Welcome to Roosevelt Island: Manhattan's Other Island

In the middle of the East River, but still part of Manhattan, we are really four islands in one:

http://www.rioc.com

Roosevelt Island Operating Corp.
of the State of New York
David Paterson, Governor
Deborah Van Amerongen, Chair
Stephen Shane, President

➢ AN ISLAND FOR FAMILIES

A community of more than 12,000, we are proud of our safe, clean streets, our wonderful views of Manhattan, our excellent elementary and middle school, and more. A community of mixed income and multi-ethnic backgrounds, we work together to maintain our special quality of life. There are four phases to our unique planned community: "Northtown I", with 2,100 units; the original "WIRE" buildings (Westview, Island House, Rivercross and Eastwood)–built under the Mitchell-Lama subsidy program; "Northtown II" - Manhattan Park with 1,100 units (20% of which are for lower income families); the Octagon (with 500 market rate rental units, 100 for middle income); and "Southtown" (called "Riverwalk"), which when completed, will have 2,000 rental and ownership units, 20% of which are set at "affordable" rates.

➢ A RECREATION & SPORTS ISLAND

Our many lovely parks, playgrounds, and recreational areas on this two-mile-long island (800 feet wide at its broadest point) are open to residents and visitors alike. The facilities include everything from jogging and swimming to tennis, soccer, basketball, and baseball. A promenade ideal for bicycling, jogging, or strolling wraps around much of the island. Our 360-degree waterfront vistas provide a welcome rest for the soul.

➢ AN HISTORIC ISLAND

With six designated landmarks and even more structures on the National Historic Register, we span New York City's history. In pre-colonial days, the Canarsie Indians (who owned the island) called it "Minnahannock". In 1686, ownership passed to an English farmer named Robert Blackwell. The Blackwell family built the clapboard frame farmhouse which you see restored today. Steeped in New York City folklore, some of the city's most famous–and infamous – celebrities spent time here. The powerful political leader William "Boss" Tweed served time for graft in the penitentiary in 1873. Actress Mae West served ten days in the workhouse for her notorious 1927 play "Sex". Charles Dickens and reporter Nellie Bly came to expose conditions of the chronically ill, insane, and destitute who were crowded into the eight hospitals and asylums built from 1828 through the 20th century. In 1921, the island was aptly renamed Welfare Island. However, by the 1950's–with notions of treatment changing–most of the city's institutions were abandoned.

➢ A MODEL COMMUNITY

In 1969, New York State's Urban Development Corporation (UDC; via its then president Ed Logue) was granted a 99 year lease by then New York City Mayor John Lindsay to develop and operate the island. The island was re-imagined when award-winning architects Philip Johnson and John Burgee joined with other acclaimed architects and UDC to design an innovative, mixed income, traffic limited, residential community–with both visual and physical access to the water. Wheelchair accessible, the community is designed to meet the needs of the physically challenged, as required by the 1969 General Development Plan (GDP). In the 1970's as part of the Federal government's New Communities Program, Roosevelt Island became the "new town in town," and in 1973, the island was formally renamed in honor of Pres. Franklin D. Roosevelt. In 1984, under Governor Mario Cuomo's direction, the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation (RIOC) was created as a state public benefit corporation, succeeding UDC in operating and developing the island. According to the GDP, RIOC is responsible for such services as the tram, public safety, parks and sports facilities, an internal bus system, facility maintenance as well as realization of the GDP goals.

THE WALKING TOUR (DL= NYC designated landmark)

Now, join us for a walk in the footsteps of history while in the midst of an innovative model community. The tour is designed in two parts, covering the sections north and south of the tram and subway. Check Web site http://www.rioc.com for additional details.

❖ **Part 1 - The Tram and North:** You may have just arrived on the Tram or subway, or noticed the Tram overhead. In operation since 1976, it is the first aerial tramway to be used for mass transit. It carries close to two million passengers every year and has been featured in many major motion pictures with such stars as Billy Crystal, Sylvester Stallone, and King Kong. It offers spectacular views of Manhattan, Queens and Brooklyn. It is environmentally efficient and at 30 years plus, still ahead of its time as a major urban mass transportation device. Scheduled to be shut down for modernization for six months during 2009, the restored Tram will be even more environmentally sound, with improved comfort and service.

