Dear Friends,

Welcome to the first edition of our quarterly newsletter, Sustainable Southeast Queens. The overall theme of our Community Cafes has been Quality of Life in Southeast Queens. The Big Question has been: What would make Southeast Queens an ideal place to live? We constantly ask: Have we been able to achieve a basic quality of life that supports our health, happiness and general well-being in Southeast Queens? What impacts it? What is needed to improve it? Do we indeed have a sustainable community? Are we, and all of the entities within our communities, living in productive harmony with our environment and with each other? Are there individuals who are polluting the environment, endangering our health and well-being, and depleting our natural resources for economic and/or political gain? Is government making decisions for our communities that preserve, support and protect the natural resources we need to protect our human health and the environment? These resources include our air, water, and soil; critical ecological areas such as our wetlands, our parks, our open spaces; our trees, lakes, and ponds.

It is our hope that this newsletter leads to the creation and maintenance of a sustainable Southeastern Queens. This meshing of the built and natural environment will be based upon the local identity and make us impervious against any circumstances that threaten to compromise our communities and future generations. We hope to demonstrate that sustainability is feasible and the adoption of this principle will lead to endless, as well as reciprocal benefits.

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About the Eastern Queens Alliance, Inc.

The Eastern Queens Alliance (EQA) is a coalition of civic associations that joined forces in 1989 to address problems, issues and concerns that defied boundaries and plagued all or most of our communities. We know that it is working together that we have the strength to confront the issues, negotiate viable solutions, and whenever necessary, agitate to bring pressure to bear to achieve our goals. We are a proactive organization, striving to be ever vigilant to prevent problems before they become entrenched. In doing so, we collectively enlist the aid of elected officials, as well as all of the government and private agencies who are charged with the responsibility and/or have the resources to assist us.
Our Vision: A Healthy Southeast Queens

Health & Wellness
Prosperity/Economic Development
Housing & Land Use
Peace & Safety
Senior Advocacy
Going Green/Healthy Environment
Community Spirit/Engagement
Youth Engagement

Envisioning a Sustainable Southeastern Queens

“Imagination is everything. It is the preview of life’s coming attractions.”

– Albert Einstein

The EQA envisions a resistant southeast Queens with communities that understand the sensitive balance needed to preserve sustainability and its coming attractions. We yearn to see communities adopting an open door policy when it comes to helping one another in the wake of obstacles and crisis. Our commitments and visions are the utilization of conservation development and smarter urban planning designs to promote open space conservation, the reforesting of former woodlands and grassland dunes, the replanting of native species of grasses and wildflowers, encouraging restoration of previously drained wetlands, recharging groundwater supplies through infiltration measures, utilizing storm water management strategies to replenish aquifers with clean water and minimizing surface runoff, wherever feasible. We imagine green communities that understand the value and beauty of trees; communities that grow their own food without chemical pesticides; communities that stand for environmental, economic and social justice; communities that utilize the precautionary principle (practicing preventative measures to avoid having to find cures/solutions later on); communities that adopt the “Not In My Backyard” (NIMBY) philosophy; communities that are proactive in combatting the diseases that plague us; communities that understand that a clean and stable environment is necessary to raise our children and instilling this knowledge and values into future generations; communities that support local businesses/local economies; communities that support local advocacy organizations; communities that advocate for better health care facilities; Communities that are sustainable.

The EQA envisions resistant communities armed with proactive members and assertive voices that advocate against everything that threatens to compromise the livelihood of Southeast Queens.
Gasping for Cleaner Air  
Is JFK airport making southeastern Queens sick?

By Tamara J. Mitchell & Kelechi Isiugo

John F. Kennedy (JFK) international airport, which is adjacent to southeast Queens, is a significant source of particulates and other pollutants to our community. Research shows that if you live within six miles of an airport, you may be at risk of dying prematurely from an environmental carcinogen such as some chemicals associated with airports. Increasing evidence also shows that residing near an airport is the source of many respiratory illnesses.

Airport particulates have been found to be carcinogenic and mutagenic due to their microscopic size and ability to travel deep within the lungs. With the increasing rates of respiratory illnesses in Queens, it is imperative that we improve our air quality.

This goal can only be achieved by first identifying the levels of chemicals in our ambient air, which is one of the major projects that the Eastern Queens Alliance Inc. (EQA) is working on. The first results of a series of air samples taken by the EQA revealed that there is some cause for concern, and addressing this problem is necessary.

Airports are responsible for emissions of nitrogen oxide, hydrocarbons, sulfur dioxide, naphthalene, benzene (a known carcinogen), formaldehyde (another known carcinogen). It is also a significant source of dust particles that harm human health and contribute to global climate change. What’s even more alarming is that aviation is the only form of transport not regulated in any significant way to reduce environmental impact.

