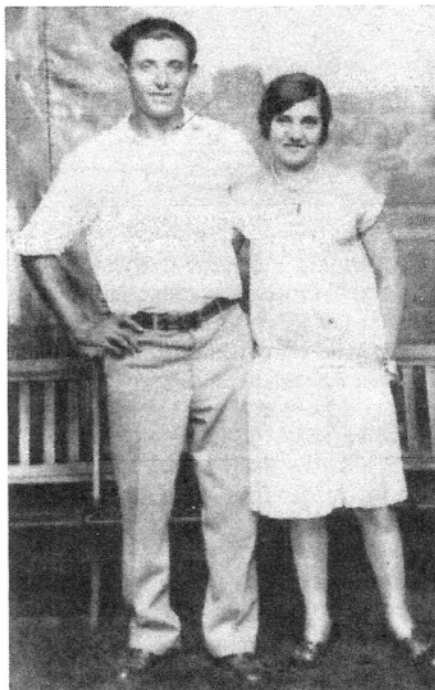


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Gertrude and Jerry Guglielmello, 1926 at Palisades Park.

Gertrude was my first neighbor when I moved to Piermont in 1978. She lived, as she had most of her married life, in a red shingle house across Piermont Avenue from my home on the creek, just west of the post office. I clearly remember her standing on the curb in a space just vacated by the moving van. "I'm Gertrude Guglielmello. We were close to the Italiano's (the folks that had owned my house). They used to keep goats and chickens — the rooster was a nuisance. I live across the street. Stop by." I'll tell you, I felt that I had arrived.

In a village like Piermont it is easy to sentimentalize the simple visual

Piermont's Mom

pleasures one encounters. Stepping through Gertrude's garden gate was one of my favorites. Her yard, graced by two statues of the Virgin, stretched in a long rectangle westward. A very old blush colored rose dipped over the wall to the street. Mustard, tomatoes, garlic, rabe and spiking sunflowers were protected by carefully placed newspaper mulch. Flashing aluminum pie pans kept the black birds away. Her front porch sat right above the sidewalk wall, bordered with lavender penstemon. Not more than a decade earlier, with the factory open, and television still an oddity, most of the houses on Piermont Avenue directed themselves toward the street and passers-by. Gertrude enjoyed the neighborly pleasures of that porch. My children and I felt protected under her watchful eye.

Gertrude was born in 1913, the daughter of Italian immigrants, Rocco and Rose Codello. The men of the family were landscapers. They built and maintained most of the greenhouses behind the stately homes of the River Road. Gertrude's mother ran a boarding house on Oak street, above and just behind what is now Freelance Cafe. One of the young borders was Jerry Guglielmello, a worker in the mills across the street. When Gertrude came of age, the two were married. Jerry set him self up as a contractor in Piermont, and Gertrude began a remarkable life as "Mom." She and Jerry raised 12 children in the red and grey shingle house on Piermont Avenue. She also looked after the

needs of many struggling families along the creek, and throughout the village. Her daughters fondly remember helping with their mother's weekly distribution of food and comfort along Piermont Avenue, pulling a small wagon filled with her fresh-caught Hudson fish, homemade bread and goat's milk cheeses, and chickens. When my little girl was born, Gertrude (by now the grandmother of 34 grandchildren herself), brought her tiny handknit sweaters. As the months went by, she would send over her grandsons to spirit away my oldest to Kane park so I could catch my breath (me with just 2!). At the time of her death in November, her family, which seemed to grow geometrically, included 24 great grandchildren, with 4 "on the way".

Newer village residents, while not knowing her by name, undoubtedly had Gertrude fly past them on Piermont Ave. in her wool coat and hat. She was on her way to volunteer at St. John's Church, the Thrift Store, Piermont Senior's meetings, or perhaps pounding the pavement to raise funds for the American Heart Association — she was the top money maker two years running. "Mom" is pictured on the facing page there at center with a grandchild for the dedication of the Kane Park Gazebo in 1971. Gertrude was one of the reasons I've loved living here — the sanctuary of her yard, her generous and understanding heart and what her children refer to as her natural wisdom. She is greatly missed.