- **Main Street:** Across the street and to the west of the Tram, or, just in front of the subway exit, is the start of Main Street's west loop, running north and south. At Blackwell House, it joins the east loop to form a Main Street, the "spine" of the original community, providing retail and community space. Designed to maximize river views from the buildings, it echoes a walled medieval city, a design not continued after Northtown Phase I.
- **Riverwalk:** The development just north of the tram, it will contain 2000 units when completed. Development began in 2002 and six of the nine buildings have been built or are under construction. Riverwalk includes rental and condominium units, 20% of which are priced to be "affordable". Retail and community spaces including several restaurants, have already opened. The Riverwalk sales/rental office is located on the east Main St. loop, opposite the buildings. Upon completion, this development, originally known as "Southtown" will mark the completion of the original housing plan. The subway station, which opened in 1989, is located in the midst of Riverwalk. Currently, Roosevelt Island is serviced by the F line (periodically, check for MTA service line changes).
- **Firefighters Field:** This open space just east of the Riverwalk development, overlooking the river, serves as a sportsfield as well as the site for summer outdoor movies, sponsored by RIOC.
- DL **- Blackwell House, Park, and Playground**: In 1784, the island boasted just "two small houses, a barn, a bake and fowl house, a cider mill, a large orchard, stone quarries, and running springs." Just north of Riverwalk, on Main St. is Blackwell House, a designated New York City landmark, built in 1796 by James Blackwell. It is one of the few farmhouses dating from the years immediately following the Revolutionary War and one of the oldest surviving in New York City. The family raised fruit trees and mined the gray granite quarries on what was then called Blackwell's Island. You can see the stone used on some of the buildings today, including the landmark Chapel and Lighthouse on the northern tip of the island. In 1973, the noted preservation architect Giorgio Cavaglieri supervised the Blackwell House restoration. The location is surrounded by parks, playgrounds, and a basketball court.

TRANSPORTATION

THE TRAM:
Running every 15 minutes (more often during rush hour) and gliding at a maximum speed of 16 mph, the Tram reaches a height of 250 feet above the East River. You can board at 59th Street and Second Avenue in Manhattan. The fare costs the same as a New York City subway ride.

THE SUBWAY:
The F line links Roosevelt Island with stations at 63rd Street and Lexington Avenue in Manhattan and 21st Street/Queensbridge in Queens.

CITY BUSES:
The Q102 Queens Transit bus circles the island and carries passengers to and from Queens, connecting with the Q101 and the Q60, which can be picked up at the Queensboro and Queens Plaza subway stops in Queens. It runs to 59th Street & Second Avenue in Manhattan.

THE RED BUS:
The Roosevelt Island bus, which costs a quarter, loops from Tramway Plaza north to the new Octagon development and back, stopping at the highlights along Main Street. The driver can assist you in finding your destination.

BY CAR:
Via the Roosevelt Island Bridge at 36th Avenue and Vernon Boulevard in Queens. Visitor parking is available at the Motorgate Garage.

- **The Western Promenade:**

Along the western sea wall, just north of the subway is Observation Pier, built in 1990. The promenade circumnavigates the western edge of the island starting just north of the pier, running to Coler Hospital and Lighthouse Park, to the northern tip. The pier, promenade, and Meditation Steps north of the pier, offer a peaceful setting to watch yachts, tugs, oil tankers and other vessels as they chug upriver or south toward New York Bay. Across the river to the south is the United Nations. Upriver to the north is Rockefeller University, the brown-and-red-roof complex. To its north is New York Presbyterian Hospital. Continuing north on the west promenade, you pass a three part 1996 sculpture situated in the East River by Tom Otterness, entitled the "Marriage of Real Estate and Money." Further north is a pier designed as a "prow" jutting over the East River and also Octagon Pier, possible home to a water taxi service in 2010.