JFK proposal for further runway expansion will leave southeastern Queens gasping for cleaner air. Furthermore, the expansion calls for the removal of hundreds of trees in Idlewild Park Preserve, deemed “aviation hazards”. These trees play a vital role in counteracting the harmful effects of particulates emanating from the airport by providing oxygen. Removing these trees will also have detrimental impact on wildlife, especially endangered species, as well as lower the property value of our community; therefore it is important that other alternatives be explored.

Instead of expanding runways, it is essential that they first implement environmentally safe methods of reducing the amount of pollution originating from the airport.

“Research shows that if you live within six miles of an airport, you may be at risk of dying prematurely from an environmental carcinogen such as some chemicals associated with airports.”

-Sharon Ruth Skolnick
The Need for Health Advocacy
As a Tool to Achieve Environmental Justice

By Kelechi Isiugo

“We next step is call action. It is not advisable to fold our arms while there is progressing wild fire in our community. The fact that we cannot see, taste or smell it does not take away its insidious effects.”

What is health advocacy?

Health advocacy can be described as supporting conditions that affect the health of a population and pleading in favor of these conditions by argument based on evidence and recommending publicly. The issues of noise, air, soil and possibly water pollution as result of living in proximity to an airport has been made evident through rigorous scientific studies. Our community which is nearby JFK airport is not excluded in this negative trend of experiencing pollution from airports.

The recurrent noise of low flying aircrafts over our community is certainly not a salubrious indicator; research has shown that there are direct links between noise and debilitating health conditions. Long-term effects of noise pollution include stress related illnesses, high blood pressure, speech interference, hearing loss, sleep disruption, and lost productivity. Pollution from the airport may also compromise air quality in surrounding communities.

With all this said, how can we mitigate this life-threatening risk in our community?

The first step is verifying that there truly is a problem of pollution. The next step is a call to action. It is not advisable to fold our arms while there is a progressing wild fire in our community. The fact that we cannot see, taste or smell it does not take away its insidious effects. One of the aims of Eastern Queens Alliance’s advocacy initiative is influencing the decision made by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) on the Environmental Assessment (EA) of JFK airport. We are demanding a full Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) from them and advocating for a policy which would regulate the environmental impact of airports and require the New York New Jersey Port Authority to periodically provide comprehensive studies that measure the burden of pollution in communities surrounding JFK airport. Already, there is a Community Right to Know law that should mandate such studies from the Port Authority, but the current absence of such means a lack in regulations and compliance measures. We can help to achieve this through your support, by attending community cafes and other programs organized by Eastern Queens Alliance. Furthermore, we can also achieve this, by visiting regulations.gov and writing comments on New York New Jersey Port Authority’s proposal to fell trees and extend the run way at JFK airport if comment period is reopened in the near future.

You should also endeavor to regularly attend civic association meetings to get information on the development of this issue. We are certain that with your help and our input, we can help reduce pollution and produce a healthier Southeast Queens.

“NYC’s Community Right-to-Know Law, enacted as Local Law 26 of 1988, requires commercial, industrial, or public facilities that use, store, process, or handle any substance on NYC’s List of Hazardous Substances at or above its threshold reporting quantity (TRQ) to provide information including chemical names, amounts stored, substance characteristics, safe treatment methods, and potential health effects to the NYC Department of Environmental Protection.”
Staff Profiles

Tamara J. Mitchell

Tamara Mitchell is our new Environmental Specialist/Coordinator. Ms. Mitchell started off with the EQA as an Environmental Education Intern during her junior year at Stony Brook University, where she obtained her bachelor’s degree in Environmental Studies and a minor in Marine Science. She has worked in Honduras, bringing potable water to remote communities. Ms. Mitchell is currently doing her Master of Science: Environmental and Occupational Health Science degree at Hunter College. She will also pursue her Ph.D. in Industrial Hygiene. Ms. Mitchell’s research concentrates on anthropogenic effects on the environment, specifically harmful toxicants. She is dedicated to bridging the gap of man’s exploitative pathologies that threaten the health of earth’s biodiversity/sustainability and developing resolutions through effective management.

Shannon Hall

Shannon Hall is an Environmental Instructor at the EQA. He is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Biology at Brooklyn College. He hopes to pursue his Ph.D. in a more specialized field in Biology. He is responsible for planning and executing environmental science based workshops in our Queens public schools and our after school programs. He re-enforces his lessons by utilizing Idlewild Park Preserve as an outdoor laboratory and classroom for a number of hands on activities. His primary goal in working with the EQA is educating community members, especially youths in creating awareness of our impact on the environment around us. He is a firm believer that instilling environmental consciousness in our youths will yield sustainable benefits in the future.