Dr. Muriel Prince Warren Psychotherapist

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Should Old Acquaintance Be Forgot. . .



photo Sally Savage, 1972



1. Daisy Spencer
2. Robert Bradbury
3. Gertrude Guglielmello
4. Davis Crippen
5. Ed McPherson
6. Monica Bradbury
7. Phyllis Brunson
8. Bo DiFrancesca
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The Shape of the Sparkill Creek

If the effects of the El Nino will be measured in our stretch of the Hudson Valley, the waters of the Sparkill Creek will be our barometer. The speed and quality of the waters of the creek, coursing west to New Jersey, north to Orangeburg, directly impacts the stability of hundreds of properties. With Spring comes snow melts and rain filling its channels with floods of runoff, sediment and debris. Piermont's Committee on the Sparkill Creek (COSC) has been both watchdog and activist in monitoring the short and long term proposals that will effect that body of water.

Decisions due on development of Grainey Sandpit in Sparkill

On January 14, the Orangetown Planning Board reviews a proposal for the rezoned Grainey property, known locally as the Sandpits. Now before them is a proposal for 34 units on 12+ acres plus buffer. The regional environmental group, Scenic Hudson, has been working with the COSC's own engineers to impress upon the Planning Board the need for a long term Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) before any further action is taken.

Rockland County Undertakes Study

\$700,000. of a Rockland County grant to study its water systems has been allocated to a Sparkill Creek study that will get underway this Spring. Water denigration, diminished water retention areas, and dredging needs will be reviewed. Particularly worrisome are various proposals to dredge portions of the creek. Siltation has choked the Piermont "pond" portion of the creek above the Silk Mill, a situation that seems to warrant some action. Many residents along its waters remember Orangetown Engineer Don Brenner's talk in the early 1980's of a channelization of the creek through Piermont, with deep dredging and cement retaining walls out to the marsh below the Silk Mill. The idea was to relieve saturated flood plains, possibly paving the way for development west and north. But creek dwellers were divided. Some say free seawall replacement, but most envisioned a fast water sluice, thinking of Los Angeles' paved spillways, and havoc as the runoff hit the marsh at Tallman Park.

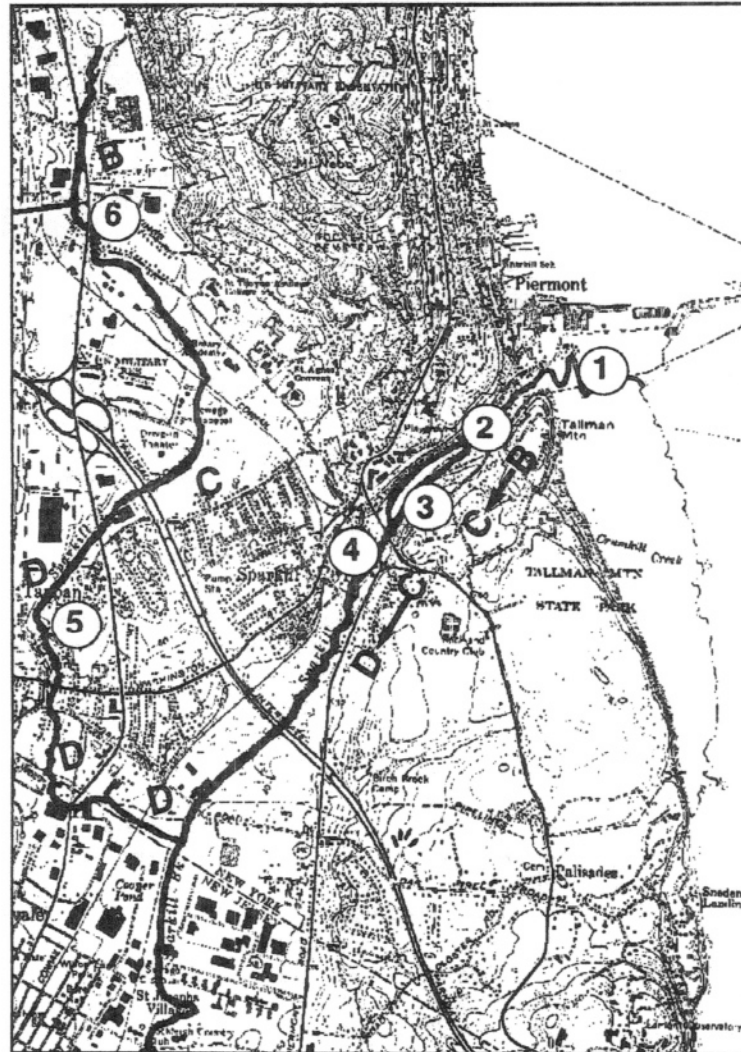
The Committee On the Sparkill Creek will be actively participating in the review of studies and proposals. If you would like information about COSC's work or to make a donation to help defray engineering study costs, contact Village Hall.