- **Main St. Homes, Parks, and Landmarks:**

✓ Eastwood 510-580 Main St. Just north of Blackwell House (on the east side of Main St.), Eastwood contains 1,003 rental apartments. Originally intended for moderate income families, the owners recently exited from the Mitchell-Lama program (state housing subsidy) at the end of the program's thirty year cycle. Eastwood's award winning design by Sert, Jackson and Associates, includes specially designed apartments for seniors and the physically challenged.

✓ Rivercross: 531 Main St. The complex across from Blackwell House and Eastwood is a Mitchell-Lama middle-income cooperative with 377 units. It has an indoor swimming pool and was designed by Johansen & Bhavani.

✓ DL - The Chapel of the Good Shepherd: 543 Main St. is now, a NYC landmark, where a hundred years ago, the huge chapel bell on the red brick tower rang each morning to wake the poor, sleeping on their straw mattresses in the nearby almshouses. Today, the Chapel serves as a community center, for social, community, and cultural programs. The stone and brick Victorian Gothic church was built in 1889 by famed architect Frederick Clarke Withers, an Englishman who became one of the first members of the newly formed American Institute of Architects. A gift from New York City Civil War era entrepreneur George Bliss to the Episcopal Mission Society, it was renovated by preservation architect Giorgio Cavaglieri in 1975.

✓ Island House: 551-575 Main St. Just north of the Chapel is a Mitchell-Lama middle income rental building with 400 apartments designed by Johansen & Bhavani.

✓ Westview: 595-625 Main St. Further north on the west side of Main St. is a Mitchell-Lama middle income rental building with 361 apartments and an indoor pool which was designed by Sert, Jackson & Associates.

✓ PS/IS 217: 645 Main St. North past Westview, is the island's public school for pre-K through eighth grade. Opened in 1992, it has special features such as modular classrooms and a cafeteria with a waterfront view.

✓ Capobianco Field: Across Main St. from our public school, this park offers a Little League baseball/softball field plus handball, paddleball and basketball courts enjoyed by island residents and visitors from all boroughs alike. On a spring afternoon, you may see members of the Little League at batting practice. It is designed by the acclaimed architect Michael Fieldman & Partners.

✓ Manhattan Park: 2-40 River Rd. Completing Northtown, as Phase II, this five building rental complex just north of the public school opened in 1989 with 1,107 units. It consists of four market-rate buildings and one federally-subsidized 222-unit building for seniors and low income families. It has a large auditorium and an outdoor swimming pool. It was designed by Gruzen, Samton and Steinglass. Deviating from the Main St. spine design, it offers a formal European-style sitting park and several playgrounds.

✓ Octagon Park: Situated north of Manhattan Park, the 15 acres were converted from a barren construction site with proceeds from the Manhattan Park development, to become the site of the most extensive outdoor sports complex on the island. Named after the NYC landmark Octagon Tower to the north, the park features a regulation size soccer/sports field, 200 community gardens, picnic and barbecue areas, six tennis courts and a baseball diamond. It is designed by the award winning firm of Weintraub and di Domenico. Behind the big fence in the middle is construction access for New York's third water tunnel being built by New York City's Department of Environmental Protection. When DEP completes its work, the tunnel site will be landscaped.

✓ Octagon Development: 888 Main St. Named after the landmark Octagon Tower, which it incorporated, this 500 unit rental building, winner of the LEED Energy award, opened in 2006. With 100 apartments reserved for middle income families, a waterfront pool, terrace, park, and other amenities, this development has blended private sector entrepreneurship with civic engagement by preserving and restoring the Octagon Tower as its lobby.

✓ DL - The Octagon Tower: The Octagon, now serving as the entrance and lobby of the Octagon development, is a New York City landmark. It was once the central hall of New York's first municipal asylum. Inside the stone facade was a magnificent five story rotunda with a cast iron spiral staircase. The hospital, with two long wings now demolished, once housed 1,700 patients–twice as many as it was meant to accommodate. In 1843, Charles Dickens visited the building and commented favorably on its architecture but noted the "long, listless, madhouse air [and] terrible crowd with which these halls and galleries were filled."