Kelechi Isiugo

Kelechi Isiugo is our Environmental Health Intern. Mr. Isiugo has also interned at the New York City Department of Environmental Protection (NYCDEP). He is currently completing his Master of Public Health degree in Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences at Hunter College. He will be pursing his Ph.D. this fall in a related field. Mr. Isiugo acts as one of our principal investigators regarding the environmental and human health impacts of JFK international airport on surrounding communities. He is well versed on the effects of pollutants on human health and uses this knowledge to educate community members. He has a passion for sustainable development, health equity and innovative scientific, technological and public health strategic development.

Community Spotlight: MR. MICHAEL R. CARTER
The founder of the EQA

Michael R. Carter, a community activist from his youth, was a key founding member of the Eastern Queens Alliance. Below, read what he says about the founding of the Alliance.

“I convened the first meeting of seven key civic presidents representing South east Queens. During this initial discussion, I was elected to serve as Chairman of what the group would call The Eastern Queens Alliance.”

“In two months, we pause to commemorate the 25th Anniversary of the EASTERN QUEENS ALLIANCE, when seven Presidents of long standing civic associations joined together to work towards eradicating the scourge of drugs plaguing Eastern Queens. This was the first of its kind as issues involving education, housing, zoning and often police resources repeatedly divided our diverse middle and upper middle class communities. Working in concert, sharing ideas through limited civic resources was the only effective way to address this problem.”

“By the early fall, news had spread and agencies of government took both notice and interest. The office of the Lt. Governor, the Mayor’s Office of Drug Abuse, District Attorney's Office, Borough President's Office, and even local and state elected officials all offered their support and commitment. Most interesting! Dedicated and committed civic volunteer leaders had garnered the most diverse cadre of government and private sector community based agencies to work collaboratively for the betterment of our communities. Added and much needed strength came as the United Black Men of Queens, the Queensboro Council of Social Welfare and the Citizens Committee of New York helped in the formation of what became the Southeast Queens Community Partnership, a non-profit drug prevention program birthed by Eastern Queens Alliance and the above mentioned partners. This program gave us a platform and preparedness to successfully conquer these problems.”

“While we have much to be thankful for there is still and will continue to be, both old and new issues confronting our neighborhoods. Today, the most pressing issues include, security of our families, our homes and businesses and our places of worship as well as the protection of our natural resources. These issues command effective communication, coordination and collaboration.”

No.1, February 2014.
Environmental Science: A Gateway to Success

By Shannon Hall

“I don’t like science” is a phrase all too familiar in most inner city classrooms today. Perhaps, the lack of more hands-on science lessons in our public school curriculum is to blame. Children who are not exposed to science from an early age are more inclined to turn away from science, if not reject it altogether. Another obstacle students often face is science is not related to them in ways they can connect with personally. It’s a shame because science is all around us, particularly demonstrated within our environment.

Environmental science is one of the most desirable paths to take in introducing our young scholars to the realm of science. This is because it is very easy to teach students about the world outside them. It’s an affordable and probably the most creative science experience you can offer a student. They are more likely to remember the concepts learned from enacting a lesson, rather than just talking about it in the ordinary classroom setting. It is a vital subclass of science that covers topics like public health, environmental impact on humans, and animals’ interaction with nature.

To encourage our students to partake in science, particularly environmental science, it is important they understand where this field can take them. Careers in environmental science include education, archaeology, botany, environment conservation, environmental law, public health and so much more. These are lucrative careers which can provide wealth and success not only for our developing students, but also their families and the scientific community as a whole. Our students are bright and eager enough to develop a strong understanding of science in their lives. It is just our job as educators and mentors to expose our students to the positives of science.

Here, we can hopefully ignite an interest in them, potentially leading to a bright and prospective career in science.

We are devoted to promoting the comfort, safety, health, prosperity, economic stability, aesthetics, and general welfare of our communities. We are also dedicated to protecting our natural and developed resources. These are the ingredients necessary to achieve ultimate sustainability.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) tells us that Sustainability “is based on a simple principle: Everything that we need for our survival and well-being depends, either directly or indirectly, on our natural environment.” The whole concept of Sustainability, according them, “has emerged as a result of significant concerns about the unintended social, environmental, and economic consequences of rapid population growth, economic growth and consumption of our natural resources.” Their website tells us that, in the past, EPA has striven to ensure that industries meet legal requirements to control pollution. Now, EPA is beginning to develop theory, tools, and practices that enable it to help prevent pollution. They are drawing on advances in science and technology to protect human health and the environment, and promote innovative green business practices. We need to embrace these.

EQA knows that these goals cannot be achieved without the help of community advocates, experts in designated fields, and most importantly the voice and power of the members of our communities. So an essential question is: How can we make sure that all of our systems—social, cultural, environmental, economic, and political—truly work in concert with the goal of sustainability? How can we knit together all of the complex systems of the society—the natural environment, economic vitality, and that which produces and sustains healthy communities? These are essential questions that we must ask and answer if we are to ensure the sustainability of Southeast Queens. These are the questions that we must raise in order to answer The Big Question: What would make Southeast Queens an ideal place to live? Our very quality of life depends on it!