The adjacent map reveals what few of us know about the Sparkill Creek — its shape and direction. While it heads west and south past the New Jersey border, a branch designated Sparkill Brook makes a U-turn and doubles back into Rockland, flows behind the Tappan Library, and then back into Sparkill along the sewage treatment plant to Route 303 at 340, and beyond.

Noted in text: 1. Piermont Marsh; 2. Silk Mill crossing floodgates; 3. Pond; 4. Grainey Sandpits; 5. Brook at Tappan; 6. Brook at Rt. 303/340 "Peanut Grill."

COCA has provided us with water quality conditions, based on DEC monitoring along that route: (in general terms) A - Swim in it; B - Fish in it; C and D - Neither (D being a more seriously degraded condition than C).

~ Margaret Grace.



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A Garage Blossoms

It certainly wasn't the only eyesore in Piermont., but you could have made money betting that the twin garages at 553 diagonally across from the firehouse and their adjacent parking area were the worst eyesore on Piermont Avenue. Successive mayors tried quite unsuccessfully to convince the landlord to "clean up" the dilapidated garages behind which a succession of abandoned cars and storm tossed boats competed with piles of tires and other refuse to provide a haven for neighborhood rats. Artist Alan Gussow, looking out the south window of his house at the side of the peeling white garage with "duce" spray painted on it, used to describe it to visitors as "our third world view." Was "duce" referring to Il Duce (Mussolini for those under 50) or was the heart painted above it meant to indicate that "duce" meant "two"? Who knew?

Dog walkers, and teenagers intent on errands known only to teenagers, cut a diagonal path through the refuse to get from Piermont Avenue to the waterfront. When it rained, water poured off Main Street from the clogged drain in front of the garages, rushing down through the property and keeping well watered the 10 foot high weeds that concealed much of the refuse in the summer. The site's single redeeming feature was a 50 foot high pear tree, that—in proud defiance of its setting—produced a glorious cloud of white blossoms in the spring and dropped a giant crop of crunchy pears through the fall.

One day this July, two men were seen hanging around the building. Responding to a query about whether they were tearing it down they replied that they were estimating the cost of fixing it up. Oh sure! Shortly afterward, a compact, smiling, determined young woman appeared, and identified herself as Tess. She had taken a five year lease on the garage and with financial assistance from the landlord's daughter planned to turn it into a floral and garden design studio. It had no heat, of course, and no water, large cracks in the concrete block walls, and a roof that looked like a swaybacked horse, but it was no match for Tess. In short order she had arranged for the abandoned cars and one of the boats to be towed away. Her workmen cleaned out the tires and the other trash and uncovered a paved terrace at the back of the north garage. The contents of that garage—the remains of now departed construction and electrical contracting businesses—were dragged into the street and taken away by eager scavengers and the Piermont Department of Public Works.

Then the workmen moved in, putting a new layer of cement over the floor, bracing the sagging roof, replacing the rotted window frames and garage door. Stovepipe, gypsum board, spackle, sandpaper, paint did the rest.

So 553 Piermont Avenue is no longer the village's leading eyesore. Its

roof, still sagging, is braced and sturdy. Its front is rebuilt, its back wall opened to a view of the Community Garden and the river. At the suggestion of the incomparable Barry Pagnozzi, Tess looked for, and found, a well which she hopes to open up in the spring for water. The wood stove that occupied the Pantale living room before 563 was sold, demolished, and rebuilt, now sits in the corner of 553 and heats up a new room with a view.

Some changes to Piermont seem depressing; many seem actually alarming. It's nice to report on a truly positive change. It's also reassuring to know that despite the transformation of 553, some things remain the same. The stalwart pear tree dropped its pears as usual this fall. And Tess is hoping for dry weather, since water 8 inches deep still collects in front of her door in heavy rains—over what may be the most badly clogged storm drain in town.

~ Joan Gussow



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The big news from here for the coming year is that on Tuesday, January 6, the library will officially enter the electronic age, going on-line as a member of ANSER (Automated Network Services) which connects RCLS (Ramapo Catskill Library System) member libraries in Rockland and Orange counties. Many of our patrons are familiar with this system, which is already in use in other Rockland libraries, and most already have the barcoded library cards that can be used in any member library. Piermont has faced the financial difficulties of other small libraries trying to add fairly expensive equipment to take advantage of the explosion of information technology, but has been fortunate enough to receive state funding for the equipment needed to go forward. So, forward we go.