In 1887, reporter Nellie Bly had herself committed to the asylum as an inmate and exposed its terrible conditions as a "human rat trap" with some patients chained to their beds during the nights. Her articles resulted in a $1 million appropriation and other reforms. Built in 1839 in the Tuscan style by the acclaimed Alexander Jackson Davis, it was converted and renamed Metropolitan Hospital in 1894. In 1955, Metropolitan Hospital moved to Manhattan and the Octagon was abandoned.

- **Island Services:** A cluster of structures on the east side of Main Street, opposite the public school and running north to the end of Octagon Park, constitute the hub of RIOC's services. Motorgate, a parking garage was designed by Boston architects Kalmon & McKinnell. The ramp at its southern end links with the Roosevelt Island Bridge to Vernon Blvd. in Queens, the only vehicular access to Roosevelt Island. AVAC, the gray structure north beyond Motorgate is the "Automated Vacuum Collection System", also found in Disney World. AVAC whisks refuse from the island's residential buildings at 55 miles per hour through underground tunnels to the AVAC building where it is compacted, containerized and trucked off the island by the NYC Department of Sanitation. Further to the north on the east side is the headquarters of the NYC Fire Department Special Operations Division, servicing all of NYC.
- **The Island's Northern End:**

✓ Bird S. Coler Hospital, built in 1952 with 1,045 beds, is one of the two remaining long-term care and rehabilitation facilities on the island, both of which are run by NYC Health and Hospitals Corp., merged under one administration with Goldwater Hospital to the south.

✓ DL Lighthouse Park, designed by the firm of Quennell Rothschild and Partners in 1977, includes the fifty foot Gothic style stone lighthouse built from the island's stone (Fordham gneiss). Since decommissioned, it shone a beacon of light in the East River starting in1872. Built under the supervision of James Renwick, Jr. (architect of St. Patrick's Cathedral and the Smallpox Hospital at the south end of Roosevelt Island). Legend has it that an industrious patient from the nearby lunatic asylum built a structure where the lighthouse is now situated, fearing an invasion by the British. Today the park surrounding the lighthouse offers respite for enjoying the panoramic views of Manhattan's Upper East Side, Ward's Island, and the Triborough Bridge from its barbecue and picnic grounds. Looking east, you can see the Socrates Sculpture Park in Astoria, Queens, a 15 minute walk over the bridge to Vernon Blvd. and then north, where the Noguchi Foundation Museum is also located.

❖ **Part 2 - South of the Tram:** The second phase of our tour is on the southern end of the island and should take less time. You can walk there going south along the western promenade and enjoy the view, or along the east seawall, where you can often see fishermen. The southern end of the island offers more indoor sports activities and still more open space and historic structures. You'll notice the two tennis bubbles and clubhouse just below the Queensboro (59th Street) Bridge–just to the south of the Tram. The facility is privately operated and is open to all New Yorkers.

