

Mosholu Golf Course

A group of devoted Mosholu golfers wonder how many holes there are to play in the future

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It is only 8:45 on a sunny but cold Thursday morning, and in front of the Woodlawn cemetery and the last stop of the 4 train in the Bronx, where the Mosholu Golf Course sits, 64 year old Marvin Kelemen takes his first swing of a long day of golf. Mr. Kelemen is one of the many retired senior citizens who spend their free time playing on the Mosholu Golf Course every single day, whether it is hot, or cold, like today.

But not only senior citizens come to play golf here. People of all ages come from all parts of New York because of the easy access to transportation and because there are only nine holes, which is all that some players can handle. Even Councilman Adolfo Carrion, one of the youngest New York politicians squeezed some time from his busy schedule to get in some tee shots before a press conference scheduled for 11:15 a.m. that morning.

Unfortunately for all the people who currently enjoy the tranquility of the golf course, the construction of a \$700 million water filtration plant, on that very site, will force them to listen to the noise produced by the construction over the next five to seven years. A two-year battle, which according to some was not strong enough, was not successful in stopping the filtration plant from being built in the Mosholu golf course.

Last May 12th, Judge Gina Gershon of the Eastern District Federal Court ruled in support of the construction, which will begin on September 1, 2001.

This case got to her hands after five Norwood residents, Sonia Rivera, Fay Muir, Lena Burger, Harriet Gwynn Smalls, and Ora Holloway, with the advice of attorney Jack Lester, filed a law suit in federal court. That lawsuit was based on an argument that Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz raised, arguing that the construction of the filtration plant in the golf course required an order of state legislation. But Judge Gina Gershon made her decision based on the theory that since the plant would be con-beneath the Golf Course, the construction would not destroy parkland, and that the golf course would eventually be restored,



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therefore the state legislation was not necessary in this case.

Community members and leaders have appealed Judge Gershon's decision, but if opponents of the construction don't act fast, and more community members and golfers don't get involved soon, it is very possible that no one will be able to stop this from happening. "Even Hillary Clinton, who has expressed her disagreement about this construction, will have only a few months to fight this decision, that is if she can, and if she is elected as a senator in the following elections," says Mr. Kelemen, looking disappointed.

Mr. Kelemen, who is one of the first male graduates of the class of 1953 from Hunter College, retired from the school system

after working as a track coach for over twenty years in LaGuardia High School in Manhattan. He thinks that the problem with the process of stopping the construction of the plant was that the people weren't organized to fight this proposal. He admits that although he knew there were more things to do to stop the construction of the plant, he never got 100% involved. "We did what we could do, we signed petitions, and we wrote letters, but I doubt very much that the golfers here, at least the regulars who are mostly senior citizens, had the energy to be going from one place to another," says Mr. Kelemen.

Mr. Kelemen also expresses his concern for all his comrades, who unlike him will not have access to other places to play golf.

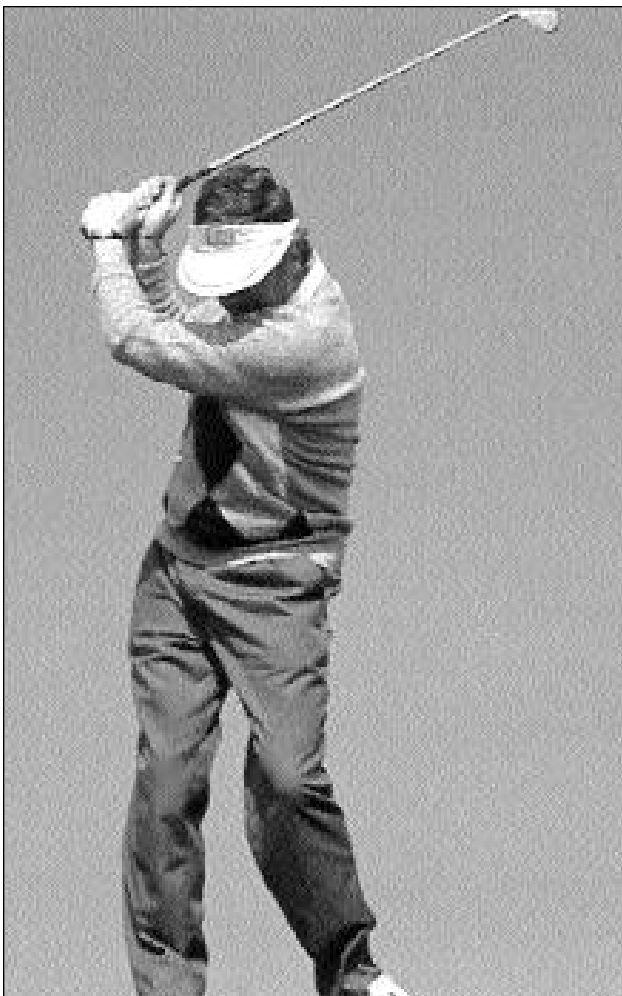
"I am afraid that this will be the end of golf for some of them. I can still drive and I have access to other places, but most of the people who come here live in this neighborhood, and don't drive, unfortunately. Golf means a whole lot to them; this is all that they enjoy," affirms Mr. Kelemen.