Which means that beginning on January 6, we may have to beg your indulgence as our staff engages in a "hands on" learning of the new system. We will have two training sessions prior to the start-up date, but most of the learning of this sort of thing is done in the doing. Ultimately our being part of the network will provide more far-reaching service for everyone as New York State moves closer to making all public libraries "electronic doorways" to information. So please bear with us. For the moment, we are going to have to operate with the one terminal already installed. Later in the year, we plan to add a second, public access, terminal (PAC) for patrons to use in doing their



At The Library

own searches, after which we expect the system to operate smoothly.

Patrons who are now on-line at home should be aware of expanding library services available to them as part of this move to "electronic doorways." The RCLS webpage at www.rcls.org offers a number of noteworthy options. WebPAC is a public access catalogue that allows you to search the holdings of all ANSER libraries and to check if the books you find are in or out. Rather than making a trip to the library, or calling for the information, you can simply check the WebPAC. Several periodical databases are also now available. **SuperTOM** is designed especially for high school students, but includes most of the popular newsstand magazines and is useful to adult patrons as well. This database also gives you access to **Collier's Encyclopedia**, the **Information Please Almanac** and the **Columbia One Volume Encyclopedia**. In the

Business Index you will find the popular business magazines, and in the **Health Reference Center**, full text articles from medical magazines, as well as a medical dictionary and drug information.

In addition to the electronic resources available through RCLS, the library offers an INTERNET connection for public use. Please note that we do not permit access to e-mail or chat rooms, and that INTERNET use is intended for serious research purposes only.

Finally, the magic key to unlocking many of these electronic doorway services is the barcode number from your library card. And you certainly need your card if you plan to check out books — which is still done! So if you do not yet have a card, please come in to register for one. If you do have a card, please remember to bring it in soon for a 1998 update.

Best wishes to all for a happy and prosperous New Year!



UPCOMING

JANUARY: **WORLDSAPES**, a show of color landscape photography by Dean Gross of Alpha Photography in Spring Valley will brighten our days this January. Dean has a degree in photography from the Germain School in New York City and has been engaged in freelance photography for fifteen years. This will be the first show of his work. An opening reception is

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planned for Sunday, January 4, from 2 to 4 p.m. All welcome!

FEBRUARY: The beautiful pastel landscapes of the Hudson River that you may

have seen in the window of Aubrey Flowers are the work of Piermonter Nancy Quaglia. Nancy will be showing a collection of her work here during February,

Don't miss it!

MARCH: This summer plein air painters seemed to be everywhere in Piermont and Sparkill. Groups from the Vytlacil School of the Art Students League on King's Highway were busily taking advantage of the good weather to capture the unique flavor of our area. Now that the cold has driven them indoors, a group is getting together a show, which will be curated for us by Piermonter Muriel Henriques.



REMINDERS

The library is located at 153 Hudson Terrace and is open from 3 to 10 p.m., Monday through Friday, and 1 to 5 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday. For more information, please call 359-4595. Fax 365-1423 and e-mail pml@j51.com.

~ Grace Mitchell



REMEMBERING MILDRED

Mildred Burck, founder of the Friends of the Piermont Library, died on December 3. She was 88. Mildred's 36 plus years of civic activism touched and improved nearly every part of village life. When it came to preserving the best of what we have and improving what needed to be changed, she seemed to be everywhere — that's because she was. Among the Piermont places and institutions that benefited from her vision and vigor were Main Street, the Piermont Public Library, and the publisher of this newsletter, The Piermont Civic Association.

Mildred George Burck and her husband Gilbert moved to Piermont in 1961. Mildred immediately signed up as a Piermont Library volunteer. She was one of the founders of the Tappan Zee Thrift Shop, along with Kathryn Smith, Lee McPherson and Mimi Bryan and others. Mildred also

served on the Piermont Planning Board, and became a trustee of the Piermont library. While a trustee, deep into the planning for the new library, she saw the need for a separate fund-raising organization to help pay for it. And so she founded the Friends of the Piermont Library. For good measure, she became its first president.

Mildred was a woman who knew her mind and expressed her opinions pithily and convincingly. She was a good colleague and friend, always ready to listen, to talk. A woman full of good ideas herself, she was open to the ideas of others, ready to try something new if it seemed like a useful way to go. Her involvement with the Friends of the Piermont Library exemplified her dedication to ideas and community. The realization of a new library will be a testament to her vision.