- **Sportspark**: Adjacent to the tennis bubbles is a large sports complex with an indoor swimming pool, squash courts, basketball court, and steam rooms. The facility is currently available for rent to outside organizations for team sports events, parties, film work, and other appropriate uses. Call (212) 832-4563 for more information.
- **Goldwater Hospital:** Opened in 1939 by NYC Health and Hospitals Corp., it specializes in rehabilitative medicine servicing chronic care patients. Administratively consolidated with Coler hospital at the north end, together the Coler/Goldwater campus has 2,600 employees and 2,013 beds.
- **Southpoint Park:** Beyond the fence to the south of Goldwater are eleven acres, which though groomed and publicly accessible, form the future site of Southpoint Park, with construction slated for 2009. In partnership with the Trust for Public Lands, Southpoint Park will feature a landscape design based on a concept of "green rooms" and "wild gardens".
- DL **Smallpox Hospital:** In the middle of the open space sit the remains of the Smallpox Hospital. In 1854-56, when smallpox was rampant in the City, renowned architect James Renwick, Jr. architect of St. Patrick's Cathedral, our landmark lighthouse at the northern end and City Hospital (see below), designed this building for charity and paying patients. In 1875, it was converted to a city hospital and a nursing school, the third nursing school in the United States. The only landmark ruin in New York City, it suffered a near collapse in December 2007. With stabilization money from New York City secured by Councilmember Jessica Lappin, RIOC has undertaken to "stabilize" this structure, which when completed, should be more visible and accessible to the public.
- **City Hospital Site**: Also designed by James Renwick Jr. and on the National Historic Register, it was built from island granite quarried by convicts. It opened in 1859, just in time to receive thousands of wounded Union soldiers. Dismantled in the 1990's, its remaining foundation will be incorporated into part of the gardens of Southpoint Park.
- DL **Strecker Laboratory**. Designed by Withers & Dickson, this was the City's premier pathology laboratory for medical and bacteriological research when it opened in 1892. Restored in the early 1990's by the Metropolitan Transit Authority, it houses subway electrical infrastructure.
- **Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial Park.** Our very southern tip, just across from the United Nations, is the site for the proposed park and memorial to President Roosevelt. There is no comparable monument in the United States. It is one of the last works designed by the famed architect Louis I. Kahn. Funds are being raised by the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute. Currently, RIOC sponsors an annual 4th of July celebration, with spectacular views of the City's fireworks display on the undeveloped land. Tickets can be purchased by visiting the RIOC website in June.

ISLAND SERVICES

VISITORS CENTER: Roosevelt Island Historical Society Kiosk, situated across from Tram dock, island side: http://www.rihs.us or (212) 688-4836.
EMERGENCIES: Roosevelt Island Public Safety Office is located at 552 Main Street, (212) 832-4545, and is open 24 hours a day.
PUBLIC RESTROOMS: Located at the Roosevelt Island Tram Station and at Octagon Park.
RIOC: 591 Main Street, (212) 832-4540, open 9AM-5PM, Monday through Friday.
RIOC Public Safety: 552 Main St., (212) 832-4545
PERMITS: For film, commercial photography, or sportsfield rental, go to http://www.rioc.com/permits or call (212) 832-4563.

MANHATTAN
EAST RIVER
(WEST CHANNEL)
ROOSEVELT ISLAND AERIAL TRAMWAY
CIRCLELINE
RIVERCROSS
MEDITATION STEPS
OBSERVATION PIER
PROMENADE WALK
RIVERWALK
F SUBWAY
VISITORS CENTER
TRAM DOCK
CHAPEL OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD
ISLAND HOUSE
WESTVIEW
Otterness Sculpture
PS/IS 217
MANHATTAN PARK
MAIN STREET
RIOC
Public Safety Dept. Office
MOTORGATE
Capobianco Field
BLACKWELL HOUSE
EASTWOOD
BLACKWELL PLAYGROUNDS
River Walk Sales & Rental Office
QUEENSBORO BRIDGE
TENNIS
SPORTSPARK
Cherry Tree Walk
GOLDWATER MEMORIAL HOSPITAL
FORMER CITY HOSPITAL SITE
SMALLPOX HOSPITAL RUIN
Southpoint Park
F.D.R. MEMORIAL PARK (PROPOSED)
STRECKER LABORATORY
EAST RIVER
(EAST CHANNEL)
DESIGNED AND PRODUCED BY DON SINISI (1992)
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THE LIGHTHOUSE PARK
LIGHTHOUSE PARK
COLER HOSPITAL
OCTAGON
NYC WATER TUNNEL #
OCTAGON PARK
SOCRATES SCULPTURE PARK & NOGUCHI FOUNDATION MUSEUM
FDNY
AVAC
ROOSEVELT ISLAND BRIDGE
36TH AV L.I.C.
QUEENS
WELCOME TO
Roosevelt Island NYC
MAP & WALKING TOUR
RIOC
ROOSEVELT ISLAND OPERATING CORP.
• Home of THE TRAM
• Historic LANDMARKS
• Affordable Apartments
• Exceptional PARKS
• Open Space with Urban Grace
• A Place to Play...
• A Place to Spend the Day
• A Place to Stay
TDL: DESIGNATED LANDMARKS (6)
(NYC LANDMARKS COMMISSION)