This newsletter will focus in on all of those things that impact our quality of life, our very well-being. We hope that you will not only enjoy, but benefit from the articles and information that we include in Sustainable Southeast Queens!

Sincerely,
Barbara E. Brown,
Chairperson
Combating the Diabetes Epidemic in Southeast Queens

By Tamara J. Mitchell

How much sugar did you have today? With one out of every four adults being obese in southeast Queens, it is not surprising that one out of every ten adults is diagnosed with diabetes. This is 11% of our population, with over 95% being type 2 diabetes. The problem is lack of awareness and lack of exercise. For example, did you know that 1 teaspoon of sugar is approximately 4.2 grams? (And 1 gram of sugar= 4 calories). For the soda lovers, if a serving size of ginger ale contains 35 grams of sugar, this means we’re consuming over 8 teaspoons of sugar! Would you put 8 teaspoons of sugar in one cup of your desired drink? This is concerning since most individuals drink more than the recommended serving size, and ginger ale traditionally had less sugar than the average serving size of other flavored soda. It is important that we do the math before consuming beverages and other foods high in sugar.

Many of us come from diverse backgrounds. Though some cultural foods are healthy, foods high in starch (carbohydrates) can have a significant impact in increasing your risk for diabetes. Some of these foods are white rice, macaroni and cheese, pasta dishes, peas, corn, potatoes etc. When consumed, the process of digestion breaks down starch (carbohydrates) into sugars, spiking our insulin levels. With the rate of obesity and diabetes increasing in southeast Queens, it is imperative that we explore healthier options.

Additive to the issue, many processed foods do not label “sugar” as “sugar”, since many of them use sugar substitutes to maximize profits. Many of these sweeteners provide us with “empty calories”, since they have little to no nutritional value. Some of the common ingredients that are sugar substitutes are: glucose, sorghum syrup, dextrose, honey, high-fructose corn syrup, lactose, fruit juice concentrate, fructose, corn syrup, sorbitol, molasses, maltose, corn sweetener, sucrose, brown sugar and syrup. Though some artificial sweeteners do not add any calories to our diet and may aid in combating diabetes, that doesn’t mean they are good for you. Some common artificial sweeteners are saccharin, sucralose, neotame, aspartame and acesulfame.

Another problem is that many foods labeled as “healthy” is not so healthy. According to registered dietician Elaine Magee “Just because there’s a nutrition-oriented statement on the package (like “contains whole grain,” ”excellent source of calcium,” ”fat-free,” ”100% juice” or ”25% less sugar”) doesn’t mean it doesn’t contain a shocking amount of sugar. And just because the brand name or product name sounds like it’s good for weight loss (Weight Watchers, Skinny Cow, etc.), don’t assume the food is lower in sugar”.

To combat the diabetes epidemic, we must be aware of the sugar substitutes we are consuming, reduce our daily intake of such sugars and exercise more. According to a Community Health Survey done by the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, less than half of southeastern Queens adults are meeting physical activity recommendations. Unlike the heavily urbanized parts of NYC, where it’s best to get a gym membership, here in southeast Queens we have many public parks where we can take a brisk walk, jog or run.

Tricks for cutting down on sugar

Reduce how much soft drinks, soda and juice you drink. A recent study found that for each 12 oz. serving of a sugar-sweetened beverage you drink a day, your risk for diabetes increases by about 15 percent. If you miss your carbohydrate kick, try sparkling water with a twist of lemon or lime or a splash of fruit juice. Reduce the amount of creamers and sweeteners you add to tea and coffee drinks.

-Sweeten foods yourself. Buy unsweetened iced tea, plain yogurt, or unflavored oatmeal, for example, and add sweetener (or fruit) yourself. You’re likely to add far less sugar than the manufacturer would have.

-Reduce the amount of sugar in recipes by ¼ to ⅓. If a recipe calls for 1 cup of sugar, for example, use ⅓ or ¼ cup instead. You can also boost sweetness with cinnamon, nutmeg, or vanilla extract.

-Find healthy ways to satisfy your sweet tooth. Instead of ice cream, blend up frozen bananas for a creamy, frozen treat. Or enjoy a small chunk of dark chocolate, rather than your usual milk chocolate bar.

-Start with half of the dessert you normally eat, and replace the other half with fruit.

http://www.dhhs.state.nh.us/dphs/nhp/adults/documents/sugar.pdf
1. True
2. False. Air pollution contributes to more than 200,000 deaths per year in the U.S.
3. True
4. True
5. True
6. True

Surprised? Voice your concerns and support your local environmental/civic organizations to combat this problem.

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