~ Davis Crippen

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Tall Ships Sailing to Piermont

Piermonters will have front row center seats for one of the most spectacular events of the Rockland County Bicentennial celebration this year.

During Memorial Day weekend, tall ships from around the world will parade up the Hudson River as part of River-Fest.

It all happens starting on Friday, May 23, when 20-25 sailing vessels from many nations will gather in New York Bay and move up the Hudson River to help commemorate the Bicentennial of Rockland County.

"We're expecting HMS Rose, the Ernestina, the HMS Bounty and six Class A vessels to participate," said Herb Zlotnick, who is with Rockland Bicentennial 1998, Inc. Class A vessels are the large sail training vessels the size of the US Coast Guard's Eagle. The Eagle may be participating in the parade as well, said Herb, escorting the parade to the Tappan Zee Bridge.

Once the flotilla reaches Rockland County, the ships will be tying up at numerous locations from Piermont to Stony Point. Although it is not known at presstime which vessel will be tying up here in the village, Herb says the boat will be open for free tours Saturday and Sunday of the long weekend.

On Monday, the ships with Coast Guard escort will head down the river, back to New York City and the sea.

Governor George Pataki, in his invitation to the ship captains, wrote: "During this special event, a flotilla of ships will gather on a grand stretch of the Hudson River near Rockland County to celebrate the region's 200th birthday. Throughout history, the Hudson River has played an integral role in the development of Rockland County and its continued prosperity. Rockland's dynamic and diverse communities evolved around the activities of the Hudson and its mariners were the link to other parts of the world. It

promises to be an event that highlights the significance of the region's maritime history and will offer a remarkable display of tradition and parade of colors in celebration of Rockland's 200th birthday."

The celebration itself will kick off on Feb. 22. There will be exhibits from the Smithsonian, a parade, military reenactment, an international dance and music festival, all culminating in a closing day event, Oct. 24.

~ Greg Creedon

Hollywood on Hudson, Revisited

Holy Batman! Murder and mayhem on Tate Street in January? Well, not exactly. More like a suspense/love story on Tate Street. Why Piermont? According to Metro Goldwin Mayer, "The Village of Piermont is our first choice for what is depicted in our scenario as Pinecrest; a small, idyllic American town." Watch for the filming of *Sight Unseen* in Piermont this month, starring Val Kilmer (*Batman*, *Top Gun*, *Doors*), and Mira Sorvino (*Mimic*, *Mighty Aphrodite*) directed by Irwin Winkler (*Night in the City*, *The Nef*). Audrey Montesano's turning over her home on Tate to film makers. She says the crews have completely changed the inside of the house. The den's become a bathroom. The living room is now his bedroom with what sounds like dreadful dark wallpaper. It was alright, Mrs. Montesano was quick to point out, "The character he plays is blind."

Filming will go on throughout January, with some scenes to be filmed on Main Street, others in Tappan. Check with Rick at Piermont Pictures for Val's greatest hits, and watch for *Sight Unseen* coming to a street near you.

~ Margaret Grace

BOAR'S HEAD

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REALTOR SUES

continued from page 1

where the old track bed crosses Piermont Avenue. It then narrows and becomes very steep as it stretches back along the Erie path toward Sparkill. There is no road in or out, aside from the path and that's park land. If the property, which is zoned R-10, was level and on a conventional street, she'd be allowed to put up to 36 houses on quarter acre lots.

Planning Board members admit they angered James in October when they refused to hold an informal discussion with her about a new plan. The Board had announced at the beginning of the meeting that it wouldn't have time at the end of the session for any informal presentations.

Unfortunately, the Realtor and her attorney arrived too late to hear that announcement. After sitting through nearly four hours of exhaustive and exhausting discussions on the pier project, she and her lawyer were advised to come back another time.

They were furious. When they asked if they could be first at the next meeting, they were told that preliminary plans are only discussed at the end of meetings. Some Board members now admit that this was a mistake. An exception should have been made.

Most people involved on the village side believe James' complaints could have been worked out without a lawsuit. They also question the wisdom of someone in a business that is totally dependent on the goodwill of Piermonters bringing a legal action against individual Board members and the Mayor.

"If they felt they were being mistreated by the Planning Board," Icobelli said, "they could have picked up the phone and called me or Mayor Hardy. We would have taken care of it."

"This looks like something that will be worked out" added Jamie Howarth, a Board member. "They'll eventually make an application with something that's acceptable."

~ Bob Samuels

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I have enclosed: \$_____ 1997 PCA Family Membership (\$15 includes the *Newsletter*)

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