

LIFE WITH LITTLE ONES

CHALK TALK

Students salute school's namesake

Christian Perez: "I felt strongly about my country, standing in Hero Park"

TOMPKINSVILLE — Students at Dreyfus Intermediate School (IS 49) in Stapleton are living proof of the benevolent spirit of their school's namesake, **Berta A. Dreyfus**.

As part of the 350th Anniversary of Staten Island (SI350), Dreyfus students collaborated with Wagner College, the College of Staten Island, the Borough President's office and the City Parks Department to celebrate the rich history of Staten Island.

As part of this effort, volunteers from Wagner College, under the direction of Professors **Lori Weintraub** and **Steven Preskill**, educated the Dreyfus students on the significance of Hero Park in Tompkinsville. The land for the park was donated to the city by Berta and **Louis Dreyfus** in 1920.

Hero Park, located at the intersection of Victory Boulevard and Louis Street in Tompkinsville, honors the 144 Staten Island soldiers who died in World War I. Large evergreen trees, dedicated to each veteran, as well as memorial tablets decorate the park, in tribute to those who gave their lives during the war.

During her lifetime, Berta Dreyfus donated hundreds of thousands of dollars to various hospitals, colleges, civic groups and charities. Berta purchased the first ambulance for Richmond Memorial Hospital. She made countless donations to the then Staten Island Hospital in New Brighton as well as what was then known as the Wagner Lutheran Memorial College on Grymes Hill.

Trinity Lutheran Church in Stapleton, Zion Methodist Church in Tompkinsville, the Staten Island Council of Boy Scouts of America, the Visiting Nurse Association of Staten Island, the Conference House Association, the Staten Island Civic Committee and the Girl Scouts of America, were also recipients of her generosity.

Berta's husband Louis, discovered a process for making chewing gum base in 1909 and formed the L.S. Dreyfus Company in Clifton. As demand increased for the chewing gum base, Dreyfus' business grew steadily and prospered. By 1913, it had more than 40 customers, including the **William Wrigley Jr. Company**, which still manufactures Wrigley Chewing Gum.

Over the past several weeks, sixth-, seventh- and eighth-graders at Dreyfus participated in interdisciplinary lessons commemorating the history of Staten Island and Berta Dreyfus. Some of their assignments included creating scaled drawings of Hero Park and writing reflective essays about the importance of celebrating Hero Park. Students also made their own chewing gum using some of the same ingredients used by Louis Dreyfus.

Ten days ago, Dreyfus Principal **Linda Hill** coordinated the celebration of Hero Park. A group of about 60 students, accompanied by their teachers, **Steven Warcholak** and **Dr. Richard Candia**, participated in the day's events. The festive occasion included a musical prelude by the school orchestra conducted by **Samantha Incarbon**.

Students were welcomed by **Lee Covino**, Veterans Affairs advisor to Borough President **James Molinaro**, and Borough Historian **Thomas Matteo**. Both were impressed with the students' knowledge of Berta and Louis Dreyfus.



Students from Dreyfus Intermediate School look at the names of veterans on a memorial plaque in Hero Park, Tompkinsville.



Dreyfus teacher Richard Candia; Lee Covino, from the Borough President's Office of Veterans Affairs; Thomas Matteo, Staten Island Historian; Linda Hill, principal of Dreyfus; and Steven Warcholak, another teacher, stand in front of the memorial plaque at Hero Park along with band leader Samantha Incarbon.



DIANE LORE

"Every school should do a little research about their namesake," Covino said.

Seventh-grader **Detra Johnson** read an excerpt about the generosity of Berta Dreyfus. "I felt honored to recite the information we learned about Berta Dreyfus," she said.

City Parks Department representatives **Meredith Leslie** and **Frank Filatro** helped students plant 1,000 daffodil bulbs throughout the park. "To me, each flower represents a fallen hero," said student **Soledad Acevedo**, who is looking forward to the spring, when the park will turn into a sea of yellow daffodils. The day ended with a moving roll call of 144 names by the students, in remembrance of the heroic deeds of the Staten Island soldiers who made the ultimate sacrifice for their country during World War I.

"I memorized the names of the World War I veterans that I recited in the roll call, so I won't forget them," said **Yasmen Adams**.

Classmate **Christian Perez** said he found the day a moving experience. "I felt strongly about my country, standing in Hero Park."

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PHOTOS COURTESY OF DREYFUS INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL

Students plant flower bulbs in Hero Park in Tompkinsville.