Councilman Adolfo Carrion also thinks that the fight against the filtration plant's construction has not been strong enough. "The congressional delegation has not really joined us as they should have to fight the plant, it is just not a priority for them," says Carrion, taking a sip of his coffee in the cafeteria of the golf course.

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Councilman Carrion is also concerned about the effects of this construction, not because he has been politically involved in this fight since the beginning, but as a resident of the community. "I think that this is a serious health problem; our environment will be highly impacted by the noise, traffic and dust produced by the construction. Also, that construction will be interrupting a tradition. I know people who are in their

Commission and later on Judge Gina Gershon approved the construction of the plant, many opponents began losing faith. Regardless of the opposition of the community boards involved, the Borough President Fernando Ferrer, Councilwoman June M. Eisland, and councilman Adolfo Carrion, the construction of the plant is still on schedule.

70's and have been coming to play golf since they are 30," says Carrion, who says he will never forget a match he had about a year ago on this golf course against a 74-year-old woman. "She was so good, and me, I am just pretty decent," says Mr. Carrion.

When the proposal to build the 11-acre water filtration plant on the Mosholu Golf Course was announced on December 1, 1998, by the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), community activists and organizations, such as the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition, The Mosholu Woodlawn South Community Coalition, the Friends of Van Cortlandt Park, the Sierra Club, and the Norwood-Bedford Park Consortium, did not wait to protest this decision.

But little by little, as the City Planning Commission,

Now, even the golfers and the employees of the Mosholu golf course, who will be the first affected, doubt very much that the construction can be stopped.

"I think the city has already made up their minds. Giuliani probably wants the plant here in the city because of the money that the construction will bring," says 57-year-old Mr. Phillip Gager, the manager of the golf course, and Robert Buckmaster, who is in charge of the cafeteria, agrees.

Mr. Gager, who is also a golf player, has been playing golf for ten years, and he believes that this golf course is unique because is the only golf course in New York with access from the subway system. But the funny thing about Mr. Gager and Mr. Buckmaster is that neither of them is worried about their job, they are worried about the elderly who come to play golf and the impact of the plant on the community, and the wild life that will be affected as well.

"It might sound funny to you, but all those squirrels are going to lose their homes, and where are all those senior citizens going to go once this is gone? I can find another job, that is the least important here," says Mr. Buckmaster, who would like to see more rallies against the filtration plant.

Everything started in 1992, when the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency required the New York State Department of Health to make an agreement with the city to comply with the Federal Safe Drinking Water Act. Such agreement consisted on filtering the Croton water, which is one of the three water systems that provide New York with its water.

The Croton Supply System is the smallest of the three systems. Catskill, and Delaware are the other two, and the Croton System only provides 10% of all the water. Still, this system supplies about nine million peo-

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ple on the west side of Manhattan, the south and east of the Bronx, and Westchester County with an average of about 1.4 billion gallons of water per day.

The Mosholu Golf Course was not initially considered as a site for the filtration plant for the Croton water supply.

In fact, there were seven other sites, including The Jerome Park Reservoir, the Shandler Recreation Area, also close to Van Cortlandt, as well as an area in the Croton Woods, and industrial sites in the towns of Mt. Pleasant, Westchester, Yonkers, Greenburgh and Yorktown. But after the city rejected the idea of using the Jerome Park Reservoir for such a project, another site had to be found. In this case, the Mosholu Golf course in Van Cortlandt Park was selected because, according to the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), "construction at the golf course would result in the least potential for significant impacts," compared to any of the remaining six sites.

Mr. Buckmaster, Mr. Gager, and Mr. Kelemen all say that most people in the community are getting tired of fighting against having this filtration plant be built in their neighborhood. They agree that since the community just finished an almost seven-year-struggle against the Jerome Park Reservoir site, now it is almost impossible to keep fighting with the same energy.

And although time is running out, and many opponents to the construction of the water filtration plant have lost hope of stopping the construction, some others still believe it can be stopped.

"It is never over till it's over," says Mr. Buckmaster. And Councilman Adolfo Carrion mentions that there are other alternatives to filter the water if that is what the city wants to do.